

Atlantic Bodies: Health, Race, and the Environment in the British Greater Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the relationship between race and bodily health in the British West Indies and the Carolina/Georgia Lowcountry from the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, planters often justified African slavery by claiming that Africans, unlike Europeans, had bodies particularly suited to labor in warm climates. Historians have tended to take these claims as evidence of a growing sense of biological race in plantation societies. Much of this work, though, relies on published sources. This dissertation examines these public sources, including medical manuals, natural histories, and political pamphlets, alongside private sources, particularly the personal correspondence of planters and slaveholders to uncover a different story of race and slavery.

These two source types reveal significant discrepancies between planters' public rhetoric and private beliefs about health, race, and the environment in plantation societies. First, correspondence between the Greater Caribbean and Britain demonstrates that health and disease did not contribute to the development of racial slavery in the Atlantic. Second, these sources show how and why planters manipulated public conceptions of climate and health to justify and maintain a system of racial slavery. Planters insisted on climate-based arguments for slavery in spite of their experiences in the Americas, rather than because of them. Slaveholders contributed to the construction of a biological concept of race by making arguments about health differences between Africans and Europeans that they neither experienced nor believed. Nevertheless, their arguments entered the public record and consciousness, and the resultant development of racial thinking had profound consequences that continue to the present day. This dissertation demonstrates the critical importance of the environment to the history of race.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- APS American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA
- BL British Library, London
- Bod. Bodleian Library, Oxford
- GHS Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, GA
- HSP Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
- ICS Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library, London
- MHS Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA
- NLJ National Library of Jamaica, Kingston
- NLS National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
- NRS National Record Office of Scotland, Edinburgh
- TNA The National Archives, Kew, London

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Introduction

The lush green hills of St. Vincent, sloping away from the sea on a bright April day in 1791, provided a stark contrast to the bleak windswept hills of Scotland. As a ship made its way into the Caribbean island port, most of its Scottish passengers would have noticed the difference between the landscape they had left behind and the vibrant environment of their new home. Unlike the gentle inclines of the Highlands, where sheep dotted a terrain of exposed rock and grass, St. Vincent's peaks rose sharply out of the ocean. Thick forests covered some of the slopes, and rows of coffee plants grew along the sides of others. Instead of the misty winter and occasional thin sunlight the travelers had left, the air in St. Vincent was heavy with heat and the steam of spring rains. Greenery stretched for miles in the warmth, and the early April sun was stronger than most of the migrants had ever felt.

Many of the travelers had undergone extensive journeys across Scotland even before boarding the ship in Glasgow. After suffering through a harsh winter with little food, heat, or work, the travelers packed tightly into the ship in preparation for at least six to eight weeks of sailing, depending upon the prevailing winds. As the ship charted a course across the Atlantic, its passengers endured increasingly stale and meager food rations, along with a dwindling supply of stagnant drinking water. Yet for many of the voyagers the journey represented opportunity: they had heard that some of the West Indian islands needed laborers, and the migrants traveled to work.

When the ship reached the harbor, its passengers caught sight of a small town with a handful of buildings along the coast, flanked by steep hills. As they disembarked, the migrants encountered some fellow Scots on the island, many of whom eyed their countrymen with suspicion. "Have you no employment for your young men in Scotland?" one St. Vincent

inhabitant, Thomas Fraser, wrote to his cousin a few days later. The ship from Glasgow had deposited so many new arrivals, Fraser continued, “that it was said she was a Scotch Guinea man and that in spite of Mr. Wilberforce and the Parliament we would get white negroes from Scotland enough to cultivate our plantations without buying them.”¹



KINGSTOWN, SAINT VINCENT.

Published by Ridgway & Son, Piccadilly.

Undated image from Charles Shephard’s *An Historical Account of the Island of St. Vincent* (London: W. Nicol, 1831). Although this rendition may not have been entirely accurate, the hills lend a distinct impression to the town. In addition, although Shephard’s account was published forty years after the migrants landed, the port town had not significantly developed in the intervening years.

In a competitive labor market, it had taken Fraser many years to establish himself as a carpenter in Grenada and Tobago, and finally as a coffee planter in St. Vincent. The number of Scots pouring into the island meant potentially stiffer competition for artisans. But as Fraser also

¹ Thomas Fraser to Simon Fraser, 8 April 1791, Simon Fraser Papers, HCA/D238/D/1/17/6, Highland Archive Center, Inverness, Scotland. A “Guinea man” referred to a slave ship from West Africa. For more on Scottish migrants to the West Indies, see Alan L. Karras, *Sojourners in the Sun: Scottish Migrants in Jamaica and the Chesapeake, 1740-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

grumbled, even if tongue-in-cheek, the new migrants might labor on plantations along with, or in place of, enslaved African laborers. For while Fraser wrote to his cousin in Scotland, members of Parliament in London were engaged in a heated debate regarding the future of the slave trade in the British West Indies. William Wilberforce, the voice of the abolitionists in Parliament, led the charge against the African slave trade, pointing out its cruelty and inhumanity. On the other side, blithely ignoring ships such as the “Scotch Guinea man” docking in St. Vincent as they spoke, planters argued that abolishing the slave trade would doom the West Indies. The enslaved population in the Caribbean was not self-sustaining; enslaved laborers died at higher rates than they reproduced, and planters depended on a constant influx of new laborers from Africa to work plantations. In response to Parliament’s queries about employing Europeans instead, both absentee and resident planters, one after another, insisted that European laborers would never be able to stand the heat of the West Indies. Hot climates, without exception, they argued, required African laborers.

How to account, then, for the “white negroes” disembarking in St. Vincent? Why did members of Parliament entertain claims about the impossibility of European labor in the tropics at the precise moment that Fraser complained about the numbers of Scottish migrants seeking labor? And how could planters argue that Africans, but not Europeans, could labor on plantations if the African population kept dwindling? This dissertation examines these apparent conundrums by investigating the links connecting conceptions of climate, health, labor, race, and the environment in the hot climates of the British Atlantic. During the period ranging from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, this area encompassed the British Greater Caribbean, made up of the West Indies and the Carolina/Georgia Lowcountry. Although each of these places had significant differences from one another, together they stood out as a distinct

region defined by their plantation economies, vast populations of enslaved laborers, and similar environments.²

In both the Lowcountry and the West Indies, at various points during the eighteenth century Europeans argued that only Africans could labor in these hot places. Two instances in particular generated explicit articulations of this belief: the first in Georgia during the 1730s and 40s, when an experiment with free English settlers provoked outrage at a ban on slavery in the colony, and the second in Parliament during the 1780s and 90s. In both cases those who argued for the necessity of African labor drew upon ancient climatic tropes, passed down through generations, which characterized hot climates as dangerous for European bodies.³ The ability to labor was directly tied to bodily health, as planters and slaveholders claimed that Africans would be healthy in hot climates while Europeans would sicken and die. English settlers in Georgia, planters and plantation managers in the West Indies, and absentee planters in England all insisted upon this colonial truism, and used it to justify their reliance on enslaved African laborers. The persistence of this argument had lasting repercussions for the development of racial thinking across the Atlantic.

“Atlantic Bodies: Health, Race, and the Environment in the British Greater Caribbean” investigates the climatic arguments for African labor from the perspective of the people who made them – primarily planters and plantation managers. At various points from the mid-seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries, the term “planters” conveyed different groups of people. It often referred to resident plantation owners, but could also mean proprietors or

² For a recent articulation of this region’s coherence, including its climatic, socioeconomic, and cultural similarities, see Matthew Mulcahy, *Hubs of Empire: The Southeastern Lowcountry and British Caribbean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 2-8.

³ See Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (Apr. 1984): 213-240. For more on Hippocrates’s work and its influence on Western thought, see Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 80-115.

absentee planters living primarily in Britain, or else the managers or attorneys that plantation owners appointed to serve in their stead and to direct the workings of a plantation.⁴ For the most part, “planters” signified people who had considerable familiarity with plantations, as well as with their residents. When absentee planters left resident managers in charge of a plantation, the owners tended to correspond regularly with the managers regarding the operations and events of plantation life.

These letters, scattered across Britain, form one of the primary source bases for this dissertation. Although only a fraction of this voluminous correspondence survives, the thousands of existing letters provide significant insight into the beliefs, desires, and frustrations of planters and managers in Britain and the colonies. Some of these letters are well catalogued and preserved in libraries and historical societies, while others remain in the care of planters’ descendants, packed away in the back corners of estates in the Scottish Highlands. As I read increasing numbers of these letters, distinct patterns began to take shape. First, it became clear that for residents of the West Indies and Lowcountry, notions of climate and environment were highly nuanced concepts. They were also extremely important, and shaped colonial life in a number of ways. Several other types of sources confirmed this conviction: colonial reports, petitions, and medical manuals, for example, all endorsed the view that a place’s local environment proved influential, if not essential, to determining the use of that particular place.

⁴ Regarding the seventeenth century, Richard Dunn discusses the rise of the planter class, particularly in Barbados, as comprised largely of “slave-owning gentry” living on plantations. See Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 46-48. Later in the eighteenth century, more established planters tended to live in Britain as absentees, appointing attorneys to manage their plantations for them. For a brief description of the various classes involved in this hierarchy, see B.W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), especially 7-11. Although several historians have argued that by the late eighteenth century a significant proportion of planters were absentees, Trevor Burnard argues that scholars have overstated the case, and that “white Jamaicans in the eighteenth century [were] genuinely trans-Atlantic people, connected to both Britain and Jamaica.” See Burnard, “Passengers Only,” *Atlantic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2004), 189.

Rather than being sidelined, climate and environment were central to the construction of British colonial spaces.

Second, as I compared private correspondence to published sources, significant discrepancies emerged between the two source types. Regarding climate and bodily health, these distinctions did not appear to be particularly deliberate; rather individuals' experiences often varied from their expectations in surprising ways. Published texts or other sources of information, for example, may have led an Atlantic traveler to expect particular climatic conditions, but once in the West Indies, travelers' ideas began to change. With regard to debates over enslaved laborers, though, the differences between private beliefs and public rhetoric took on a tone of greater urgency. Letters from slaveholders about the potential end of the slave trade demonstrated a consciously constructed public narrative of deep certainty and cohesion in contrast to a private story of opportunism and indeterminate beliefs. That is, over the course of several years or decades, letters demonstrated varying opinions regarding climate, health, and labor. Faced with the possibility of an abolished slave trade, though, sometimes these same letter writers expressed strong convictions about race and labor that their other letters did not confirm.

Through an extensive evaluation of private correspondence written from Greater Caribbean colonies, along with official documents and published texts, "Atlantic Bodies" considers colonial concepts of environmental health, or the relationship between bodies and their environments. It examines planters' conceptions of Africans' and Europeans' health, as well as their ability to labor, in plantation societies. It also analyzes planters' perceptions of bodily health alongside nascent conceptions of race, or innate and heritable bodily difference. Medical manuals, natural histories, and colonial petitions demonstrate an extensive and profound connection between bodily health and the climate. At the same time, an examination of private

correspondence ranging from Jamaica to the Lowcountry, and from Barbados to the Leeward Islands reveals an inconsistent and indirect route from a seventeenth-century British uncertainty about hot climates to a late eighteenth-century insistence upon the disparate abilities of Africans and Europeans to labor in the Greater Caribbean.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most European planters and physicians held an environmental conception of health, or a belief that bodies responded to their surroundings. Environmental forces inscribed themselves on the bodies of their inhabitants, as bodies were porous entities, and both health and physical appearance changed according to the local environment. Atlantic travelers believed, for example, that the texture and tone of their skin might alter, or the shapes and contours of their faces and eyes would shift to accommodate a change in the angle of sunlight if they moved from one environment to another. A person's bodily fibers could tighten, toughen, or relax according to the climate; pores might widen or narrow along with the heat and moisture in the air; and the internal organs would adjust along with the body's external appearance. At the same time, a person would be healthy or ill depending on the body's response to the environment, which could change with fluctuations in the air temperature, moisture quantity, or strength and direction of the wind. Bodies adjusted as people moved, acclimatizing to different places through a process known as seasoning.

Venturing to a hot climate, then, was an uncertain and often daunting prospect for the English men and women who considered the voyage during the seventeenth century. Applying the ideas of ancient scholars, whose writings continued to provide the foundation for seventeenth-century European medicine, English travelers believed their bodies might alter entirely in the Greater Caribbean if they survived at all. Still, these same theories had also

predicted an utterly uninhabitable zone in the hottest latitudes, which turned out to be incorrect.⁵ For much of the seventeenth century, travelers and prospective migrants did not know what to expect upon visiting the tropics. Would their bodies visibly change? How might the environmental conditions affect their health, and what would the seasoning process entail? Medical theories emphasized the individuality and unpredictability of bodies; women's bodies differed from men's, for example, and might adjust to an unfamiliar environment differently, but without intimate knowledge of a person's bodily constitution it was impossible to know the effects relocation might have on a particular person. Over the course of the seventeenth century, increasing numbers of English travelers settled in the hot climates of the Americas as both planters and laborers. Several noted changes in their bodies as they adapted to the different climate, and others wrote of the ways they were changing the environment itself, by cutting down trees and draining swamps to make these places healthier and more suitable for their bodies.

At the same time, planters increasingly began to rely upon laborers from Africa to work plantations. Planters found enslaved Africans to be more readily available and economically expedient than indentured Europeans. Questions of climatic suitability did not factor into this labor transition during the seventeenth century; it was only later in the eighteenth century that planters began to make systematic climatic arguments in favor of enslaved African laborers.⁶ By then the unhealthy reputation of the Caribbean islands, along with the Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry, was more firmly established in Britain. The Georgia experiment strengthened this reputation: In the 1730s, the colony's financiers prohibited slavery, along with anyone of African

⁵ For more on this, see Chapter One.

⁶ On the labor transition, see Chapter One; also see Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 132, 134.

descent from the province, deciding instead to send Europeans to cultivate the land. Once in Savannah, a group of English settlers found conditions more difficult than they expected, and tried to persuade the Trustees, who financed the colony, to allow slavery after all. The settlers used a variety of economic arguments to support their case, but finding the Trustees unmoved, eventually resorted to a climatic argument, claiming that only Africans could work the land in the Lowcountry environment. Although settlers in Georgia did not in fact believe this to be the case, they recognized the power of the climatic argument and used it to serve their own economic ends. In Britain, the switch to slavery seemed to be incontrovertible proof that places with warm climates required African laborers. When the question of European labor resurfaced in abolition debates toward the end of the eighteenth century, most planters had little trouble insisting that European bodies found hot places insufferable but that Africans could easily labor in climates that so well suited their bodily constitutions.

As absentee planters in Britain made arguments segregating black and white bodies, their plantations across the Atlantic bore witness to a different reality. Not only were plantation managers aware that Europeans could, in fact, labor in the Caribbean climate, but they also did not believe that the West Indian environment was any more conducive to Africans' bodily health than it was to Europeans'. Rather than noting race-based differences in people's health in warm climates, planters and managers in the Greater Caribbean region believed that particular environmental conditions would affect everybody in the same way. Unlike ancient European notions of an earth sliced by large swaths of climatic bands or zones, Euro-American inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean held a far more nuanced conception of environmental difference. Local environmental conditions could change over remarkably small distances, and those changes produced variations both in the health of a particular place and in the bodies of that place's

residents. While the climate played a role in determining health, other aspects of the environment – proximity to water, for example – mattered a great deal more than the temperature.

This understanding of climatic complexity extended to people. Since bodily type, appearance, and health all depended upon the local environment, inhabitants of particular places differed significantly from one another. For planters, people from various parts of Africa differed as much as, if not more than, people from various parts of Europe, and neither appeared to be the same as natives of the Americas. After a transatlantic voyage, Africans suited the Greater Caribbean climate no better than Europeans did, and migrants from both places underwent a seasoning process upon arrival. Equating the “African” climate with that of the West Indies or the Lowcountry, then, was for planters no more than a rhetorical tool.

These ideas regarding climatic nuance, bodily variation, and especially African adjustment to the Greater Caribbean, though, did not transfer to Britain. Although planters held these conceptions, it served their economic and political interests to prevent the transmission of these notions and to nurture the belief that Africans in general, from a hot climate themselves, would suit another hot climate. During the debates over abolition of the slave trade, West Indian planters were keenly aware that their economic prospects lay in the hands of Parliament. They also knew that although most members of Parliament had never traveled the thousands of miles to the Caribbean themselves, they nonetheless had heard reports of the place’s climate and its inhospitable nature. While some planters noted the economic advantages of purchasing enslaved Africans over paying European servants, pointing out that owning a laborer cost less overall than continuously employing one, most simply claimed that only Africans and their descendants could labor in the West Indian climate. If they could convince members of Parliament that only

African bodies could stand the Caribbean climate, planters believed they could protect the slave trade, save their plantations, and ensure their own economic livelihoods.

Planters' economic aspirations and reliance on enslaved African laborers created a divide between prevailing ideas about climate and bodily health in the Greater Caribbean and entrenched notions in Britain. A handful of eighteenth-century free labor experiments in tropical and semi-tropical environments provided fodder for these climatic notions. The histories of Georgia, Kourou, and Sierra Leone, with results ranging from poor to abysmal, appeared to confirm the need for African laborers in hot climates.⁷ Kourou, a failed settlement in French Guiana during the 1760s, and Sierra Leone, a beleaguered British free labor colony on the West African coast, both faltered for various reasons, and their detractors blamed the climate. Georgia's case was especially telling, as it was the first and longest lasting of these experiments, and its critics made public arguments about the unsuitability of European laborers for the climate. The situation in Georgia itself, though, looked rather different, as Chapter Two demonstrates.

Although the experiences of Kourou and Sierra Leone informed eighteenth-century notions of climate, race, and labor, the story in this dissertation is a distinctly British one. It is also specific to a particular geographical region – the Caribbean and the Lowcountry – rather than extending east to Africa or north to the Chesapeake. Unlike the Chesapeake and places north, by the middle of the eighteenth century the Lowcountry (along with the West Indies) had a reputation for being an unhealthy place. And unlike West Africa, a region with a climate familiar to its inhabitants, Caribbean plantation societies were unfamiliar environments for both African and European residents. Neither had bodies calibrated to the climate, and both would

⁷ On Kourou, see Emma Rothschild, "A Horrible Tragedy in the French Atlantic," *Past and Present* 192 (Aug. 2006): 67-108. On Sierra Leone, see Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91-100.

have to adjust. Moreover, from a European standpoint, concerns about the potential for bodily change in unfamiliar climates particularly bothered Britons. Published texts about the effects of climate on bodies, along with medical advice manuals, proliferated in Britain more so than in other imperial nations with stakes in the Caribbean. These texts demonstrate widespread concern about specifically British adjustment to a hot, sunny climate: Britons believed the Spanish, for example, would have an easier time adapting as they would be used to the sun, and already had darker skin tones.⁸ In addition, the British, unlike other imperial powers, made extensive arguments about the necessity for African laborers at least twice during the eighteenth century. This history, then, may have common elements with other stories, but its geographical and national parameters are distinct.⁹

The intertwined geographical and conceptual divides between those living in plantation societies and those in Britain is evident in historical source material. Although several British travelers and migrants wrote to family and friends expressing their surprise at the healthful nature of the Greater Caribbean climate, these letters remained private correspondence, reaching only a small number of people. In contrast, documents published in Britain, including accounts of devastating natural disasters and medical advice manuals specifically for travelers to hot climates, reached a wider audience. This published material reinforced the Caribbean's unhealthy reputation in Britain, and occluded any positive reports individuals might have transmitted based on their own experiences. Paradoxically, as colonists' understandings of Caribbean microclimates and environmental variability grew, so did their climatic justifications

⁸ Briton James Savage, for example, wrote that he was "as black, as a Spaniard" after prolonged residence in the West Indies. See James Savage to Mary Lincoln, 17 March 1806, James Savage Papers II, MHS.

⁹ Often I use "British" while at other times I use the word "European." For the most part, this is because "British" applies to writers of medical manuals, receivers of letters, or imperial or colonial officials, as well as to residents of the Greater Caribbean. Not all European residents of Caribbean societies were actually British in origin, though. Some were from Germany or elsewhere in Europe; in these cases I more often use the term "European."

for African slavery. Why was it that as Britons gained an appreciation for climatic difference on a local scale, they simultaneously advanced maxims equating climates across continents? One of the answers, I suggest, was a growing need for British creoles to publicly assert their own identities as both white and British, even as their private correspondence reveals their creeping certainties that they had in fact become neither. Planters' desperate claims to Parliament ensured that, unlike Thomas Fraser's comment, "white negroes" would not cultivate Caribbean plantations.

The discrepancy between public rhetoric and private beliefs had significant and lasting implications for developing concepts of race across the Atlantic world, as well as for subsequent histories of race, labor, and climate. Many decades ago Eric Williams pointed out that England's Atlantic colonies had relied upon the labor of European servants for years before the adoption of African slavery. "This white servitude," Williams wrote, "completely explodes the old myth that the whites could not stand the strain of manual labor in the climate of the New World and that, for this reason and this reason alone, the European powers had recourse to Africans."¹⁰ Williams's argument that African slavery was economic rather than racial set off generations of debate about economics and racism in the history of British Atlantic slavery. But Williams's key point about the climate myth has largely fallen by the wayside as historians have instead taken it up with renewed vigor. Sometimes these historians make deliberate attempts to not engage in the race/economics debate, arguing that Britons did not turn to African slavery for financial or racist reasons, but because they observed differences between African and European bodily responses to the Caribbean climate.¹¹ These histories, though, often do not take into account the

¹⁰ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 20.

¹¹ Some of these histories are explained in the following pages. But more than the books or articles that deal with the subject directly, I continually encounter the persistent public perception that the Caribbean climate justified African

significant differences between public or published sources and private correspondence. Planters told a starkly different story in their Parliamentary testimony, for example, than the one that emerges from their letters. While the first set of sources appears to confirm or encourage climatic justifications for racial slavery, the second set demonstrates no such clarity of conviction. This dissertation revisits Williams’s “old myth” by reading public sources against the private ones, and in doing so uncovers a great deal of depth, nuance, and uncertainty regarding climate, bodily health, and race during the eighteenth century.

Several scholars see the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a formative period for theories of biological racial difference in Europe. Roxann Wheeler argues that for much of the eighteenth century, Britons believed that “the humoral body was porous” and responsive to environmental change. The “fluidity of skin color” depended upon climatic influences, and was therefore not “a reliable way to demarcate human differences.”¹² During the last quarter of the eighteenth century and into the first decades of the nineteenth, though, these beliefs underwent a significant shift. Historians Nancy Stepan, Londa Schiebinger, and Andrew Curran point to scientific experimentation, measurement, and dissection as integral to this change. The growth of anatomy, biology, phrenology, and other disciplines led scientists to attempt to ascertain the origins of human difference by scrutinizing African and European bodies.¹³ Bronwen Douglas argues that colonies were a crucial part of this shift, as “the

slavery. This assertion appears all the time, in both academic and non-academic writing, as though it is a given fact and needs no proof or elucidation; rather it is common knowledge. It is this sort of accepted wisdom I hope to counter in these pages.

¹² Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 22, 264, 295.

¹³ Wheeler and Stepan see the change as part of nineteenth-century “British racial science,” especially phrenology, while Schiebinger and Curran argue for a slightly earlier shift. See Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science:*

information about non-white people pouring into Europe from around the globe both enabled and seemed to require the demarcation of new scientific disciplines” to study human bodies.¹⁴ These scientific developments meant that in England, bodily characteristics, including skin color, that had once been seen as fluid and malleable, became hardened, immutable entities unable to change and impervious to climatic or environmental influences. The previous malleability of bodies gave way to a rigid view of biological racial difference, grounded in the (heritable) membrane of the skin or the shape of a person’s skull.¹⁵

While several historians see these investigations as indicative of a growing race consciousness across the Atlantic, a close reading of correspondence from plantation societies reveals a geographical divide in this racial argument. Much of this history focuses on Europeans, and on the body of writing European scientists and philosophers produced, to determine racial thinking during this period. As historian James Delbourgo puts it, most of these histories “have taken for granted [...] that the task at hand was to uncover western European

Great Britain, 1800-1960 (London: Macmillan Press, 1982) (quote on p. 2); Londa Schiebinger, “The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 387-405; Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). Snait B. Gissis also argues that a fluid concept of race hardened in late eighteenth-century Europe as “anatomical and physiological investigations became prominent in natural history and in medicine.” See Gissis, “Visualizing ‘Race’ in the Eighteenth Century,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 41-103 (quote on p. 88).

¹⁴ Bronwen Douglas, “Climate to Crania: science and the racialization of human difference” in Douglas and Chris Ballard, eds. *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race 1750-1940* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2008): 33-96 (quote on p. 43).

¹⁵ Dror Wahrman also argues that the end of the eighteenth century witnessed a significant shift in European perceptions of human difference, regarding both race and gender, although he argues that cultural change rather than scientific developments drove this change. See Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). For another argument about the importance of the late eighteenth century in developing European ideas about racial difference, see Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996). A brief word on gender: for the most part, gender does not figure in the story this dissertation tells. This is because although Britons worried about the effects of climatic change on their bodies, they were concerned about darkening skin and about the potential for racial confusion. They worried about black and white bodies mixing and approaching one another in kind, and thus sought to create and preserve distinctions between them. Gender fluidity, on the other hand, did not figure into these concerns.

statements about non-European people.”¹⁶ It is, in fact, a somewhat surprising convention that given the mixed populations on the ground in the Americas, historians should turn to western European scientists to tell histories of race.

Indeed, as Roxann Wheeler notes, “Ideas about human differences developed at a different pace in England than in the colonies, and they had different histories” in each place.¹⁷ In India, for example, Mark Harrison argues that a “rigid view of human variation [...] displaced earlier, more elastic conceptions of human difference” in the 1830s, and E.M. Collingham sees flagging attempts to “Indianize” British bodies over the course of the nineteenth century as indicative of a similar change.¹⁸ Whereas human bodies had once been an integral part of their surroundings, permeable and apt to change with the environment, bodies became “fixed” entities, “sealed off” from the rest of the world.¹⁹ In the United States, Linda Nash and Conevery Bolton Valencius perceive the shift even later in the nineteenth century; writing of westward migration, Nash argues, “Until the late nineteenth century, most Euro-Americans believed that it was the very permeability of the body that created its race and that a person’s race was liable to change in a new location.”²⁰

The eighteenth-century British Atlantic, then, seems in many respects more similar to the nineteenth-century United States than to contemporaneous Britain, at least according to the

¹⁶ James Delbourgo, “The Newtonian Slave Body: Racial Enlightenment in the Atlantic World,” *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 12 (June 2012), 186.

¹⁷ Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 9.

¹⁸ Mark Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600-1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61; E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947* (Polity Press, 2001), 25.

¹⁹ Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1660-1830* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 208; Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*, 26.

²⁰ Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 13. Also see Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

above historians. A particular segment of British society may have cultivated ideas about biological racial difference between Africans and Europeans, but in the Greater Caribbean, planters believed that bodily difference lay elsewhere. Their understandings of environmental health led to a belief that all bodies that had adapted to the same environment shared similar characteristics. But British planters whose bodies suited the same environment as enslaved Africans often proved unwilling to admit to that similarity publicly.

While historians of racial thought in Britain often focus on scientists who attempted to discover an underlying cause of human difference, rooted in the body, scholars of race in the American colonies focus significantly less on the body itself.²¹ Instead, most historians of race during this period have focused on whether racism preceded slavery or vice versa. Some historians argue that racial prejudice developed over the course of decades and centuries of African enslavement.²² Others point to early modern images or literary works depicting dark-skinned people in a negative light as evidence that racial prejudice existed before slavery.²³

²¹ A significant exception is Joyce Chaplin's *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Chaplin argues that differences in immunity and susceptibility to disease between Europeans and Native Americans played an integral role in the formulation of concepts of racial difference in seventeenth-century North America. In the West Indies and Lowcountry, though, Africans and Europeans died or survived at rates much closer to one another, so inhabitants did not experience the same phenomena. Additionally, a couple of recent studies by literary scholars examine race from a medical perspective; Kelly Wisecup argues that "theories of difference remained flexible and interchangeable throughout the eighteenth century" and Katy Chiles argues that in the eighteenth-century American colonies, "the racialized body" was "not essentialized in the same way that it would be in the nineteenth century." See Kelly Wisecup, *Medical Encounters: Knowledge and Identity in Early American Literatures* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 20; Katy L. Chiles, *Transformable Race: Surprising Metamorphoses in the Literature of Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 24.

²² See, for example, Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975); Susan Dwyer Amussen, *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²³ See Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White*

Several historians have made the case for a more complex picture of race and slavery; Winthrop Jordan, for example, argued that each reinforced the other as African enslavement in North America strengthened pre-existing negative attitudes Europeans held towards people with dark skin.²⁴ In order to measure racial thinking, many of these scholars have studied the development of racist practices through laws and exclusionary policies. While indicative of racist attitudes, this approach does not directly address people's beliefs about the nature of bodily difference or its potential malleability. These works do not focus on the development of "race" as a biological category, as something fixed and unalterable that can be used to separate people from one another, a curious divergence from scholars who study the emergence of race in Western Europe. Yet studying people's ideas about bodies, and about bodily health in particular, can yield important insights regarding the development of conceptions of race and bodily difference.

A small group of scholars have, in fact, looked to bodies for evidence of the development of racial thinking. These historians focus on health, medicine, and disease as potential markers of difference – discerning, for example, whether physicians approached black and white bodies differently from one another, or whether they identified particular diseases as affecting certain

Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); James Sweet "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought" *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (Jan 1997): 167-192; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*.

²⁴ See Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); also see Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 8, 48. One notable exception to the prevailing idea that "race" (as a concept grounded in immutable bodily characteristics) did not develop until the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries is Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's work on Spanish America, in which he argues that Spanish inhabitants of the Americas made coherent arguments for fundamental bodily – indeed, racial – difference in the early seventeenth century. See Cañizares-Esguerra, "New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (Feb 1999): 33-68. For a longer discussion of the historiography on the race/slavery debate, especially in Virginia, see Alden T. Vaughan's historiographical essay, "The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," in Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 136-174. More recently, Lorena Walsh's work on the Chesapeake offers a persuasive argument about the preeminence of planters' economic concerns in the transition from indentured European laborers to enslaved Africans. See Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Managements in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). For more on the discussion of this transition, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

bodies in particular ways, divided along racial lines. Mark Harrison argues that British physicians' experiences in the colonies influenced medical practices in Europe, and stimulated "the emergence of what was known as 'rational' or 'scientific' medicine" – arguably a precursor to the anatomical and physiological developments mentioned above.²⁵ Richard Sheridan located similar medical changes in the colonies, writing that European-trained physicians who ventured to the West Indies made a point of noting "the differences between Africans and Europeans with respect to resistance and susceptibility to various diseases."²⁶ Along similar lines, Norris Saakwa-Mante believes that one naval physician's writings on sleepy distemper "contributed to constructing race" early in the eighteenth century.²⁷ All of these interpretations, though, rely largely on the publication of physicians' works in Europe, for Europeans. These publications, often written specifically for Europeans traveling to the West Indies, were marketed to potential British consumers, and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs of planters or even physicians in the colonies themselves. The publications could, in fact, have served as a stimulus to racial thinking, but again this would have been confined to Europe and not to plantation societies.

A few scholars have approached the question of race-based susceptibilities to different diseases with caution. Most of these have suggested that Euro-American inhabitants of slave societies across the Atlantic did notice differing degrees of susceptibilities to certain diseases between black and white bodies. They argue that such differences had an array of effects: that contemporaries used them to justify racial slavery, or that these differences were instrumental in

²⁵ Harrison, *Medicine in the Age of Commerce and Empire*, 3. For another account of European-trained physicians changing their approaches to medicine after colonial experience, see Roger Norman Buckley, *The British Army in the West Indies: Society and the Military in the Revolutionary Age* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

²⁶ Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the British West Indies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18.

²⁷ Norris Saakwa-Mante, "Western medicine and racial constitutions: surgeon John Atkins' theory of polygenism and sleepy distemper in the 1730s," in *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700-1960*, Waltraud Ernst and Bernard Harris, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 31.

military conflicts or patterns of settlement. Several of these scholars write that such observations “had a basis in fact.”²⁸ Most have been careful to differentiate genetics from race, pointing out that some Africans had a genetic resistance to malaria, for example, compared to most Europeans who did not. My approach differs from this perspective in several respects.

First, although these historians limit their arguments about differences in immunity to malaria and yellow fever, neither eighteenth-century physicians nor laymen used the term “malaria” or identified it as different from other types of “fever.” Yellow fever had only slightly more recognition. As even Philip Curtin, who laid the groundwork for such assertions of differences in immunity wrote of the nineteenth century, “‘Fever’ as a category covered yellow fever, malaria, typhoid, and a great deal more [...] because medical men could not always make valid distinctions between them.”²⁹ And as Mark Harrison found in his more recent study of the eighteenth century, most physicians writing about yellow fever found that “it was difficult to distinguish from common varieties of fever” and that physicians instead held a “belief in the underlying unity of fevers.”³⁰ If physicians had trouble distinguishing yellow fever, and

²⁸ See Philip Curtin, “Epidemiology and the Slave Trade,” *Political Science Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (June 1968): 190-216 (quote on 207) for an early elaboration of this argument. For subsequent variations, see Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), especially 119-121; Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves*, especially 3, 18; Mart A. Stewart, “What Nature Suffers to Groe, ”: *Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 63-64; Gary Puckrein, “Climate, Health and Black Labor in the English Americas,” *Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 2 (Aug 1979): 179-193; Trevor Burnard, “‘The COUNTRY Continues Sicklie’: White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780,” *Society for the Social History of Medicine* 12, no. 1 (1999): 45-72; J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Although McNeill takes pains to explain that immunity to yellow fever was “not a matter of race or skin color” (46), he still argues that West Indians “noticed the effects of differential immunity” between some Africans and Europeans (67). For examples of historians who see the divide in immunities to malaria and/or yellow fever as strictly a racial one, see Francisco Guerra, “The Influence of Disease on Race, Logistics and Colonization in The Antilles,” *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 69, no. 2 (Feb 1966): 23-35; Kenneth Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 163-165; Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia Himmelsteib King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease, and Racism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), xii, 28, 60, 67.

²⁹ Curtin, “Epidemiology and the Slave Trade,” 208.

certainly malaria, from other fevers, it seems problematic to argue that differences in immunity and susceptibility to these diseases helps to explain racial slavery.

Epidemiological explanations or excuses for racial slavery also disregard the overwhelming lack of evidence that planters had any notion of them. Aside from minimal mentions of yellow fever in a few planters' writings, plantation managers – the people involved with daily life and death on plantations – did not, when discussing health, disease, or physicians' visits, mention any conception of biological difference between whites and blacks on plantations. When recording illness or death, managers often wrote “fever,” or “fever and ague.” A fluctuation in air quality, usually moisture or wind, was often the culprit, but other than a “contagious illness” (generally smallpox), all illnesses had environmental causes.

Second, although historians have tended to write of the Greater Caribbean as a “death trap” for Europeans, the reality in the colonies was more complex. British settlers took considerations of health seriously when they ventured to the Greater Caribbean, and, once there, they developed a nuanced sense of the surrounding environment, as evidence from both private letters and public debates demonstrates.³⁰ Moreover, the perpetuation of the notion that Britons in the colonies were only interested in living fast and dying young has led some historians to believe there was truth in planters' claims about the relative healthiness of the Greater Caribbean climate for black and white bodies. Writing of the Carolina Lowcountry, Peter McCandless points out that in spite of the popular belief “that blacks were wholly or largely immune to the diseases that killed so many whites, and that is why the planters chose them to work on the

³⁰ Harrison, *Medicine and Commerce*, 257. Peter McCandless makes a similar argument for South Carolina, writing, “Prior to the 1740s, and for decades after, contemporary sources refer to yellow fever by a bewildering variety of names, including malignant fever, pestilential fever, putrid bilious fever, Siam distemper, black vomit, or simply plague, pestilence, or sickness.” See McCandless, *Slavery, Disease and Suffering*, 62. Although some planters and physicians noted cases of yellow fever, there was little consistency among diagnoses.

³¹ For more on the sense of environmental nuance and its public recognition, see Chapter Three.

plantations,” in actuality, “people of all hues, including the oft-forgotten mixed-race folk, died in huge numbers from lowcountry diseases.”³² All people, regardless of origin, genetics, or skin color, died in high numbers in the Greater Caribbean. As Richard Dunn wrote, “mortality in the sugar islands was frightfully high for whites and blacks alike in the seventeenth century.”³³ The eighteenth century was no better; Vincent Brown notes that in Jamaica, even if Europeans died in slightly higher proportions, Africans died in larger numbers.³⁴

Historical explanations for racial slavery that lean on modern-day epidemiology risk not only anachronistic interpretations of the past, but can lose sight of the deep prejudice or racism involved in the history of Atlantic slavery. As David Brion Davis argues, “whites, blacks, and Amerindians all suffered extraordinary mortality rates, but certain peoples were always considered more expendable than others.” Colonists did not, in Davis’s words, choose “African labor in order to minimize the loss of life” in the Caribbean.³⁵ Finding medical explanations for differences in disease or death, then, can lessen or temper the role of racism in African enslavement by suggesting that planters had legitimate immunological justifications.

Finally, ascribing modern causes to eighteenth-century deaths disregards the ideas and beliefs of historical subjects. Although many people from both Europe and Africa who ventured to plantation societies died, and an alarming number seemed to die relatively quickly, in most cases the cause of death was not specified at the time. When it was, historians have tended to

³² Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*, 9. Also see 125-126, where McCandless notes that “blacks endured as much or more sickness than whites” and that “many blacks did not enjoy the disease immunities some whites comfortably ascribed to them.” Similarly, David Eltis dismisses the fallacy of the climate argument, writing, “Arguments that Africans could stand up to the epidemiology of the Caribbean environment are irrelevant” to the switch from European to African labor in the tropics. See David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68.

³³ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 301.

³⁴ Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 13.

³⁵ David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 65, 67.

dismiss these eighteenth-century explanations as incorrect; Richard Sheridan, for example, writes of the “error and malpractice” of “the humoral-climatic and miasmatic theory of medicine.”³⁶ In “Atlantic Bodies,” I pay attention to eighteenth-century interpretations of health, illness, and death, because my aim is not to diagnose past illnesses but to understand colonists’ motivations.

To take one example, historian Trevor Burnard notes that death rates for English migrants in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were extraordinarily high in Jamaica. Using parish registers for St. Andrew, which includes the towns of Port Royal and Kingston, Burnard points to five years that seemed especially deadly for Europeans: 1693, 1703, 1732, 1745, and 1758. He argues that the last three of these years all corresponded with periods of war, when an influx of soldiers inundated the town and raised the death rate. Burnard attributes a large portion of the deaths to yellow fever, but laments that “Contemporaries were hindered” in their understanding of these deaths “by their limited and often erroneous medical knowledge” dependent in large part on a “misplaced” belief in humoral theory and an “obsession with climate.”³⁷ I would add that if we look at the first two of these years with particularly high death rates, they also suggest other explanations: the first, 1693, followed a massive earthquake in Port Royal, and during the second, 1703, an enormous fire raged through the re-built town, wiping it out almost entirely.

Beyond the immediate death tolls of these events, though, it is worth considering what residents of the island perceived to be the causes of illness and mortality. From a modern perspective, disasters and war may have caused an increase in deaths during these five years, and the entire period appears to have been particularly deadly for English migrants. But it is

³⁶ Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves*, 329-330.

³⁷ Trevor Burnard, “The Countrie Continues Sicklie,” 50-51, 54-55, 63, 66. Burnard also believes that colonists’ desire to see Jamaica turn into an Anglo settler society clouded both their views of the climate and their reports to those in England.

important to take the colonists' theories seriously, including their climate obsession, if we want to understand their actions. Euro-Caribbean inhabitants believed that most illnesses had environmental causes. As Chapter One will demonstrate, reports following the earthquake of 1692 showed that many of Jamaica's inhabitants believed that the quake had changed the climate. If the climate had changed significantly, this would have been reason enough, in their minds, for many of them to fall ill. Burnard used the data to argue that Jamaica's climate was more deadly for Britons than it was for Africans, and that planters exploited this difference to their advantage. According to Burnard, "Europeans' poor health in tropical climates encouraged Europeans to employ black Africans as labourers [...] and Africans' greater resistance to fevers enabled Europeans to argue that Africans were innately suited to hard labour as slaves in the tropics."³⁸ Although this argument supports planters' claims in Parliament, it is not clear that most planters or settlers living in Jamaica consulted statistics or that they made any comparisons between white and black death rates. Instead they relied largely on their perceptions of their own experience and of others they knew to consider the effects of the climate on the bodies of Caribbean inhabitants.

In fact, as this dissertation will demonstrate, it was precisely colonists' "obsession with climate" that undermined their own arguments for African slavery. As Chapter Three argues, residents' understandings of the local climate affected patterns of settlement across the island as well as the region as a whole, underscoring the immense importance Jamaican residents placed upon local environments far more than race. Moreover, not all migrants faced imminent death. Thomas Fraser was himself a living testament to the contrary; at the time he wrote from St. Vincent about the "Scotch Guinea man," he had lived in the West Indies for over two decades. Conceptions of local climatic difference, along with the ability of people like Fraser to live and

³⁸ Burnard, "The Countrie Continues Sicklie," 71.

work in the tropics for so many years, together expose the hypocrisy of planters' arguments, as the rest of this dissertation shows.

The dissertation is organized into five chapters, which examine race, labor, climate, and health from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. Taken together, the chapters reveal the centrality of these concerns to the history of the Greater Caribbean region. Chapter One explains the roots of English preconceptions about hot climates prior to colonization. Ancient Greek texts prompted Europeans to assume that the tropics would prove fatal to frail northern bodies. But travelers and settlers in the Caribbean during the seventeenth century often remarked upon the surprising ability of Europeans to labor in the heat even as other events solidified the Caribbean's unhealthy reputation in Britain. At the same time, planters increasingly began to rely upon laborers from Africa to work plantations. This chapter revisits the labor transition, examining planters' writings about the health of both European indentured servants and African slaves in the Caribbean. It discusses settlers' and physicians' conceptions of health and illness, analyzing the environmental and behavioral causes contemporaries ascribed to poor health, and demonstrating the complex and changing nature of climatic thinking.

Chapter Two focuses on the 1730s and 40s, when a group of Trustees in Britain decided to finance the new colony of Georgia on the condition that it be settled and planted exclusively by European laborers, none of whom could own slaves. Historians largely regard Georgia as a failure: the colony lasted less than two decades without slavery, and residents petitioned the Trustees insisting upon the need for African labor in Savannah's heat. But reports from Georgia in the 1730s and 40s show a marked divide among the populace, with fierce debates between those who advocated for African labor and those who denied that it was necessary. This chapter

argues that the evidence overwhelmingly shows that Europeans could labor in Georgia, but that those interested in profiting from the Atlantic slave trade argued that they could not. Slave traders used a variety of tactics to coerce Georgia residents into signing petitions in favor of slavery while using a climatic argument to persuade the skeptical Trustees. The implication of this argument – that African labor really was necessary in the heat – served as a convenient and lasting justification for race-based slavery across hot climates of the Atlantic.

The next two chapters examine ideas about climates and bodies in depth. Chapter Three shows that ideas about microclimates proved essential to determining patterns of settlement in the Atlantic. Both colonists and government officials considered the local environment and evaluated particular places for their effects on people's health as they determined the locations and layouts of towns, cities, and residences in the Lowcountry and the West Indies. Planters found that incremental differences in location mattered a great deal in determining the health of a place's inhabitants, and they constructed buildings for themselves, as well as for enslaved people, accordingly. These ideas also extended to military barracks and hospitals. The frustrations of military officials in the Caribbean evident in communications with their superiors in London illustrates the continued divide between conceptions of climatic nuance in Britain and those in the West Indies.

Chapter Four examines eighteenth-century understandings of individualized bodily health. Far from relying on a sense of ethnic or racial difference in susceptibilities to disease, physicians and laypeople alike understood bodies as products of their environments, consistently subject to change. The chapter offers a close reading of planters' letters to determine how residents of the Greater Caribbean understood health and bodily difference based on their own experiences. As they prepared to relocate to the warm climates of the Atlantic, Britons

understood that over time their bodies would adjust to the environment. Significantly, planters purchasing enslaved laborers also believed that Africans would undergo an identical process of bodily adjustment as they adapted to the West Indian climate. By showing the universal opinion among planters that Africans needed to adjust to the significantly different American climate, the chapter uncovers the deep contradictions between planters' private beliefs about bodily difference and the public claims they made in Parliamentary hearings.

Chapter Five elucidates these contradictions in greater depth through a focus on the abolition debates in the 1780s and 90s. West Indian planters insisted that the abolition of the trade would bring about the demise of the sugar colonies because plantations could never be cultivated without African labor. But others maintained that European bodies could stand the heat of the Americas as long as they were inured to labor, and many planters often made a point of recruiting Highland Scots for their plantations, assuming they would be accustomed to harsh labor conditions. In their repeated petitions to Parliament, though, planters dismissed all history of European labor in the West Indian colonies, insisting instead on its impossibility.

In their desperate attempts to retain their plantations, planters sensing an imminent end of the slave trade proposed recruiting labor forces from India and parts of China. As planters attempted to persuade the British government to back such migration schemes, they again turned to a climatic argument, acutely aware of its power. The conclusion shows that planters' Parliamentary testimony regarding the West Indian climate contributed to the importation of hundreds of thousands of migrants from South and East Asia. Yet again, the climatic argument functioned as a justification for procuring laborers from outside Europe to perform the grueling work of the cane fields.

The fact that planters used climatic arguments in favor of importing Asian migrants undermines epidemiological explanations for African slavery. In none of the racial formulations that European philosophers suggested at the end of the eighteenth century did Chinese, Indians, and Africans all occupy the same place. Instead I argue that climatic theory persisted as an excuse and justification for forced labor, and that a belief in a racial hierarchy co-existed with no clear sense of biological bodily difference. Europeans, in other words, did not believe that African bodies would be particularly healthy in the West Indies because of any epidemiological advantages. Their recruitment and subjugation of African, Indian, and Asian bodies was simply a matter of forcing black and brown people to do the labor that white people refused to perform. A close analysis of planters' understandings of health and bodily difference supports this persistent prejudice even in the absence of a biological conception of race.

In the twenty-first century we tend to think of health and disease as binary opposites: in contemporary understanding, health is the absence of disease. But in the eighteenth century the concept of health meant something different. Bodily health generally referred to a state of balance, both within the body itself and between the internal bodily elements and the external environment. A healthy body was a body in harmony with its surroundings, and changes in a person's locale – the air temperature, humidity, wind, soil, or water of a particular place – produced changes in the internal body as well. As long as the body re-calibrated itself to balance the external changes, a person would be healthy. Unhealthiness, in contrast, resulted from an imbalance, but did not necessarily connote disease. Because I am concerned with planters' thoughts and ideas about health and the body, this dissertation is not about particular diseases or their cures. Rather it is about the ways in which eighteenth-century inhabitants of warm climates

in the Atlantic thought about their bodies and the bodies of others, and about the ways they conceived of health, particularly as they faced the prospect of changed bodies and identities in different places and climates.

Winthrop Jordan argued that eighteenth-century Americans' lack of attention to differences in diseases between white and black bodies demonstrated that they had no sense of biological race. Most people in plantation societies "refused to extrapolate from outward appearance to inward physical dissimilarity," he wrote. Significantly, "white men failed to seize the opportunity for saying that the Negro was susceptible to different diseases than the white man. Disease was fundamental, it touched man's very core, and almost no one was prepared to say that the Negro was different in such a fundamental way."³⁹

"Atlantic Bodies" expands upon Jordan's work to show that planters did not make such arguments because they did not have a clear conception of innate bodily difference. Rather than demonstrating clear beliefs in climatic thinking, letters reveal some of the ways planters used older European ideas about environmental determinism for their personal benefit, even as their own experiences contradicted these ideas. Planters' public climatic justifications for African slavery, grounded in their own economic interests, contributed to the development of concepts of biological race. At the same time, evidence from private correspondence challenges the conventional narrative about race in the Americas, and changes the way we understand the development of racial thinking during the eighteenth century.

Today, many scholars in the humanities argue that race is a social construction. Differentiating people on the basis of skin color is "a scientific chimera" with no more scientific

³⁹ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 259. As Susan Scott Parrish argues, "complexity and imprecision" surrounded concepts of race in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic. See Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 102.

basis than any other seemingly random basis of categorization, as Colin Kidd points out.⁴⁰ At the same time, some scholars of race argue that race is a modern concept and that writing a history of race prior to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century is anachronistic, particularly since the word “race” did not then have the same connotations that it did later.⁴¹ Keeping in mind that the etymology of the word race has changed over time, in the context of this dissertation I use race, or bodily difference, to mean visible, heritable characteristics, especially skin color. Given these two claims – one, that race as a scientific category does not exist, and two, that race is a recent invention – race as a scientific concept has a short history. But even if race does not exist, racism does.⁴² Racial prejudice has existed before, during, and after the advent (and partial destruction) of scientific race.

To understand both the basis and larger implications of planters’ arguments, I place a great deal more weight on their private correspondence and personal writings than on statements they made in public. Focusing on individual experience in the West Indies and the Lowcountry re-centers a discussion away from European scientists and thinkers and toward people’s experiences in plantation societies. Although most historical work rests on the assumption that a fairly continuous line exists from one end of the eighteenth century – an uncertain fear – to the other – a biological theory of racial difference – this study aims to show that no such continuum existed. Instead, “Atlantic Bodies” demonstrates that theories of racial difference developed

⁴⁰ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10. Similarly, David Brion Davis writes, “responsible scientists have long discredited any biological or genetic definition of racial groups,” arguing that “the so-called races of mankind” were “arbitrary inventions.” See Davis, “Constructing Race: A Reflection,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 no. 1 (Jan 1997): 7-18.

⁴¹ See, for example, Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*; Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1996): 247-64; George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁴² For a recent study of the persistence and pervasiveness of racism, even without scientific race, for many centuries and across cultures, see Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: from the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

very differently in the hot climates of the British Atlantic than they did in Britain itself. By focusing on unpublished sources written by people largely outside the intellectual circles of the elite, this study reveals the prominence of different perceptions about bodies, race, and the environment during the eighteenth century. It demonstrates many of the complications and nuances inherent in arguments about race and bodily difference, as well as the subtleties involved in the body's relationship to the climate and environment during this time. Rather than tracing a progression from idea to confirmation in scientific "proof," my dissertation shows that in the British Atlantic world, colonists' experiences with bodies and the environment repeatedly contradicted their assumptions. These experiences, though, did not contribute to the body of knowledge that supposedly "Enlightened" scientists in Western Europe drew upon to theorize bodily difference. Instead, experience and ideas emerging from plantation societies became subsumed by productions of European elites far removed from life in these societies. My dissertation examines the ways in which these two divergent strains of thought developed: one, a stubborn insistence on bodily difference with constant references to climate and bodily health; and two, people's actual experiences with bodily health and difference in the hot climates of the Americas.

Debates about bodily difference and climate created a transatlantic discussion, and my approach reveals both the breadth and the pervasiveness of these ideas across time and place. In many cases continuity of thought looms larger than change. This dissertation tells a story about public versus private opinions, about a lack of transference of ideas from one place to another, and about the power of political and economic concerns to enable people to turn a blind eye to clear evidence. It is a story about the ways in which ideas about racial difference developed in spite of people's experiences rather than because of them. This story's legacy – the impact of

racial thinking in the Atlantic – continues to this day. Although climatic arguments for African slavery had little evidence in experience to support them, economically-driven planters perpetuated these theories, with consequences that reverberated throughout the Atlantic for centuries to follow.

Chapter One The Experience of Hot Climates

For months after the 1692 earthquake shook the foundations of English society in Jamaica, the residents of Port Royal and the surrounding area continued to feel aftershocks. The tremendous earthquake took the merchant town by surprise: on a Tuesday morning in early June, the earth opened up and swallowed much of the flourishing port. “We felt the House shake, and saw the Bricks begin to rise in the Floor,” wrote one witness. He watched as neighboring houses were destroyed; “some swallowed up, others thrown on Heaps” and saw “the sand in the Street rise like the Waves of the Sea; lifting up all Persons that stood upon it, and immediately dropping [them] down into Pits.” Another writer suggested that “for its Violence and strange Effects” the Port Royal earthquake “may perhaps be compared with the greatest, that ever yet happened in the World.”¹ The tremors that shook Port Royal and the nearby Liguanea plain caused mass destruction. Scores of houses tumbled to the ground, a mountain collapsed in on itself, and two-thirds of Port Royal fell into the sea. Churning waves drowned hundreds of people, and many survivors found their homes and businesses destroyed.²

At first, Jamaica resident Joseph Norris counted himself amongst the fortunate survivors. Although his father perished in the violent upheaval, Norris recovered from the “strange sort of agony” he experienced during the quake. Shaken, and encouraged by local preachers who blamed the destruction on Port Royal’s sinful culture, Norris fasted for three days and nights. The results, he informed his brother, were astonishing. His body became “strong and healthy,”

¹ From Hans Sloane and Alvarez de Toledo, “A Letter from Hans Sloane, M.D. and S.R.S. with several Accounts of the Earthquakes in Peru October the 20th, 1687. And at Jamaica, February 19th, 1687, and June the 7th, 1692.” *Philosophical Transactions* 18, no. 209 (1694): 78-100. This article contains several accounts of the June earthquake, most of which, Sloane claimed, were from eyewitnesses, and the others were compiled secondary accounts. These quotes are from no. VI, 6 March 1693, 85 and no. VIII, 3 July 1693, 89.

² Two-thirds is a rough, but conservative estimate. One contemporary report claimed that nine-tenths of the town was submerged in the ocean. See Sloane, “A Letter,” no III, 20 June 1692, 83.

he wrote, and his “very constitution altered for the better.” Water, which before had “cooled” his stomach disagreeably, became his “cheifest drink,” and he reported general feelings of health and satisfaction.³



An image of Port Royal tumbling into the sea during the earthquake.

But during the long, hot summer following the quake, and into the autumn some observers noted changes in the atmosphere. “The Weather was much hotter after the Earthquake than before;” one person wrote, “and such an innumerable quantity of *Musketoës*, that the like was never seen since the Inhabiting of the Island.” Another noticed alterations in the usual wind patterns: “since the Earthquake, the Land-breezes often fail us,” he wrote.⁴ These atmospheric changes, along with physical aftershocks in the earth, caused bodily effects in survivors. In the

³ Joseph Norris to Isaac Norris, [summer 1692], MS 1662, NLJ.

⁴ Sloane and Toledo, “A Letter,” no. VI, 6 March 1693, 88; no. VIII, 3 July 1693, 99.

wake of the disaster, the general health of the inhabitants declined. “We have had a very great Mortality since the great Earthquake (for we have little ones daily),” wrote one person the following September. “[A]lmost half the People that escap’d upon *Port-Royal* are since dead of a Malignant Fever, from Change of Air, want of dry Houses, warm Lodgings, proper Medicines, and other Conveniencies.”⁵ This time Joseph Norris was among the dead, having succumbed to ill health in early September, three months after the initial quake.

Some of Port Royal’s residents rebuilt on the remaining narrow strip of land jutting into the sea while others left for a more secure foothold on the mainland.⁶ “After the great shake,” one witness recounted, some people “went to the place called *Kingstown*,” a small settlement across the harbor from Port Royal. But the results were deadly: “from the first clearing of the Ground, and from bad Accomodations [...] not sufficient to keep out Rain, which in great and an unusual manner followed the Earthquake, lying wet, and wanting Medicines, and all Conveniencies, &c. they dyed miserably in heaps.” In fact, “a general sickness” prevailed “all over the Island” and “few escaped being sick.” The earthquake, the writer speculated, by releasing foul air from the depths of the earth, bore responsibility for the illness and deaths. Kingston, as “yet an unhealthy place,” suffered the brunt of this mortality, “supposed to proceed from the hurtful Vapours belch’d from the many openings of the Earth.” Making matters worse, dead bodies regularly floated around the harbor “as the Sea and Land-breezes blew them, sometimes 100 or 200 in a heap.” Some were newly dead, and others had washed out of

⁵ Sloane and Toledo, “A Letter,” no. IV, 23 September 1692, 83.

⁶ The earthquake actually severed the connection between Port Royal and the Jamaican mainland temporarily, until enough sand accumulated to rebuild the land bridge between the two places. For more on this, and for a more extensive account of the earthquake, see Matthew Mulcahy, “The Port Royal Earthquake and the World of Wonders in Seventeenth Century Jamaica,” *Early American Studies* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 391-421.

cemeteries in various stages of rot, which “may be thought to add something to the Unhealthfulness of this Place.”⁷

When news of the earthquake and its aftermath reached England, some religious leaders claimed that Port Royal’s inhabitants brought the destruction upon themselves through their immoral behavior. The town held an unsavory reputation as “a Sink of all Filthiness” and “one of the Ludest [places] in the Christian World.” A pirate’s haven, the port witnessed constant “Drinking, Swearing and Whoreing,” and many of the earthquake’s first victims included a large number of men in taverns at eleven in the morning.⁸ The quake was clear evidence of divine vengeance for evil behavior, a sign of holy wrath. The misery inflicted upon the area, these writers insisted, demonstrated the consequences of vice. The earth had opened and swallowed the sinners, leaving those behind the chance to repent and redeem their souls. And if the repentant succumbed in spite of their prayers, their deaths caused no surprise to those in England. The extensive illness and mortality that followed the disaster simply confirmed what many in Europe already suspected: the Caribbean had an unhealthy climate, dangerous to any who traveled there.⁹

⁷ Sloane and Toledo, “A Letter,” no. VIII, 3 July 1693, 100. Contemporary views held that earthquakes resulted from air escaping from under the earth. In the words of West Indian traveler Thomas Gage the “hollow” mountains in the islands trapped the wind, which then “shake the earth to get out,” causing earthquakes. See Thomas Gage, *The English-American his Travail by Sea and Land: or, a New Survey of the West-Indias* (London, 1648), 44. Aristotle also believed that earthquakes were caused by a buildup of wind bursting out of the earth. See Aristotle, *Meteorology*, book II, chapter 8 [350 BCE] (trans. by E.W. Webster, Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 2001).

⁸ Captain Crocket, *A True and Perfect Relation of that Most Sad and Terrible Earthquake, at Port Royal in Jamaica* (London, 1792 [1692]). For another account, see *The Truest and Largest Account of the Late Earthquake in Jamaica, June the 7th, 1692* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1693). This account, written by a “Reverend Divine” in Jamaica, emphasized the moral nature of the earthquake. For another moral interpretation, see Reverend Emmanuel Heath, *A Full Account of the Late Dreadful Earthquake at Port Royal in Jamaica; Written in two Letters from the Minister of that Place* (London, 1692).

⁹ On the suspected dangers of hot climates for British bodies, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (April 1984): 213-240.

Residents of Jamaica, though, held a different set of beliefs regarding the earthquake and its aftermath. Although some of them may have agreed with the proposed cause of the quake – divine retribution – most did not attribute the subsequent illness and death to the general unhealthiness of the Caribbean climate. While seventeenth-century English travelers expected the climate in the tropics to be invariably and oppressively hot, established residents of warm climates held significantly different understandings of the local environment. Rather than believing that the Caribbean was uniformly hot and unhealthy for English bodies, inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean, Jamaica included, held a much more nuanced view of the climate. As witnesses in the summer of 1692 explained, illnesses following the quake resulted from contingent circumstances: from the newly cleared land in Kingston, from exposure to rain and proximity to dead bodies, and, most of all, from the foul air released by the earth that many people believed caused a change in the environment. Residents of Jamaica did not believe that the climate itself was necessarily or universally unhealthy. Instead, they believed that specific environmental factors resulting directly from the earthquake caused a shift in atmospheric conditions, rendering the surroundings temporarily unhealthy.

Interpretations of the earthquake and its aftermath exemplified the divergence between English and western Atlantic understandings of the Greater Caribbean climate. While many English Atlantic travelers feared the bodily effects of a hot, tropical climate upon their initial arrival in the West Indies and Lowcountry, those who stayed developed a different understanding of the climate. Not only could Europeans live in the Greater Caribbean, but with a few adjustments – a diet that incorporated local food, for example, or sleeping quarters designed to encourage air flow – they could flourish in the warmth.

Most significantly, Europeans could, and did, labor in the hot climates of the Americas. Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, European laborers formed the majority of the plantation labor force in the English Caribbean. And although planters transitioned from mostly European to mostly African laborers around the middle of the century, this transition had nothing to do with the climate or its perceived effects on people's bodies. Europeans continued to labor on plantations in various capacities throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that planters definitively argued that Europeans could not labor in the heat. Applying this argument retroactively, they claimed that Europeans had never worked as arduously as Africans had in the Caribbean climate because their bodies would never have been able to withstand labor in such an environment. Evidence from the seventeenth century belies this argument. But the association of the West Indian climate with poor health, substantiated by reports like those following the 1692 earthquake, made it easier for eighteenth-century planters to later claim that the environment was too unhealthy to support British bodies.

Understandings of climatic complexity, as well as Europeans' bodily fitness for such places, did not traverse the Atlantic intact. While Euro-Caribbean residents often found that their experiences in warm climates did not conform to their expectations, in England this experience often went unheeded. Meanwhile, any reports of the Caribbean's unhealthiness fueled English perceptions of the climate's potential dangers, along with the belief that warm climates, in and of themselves, destroyed English bodies.

The transatlantic disparity regarding beliefs about bodily health and hot climates allowed inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean to harness the power of climate as a rhetorical tool. Through a combination of pre-conceived European notions and reports like those following the

earthquake, Euro-Caribbean residents used entrenched English suspicions about the dangers of hot climates to further their own economic prospects. Some colonial officials, for example, demanded higher wages to compensate for the health risks of residing in the heat. It took planters and slaveholders a remarkably long time to rely upon climatic justifications for African slavery, insisting that African bodies were better adapted to labor in hot climates. But when planters did begin to make such arguments, they found substantial foundations for their arguments already in place.

The political and economic savvy of Euro-Caribbean residents regarding climatic prejudice in England should not eclipse the sincere trepidation many of them felt about a hot climate's effects on their bodies. While some English settlers may have felt healthy in the warm regions of the Greater Caribbean, natural disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, revealed the precariousness of environmental conditions in these places. Many inhabitants were not without qualms, and several questioned the stability both of the local environment and of their own bodily health. Yet rather than viewing hot climates as unequivocally dangerous for European bodies, a variety of sources show a measured, if ambiguous, Euro-Caribbean approach towards bodily health and potential change in an unstable climate. These sources depict an uncertainty of the climate's capability coupled with a sincere belief in its power. Particular events, such as an earthquake, could create enormous atmospheric and environmental change that could, in turn, cause widespread illness and death. On a more quotidian level, though, the climate might or might not affect people's bodily health or appearance over time. Taken together, sources show no seventeenth-century consensus on the Greater Caribbean climate's ability to affect European bodies. Would prolonged exposure to a hot climate make travelers healthier or sicken them? Would heat or sun alter their skin, or their fundamental beings? Given

several factors, including a relatively short span of English habitation along with settlers' efforts to change the environment, at the end of the seventeenth century the verdict was still out.

In England, where ancient climatic theories still prevailed, the dangers of hot climates seemed more certain. As Karen Kupperman has argued, the English in the seventeenth century “continued to question the wisdom of transplantation to strange lands on the basis of the Aristotelian claim that the ‘burning’ and the ‘frozen’ zones were equally uninhabitable.”¹⁰ Aristotle had theorized that the earth could be divided into sections based on latitudinal bands, and that only the middle section – between the torrid center and the frozen poles – could be inhabited by humans.¹¹ In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, then, as growing numbers of Europeans traveled to the American tropics, many of them still felt compelled to reassure inhabitants of Europe that warm climates did not induce swift and sure death. The Jesuit priest José de Acosta, for example, reassured his readers that “eyewitness experience” had disproven the incorrect but entirely reasonable theories of “the ancients” who believed that the “Torrid Zone was uninhabitable.” Aristotle and other philosophers, Acosta explained, were mistaken in their belief that “the burning heat of the sun, which is always so close overhead” in the tropical latitudes would cause the entire region to dry up any water and vegetation, rendering it unfit for human habitation.¹²

Acosta, whose work was translated into English in 1604, insisted that in fact, “men enjoy a beautiful climate in the Torrid Zone.” European travelers' reports of lands full of plants and

¹⁰ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period,” *American Historical Review* 87, no. 5 (Dec. 1982), 1278.

¹¹ See Aristotle, *Meteorology*, book II, section 5.

¹² José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, ed. Jane E. Mangan, translated by Frances M. López-Morillas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 38-39 (Book 1, chapters 9-10).

people challenged Aristotle's model of a zoned earth, a globe wrapped in bands delineating each region's proximity to the sun. Some parts of the theory remained true – the Torrid Zone was indeed hot – but other parts of it, including its inhospitable nature, could be tossed out in the face of new evidence. Not only was the Torrid Zone habitable, but far from the parched earth Aristotle had imagined the region to be, the hot climates of the Americas were lush with thriving greenery and fertile land, “well supplied with men and animals.”¹³

Still, if Europeans could imagine that the tropics could support plant and even human life, this was a far cry from climatic suitability for European bodies. While European travelers may have negated one particular aspect of climate theory, most writers clung determinedly to other parts. Seventeenth-century understandings of the body in Western Europe relied largely on the writings of ancient Greek medical practitioners and philosophers who believed that people's bodily health depended upon the surrounding environment. The most influential of these treatises was Hippocrates's *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, a substantial portion of which described climate's influence over the body. For a person to be healthy, Hippocrates explained, the body's internal humors – blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile – had to maintain a balance with the environmental elements – earth, water, air, and fire. These outer elements directly affected the internal workings of the body. A healthy body maintained a stable equilibrium between its internal humors and atmospheric changes. Bodies were permeable, and a constant movement of fluids and vapors throughout the body, as well as between bodies and their surroundings, formed the most crucial components of good health. The body would adjust of its own accord with

¹³ Acosta, 34, 37 (Book 1, chapter 9). Andrew Fitzmaurice writes that Acosta's text was “enthusiastically received by promoters of early modern English colonization.” See Fitzmaurice, “Moral Uncertainty in the Dispossession of Native Americans” in Peter Mancall, *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 403. Also see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 25-26. Acosta's work was originally published in Spain fourteen years earlier, in 1590.

gradual external changes, such as seasonal transitions. More significant changes, such as sudden weather events or travel to a different climate, could throw the body off balance and cause a change in health. Bodily health would be reestablished once the internal elements adjusted to regain balance with the outside world through the continuous movement of bodily matter.¹⁴

More than a matter of bodily health, though, climate affected people's characters, appearances, and core identities. The climate in which people lived determined their essential beings, as bodies were ultimately products of their environments. Climates, like people, had particular balances of elements, so a change of climate would produce a permanent change of character.¹⁵ Residents of the British Isles, then, who considered traveling to the hot climates of the Americas in the early part of the seventeenth century, would have had good reason to worry about their health, as well as about other potential bodily changes in a different climate.

Various reports of the tropical climate's effect on European bodies began trickling back to England in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Traveler George Best's account of a 1553 voyage to Guinea speculated on the possibility of English habitation in the tropics. "Wee also among us in England have blacke Moores, Æthiopians, out of all partes of Torrida Zona," he

¹⁴ See *Hippocrates on Airs, Water, and Places: The received Greek Text of Littré, with Latin, French, and English Translations by Eminent Scholars*, trans. Francis Adams 1849 (London: Mssrs. Wyman & Sons, 1881), 58:55. For more on humoralism and European bodies in the Americas in the early modern period, see Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20-41. Hippocratic theory also served as the reasoning behind Joseph Norris's dislike of a beverage (water) that "cooled" his stomach. Late seventeenth-century medical theory proposed particular diets of "hot" and "cold" foods (a designation separate from actual temperature) to balance the body and help it adjust to certain environments. Historian Michael Stolberg explains that by the early modern period, medical practitioners in Europe had moved beyond basic Hippocratic theory to embrace a model of health that was "founded on the continuous movement of fluids, spirits, and vapors within the body, as well as across the body's boundaries." Stolberg discusses the application of these ideas through practices, such as bloodletting, that encouraged the movement of bodily fluids. See Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness and the Sick Body in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 [2003]), esp. 83-105, 126-134 (quote on 127).

¹⁵ See Hippocrates, *Air, Water, Places*, especially sections 124-127 on the ways in which climate affects people's dispositions and bodies. Hippocrates's work in particular, along with that of other "ancients" like Aristotle, Galen, and Pliny the Elder, experienced a substantial revival among European medical practitioners and philosophers in the seventeenth century. On the Hippocratic revival, see Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1660-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30-33.

wrote, “which after a small continuance, can well endure the colde of our Countrey.” If people from hot places could bear a cold climate, Best theorized, then “why should not we as well abide the heate of their Countrey?”¹⁶ Another writer, though, did not believe in a reciprocal relationship. In his own voyage to Guinea a year after Best’s, he wrote of men returning to England who “brought with them certaine blacke slaves.” Although the visitors might be able to adjust to the “colde and moyst aire” of England, the writer believed this did not indicate that English people would be able to stand a similar transition. “[D]oubtlesse,” he wrote, “men that are borne in hot Regions may better abide colde, then men that are borne in colde Regions may abide heate.”¹⁷

By the 1620s and 30s, scattered travelers’ reports gave way to lived experience, as growing numbers of English people began settling in the Caribbean region. Henry Colt, who traveled to several Caribbean islands and began work on a home in St. Christopher in the summer of 1631, found the Torrid Zone “temperate enough, wth an ayre fresh & coole” because of the constant breezes. Although he believed the heat of the sun sometimes induced pestilential fevers which could be fatal “in y^e hott season of y^e yeer,” Colt himself had not suffered from any ill health in the tropics. In part he believed he had hedged against sickness by carefully calibrating his diet and wardrobe to the climate. In case his son George should undertake the journey from England to the Caribbean, Colt advised him to keep his stomach warm outside and

¹⁶ George Best, “A true discourse of the three Voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya, by the Northwest, under the conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall: Before which, as a necessary Preface is prefixed a twofolde discourse, containing certaine reasons to prove all partes of the World habitable” in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations: Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, made by sea or overland to the remote & farthest distant quarters of the Earth at any time within the compasse of these 1600 yeares*. (London: J.M. Dent, 1910-1913 [orig. 1589-90; enlarged edition 1598-1600]), vol. V, 172.

¹⁷ “The second voyage to Guinea set out by Sir George Barne, Sir John Yorke, Thomas Lok, Anthonie Hickman and Edward Castelin, in the yere 1554. The Captaine whereof was M. John Lok” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, vol. IV, 65.

in, by wrapping himself in a sweater and adding pepper to his food.¹⁸ Warming the stomach aboard ship served two purposes: it protected a person from sudden gusts of ocean wind that could bring chills, and it would ease the climatic transition by preparing the body for a hot place.

Several years later, Richard Ligon, who published a history of Barbados in the 1650s, confessed that upon his arrival on the island he had found the air “torridly hot.” He wondered how “bodyes comming out of cold Climates, could indure such scorching without being suffocated.” He soon found, though, that after a short time his body began to adapt, and he grew to appreciate the “coole breezes of wind” that arose with the sun.¹⁹ But at the same time that Ligon’s *History* demonstrated to some English readers the benign nature of the Caribbean climate, the reputation of the West Indian climate suffered a serious setback.

In 1654, Robert Venables, William Penn, and a fleet of English ships arrived in the Caribbean in order to oust the Spanish from Hispaniola. Landing far from the capital of Santo Domingo, in 1655 Venables conducted a mortifying campaign on land, in which his troops were “tormented with Heat, hunger, and thirst.” They brought only enough food with them to last a day or two, and found wells blocked and poisoned by the Spanish. The soldiers suffered through constant rain, were “extreamly troubled with the Flux,” and had to carry “fainting and almost famished Men” to try to find shelter.²⁰ Eventually they gave up on Hispaniola and left for Jamaica, which they somehow managed to capture from the Spanish despite the deplorable condition of the English army.

¹⁸ Henry Colt, “The Voyage of Sr Henrye Colt Knight to ye Ilands of ye Antilleas in ye shipp called ye *Alexander* whereof William Burch was Captayne & Robert Shapton Master accompanied with diuers captaynes & gentlemen of note” in V.T. Harlow, ed. *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623-1667* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1925), 98-99.

¹⁹ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (London, 1657), 9.

²⁰ Robert Venables, “Relation concerning the expedition,” published as *The Narrative of General Venables*, ed. C.H. Firth in the Royal Historical Society Publications (1900), 61:26-27, 34.

Upon their return to England, Venables and Penn found themselves imprisoned for their incompetent and failed attempt to capture Santo Domingo. Venables tried to excuse the botched expedition, insisting that he had been ill supplied with provisions from the first. He had insufficient food, water, tents and stores, and feared his troops, “raw and unseason’d to the Climate,” quickly became ill through exposure to the seasonal rains.²¹ In an extreme reversal of Aristotle’s vision of a parched tropical land, English officials, believing that Jamaica’s abundant forests and vegetation would provide plenty of provisions for the armed forces, had neglected to supply the troops with enough food.

Ultimately, Venables’s grievances with his commanders made little difference. Although his troops had fallen ill from predictable causes – poor diet, unclean drinking water, and inadequate protection from persistent rain – English officials, unwilling to admit their own lack of foresight in the matter, blamed the Jamaican climate (along with Penn’s and Venables’s ineptitude) for the deaths. In spite of Venables’s explanation of the preventable conditions causing illness, English suspicion of the Caribbean’s general unhealthiness received confirmation. As one contemporary account explained, “the excessive heat of the Sun, the want of water in many places, with other defects and impediments naturally incident to the place, and disagreeing to English constitutions, [weakened] and disable[d]” the troops.²² Through such interpretations, the bumbled Caribbean adventure provided a boost to English fears about the dangers a tropical climate posed to English bodies.

²¹ Venables, “Relations,” 49. For more on this expedition, known as the Western Design, see Carla Gardina Pestana, “English Character and the Fiasco of the Western Design,” *Early American Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 1-31. On its connections to colonial labor, see Abigail L. Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 32-55.

²² *A brief and perfect journal of the late proceedings and success of the English army in the West-Indies, continued until June the 24th, 1655: together with some quaeres inserted and answered: published for satisfaction of all such who desire truly to be informed in these particulars* (London, 1655), 24.

The notoriety of this campaign, and of the ill health it caused for so many of its participants, sparked a backlash of promotional literature extolling the virtues of the Caribbean climate. In another defensive measure, for many years after Venables's expedition several writers attempted to counter Jamaica's poor reputation by explaining the particular circumstances and irresponsible behavior of the army. In 1687, the cartographer Richard Blome argued that "the only reason that can be given for the great Mortality in the Army upon their first Arrival [in Jamaica] is, their want of Provisions, and their discontent, together with their unwillingness to labour and exercise themselves."²³ Blome hastened to assure his readers that the Jamaican climate was in no way unhealthy, provided people acted sensibly. "It is confirmed by a long experience," he wrote, "that there is no such antipathy betwixt our *Britanick* Temper and the Climate of *Jamaica*, as to necessitate them to any Distemper upon their arrival there, or occasion Diseases to prove mortal or contagious more than in other parts." Fevers, agues, and other illnesses that people experienced resulted from "Surfeits, Slothfulness, or excessive drinking."²⁴ Another report from the 1680s also attributed the rates of illness and death among colonists to situational factors. Although the heat in Jamaica was "constant and violent," the climate did not "inevitably" cause disease. Instead, sickness was "chiefly occasioned here by excess of diet, labour or want of lodging clothing or exercise, or by the situation of houses."²⁵

²³ Richard Blome, *The Present State of His Majesties Isles and Territories in America. viz. Jamaica, Barbaodes, St. Christophers, Nevis, Antego, S. Vincent, Dominica, New Jersey, Pensilvania, Monserat, Anguilla, Bermudas, Carolina, Virginia, New-England, Tobago, New-Found-Land, Mary-Land, New-York. With New Maps of every Place. Together with Astronomical Tables, Which will serve as a constant Diary or Calendar, for the use of the English Inhabitants in those Islands; from the Year 1686, to 1700.* (London: H. Clark, 1687), 23. In this case Blome wrote of the English army stationed in Jamaica after the conquest, not only of the expedition itself.

²⁴ Blome, *Present State*, 22-23.

²⁵ "The History and State of Jamaica under Lord Vaughan, with the alterations of Government that have happened since the Appointment of the Earl of Carlisle (1679-1680)," MS 159, 4-5, NLJ.

To further counteract negative perceptions of the climate and to induce migration to the islands, the colonial office in London encouraged reports promoting the salubriousness of warm climates for English bodies. Accounts from mid-century, for example, noted the “very healthfull aire” of Antigua, or the “Coole, and temperate [...] delightfull arye” in Barbados which “agree[d] with the temper of the English Nacōn.”²⁶ Early descriptions of Jamaica were likewise positive. “We finde not yt there is such an antypathy between ye Constitution of the English and this clyme,” one report stated. The “foavors and auges” that sometimes debilitated people, although “troublesome” were “never mortall.” Moreover, according to the report, these fevers resulted in large part from people’s behavior: from their refusal to labor or exercise, and from poor diet as well as the excessive consumption of alcohol.²⁷ Another report from 1664 claimed that the Jamaican mountains were “most healthfull & fruitfull land” and that although newcomers might experience fevers if they arrived in the summer months, and agues could result from rainy weather in the fall, “ye up lands and hills are as healthfull” as parts of England, which could be proven by the people, both “Blacks & Whites,” who lived “in those parts all ye worst months, & never any one sick.” Others who had been “sent sick from the low lands” had recovered, further proof of the healthy climate in Jamaica’s mountainous regions.²⁸

Many early reports from Jamaica stressed the cooling qualities the breezes imparted to the island. “The Aire here is more temperate than in any of the Caribbee Islands,” the writers of a seventeenth-century survey claimed. Jamaica was “allways cooled with the breezes that constantly blow Easterly, and refreshed with frequent showers of rain, and such dewes in the

²⁶ “A Briefe Survey of Jamaica,” Egerton MS 2395, f. 288, BL; “A Breife Discription of the Ilande of Barbados” in Harlow, ed. *Colonising Expeditions*, 43.

²⁷ “A Briefe Survey of Jamaica,” Egerton MS 2395, BL.

²⁸ CO1/18, no. 109, f. 260-1, TNA; also see “A View of the Condition of Jamaica the 20th of October 1664,” [Thomas Modyford], Add MS 11410, f. 20-21, BL. “Ague” was generally a term used to describe illnesses, often (but not always) in conjunction with fevers. It usually meant chills, aches, or general feelings of lassitude.

night.”²⁹ Richard Blome, who used these notes for his 1687 report on the English American colonies, added that the Jamaican climate “may truly be called *temperate* and *healthful*,” that, in fact, it was “one of the most delightful Places in the *World* to live in.”³⁰

If planters still seemed ambivalent about settling in Jamaica, South Carolina on the American mainland was another option.³¹ From the 1660s through the early eighteenth century, dozens of promotional pamphlets appeared in England encouraging potential colonists to settle in Carolina. All of these pamphlets stressed the “*Healthfulness of the Air*; the *Fertility of the Earth*, and *Waters*; and the great *Pleasure and Profit*” that would “accrue to those that shall go thither to enjoy the same.”³² One pamphlet, published in 1666, emphasized that the “wholsom Air” of Carolina was what “makes this Place so desireable.” Expanding upon the climate’s fitness for potential English settlers, the pamphleteer assured them that “The Summer is not too hot, and the Winter is very short and moderate, best agreeing with *English Constitutions*.”³³

The incentives for planters to settle were considerable: any free person who ventured to Carolina by late March 1667 would receive land grants from the English government in the

²⁹ “A Brief Survey of Jamaica,” Egerton MS 2395, f. 609, BL.

³⁰ Richard Blome, *Present State*, 3. In 1678 Governor Lord Carlisle even claimed that in Jamaica he had “the comfort of having my health better than in England.” See Governor Lord Carlisle to Secretary Sir Joseph Williamson, 24 October 1678, CO 1/42, TNA, no. 37.

³¹ Many early English settlers in South Carolina arrived directly from Barbados. For more on this re-location, see Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*; also see S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), especially 43-44; and Justin Roberts and Ian Beamish, “Venturing Out: The Barbadian Diaspora and the Carolina Colony, 1650-1685,” in Michelle LeMaster and Bradford J. Wood, eds. *Creating and Contesting Carolina: Proprietary Era Histories* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013): 49-72.

³² From the title of one pamphlet, *A Brief Description of the Province of Carolina, on the Coasts of Floreda. And More perticularly of a New Plantation begun by the English at Cape Feare, on that River now by them called Charles-River, the 29th of May, 1664. Wherein is set forth The Healthfulness of the Air; the Fertility of the Earth, and Waters; and the great Pleasure and Profit will accrue to those that shall go thither to enjoy the same* (London: Robert Horne, 1666) in *Historical Collections of South Carolina; embracing many rare and valuable pamphlets, and other documents, relating to the history of that state, from its first discovery to its independence, in the year 1776*. Compiled, ed. B.R. Carroll (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), Vol. II.

³³ *A Brief Description*, 13-14.

amount of 100 acres for every free man, woman, child, and male servant, and 50 acres for each female servant or slave. “Let no man be troubled at the thoughts of being a Servant for 4 or 5 year,” the writer continued, encouraging “all Artificers, as *Carpenters, Wheel-rights, Joyners, Coopers, Bricklayers, Smiths,* or diligent Husbandmen and Labourers,” who wanted to “live in a most pleasant healthful and fruitful Country” to indenture themselves. In an attempt to assure potential travelers that they would remain healthy, the pamphlet writer advertised that “at the first setting down of the Colony, when they had no house nor harbor, but wrought hard all day, in preparing Wood to build, and lay in the open Air all night,” “not one of” the first European settlers had been “ill, but continued well all the time.”³⁴

Other promotional pamphlets made similar claims. One from 1682 advertised that colonists would notice the beneficial effects of the Carolina air: men would find their bodies “more lightsome, more prone and more able to all youthful Exercises than in England;” while women would be “very fruitful” and children would quickly gain the “fresh sanguine Complexions” found throughout the colony.³⁵ Another, published the same year, explained that the Carolina air was “of so serene and excellent a temper, that the Indian Natives prolong their days to the Extremity of Old Age” and that “English Children there born, are commonly strong and lusty, of Sound Constitutions, and fresh ruddy Complexions.”³⁶ Notably, these pamphlets

³⁴ *A Brief Description*, 14-17.

³⁵ Samuel Wilson, *An Account of the Province of Carolina, in America: together with an abstract of the patent, and several other necessary and useful particulars to such as have thoughts of transporting themselves thither. Published for their information* (London: G. Larkin, 1682), in *Historical Collections of South Carolina*, 27.

³⁶ T.A. Gent, *Carolina; or a Description of the Present State of that Country, and the Natural Excellencies thereof* (London, 1682), in *Historical Collections of South Carolina*, 62-63. This pamphlet was also published under a different author, Thomas Ashe; see Thomas Ashe, *Carolina: or A Description of the Present State of that Country, and the Natural Excellencies Thereof, viz. The Healthfulness of the Air, Pleasantness of the Place, Advantage and Usefulness of those Rich Commodities there Plentifully Abounding, Which Must Encrease and Flourish by the Industry of the Planters that Daily Enlarge that Colony* (London, 1682).

showed no sense of racial difference; there was no reason to believe, for instance, that the English would not enjoy the same good health that the “Indian Natives” did in Carolina.

While pamphleteers devoted considerable space to assurances of Carolina’s healthy climate for European bodies, private letters contained a variety of settlers’ observations and opinions. Thomas Newe, who arrived in Charleston in 1682, found to his surprise that the Carolina climate was not, in fact, quite the picture of health the promotional pamphlets had made it out to be. “One thing I understand (to my sorrow) that I knew not before,” he wrote to his father, was that “most have a seasoning.” This seasoning entailed a period of ill health while the body’s internal workings struggled to adapt to the change in climate. Still, he continued, few people actually died from this seasoning, and Newe expressed his desire to stay in the country. He asked his father to send over a male servant as soon as he received money for his passage, “for such will turn to good account here.”³⁷

While the authors of the promotional pamphlets conceded that on occasion settlers experienced ill health, they dismissed this unfortunate circumstance by blaming the settlers themselves for their sickness. While one explained that people who “seated themselves near great Marshes are subject to Agues,” he added that those “who are so seated in England” had similar afflictions, and that settlers “who are planted more remote from Marshes or standing waters, are exceedingly healthy.”³⁸ Another claimed that the only “Epidemical or Mortal” illnesses colonists experienced arose from their “Excess or [...] Intemperance.”³⁹

³⁷ Thomas Newe to father, 29 May 1682, Charleston, SC. Letters of Thomas Newe, Newberry Library, Chicago [originals in Bodleian, MS. Rawlinson D. 810].

³⁸ Wilson, *Account of the Province*, 26.

³⁹ Gent, *Carolina*, 62.

Blaming settlers and travelers for their illnesses was a familiar tactic. Officials in England received numerous reports from colonial governors throughout the Greater Caribbean region claiming that the islands abounded with health; it was instead people's behavior that made them ill. In 1665 John Style wrote from Jamaica, "I conceive the clymat most healthy [...] the heate by reason of the coast and breesis most temperate; so it is not the country but the deboystness [debauchery] and intemperance of the people in the country that brings the evill vapours." For his own part, Style continued, he had never enjoyed better health since arriving on the island, and found this to be the case with others "that keeps themselves temperate."⁴⁰ Similarly, Thomas Modyford reported that he "enjoyed as great a measure of health" in Jamaica as he did in England since his "natural inclination" was to be temperate.⁴¹ Richard Ligon also warned against over-consumption of alcohol in the heat. Excessive drinking, he explained, "over-heats the body, which causes Costiveness, and Tortions in the bowels." But Ligon had nothing against alcohol itself, and even believed that it was necessary in such a climate as Barbados's. Strong drinks, he wrote, were "very requisit, where so much heat is; for the spirits being exhausted with much sweating, the inner parts are cold and faint, and shall need comforting, and reviving."⁴²

Ligon excepted, many later seventeenth-century writers took their treatises on the West Indies as an opportunity to condemn, or at least advise, their contemporaries' behavior. William Hughes, in his 1672 *The American Physitian*, warned travelers to the Caribbean region to be careful in their consumption of food and drink. Substances that produced heat in the body,

⁴⁰ Style to Council, CO 1/19/81, TNA.

⁴¹ Modyford to Council, CO 1/19/127.

⁴² Ligon, *True and Exact History*, 27. The physician Hans Sloane also attributed most illnesses – when he named a cause at all – to the over-consumption of alcohol. For more on alcohol and temperance in the seventeenth-century West Indies, see Michael R. Hill, "Temperateness, Temperance, and the Tropics: Climate and Morality in the English Atlantic World, 1555-1705" (PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 2013).

including alcohol, “put flame to fire our natural parts,” Hughes explained, and were “apt to open the Pores.” If a person’s pores were not already sufficiently opened, the body could overheat, throwing it out of balance and causing illness.⁴³ Perhaps Henry Colt had this same idea in mind when he advised his son to make every effort to keep his stomach warm on the way to the Caribbean. If he were already warm, Colt may have reasoned, the heat of the air and of the food and drink might not bother him.

Other writers implored English travelers to change their diet and behavior upon arrival in the West Indies. In 1679 Jamaica physician Thomas Trapham published what turned out to be the first of a new genre of medical literature: a treatise specifically for European colonists about health and disease in the Caribbean. Trapham’s treatise, which he wrote as a guide for travelers hoping to preserve their health in the tropics, advised newcomers to “change our way of living and accommodate it unto the Climate.” The “ordinary English way of living,” he wrote, “is no ways suitable in most Southern Countries.” Trapham explained that most diseases in warm climates resulted from ill-advised behavior. He informed his readers that the “quantity, times, and quality of our English Drink and Food, ought, according to the best of my reason, to be wholly changed for other more natural and agreeable to the clime and circumstances of living.”⁴⁴ People should eat less food at each meal, but eat more often during the day. If colonists did not change their diet, Trapham warned, they would retain their “ancient English humor,” which, although “most desirable in its proper place,” would be dangerous in a different climate. If they

⁴³ William Hughes, *The American Physitian; or, a Treatise of the Roots, Plants, Trees, Shrubs, Fruit, Herbs, &c. growing in the English Plantations in America*. (London, 1672), 141-142. Hughes advised that people consume hot food and drink only in summer, when pores would already be open, in order to minimize the dangers of overheating.

⁴⁴ Thomas Trapham, *Discourse of the State of Health in the Island of Jamaica. With a provision therefore Calculated from the Air, the Place, and the Water: The Customs and Manners of Living, &c.* (London, 1679), preface, 1, 50. Trapham wrote that upon his arrival in Jamaica, the “first Generals” he referred to in practicing medicine “were the Topicks of *Hippocrates*, viz., the Air, the Place, and the Waters,” (2), and divided his treatise into sections with these titles.

adjusted their food, drink, and manners of living, though, English travelers would be able to “shift [their] thick blood by emissions, to the bettering of the whole mass, and fundamentally securing life and health” in the tropics.⁴⁵

Like many of his contemporaries, Trapham believed that alcohol and wet weather caused the vast majority of illnesses he observed in Jamaica. The “over-copious drinking of Rum and other spirituous liquors,” he wrote, caused “distempers” among both Africans and Europeans.⁴⁶ Moreover, both suffered from exposure to excessive moisture, and the same environmental conditions – dry situations – would benefit and ensure the health of everyone. In South Carolina too, John Archdale, governor of the province at the turn of the eighteenth century, explained that any illness in the colony resulted from people’s careless behavior and “the Intemperance of too many.” In his own five-year residency in the colony, Archdale continued, he “had no Sickness, but what once I got by a careless violent Cold.” Archdale blamed a lack of proper behavior for all illnesses: “Feaver and Agues were generally gotten by carelessness” in improper clothing or excessive drinking, he wrote.⁴⁷ And when Peter Purry first proposed a settlement neighboring South Carolina, he headed off objections about the climate. “Some perhaps will object, that this Country is feverish and unhealthy,” he wrote. But, he explained, “if People are sick there, ‘t is generally an Effect of their bad Conduct, and not knowing how to regulate themselves suitably to the Country where they live.” People who did not accommodate their bodies to changes in temperature by wearing appropriate clothing, as well as people who indulged too freely in

⁴⁵ Trapham, *Discourse*, 50, 67.

⁴⁶ Trapham, *Discourse*, table of contents and chapter two.

⁴⁷ John Archdale, *A New Description of the Fertile and Pleasant Province of Carolina: with a brief account of its discovery and settling, and the government thereof to this time* (London, 1707). In *Historical Collections of South Carolina*, 96. Archdale also blamed illness upon ships arriving from the West Indies.

Madeira wine, would indeed fall ill, Purry acknowledged. Sensible behavior and moderation would, on the other hand, ensure bodily health.⁴⁸

While earlier colonial promoters, writing to counteract prejudice, assured readers that warm climates were ideally suited to English bodies, some of the later writings exhibit a subtle shift. By the turn of the eighteenth century, even climate propagandists could no longer claim universal British health in the tropics, given the existence of some reports to the contrary. These later writers began to place more emphasis on the behavior of inhabitants, explaining that the combination of climate and behavior could produce good health. This strategy gave promoters the benefit of the doubt: the climate itself was not at fault, and migrants who fell ill had failed to adapt their behavior to the environment. This moral critique often focused on alcohol consumption as it extended from personal bouts of illness to explanations of natural phenomena, such as the Port Royal earthquake. If people would just behave properly, many writers insisted, their bodies would have little problem adjusting to the unfamiliar environment. Those who subscribed to this view, and who reported their own good health in the warm climates of the Americas, could claim a moral high ground. Their good health obviously reflected proper behavior and temperance, a deduction that sometimes lead to self-satisfied reports of personal health in the Greater Caribbean.

Unlike promoters with a clear agenda, though, physicians kept a balance between environment and behavioral aspects of health in their writings. The royal physician and naturalist Hans Sloane agreed with Trapham's two-fold assessment of people's ill health: damp situations and alcohol were responsible for most of the sickness he observed in Jamaica.

⁴⁸ Peter Purry, *Proposals by Mr. Peter Purry, of Newchattel, for Encouragement of such Swiss Protestants as should agree to accompany him to Carolina, to settle a new colony. And, also, a description of the Province of South Carolina, drawn up at Charles-Town, in September 1731 (1731) in Historical Collections of South Carolina*, 135-136.

Although he found “Fevers and Agues” to be “very Epidemic all over the Island,” Sloane concluded that these arose from the frequent violent rains, much as similar fevers appeared in the “fenny and marshy Countries of *England*.”⁴⁹ And although he observed higher rates of dropsy among his patients in Jamaica, Sloane attributed them to “intermitting Fevers, and drinking extravagantly.”⁵⁰ Sloane’s original Jamaica patient, the Duke of Albemarle, whom he accompanied to the island, died shortly after arrival from extravagant living, and Sloane remained convinced that excessive drinking, more than the heat of the climate, caused much of the illness he observed in Jamaica.⁵¹

All of these reports both implicitly acknowledged the tenets of environmental health and recognized the unhealthy reputation of warm climates in Britain. Although promoters of colonization eager to salvage the reputation of warm climates pinned illness on immoral or improper behavior, ultimately they admitted that illness was related to a place’s environment. The combination of alcohol and wet weather was most dangerous and deadly. Hippocratic theory, and a sense that people’s bodies responded directly to their environments, remained strong, and the prevalence of such promotional material indicates the severity and persistence of doubts about hot places in England.

⁴⁹ Sloane believed that the diseases he observed in Jamaica were merely variations of those he had seen in England, and often compared the health of the two places. In his published text, a conglomeration of natural history and medical journal, Sloane claimed that he “never saw a disease in *Jamaica*, which I had not met with in *Europe*,” although he did make an allowance for “some very few Diseases, Symptoms, &c. from the diversity of the Air, Meat, Drink, &c.” See Sloane, *A Voyage to the islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (London, 1707), vol. I, preface, xc. Thomas Trapham believed that “*Jamaica* produces few Diseases in comparison of Northern Countries.” See Trapham, *Discourse*, table of contents.

⁵⁰ Sloane, *A Voyage to the islands*, vol. I, preface, xxxi, cxxxiv, cxxxv, cxxxvi.

⁵¹ Sloane was fascinated with the animal and plant life, as well as with the environment and human illnesses that he witnessed in Jamaica. Upon his return to England, Sloane went on to hold positions of authority in the Royal Society over the next fifty years. For more on Sloane in the Royal Society and a literary analysis of his *Voyage*, see Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 35-74.

Colonial officials recognized the power of the West Indian climate's dangerous reputation, particularly after the Penn/Venables expedition, and often used it to their own advantage. Several colonial governors found themselves disenchanted with the realities of island life once they arrived in the West Indies. Many expected ample living quarters and a full staff as part of their position, but upon arrival found that they were actually worse off than many of the planters they were meant to rule. Disappointed with small salaries and with the expenses they incurred on the islands, governors wrote to the Council of Trade and Plantations in London, requesting permission either to return to Britain or to relocate elsewhere. Almost all of these requests were framed as complaints about the climate, whether real or exaggerated, in large part because having come from England themselves, they knew the strength of the West Indian climate's reputation. Sir Richard Dutton, governor of Barbados in the early 1680s, wrote to the Council of Trade and Plantations in 1682 that he was "impaired in my health by ye violent heate [...] having not had one day of perfect health since my entrance upon my Government." Not being able to recover his health in Barbados, Dutton requested a leave of absence. "I am perswaded to believe," he wrote, "yt nothing but my native ayr can restore mee to a perfect state of health again."⁵² A few years later, Sir John Witham also wrote from Barbados that he would "never recover my health perfectly in this continual hott, & moist air, but must returne to my native Country, by ye advice of my Physitians, to recover my full health, & strength."⁵³

Others used the climate's reputation as a bargaining chip. In 1699 Lieutenant Governor William Beeston of Jamaica wrote to the Council requesting a health leave, but the Council had good reason to believe that Beeston was angling for more money rather than truly suffering from poor health. Beeston had spent much of the past 40 years in Jamaica by then, his body fully

⁵² Sir Richard Dutton to Lords of Trade and Plantations, August 29, 1682, CO 1/49/33; also see CO 29/3, f. 66.

⁵³ Sir John Witham to Lord Sunderland, April 30 1685, CO 1/57/107.

seasoned to the climate. He sent regular reports to England about the healthy condition of the island, stating over the course of several years that it was improving. He had also repeatedly complained about his meager salary. In a report of the Council of Trade and Plantations in October 1699, Gilbert Heathcote suggested that Beeston's uneasiness in Jamaica likely resulted from his financial situation, rather than from any medical condition.⁵⁴ As Beeston himself had explained six years before his own request, in 1693 the Attorney General in Jamaica, displeased with his position, requested a leave of absence "for his health." Beeston suggested that the Attorney General, rather than suffering from any effects of the climate, was really going to England to complain about his position in Jamaica.⁵⁵ Noting Heathcote's suggestion, along with Beeston's own complaints, the Council of Trade and Plantations informed Beeston that they would increase his salary and make him full governor rather than grant him such leave.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the English had received a number of conflicting reports about the Caribbean climate, both from published sources and from colonial officials. Some raved about the healthy environment, while others, like newly-appointed Barbados Governor Beville Granville, found the islands rife with disease. When Granville arrived in Barbados in the spring of 1703, he found the place "very sickly & ye sickness very mortall." A "dangerous distemper" raged in the colony, and Granville believed Barbados was "more unhealthy than it was ever yet known to be." The illness, "very catching and very mortall," soon afflicted Granville, although not seriously. Even so, he found the heat "painfull & insufferable"

⁵⁴ Journal of Council of Trade and Plantations, 23/24 October 1699, CO 391/12/218-223.

⁵⁵ Sir William Beeston to Earl of Nottingham, May 13, 1693, CO 137/44/31. The health excuse was not an uncommon one. In 1707, for instance, Naval Officer Charles Cox wrote from Barbados to the Council of Trade and Plantations, "I desire you to procure H.M. leave for my coming to England, alledging it's for the recovery of my health, for here is no living under such management, for some can do nothing right and others can do nothing wrong, therefore, if there be not a speedy alteration in this Government, above one half of the inhabitants will go off." Cox to Council, October 21, 1707, CO 28/10/37. Cox's infuriation with the colonial governance prompted him to want to leave Barbados, and while he would admit the real cause to the Council, he recognized that he needed to frame his desire for leave as a health absence as the only way it would be granted (which it was).

and was unable “to digest ye heat, air, meat or drink.” Granville sent several letters to various members of the Commission for Trade and Plantations complaining about the disappointing situation of the island, which had failed to live up to his expectations. He pleaded to be moved to a “more moderate” climate, especially Virginia (his first choice) or New York. After these pleas proved ineffective, he added that if a transfer was not an option, he would settle for a higher salary. When that, too, seemed to solicit no positive response, he suggested that he return to England but keep his position, appointing instead a Lieutenant Governor to serve in his place.⁵⁶

Colonial officials, then, often wrote of the climate’s healthiness or unhealthiness, according to their various experiences and agendas. Governors dissatisfied with their positions for any number of reasons – climatic, financial, or otherwise – could stress the prevalence of disease or the unhealthful nature of the colonial environment, while promoters downplayed reports of ill health, insisting that people who fell ill did so because of irresponsible behavior or because they had not allowed their bodies sufficient time to adapt to the climate. For most writers believed that English bodies would, after a period of time, acclimate to the foreign climate. Both natural historians and physicians described the process of bodily adjustment, or seasoning, and its complex effects on people’s bodies. Seventeenth-century writers believed that people might shed their outer layer of skin, and that their pores would expand in the heat.⁵⁷ These changes, along with a host of other bodily changes, would allow a person’s body to adjust to the unfamiliar environment.

⁵⁶ PRO 30/26/90, letters from Beville Granville, f. 5 (to Earl of Nottingham, June 4, 1703), 10 (to Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, June 16, 1703), 12 (to Mr. Warre, August 3, 1703), 14 (to George Granville Esq., August 3, 1703), 16 (to Sir John Stanley, August 3, 1703), 20-21 (to Sir John Stanley, September 3, 1703), 35 (to Sir John Stanley, January 12, 1703/4), 36 (to George Granville Esq., January 12, 1703/4), 96 (to Bernard Granville, Esq., January 31, 1704/5), TNA.

⁵⁷ William Hughes, *American Physitian*, 143; Richard Ligon, *True and Exact History*, 44-45; Thomas Trapham, *Discourse*, 10.

But those who claimed good health in warm places, along with those who insisted that people's bodies would adjust to the heat, risked undermining a growing system of African slavery whose defenders were beginning to adopt climatic justifications. One of the promotional pamphlets from South Carolina, for example, explained that Africans would naturally make good laborers in the Carolina climate. "Negroes by reason of the Mildness of the Winter thrive and stand much better, than in any of the more Northern Colonys," wrote Samuel Wilson.⁵⁸ Wilson cited no evidence that Africans in the north fell ill from the climate, but based his reasoning on ancient theories about people's innate suitability for particular climates. People from hot climates, such as Africans, would suit other hot climates. These theories, though, were precisely the same ones that other colonial promoters fought against in their insistence that Europeans could thrive in warm climates. The gradual decline in literature promoting the salubrious Greater Caribbean climate overlapped temporally with the turn to African slavery as the dominant labor force. Whether this relationship was causal, correlational, or merely coincidental, reports praising the health of hot climates for European bodies directly contradicted planters' interests in obtaining enslaved laborers from Africa.

Wilson's pamphlet attests to the persistence of deep-rooted climatic theories, as well as to the utility of these theories in promoting a system of racial slavery in plantation societies. Yet Wilson's claims lacked evidence. Significantly, although he used climatic reasoning to argue that Africans would be healthier in Carolina than they would be in cold climates, Wilson did not claim that Europeans would be unhealthy in warm places. Although some seventeenth-century writers remarked on the surprising ability of people, both Europeans and Africans, to labor in the

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Account of the Province of Carolina*, 30-31.

heat, they did not express the opinion that Europeans were unable to labor in such a climate. In fact, a multitude of evidence tells a different story.⁵⁹

In Henry Colt's 1631 account, for example, he observed that the West Indian climate produced no significant changes in English bodies. The sun, he wrote, "neuer freckles nor tannes y^e skinn, except of such as works in y^e heatt therof all day." Colt meant to reassure English readers by declaring that only those who worked in the sun saw changes in their skin. But his comment also reveals the commonplace nature of light-skinned manual laborers in the Caribbean. Some English, Scottish, and Irish people would tan or freckle precisely because they did work in the heat all day. In fact, Colt provided an extensive account of several such laborers who worked to clear a plot of land in St. Christopher. He described the difficult process of clearing the dense forest, where thick vines entangled the trees, often making them inseparable from one another. The vines ran "vpp to y^e topps of trees & then downe to y^e bottome, running about like roaps" so impenetrable that "we could not [divide] them wthout cuttinge downe 4 or 5 togeether," he wrote.⁶⁰

Servants from the British Isles performed the difficult manual labor of clearing land for Colt's homestead. Neither lumber nor palmetto leaves grew close to the spot Colt had chosen, so all building materials had to be "transported vppon y^e shoulders of men, y^e way from y^e sea half a mile all vpp hill." The labor was so demanding that Colt wrote to his son requesting more servants. "I want at least 40 men moor," he wrote. "I haue a great plantation, & I will [...] pay all men y^t w^{ch} is due vnto them next yeer."⁶¹ Colt's desire for servants reflected his

⁵⁹ Wilson's claims were not all that common among pamphlet writers in the early 1680s. By the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, climatic justifications for African slavery had become more common in pamphlets, although most of these pamphlets were created by backers of the African Company who had a direct interest in promoting the slave trade. See Swingen, *Competing Visions*, 179-180.

⁶⁰ Colt, "Voyage," 73, 90.

understanding of the Caribbean labor force in the early seventeenth century: if he promised payment, he would be able to procure European laborers for his nascent plantation.

By the time Colt traveled to St. Christopher, the English had already established settlements on several Caribbean islands. Most of the wealthier inhabitants owned plantations worked by European indentured servants who cleared brush, prepared fields, and cultivated and harvested crops such as tobacco, indigo, cotton, and ginger. Although some planters also relied on the labor of natives, the market for indentured servants thrived, especially as English officials began sentencing convicts to be shipped to the islands. As Colt's narrative makes clear, his reliance on indentured servants, as well as his requests for more, attests to their prevalence and importance in the early Caribbean settlements.

Several years later, Richard Ligon was both shocked and impressed with the hard labor servants were expected to perform on plantations. After a night spent in a cabin constructed of "sticks, withs, and Plantine leaves," he wrote, servants were "rung out with a Bell to work, at six a clock in the morning, with a severe Overseer to command them, till the Bell ring again, which is at eleven a clock; and then they return, and are set to dinner." After a meager meal of "Lob-lollie [gruel], Bonavist [beans], or Potatoes," they were "rung out again to the field, there to work till six, and then home again, to a supper of the same." These servants, he explained, were "put to very hard labour" in the fields. Assuring his readers of Barbados's benign climate, Ligon explained that even during the hottest part of the year, "servants, both Christians, and slaves, labour and travell tenne hours in a day."⁶² Europeans, then, or "Christians," could indeed adjust to the tropical climate. In fact, as Ligon observed, many had adapted to the extent that they could labor all day in the Caribbean heat. Nowhere in his history did Ligon indicate that

⁶¹ Colt, "Voyage," 101.

⁶² Ligon, *True and Exact History*, 44-45, 9, 27.

European servants were unable to perform difficult manual labor, nor did he note that such physical exertion in the heat would sicken or sap the strength of Europeans any more than it would that of African laborers.

At the time Ligon wrote, a generation after Colt, the population of the Caribbean islands was undergoing a massive transition. During the mid-seventeenth century the workforce changed in composition from a majority of European indentured servants to a majority of enslaved Africans.⁶³ This change was roughly concurrent with the explosion of sugar as an increasingly popular crop for planters, although several still grew cotton, indigo, and tobacco.⁶⁴ The transition itself has provoked a significant amount of historical debate, and scholars have offered both economic and race-based explanations for the transition from indentured to enslaved labor in the mid-seventeenth century. Betty Wood aptly sums up the confluence of the two as she explains that while a “preexisting English racial awareness” contributed to African enslavement and the experience of slavery then strengthened racial attitudes, Caribbean planters turned to slavery over indentured labor “principally for economic reasons.”⁶⁵ These reasons

⁶³ See Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), especially chapter 3; Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapter 6; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), especially chapter 4.

⁶⁴ For more on the transition to sugar during the 1640s and 50s, see John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, “The Sugar Industry in the Seventeenth Century: A New Perspective on the Barbadian ‘Sugar Revolution’” in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed. *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 289-330. For more on the labor transition, see Hilary Beckles, *White Servitude*, chapter 5; Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor*, 85; Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 67-73. Dunn provides some excellent tables showing the composition of the labor force on Barbados plantations in the 1640-60s (68), the numbers of servants shipped from Bristol to the islands during the 1650s-80s (70), and Barbados population estimates and a census for a slightly later period (87, 88). These tables demonstrate the stark drop in servant population along with the rise in the enslaved population in the sugar islands.

⁶⁵ Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 8. For more on the preexistence of racial awareness or biases, see Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness*; Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women*. On the way in which these existing racial biases hardened through the experience of slavery, see Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*. For a greater explication of Wood’s economic

were multifaceted and driven by both supply and demand factors. The supply side itself had two parts: one, the increased availability of West Africans from Dutch slave traders, and two, the shrinking population of readily available European servants.⁶⁶

Several factors contributed to the decrease in potential servants, including the economic opportunities in England following the Civil War and the mid-century English Navigation and Trade Laws.⁶⁷ Some historical scholarship draws attention to the decisions of English laborers themselves, as historians argue that increasing economic opportunities in England encouraged many potential servants to stay rather than leave for the colonies, or to choose mainland colonies with greater post-indenture opportunities. Russell Menard, for example, argues that the population of migrant servants began to decline in the 1660s as a result of both a decreasing population in England and better prospects for those who stayed.⁶⁸ By the 1660s, Menard argues that the sugar boom in Barbados and the large influx of Africans affected servants' decisions, since ex-servants faced "severe overcrowding and slim prospects" and that among potential

argument, see Betty Wood, *Origins*, 48-55. Most recently, Jenny Shaw's study of Irish laborers in the seventeenth-century Caribbean complicates arguments for clear-cut racial slavery. See Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), especially chapters 1 and 5.

⁶⁶ As Russell Menard puts it, "the supply of slaves from Africa proved to be more responsive to the rising price of labor than did the supply of servants from England, Ireland, and Scotland." See Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 49.

⁶⁷ Hilary Beckles argues that the Navigation and Trade Laws of 1660 and 1661 deprived many West Indian planters of easy access to Scottish servants, and that this dearth in the servant pool was one factor in the transition to African slaves during this period (Beckles, *White Servitude*, 123). This change was in contrast to the previous decade, when Cromwell sent prisoners of war (including Scots) to Barbados, in the mid-1650s (53). It also differed from the earlier Navigation Laws of 1651, when several merchants circumvented the Navigation Laws and transported "a considerable number of Scottish laborers" using special licenses (49). Still, Beckles points out that in the early 1660s the Scots "rid themselves of 'social undesirables'" by sending shiploads to Barbados (49). For more on the transportation of English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh laborers to the Caribbean, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 186-192.

⁶⁸ See Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 45. Also on the declining British population during this period see David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43.

servants, “few were willing to work as plantation laborers alongside African slaves.”⁶⁹

Moreover, as the reputation of the West Indies, and particularly Barbados in the mid-seventeenth century, reached England and Scotland, some potential laborers chose to forego the brutal passage and hard labor that awaited them across the ocean.⁷⁰

Other scholars see the transition as a careful economic calculation on the part of planters as they began to believe that enslaved labor cost less than indentured.⁷¹ Still others see the switch as a reflection of changing ideas in England about the value of domestic laborers.⁷² All of these interpretations, at various levels, view this transition as a financial decision; enslaved laborers turned out to be cheaper in the long run, and, even more importantly, by the middle of the century they were more readily available than were servants from Europe.

Letters from West Indian planters confirm the desperate shortage of servants. Planter Christopher Jeaffreson, for example, repeatedly wrote from St. Christopher to his cousin in England requesting more servants. When he first arrived on the island in 1676 he immediately

⁶⁹ Menard, *Sweet Negotiations*, 45.

⁷⁰ Carla Pestana, for example, argues that, “Accurate information about labor conditions was slow to spread to potential servants, but, as working people became aware of problems in particular New World destinations, recruiters had more difficulty lining up volunteers to travel as laborers to those ports.” See Pestana, *The English Atlantic*, 186. Also see Wood, *Origins*, 55.

⁷¹ Richard Dunn’s study of the planter class in the seventeenth century reveals a marked economic sensibility among many of them. He argues that “the English sugar planter” was in many ways “strictly a businessman,” and converted from European servants to African slaves after witnessing the success of Brazilian sugar plantations dependent on enslaved labor (and as the servant base grew increasingly scarce) (65, 71-73). Similarly, Simon Newman argues that planters “began shifting from white servants to black slaves as the latter became a more cost-effective investment” and as the “supply of voluntary indentured servants diminished” (85). In *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) Lorena Walsh argues that seventeenth-century tobacco planters in the Chesapeake, traditionally considered by historians to be less shrewd than northern merchants, actually made deliberate economic calculations that led them to switch to enslaved labor on their plantations *before* the supply of servants began to wane significantly. Either way, these historians seem to agree that the transition was primarily an economic one.

⁷² Abigail Swingen argues that shifting perceptions about imperial expansion and the utility of domestic laborers in England contributed to the transition from indentured to enslaved labor in the empire. See Swingen, “Labor: Employment, Colonial Servitude, and Slavery in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic” in Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, eds. *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 47-74. Also see Beckles, *White Servitude*, 140-143, on the decreasing returns to ex-servants in the colonies.

implored his cousin to send a couple of carpenters and masons, and over the course of the following six years his demands increased. He wanted “any laborious and industrious men,” whom he promised to house, feed, and clothe, rewarding them with significant amounts of sugar upon the expiration of their indentures.⁷³ By 1681 he found himself in need of “some white servants, especially a mason, carpenter, taylor, smith, or any handy craftsman,” as well as a clerk. He would take, he wrote, “any sorte of men, and one or two women,” including “labourers and menial servants.” Jeaffreson informed his cousin that he believed numbers of both Scottish and Englishmen “would willingly change their clymate” to venture to St. Christopher upon the terms he offered.⁷⁴

Jeaffreson’s growing frustration with the lack of servants reflected the complaints of many contemporary planters. A report issued by the Council of Foreign Plantations in 1660, a short time after the English wrested Jamaica from the Spanish, noted the difficulty of procuring laborers for the colonies. According to the report, although servants were “the wealth of planters, and the seed of plantations” they were not easy to obtain. The report explained the difficulty: “either they must bee Whites, or Blacks; if Whites, they must bee drawn out of gaoles, and prisons: and such servants are but ill-fitted to the beginnings of a plantation;” otherwise servants from Scotland needed the promise of compensation. As for “Blacks,” the report continued, the committee did not want to risk the dangers of a large African population working

⁷³ Christopher Jeaffreson to William Poyntz, 5 June 1676, 11 May 1677 in *A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century from the papers of Christopher Jeaffreson, 1676-1686*, ed. J.C. Jeaffreson (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1878), vol. I, 186, 207-209. He wrote that the indentures were generally four years, and that it was customary to promise three hundred pounds of sugar at the end of this term. “But for a good carpenter,” he wrote, “I would allow him foure thousand of sugar, or a little more, [...] and the like to a good cooper, and soe to a mason.”

⁷⁴ Jeaffreson to Poyntz, 6 May 1681 in *A Young Squire*, vol. I, 255-259. For more examples of seventeenth-century Caribbean inhabitants writing to relatives in England requesting servants, see Larry Gragg, *Englishmen Transplanted*, 113-115.

for a “paucitie of planters.”⁷⁵ The report reflects the growing unwillingness of Britons to travel to the West Indian colonies. English servants could only be procured from prison, a circumstance indicating reluctance on the part of the general population. Scots were perhaps more open to the idea of relocating, in part because of Scotland’s bleaker economic situation, but even desperate Scottish laborers refused to travel without an acceptable contract.

Moreover, as other reports clarify, strict laws against free trade with Scotland limited planters’ prospects. In 1667 representatives of Barbados petitioned the King for free trade with Scotland so that the island might have a steady supply of Scottish servants. While they waited, the representatives pleaded for a “transport of one or two thousand of English servants” to work plantations.⁷⁶ Petitions like these continued for decades. In 1680, Barbados governor Jonathan Atkins complained to the Committee for Trade and Plantations about the shortage of Europeans on the island. A “great number of people” had left over the past six years for Jamaica, Carolina, and Antigua, where they hoped to acquire more land. Servants either refused to come to Barbados or else arrived with what Atkins considered to be short contracts. Atkins believed that part of the problem lay with Parliament. The “strict Acts in England for Trade,” he explained, prevented “any white servants” from going to the Caribbean.⁷⁷ Three years later his successor Richard Dutton agreed. Barbados was in need of “a yearly supply of white servants,” he wrote, both to work plantations and to compose a militia. Dutton requested that the Committee ask the King to allow “such a proportion yearly of servants from Scotland as may supply the necessities

⁷⁵ Egerton MS 2395, f. 289-290, BL.

⁷⁶ Petition of representatives of Barbados to King, 5 September 1667, CO 1/21, f. 207, TNA.

⁷⁷ Sir Jonathan Atkins to Committee, 26 October 1680, CO 29/3, f. 46-47, TNA.

of the Island, [planters] finding by long experience that [Scots] are much better servants, than any that are sent thither from any other place.”⁷⁸

Planters, though, compounded the supply problem themselves. As Atkins complained, planters’ personal economic calculations added to the servant shortage. “[S]ince [planters] have found the conveniency by the labor & cheap keeping of slaves,” he wrote, “they have neglected the keeping of white men with whome alone they formerly carried on their Plantations.”⁷⁹

Several years later, Edwyn Stede of Barbados registered a similar grievance. Because planters found “Christian servants” to be “less profitable” to them than “the Negroes,” he explained, “they keep but few Christian servants.”⁸⁰ Even though colonial residents enjoyed neither free trade with Scotland nor with “the Coast of Ginney for Negroe Servants,” planters were increasingly finding that slaves were more affordable and obtainable than servants.⁸¹ To maximize profits, therefore, they funneled their resources into acquiring enslaved Africans over indentured Europeans.

Colonial governors and councils battled a dual opposition in their desire for European inhabitants. For governors and governing boards, expanding the population of white servants on an island had obvious appeal, since such men would serve as a colonial defense force. After decades of writing to Parliament, though, governors found themselves repeating the same requests. In the early 1690s, the Jamaica Council instructed agents in England working on their behalf to “encourage a trade with Scotland, that we may have white people from there [...] and also a trade with Wales may be obtained for white people.” The Council wanted both “servants

⁷⁸ Proposals made by Richard Dutton to Lords of Privy Council appointed by Committee for Trade and Plantations [two dates given: 1 September and 19 December 1683], CO 29/3, f. 106, TNA.

⁷⁹ Atkins to Committee, 26 October 1680, CO 29/3, f. 46-47.

⁸⁰ Edwyn Stede to Committee, March 1687/8, CO 29/3, f. 232.

⁸¹ Lord William Willoughby of Barbados to His Majesty (rec’d 9 Sept. 1667), CO 1/21, f. 168.

& tradesmen,” and reminded the agents to press for measures “encouraging the importation of white servants or free people from all countrys that you shall think fitt.”⁸² But English laws prohibiting free trade on the one hand, and planters’ preferences for cheaper laborers on the other, together stymied colonial governors.

The shortage of European servants in the Caribbean, then, had nothing to do with planters’ climatic concerns. Writers who observed European laborers sometimes expressed surprise at their ability, but did not note any climatic obstacle to their labor. Instead, their observations focused on the harsh treatment white servants received at the hands of their masters. In the 1660s, for example, a visitor to Barbados wrote that on plantations he had “seene 30, sometimes 40, Christians, English, Scotch and Irish at worke in the parching sun, without shirt, shoe or stockin.” Meanwhile, slaves worked “at their respective trades, in a good condition.” The writer explained that planters hired European craftsmen to teach Africans various trades and then abandoned the Europeans in favor of enslaved Africans. As a result, the writer bemoaned that the existing plantation economy “may be quickly endangered, for now it’s not as formerly.”⁸³ Richard Ligon believed that Caribbean planters treated their indentured servants more harshly than slaves, and John Taylor wrote in 1687 that the Jamaican planter was “verey severe to his English servants.” These servants were “kept verey hard to their labour att felling of timber, hewing staves for casks, sugar boyling and other labours, soe that they are little better than slaves.” They had poor food, lodging, and clothing, and faced “hard labour in the open feild, allmost burnt up with the sun.”⁸⁴

⁸² Instructions from the Jamaica Council, signed by Andrew Langly and Edward Broughton, to agents Gilbert Heathcote, Bartholomew Gracodion, and John Tutt [1693], in “History of the Island of Jamaica,” Henry Barham, 1722, Sloane MS 3918, f. 93, BL.

⁸³ “Some Observations on the Island of Barbados” (1667), CO 1/21, f. 334-335.

Taylor never insisted that Europeans were less suited than Africans to manual labor in the Caribbean, nor did he believe that they were more subject to illness and disease.⁸⁵ Writers who did note differing rates of illness among Europeans and Africans often observed that Africans were actually more subject to diseases such as dropsy and yaws than were Europeans, even if some noted a greater European propensity for yellow fever. Taylor, for instance, believed that Africans were “naturally afflicted with the French pox in a more higher degree than ever any European bodys were, and this they here call the yaws, and they are also subject to the dropsie in a verey high manner[.]”⁸⁶ Africans, then, were actually less healthy in the West Indies than were Europeans, at least according to Taylor’s observation. And although physicians Thomas Trapham and Hans Sloane disagreed about some aspects of the West Indian disease environment, neither believed that Europeans were more subject to illness in the West Indies than Africans

⁸⁴ John Taylor, *Jamaica in 1687: The Taylor Manuscript at the National Library of Jamaica*, ed. David Buisseret (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2008), vol II, 266.

⁸⁵ Some historians have argued that Africans were biologically better suited to the West Indian climate than were Europeans. See, for example, Gary Puckrein, “Climate, Health and Black Labor in the English Americas” *Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 2 (August 1979): 179-193; Trevor Burnard, “‘The Countrie Continues Sicklie’: White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780” *Social History of Medicine* 12, no. 1 (1999), 71-72; Simon Newman, *A New World of Labor*, 76. Beckles provides a summary of many similar historical arguments in *White Servitude* (116), but argues that, in fact, contemporaries did not believe that Africans were less susceptible to diseases than were Europeans, and in the case of yaws, they believed Africans were more susceptible. For the most part, though, Beckles points out that seventeenth-century inhabitants of the West Indies “conceived of diseases in terms of ‘plague and famine,’ rather than in terms of bacteria, viruses, and pathogens. They died, therefore, puzzled as to the nature of unfamiliar ailments and maladies” (119). Indeed, many of these arguments apply the tenets of modern medicine retroactively in an attempt to explain seventeenth-century English attitudes towards manual labor in Caribbean climates. Similarly, David Eltis writes, “Whatever the European-African mortality differentials, a hostile disease environment was never enough to prevent European indentured servants from working in the Caribbean sugar sector. Medical evidence would be pertinent only if Europeans had never labored in the Caribbean under any labor regime or if European slavery had been tried and found wanting because of excess mortality. In fact, peoples of Europe and Africa died prematurely for different reasons in the Caribbean, but life expectancies for the two groups were not very different.” See Eltis, *Rise of African Slavery*, 68.

⁸⁶ Taylor, *Jamaica in 1687*, 266–268. Others recorded cases of dropsy in both European and African bodies, but remarked upon the propensity for people to develop the disorder in the Caribbean climate. See (for example) Hans Sloane, *A voyage to the islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, with the natural history of the Herbs and Trees, Four-Footed Beasts, Fishes, Birds, Insects, Reptiles, &c. of the last of those islands; to which is prefix’d an introduction, wherein is an account of the inhabitants, air, waters, diseases, trade, &c. of that Place, with some Relations concerning the Neighbouring Continent, and Islands of America* (London, 1707), vol. I, preface, cxxxiv.

were.⁸⁷ Sloane recorded roughly equal cases of black and white patients, and both physicians held firm beliefs that wet weather and alcohol consumption, not skin color or origin, were the primary culprits in causing illness for everyone on the islands.

Although some seventeenth-century accounts of the West Indian climate present a skewed picture, either overly praising or lambasting the environment, other sources reflect people's genuine beliefs in the climate's healthiness or danger. And while some European travelers found their bodies did not agree with the change of climate, most did not believe that no Europeans could ever thrive there. Planters' personal letters, for example, consistently contain requests for servants. Nowhere do these letters confirm, or even imply, that European laborers would fall ill or be unable to labor in the tropical heat; rather they contain repeated pleas for servants, sometimes with promises of advance payment. While some sources show planters' relatively poor treatment of indentured servants, West Indian residents who wrote to friends and relatives requesting more servants would have had to pay for their passage, and thus would have regarded these servants as something of an investment, at least on a temporary basis. They would have expected the servants to at least live long enough to fulfill the terms of their contracts, and would likely not have bothered to pay for the passage of people whom they believed would die immediately upon exposure to a tropical climate. Most importantly, seventeenth-century planters did not express the idea that Europeans were constitutionally unable to labor in the Caribbean climate. For people who believed that ill health resulted from

⁸⁷ James Knight, an eighteenth-century natural historian of Jamaica, wrote that Trapham had claimed that some diseases struck Europeans but spared Africans and Indians. Knight wrote that Trapham attributed the disparity to bodily cleanliness; because Africans and Indians bathed daily, they were spared some illnesses, and Europeans could protect themselves by bathing more often. (See James Knight, "The Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica," vol. II, Add MS 12419, f. 65, BL). Yet although Trapham's text does recommend that Europeans bathe more often, he does not mention differing rates of health between Africans and Europeans. His only discusses the better health of Indians in "the East," who, in spite of living in a hot climate, did not suffer from the dry belly-ache because they bathed frequently (See Trapham, *Discourse*, 136; on the benefits of bathing see 136-137; 140-142.)

environmental factors, praising the climate as particularly healthy (as many of them did) would seem an odd way to go about insisting on their own bodily inadequacy for the local environment.

In spite of the general acceptance of Europeans' ability to labor in hot climates in the first part of the seventeenth century, though, accounts of Venables's expedition and of the Port Royal earthquake reinforced British fears of tropical climates. Several later natural histories attest to the lasting damage these incidents wrought upon perceptions of the climate. Writing three quarters of the way through the eighteenth century, planter Edward Long of Jamaica published his own account of Penn's and Venables's expedition. Adopting a familiar tone of moral condemnation, Long explained to his readers that the high rates of illness and death accompanying the expedition had everything to do with behavior and nothing to do with the West Indian climate. "Being fairly stated," he wrote, "it will appear that the same men, carrying the like thoughtless conduct and vices into any other uninhabited quarter of the globe, must infallibly have involved themselves in the like calamitous situation." Venables and his men, in other words, became ill through their own behavior. Their "thoughtless conduct and vices" would doubtless have caused illness, Long believed, anywhere in the world.⁸⁸

Even so, because the "calamitous situation" had occurred in that particular time and place, the Caribbean climate's reputation suffered. "It is difficult to remove a stubborn prejudice," Long lamented, "which has gained strength by the consent of popular opinion; but it is at least equitable to attempt some proof of its being erroneously founded." In the pages that followed, Long tried to remove, or at least improve, this prejudice against Jamaica's climate,

⁸⁸ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situations, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government*. (Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.: London, 1970 [1774]), vol. I, 221. For more on morality and behavior related to the climate during the eighteenth century, see (on Jamaica) Trevor Burnard and Richard Follet, "Caribbean Slavery, British Anti-Slavery, and the Cultural Politics of Venereal Disease," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 2 (June 2012): 427–451; (on England) Vladimir Jankovic, *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Medicine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

insisting upon its salubrity and expressing frustration with persistent English biases. “The climate of the island has unjustly been accused by many writers on the subject, the one copying from the other, and represented as almost pestilential, without an examination into the real sources of this mortality,” he wrote.⁸⁹

The earthquake, too, had done little to improve Jamaica’s reputation. As one eighteenth-century historian of Jamaica wrote, after the quake and the sickness that followed, “many persons were so terrified that they removed to other countries [...] and strangers were so discouraged, that very few would venture over and become settlers [*sic*] for many years after.”⁹⁰ Even over a century later, historian Robert Renny reiterated the dangerous ramifications of the quake: a “malignant fever” followed the initial shock, he wrote, which “snatched thousands of unresisting victims to the grave.” By the autumn, “the rich and flourishing island of Jamaica was considerably depopulated.” “It has been remarked,” Renny mused, “that the climate of this island is less genial, the air less salubrious, and the soil more unfruitful than formerly.”⁹¹

Renny’s remarks echoed the observations of several witnesses to the earthquake in 1692. As accounts of the earthquake showed, contemporaries believed that changes in the climate following the quake were largely responsible for the widespread illness and death. Although several of the reports emphasized that damaged infrastructure, a contaminated water supply, and inadequate shelter actually caused much of the sickness, the high incidences of death seemed to signify that the climate of Jamaica had changed for the worse. This change was, in fact, the

⁸⁹ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 221. For another account and explanation of the expedition, see Henry Barham’s 1722 “History of the Island of Jamaica,” Sloane MS 3918, BL.

⁹⁰ James Knight, “History of Jamaica,” vol. I, Add MS 12418, f. 149.

⁹¹ Robert Renny, *An History of Jamaica. With observations on the climate, scenery, trade, productions, negroes, slave trade, diseases of Europeans, customs, manners, and dispositions of the inhabitants. To which is added, an illustration of the advantages, which are likely to result, from the abolition of the slave trade* (London: J. Cawthorn, 1807), 42-43.

opposite of what many colonial promoters hoped would occur. Several who claimed that the Caribbean climate was healthy held two sets of expectations: first, that European bodies would adjust to the environment, and second, that English colonists would actually improve the climate itself. Through environmental management projects such as clearing forested land and draining swamps, many English settlers believed they could change the climate to suit their bodily constitutions, making the Caribbean healthier for Europeans.⁹²

But the earthquake had significantly damaged that hope, and the alarming rates of illness appeared to represent the inevitable consequences of the hot, damp climate, and to confirm earlier English fears about the dangers of the Torrid Zone. The general “change of air” following the quake, along with the accompanying alterations in people’s surrounding environment – the increased exposure to dampness, as well as the smells connected with decaying matter and the “hurtful vapours” from the earth – caused changes in people’s bodies, making them sick.

Edward Long’s attempt to reverse the poor reputation of the island’s environment demonstrates the power of climate as an ideological instrument in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Atlantic. Most British people who ventured to that part of the world took preconceived notions of the climate with them when they went: James Barclay, for example, who traveled from Scotland to Jamaica in the 1720s, wrote to his uncle about the effects of the

⁹² Thomas Modyford’s 1663 report of Jamaica, for example, noted that although the island had “formerly” been “somewhat sickly,” this was merely “because the woods were not opened,” and the health of the place would improve as the trees were cleared. Add MS 11410, f. 154, BL. Similarly, a description of Barbados and Grenada from the 1660s noted that “hott Countrys” were “very destructive to the Northern Europeans” upon their initial arrival, even “at least for the first 30 yeares,” bodies would adapt and climates would improve. See John Scott, “The Descriptions of Barbados and Grenada,” c. 1668, Sloane MS 3662, BL. This belief in the initial unhealthiness of recently-cleared land is the reason that an earthquake commentator explained that Kingston’s unhealthiness resulted “from the first clearing of the Ground.” See Sloane and Toledo, “A Letter,” no. VIII, 100, referenced on page 3. There is a great deal of historical literature on the improvement of colonial environments; for the seventeenth century, see (among others) Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes* (2006); also see Kate Mulry, “England’s Interest and Improvement: Cultivating Landscapes and Natural Subjects in the English Atlantic, 1660-1685” (PhD Dissertation, New York University, 2015). For more in this dissertation, see Chapter Three.

climate on his own body. “I believe you are not unacquainted with the sickliness of this climate,” he wrote, “which I do assure you is no better than it is said to be.” In spite of Barclay’s initial confirmation of the climate’s unhealthiness, though, his own experience differed from his expectations. As he informed his uncle, “I have kept my health perfectly well, & except a small intermitting fever with which I was seized on my first coming here, I have not had the least reason to complain of sickness since I have been in the Island.”⁹³ A year and a half later, his health suffered somewhat, although not too much; he wrote to another uncle that he had “kept my health pretty well hitherto, tho not altogether free from sickness.” Still, he found “the place agrees with me better than I expected.”⁹⁴

But Barclay’s letters were private documents; only his uncles, and perhaps a circle of friends and family, would have heard his measured reports of Jamaica’s climate. These letters, and others like them, would do virtually nothing to augment the poor reputation of the West Indian climate circulating in Britain by the turn of the eighteenth century. Some people would have had access to Ligon’s, Trapham’s, and Sloane’s texts, in which they took pains to explain the beneficial qualities of the refreshing breezes on the surprisingly moderate West Indian climate. More might have heard about Venables’s and Penn’s expedition and the numbers of soldiers who contracted mortal illnesses while in the islands. While Venables attempted to explain the causes of these high rates of sickness, most people did not have access to his narrative, and were not privy to the explanations he offered. Instead, they heard only of the overwhelming losses the army suffered, and attributed those losses to the dangerous climate. Many more people, though, would have heard about the Port Royal earthquake and the

⁹³ James Barclay to Charles Gordon, 5 December 1727, Gordon Family Papers, University of Aberdeen Library Special Collections, MS1160/5/1, Aberdeen, Scotland.

⁹⁴ James Barclay to David Gordon, 9 June 1729. Gordon Family Papers, MS1160/5/2, University of Aberdeen Library.

devastation it caused, both to the natural environment and through its considerable death toll. Perhaps even more devastating for Jamaica's reputation, the large numbers of people who became ill or died over the course of the following months signaled the dangers of the tropical climate.

By the 1720s, people in Britain confronted a bewildering mix of reports about the Greater Caribbean climate. Some, such as relatives of travelers like James Barclay, read that the climate was not as bad as expected, or that it might even be conducive to health. Several received requests for British servants, an indication that a removal to the West Indian climate did not signal an automatic or immediate death sentence. Others, particularly imperial officials, fielded complaints about the climate's dangerous and inhospitable nature, though these officials then had to try to parse genuine reports of ill health from veiled requests for higher salaries. Readers of natural histories and scientific journals such as the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, on the other hand, encountered a variety of information regarding the Greater Caribbean environment. Some of these accounts, such as stories of the Port Royal earthquake and its aftermath, suggested the perils of warm climates for British bodies, while other reports assured readers that the tropical or semi-tropical environment was in fact mild and temperate.⁹⁵

The fact that positive reports of the West Indian climate abounded during the seventeenth century appears not to have mattered to eighteenth-century portrayals of the Caribbean environment. As his letters document, James Barclay was well aware of the climate's sickly

⁹⁵ Hans Sloane's various publications, in fact, contributed to the paradox at the root of English perceptions of the West Indian climate. After living in Jamaica in 1687, Sloane began work on a natural history, in which he wrote about the pleasant climate of the island. But the first volume of this detailed and illustrated account did not appear until 1707. In the meantime, Sloane's fascination with the natural world led him to collect and publish accounts of the Port Royal earthquake, including reports of the illness that followed, in *Philosophical Transactions* in 1694. The accounts he published detailing the quake's destruction overshadowed his own, more lavish (and more expensive and less widely available) observations of the West Indian climate's relatively benign nature that appeared over a decade later.

reputation when he ventured to Jamaica in the late 1720s. By the eighteenth century, planters chose to ignore much of their predecessors' experience as they promoted their own version of the climate, one which suited African laborers above all others. Although Edward Long tried to counter the poor reputation of Jamaica's climate, he did so carefully. Europeans could be healthy in the tropics, but perhaps not healthy enough for strenuous manual labor. Their bodies would change and adapt to the climate enough so they would enjoy good health, but not to the extent that their skin would permanently darken. Long would later insist that only people of African descent could labor in the West Indies, resorting to climatic arguments that helped him socially and financially, but he still maintained that the Jamaican climate suited English bodies.

The growth of the English sugar industry and the large-scale replacement of European servants with enslaved Africans occurred as portrayals of the West Indian climate became increasingly negative.⁹⁶ Perhaps potential servants were discouraged by reports of the climate, or (more likely) by the increasing scarcity of land once promised to servants upon the expiration of their indentures. Still, because of various conflicting reports, many Britons harbored a degree of uncertainty about the Greater Caribbean climate.

It was this uncertainty about the effects of the region's climate upon British bodies, rather than any negative conviction, that led a group of philanthropists in London to consider financing a new colony in the semi-tropical Lowcountry. In spite of Sloane's claim that "Fevers and Agues" were "common and mortal" in Carolina, the wealth of promotional literature and

⁹⁶ Sidney Mintz makes a compelling argument for viewing the seventeenth-century sugar plantation as an "industrial enterprise" that preceded factory industries in England. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 50. Planters found that enslaved laborers worked more efficiently than servants did on large sugar plantations, particularly as those plantations turned towards proto-industrial factory operations in the late seventeenth century.

accounts by natural historians tempered this report.⁹⁷ John Lawson, for example, surveying Carolina in 1701, wrote of the “very healthful” climate that was becoming daily more so as it was “more clear’d of Wood.” He found the weather “very agreeable to *European* Bodies, and makes them healthy,” a claim that would have given hope and encouragement to potential migrants or investors.⁹⁸ Even more appealing, Carolina did not appear to suffer from earthquakes.

The settled parts of Carolina did rely on African labor. Rice planters dominated the Carolina colony, and as many late seventeenth-century Lowcountry settlers arrived from Barbados, they brought enslaved Africans with them. Several of these planters quickly became wealthy, and by the late 1720s only those who could afford large numbers of enslaved laborers found themselves able to compete in the flourishing rice market. But Carolina also had vast tracts of uncultivated land, and in the 1720s, a group of British philanthropists believed that a portion of that land – an area of the Lowcountry to the south of Charleston – would be an auspicious place to send Britons to start a new colony. To appease the Carolinians, the colony would not grow rice. And unlike its northern neighbor, this new place, to be called Georgia in honor of the King, would shun the use of African laborers. Instead it would employ many of those who once might have been shipped to the West Indies as indentured servants: Britons who desired, or agreed, to be small farmers. These people would clear land in Georgia, build homes for themselves, and supply Britain with semi-tropical products.

Despite mixed reports of the Lowcountry climate, these philanthropists, who soon made themselves into Georgia’s Trustees, based their plan on the beneficial reports they heard. Given

⁹⁷ Sloane, *A voyage*, preface, lxxxix

⁹⁸ John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina; containing the exact description and natural history of that country: together with the present state thereof. And a journal of a thousand miles, travel’d thro’ several nations of Indians. Giving a particular account of their customs, manners, &c.* (London, 1709), 85, 87.

property and encouragement, they believed, British laborers could cultivate land in the Greater Caribbean climate. It was a risky experiment, but the Trustees believed it might work: in the early eighteenth century, no one had proven that only Africans could work in the heat, or that Britons could not; thus far, it seemed to the Trustees, the labor patterns that emerged in the Greater Caribbean were merely a matter of economic convenience. Convinced that their plan, which relied on the benevolence of British financiers and the labor of willing European migrants, would work, the Trustees secured a charter for Georgia and began soliciting funds and settlers. Yet the story of Georgia shows how a group of settlers could, as colonial governors had in the previous century, manipulate British fears about warm climates to their own advantage.

Chapter Two

Laboring Bodies: Climate, Race, and the Georgia Myth, 1732-1750

In the midst of the American Revolution, Scottish-born minister Alexander Hewatt published a history of his adopted home of South Carolina and its neighbor Georgia. In spite of his misgivings over the inhumanity of the slave trade, Hewatt explained “the necessity of employing Africans” in the Lowcountry climate, particularly for laborious tasks like felling forests and cultivating rice. “The utter ineptitude of Europeans for the labour requisite in such a climate and soil,” he wrote, “is obvious to every one possessed of the smallest degree of knowledge respecting the country.” Had the clearing and cultivation of the Lowcountry been left to European servants, Hewatt added, these “servants would have exhausted their strength in clearing a spot of land for digging their own graves.”¹

Hewatt’s interpretation confirmed what readers in his native Britain suspected: Africans and their descendants had bodies well-suited to the Lowcountry’s climate while Europeans would wither and collapse in the heat. As Chapter One showed, Europeans based these assumptions on an array of ancient texts, philosophical treatises, and accounts that floated across the ocean from other warm climates, Jamaica included. The anomalous but familiar story of Georgia bolstered these assumptions. In 1732, a group of philanthropic Trustees in London decided to finance the new settlement of Georgia on the condition that it be populated and cultivated by European laborers. Unlike existing British colonies in the Caribbean and South Carolina, which depended heavily on enslaved African laborers, Georgia would be home to poor

¹ Alexander Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (London: Alexander Donaldson, 1779), vol. I, 120. For his opinions on the slave trade, see vol. I, 24-26; vol. II, 92-94.

Europeans. According to the Trustees' plan, these workers would prove through their industry the value of free laborers across the British Atlantic world.²

The colony's twenty-year experiment with European laborers, Hewatt wrote, failed spectacularly because Georgia's climate proved "dangerous to European constitutions." Unlike laborers of African origin, "whose natural constitutions were suited to the clime," the early Georgian colonists of the 1730s and 40s "found labour in the burning climate intolerable." English settlers who moved to Georgia specifically to create small farms soon refused to cut timber, clear land, and cultivate crops. In 1750, after rejecting complaints from a subset of the Georgia population for more than a decade, the Trustees broke down and allowed planters to use enslaved African laborers in the colony. According to Hewatt, who put a familiar gloss on the Georgia story, the "white people were utterly unequal to the labours requisite," and only laborers of African descent could prevent the colony from falling into utter ruin.³

The reverberations of the Trustees' decision, and the arguments on which it rested, had profound consequences for the development of ideas of racial difference across the Atlantic world. European bodies, the Trustees' decision implied, were simply not fit to labor in the heat of the Georgian Lowcountry or the Greater Caribbean climate. Yielding to assertions that people of African descent, and not European, had bodies naturally suited to warmer climates, the

² For more on the Trustees' purposes in founding Georgia, see Trevor Richard Reese, *Colonial Georgia: A Study in British Imperial Policy in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1963), 8; Kenneth Coleman, "The Founding of Georgia" in Harvey H. Jackson and Phinzy Spalding, eds. *Forty Years of Diversity: Essays on Colonial Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 16; Ralph Gray and Betty Wood, "The Transition from Indentured to Involuntary Servitude in Colonial Georgia," *Explorations in Economic History* 13 (1976), 354. For an overview of colonial Georgia's historiography, see Julie Anne Sweet, "The Thirteenth Colony in Perspective: Historians' Views on Early Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 435-460.

³ Hewatt, vol. II, 151; vol. I, 120; vol. II, 58; vol. II, 150. Other historians since Hewatt have offered similar interpretations. As historian David Potter explained a century and a half later, Georgia "was simply another experiment that failed." See Potter, "The Rise of the Plantation System in Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (June 1932), 135.

Trustees conceded that their high hopes for the colony had been shattered, and that laborers of African origin were necessary in the hot climates of the Americas.

In writing Georgia's story, though, historians since Hewatt have been too willing to take some of these arguments about Georgia at face value, and too eager to apply later ideas about race, disease, and differential immunity to the burgeoning Georgia settlement.⁴ Instead, this chapter argues, as the previous chapter showed for the Caribbean, that most inhabitants of Georgia did not really believe in the climatic arguments. People's experiences in 1730s and 40s Georgia varied, but many Europeans found that they could indeed labor in the heat. Lacking any real evidence that European bodies were unfit for hot climates, disgruntled settlers known as the Malcontents relied on older ideas about climatic determinism, and counted on the Trustees' willingness to accept climatic rhetoric as truth. The climatic argument served as a justification for introducing slavery, and a justification only: the Malcontents' insistence on Europeans' bodily delicacy and Africans' natural fitness for hot climates contradicted repeated accounts of Europeans' ability to thrive in Georgia's climate. The argument also disregarded customary ideas about the need for both European and African bodies to adapt to the Greater Caribbean climate. Instead, much of the evidence from Georgia in the 1730s and 40s points to other factors in the clamor for slavery. Facing chronic shortages of European servants, and unable to cultivate their lands as quickly or efficiently as the Trustees envisioned, some Savannah settlers saw slavery as a convenient answer to the struggling colony's problems. After unsuccessfully

⁴ For an argument very much in line with the Malcontents' claims regarding health and race in colonial Georgia, see Gary Puckrein, "Climate, Health and Black Labor in the English Americas," *Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 2 (August 1979), 189-193. For some other examples of applying these ideas to Georgia, see Kenneth Coleman, *Colonial Georgia: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 139, 210; Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 119-122. These interpretations echo the work of older historians, writing in the early years of the twentieth century, even if some give different explanations. In 1932 David Potter, for example, argued that "negroes were not necessary in [the intended silk culture of] Georgia, as they were in the rice plantations of Carolina, for no white man could work in the rice fields as the negroes did." See Potter, "The Rise," 124. Some later interpretations rely upon differential immunity rather than race, an issue discussed throughout this dissertation.

petitioning the Trustees with economic arguments for years, the Malcontents turned to the climate instead, well knowing that in Britain warm climates had a reputation for being inhospitable to Europeans.

Georgia's story reveals the power of ideology over experience in climatic justifications for racial slavery. The Malcontents appealed to the Trustees' preconceptions of warm climates, even as other settlers' experiences undermined their assumptions. Historical interpretations of the Georgia story, in turn, give disproportionate weight to the climate as a driving factor in the turn to racial slavery. They often rely too heavily on modern medical ideas, which appear to support the Malcontents' claims. A close look at correspondence from Georgia during the first two decades of European settlement, though, reveals a different conception of illness, and shows that the climatic argument was in fact a thinly veiled excuse for introducing slavery and creating a plantation economy.

In the summer of 1732, shortly after the Trustees in London received a charter for Georgia, they circulated advertisements seeking contributions for the new colony. Funds would both enable Georgia's settlers to "gain a comfortable subsistence for themselves and their families" and "strengthen his Majesty's Colonies & encrease the Trade, Navigation and Wealth of these Realms." Subscribers could feel assured that their money would go to a good cause: the new colony would give Britain's "poor subjects" a fresh start in Georgia, where they could cultivate plots of land both for their own subsistence and for colonial trade.⁵

⁵ GB233/Ch 2634, NLS. The advertisement contained an image (an engraving by John Pine; see below) that also appeared as the frontispiece for Benjamin Martyn's *Some Account of the Trustees Design for the Establishment of the Colony of Georgia in America*. (London, 1732). See Thomas D. Wilson, *The Oglethorpe Plan: Enlightenment Design in Savannah and Beyond* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 63-64. Martyn's brief promotional tract was followed by a copy of the subscription broadside with the same wording as the one at the National Library of Scotland, only with a different person named collecting subscriptions and a different date.

In this new idyllic colony, Georgians, unlike South Carolinians, would have peaceful and friendly relationships with local native people. The recent Yamasee War had fractured any remaining bonds between Carolina's settlers and native groups, and the British government saw Georgia as a buffer to South Carolina against both the surrounding natives and the Spanish to the south. To solicit contributions for the new colony, the Trustees circulated a broadside emphasizing the peaceful coexistence with Native Americans that they envisioned in Georgia. An engraving at the top of the paper depicted over a dozen men working together, nine with lighter skin in European clothing, and five darker-skinned men in loincloths, their well-defined muscles taut as they chopped trees and hauled logs with the more modestly-clothed Europeans. The best-dressed European man oversaw the harmonious workers in the image, commanding from a vantage point which afforded a view of the Savannah River, the fortified town, and orderly plots of cleared land, laid out for miles stretching into the forest towards mountains. Several boats on the river signified a bustling trade, and the hard-working tree-fellers, logcutters, sawyers, and carpenters in the engraving had nearly finished a spacious two-story log dwelling. This lush, verdant land would be the ideal setting for a small farming community, the image assured potential subscribers. Thick forests abounded with many different kinds of large, leafy trees, and the Europeans and Native Americans could easily – and would readily – work together to clear the land and construct impressive buildings under minimal supervision. This idyllic colony had no room for people of African descent; the Trustees made clear their intentions from the start. They intended the colony to have no enslaved workers, and no people of African origin whatsoever.⁶

⁶ The Trustees wanted to prohibit slavery in Georgia for a number of reasons. They intended Georgia to be a buffer colony between South Carolina and Spanish Florida, as well as against French Louisiana and native people. The colony needed to have military strength, and the Trustees believed that enslaved Africans could potentially weaken that strength as well as form an additional internal menace to the European settlers. They also believed that slave

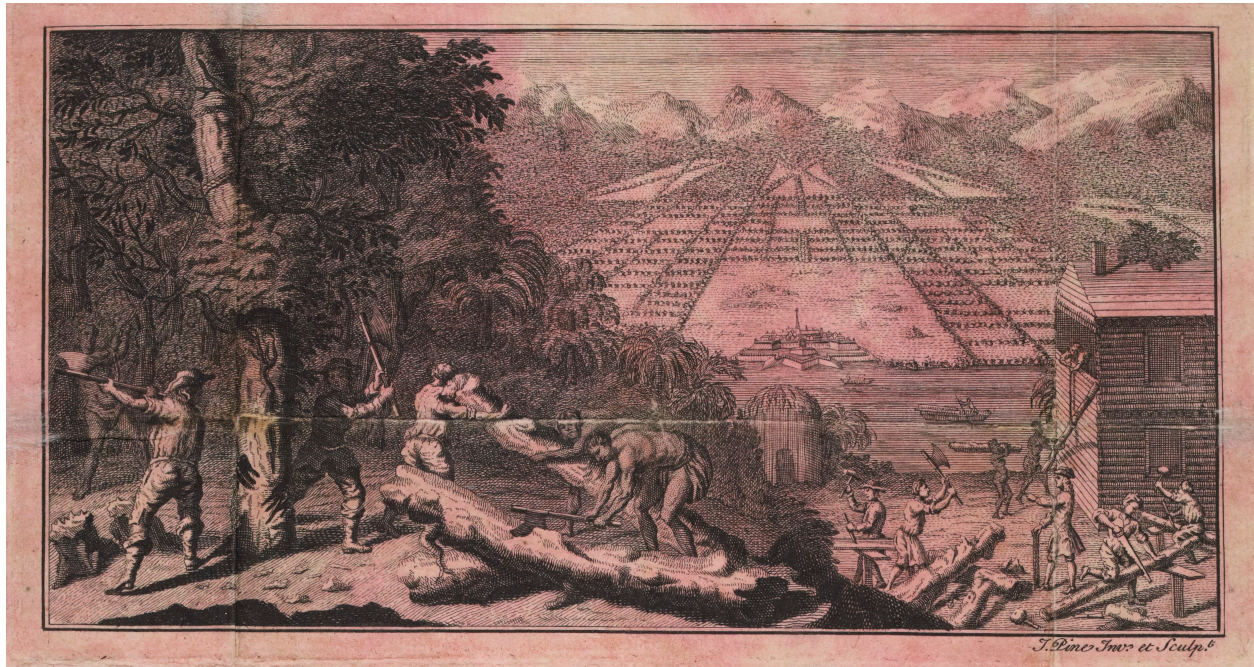


Image courtesy of National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, GB233/Ch 2634.

The image depicted several palms among the trees, which appeared to grow naturally in Georgia. Their presence in the engraving signaled a warm, almost tropical climate. Bearing little resemblance to the cold New England or mid-Atlantic regions of North America, Georgia appeared closer to Britain’s West Indian colonies, albeit with apparently snow-capped mountains in the distance, perhaps to reassure would-be contributors that the climate was not actually too

laborers hurt the work ethic of small farmers, who would be disinclined to work if they could coerce others to work for them. In a 1733 tract, *Reasons for Establishing the Colony of Georgia*, the Trustees’ secretary Benjamin Martyn explained, “No Appearance of Slavery, not even in *Negroes*; by which means, the People being oblig’d to labour themselves for their Support, will be, like the old *Romans*, more active and useful for Defence of their Government.” [Martyn], *Reasons* (London: W. Meadows, 1733), 30. The Trustees refused free people of African descent because they feared enslaved people from South Carolina would seek refuge in Georgia by passing as free people. For more on the slavery ban, see Reese, *Colonial Georgia*, 47; Randall L. Miller, “The Failure of the Colony of Georgia Under the Trustees,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 1969), 7; and essays in Jackson and Spalding, *Forty Years of Diversity*, particularly Milton L. Ready, “Philanthropy and the Origins of Georgia,” 51-54; Phinzy Spalding, “James Edward Oglethorpe’s Quest for an American Zion,” 69; and Betty Wood, “The Earl of Egmont and the Georgia Colony,” 85-86. For the Trustees’ explicit arguments, see Benjamin Martyn, *An Account Showing the Progress of the Colony of Georgia, in America, from its first establishment* (Savannah: Collections of the Georgia Historical Society, vol. II).

hot. As they could clearly see in the image, Europeans would have no trouble with manual labor in spite of the presence of palm trees – Georgia had, according to the engraving, an ideal climate.

In fact, the Trustees had only a vague sense of Georgia’s actual climate. Promotional literature boasted of its paradisiacal nature, some writers pointing to its latitudinal similarities with the fertile Mediterranean and the silk-producing regions of China. One account, published in 1717 as a proposal for setting up a colony to the south of Carolina, claimed that the land was “the most amiable Country of the Universe [...] *Paradise* with all her Virgin Beauties, may be modestly suppos’d at most but equal to its Native Excellencies.”⁷ Other promotional accounts expressed a similar exuberance, although the Trustees heard and read little accurate testimony from eyewitness observers. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the Trustees’ sense of climate would have been largely latitudinal, though tempered with a sense of other environmental factors.⁸ That is, they would have expected Georgia to be warm, even perhaps stiflingly hot in the summer months, but they also believed that features such as mountains, rivers, and trees would mitigate the heat and regulate the climate. Clearing forests would allow for a free flow of air through the region, and mountains (in the promotional image, if not in reality) would bring cool breezes into the valley.

James Oglethorpe, one of the most vociferous and enthusiastic Trustees and the one who accompanied the first colonists to Savannah, encouraged this romanticized notion of Georgia’s climate. He published his own piece of promotional material aimed at convincing supporters

⁷ Robert Mountgomery, *A Discourse Concerning the design’d Establishment Of a New Colony to the South of Carolina, in the Most delightful Country of the Universe* (London, 1717), 5-6. For another pre-Georgia publication touting the benefits of a new colony to the South of Carolina, see *An Account of the Foundation, and Establishment of a Design, now on Foot, for a Settlement on the Golden Islands, to the South of Port Royal in Carolina*. (London, 1720).

⁸ On latitudinal thinking, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period,” *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 5 (Dec 1982): 1262-1289; also see Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chapter two.

that Georgia would work as a colony. In this piece, *Some Account of the Trustees for establishing the colony of Georgia in America*, he described Georgia as an abundant place, capable of producing many kinds of plants and of sustaining all sorts of animals and people. Ocean breezes provided relief from heat in summer, he explained, and the Lowcountry never experienced the frigid temperatures of settlements farther north on the continent. The fertile soil could sustain and nurture many different products, from flax and hemp to olives, dates, raisins, wine, and more.⁹ As historian Mart Stewart argues, although the other Trustees “were not so naïve and deluded” as to believe in a literal interpretation of this propagandistic material, they recognized the value of promoting such an image in order to attract financial and Parliamentary support for the venture.¹⁰

The central climatic concern for the Trustees should have been an awareness of the need for a seasoning or adjustment period when the colonists first arrived in Georgia. British travelers to and residents of the warmer colonial climates universally acknowledged the need for a seasoning period upon arrival in the region.¹¹ Bodies would slowly adjust to the different

⁹ James Oglethorpe, *Some Account of the Trustees for establishing the colony of Georgia in America*, ed. Rodney M. Baine and Phinzy Spalding (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 15-22. One 1735 account of the colony, *A New Voyage to Georgia, By a Young Gentleman*, described Georgia as having “the pleasantest Climate in the World, for it’s neither too warm in the Summer, nor too cold in the Winter; they have certainly the finest Water in the World, and the Land is extraordinary good: this may certainly be called the Land of Canaan[.]” *A New Voyage to Georgia* (London: J. Wilford, 1735), 6-7.

¹⁰ Mart A. Stewart, “*What Nature Suffers to Groe*”: *Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 37. In his promotional piece, Robert Mountgomery acknowledged that “gay Descriptions of new Countries raise a Doubt of their Sincerity”; he claimed to draw on “*English Writers*, who are very numerous, and universally agree, that *Carolina*, and especially in its *Southern Bounds*, is the most amiable Country of the Universe” (Mountgomery, *A Discourse*, 5). For more on promotional literature on Georgia, see Randall Miller, “The Failure of the Colony of Georgia Under the Trustees,” 2-3. For more on conceptions of Edens in the New World, see Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter one; Sarah Irving, *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 52-56.

¹¹ In 1768 British naval physician James Lind argued for the similarity of the Lowcountry and West Indian disease environments: “In the latitude of South Carolina, we find these diseases [agues, fevers and fluxes] much more obstinate, acute and violent [than farther north]. In that colony, especially during the growth of the rice, in the months of July and August, the fevers which attack strangers are very anomalous, not remitting or intermitting soon,

environment during this seasoning, either gradually or through an initial period of illness. Either way, seasoning was the body's way of readjusting its internal humors to match any unfamiliar external environment. This concept was not new in 1732; scores of people had been reporting on the seasoning process from other warm climates for many decades by that time. Even some of the promotional pamphlets acknowledged the need for a seasoning period as bodies adapted to the Lowcountry environment. As one such pamphlet explained about South Carolina, "There is, in the Spring of the Year, a Feaver and Ague seizes many that are settled on the lowest Marsh Land, especially when they are new Comers into the Country, which is commonly call'd a Seasoning." After this period, if people remained temperate and lived on "dry, healthy Land," they tended to stay healthy.¹²

Oglethorpe and the first group of Georgia settlers arrived in Savannah in February of 1733. A month later, magistrate Thomas Causton reported to his wife "very little Illness" among the settlers, owing, he believed, to their situation "on a higher Ground and in dryer Air" than some ailing Swiss settlers nearby. Even so, already Causton recognized that the Savannah group consisted of "some Grumbletonians."¹³

but partaking much of the nature of those distempers which are so fatal to the newly arrived Europeans in West Indian climates. The same may be said of Georgia[.]” See James Lind, *An Essay on Diseases Incidental to Europeans in Hot Climates* (London: Becket & De Hondt, 1768), 37. Lind believed that seasoning happened gradually over time: “The constitution of Europeans, by length of time, becomes seasoned to the East and West Indian climates, if it is not injured by the repeated attacks of sickness upon their first arrival. Europeans therefore, when thus habituated, are generally subject to as few diseases abroad as those who reside at home; in so much that many persons, dreading what they may be again exposed to suffer from a change of climate, choose rather to spend the remainder of their lives abroad, than to return to their native country.” See Lind, *An Essay*, 146-147.

¹² John Norris, “Profitable Advice for Rich and Poor in a Dialogue, or Discourse Between *James Freeman*, a Carolina Planter and *Simon Question*, a West-Country Farmer. Containing A Description, or true Relation of South Carolina an *English* Plantation, or Colony, in *America*: with Propositions for the Advantageous Settlement of People, in General, but especially for the Laborious poor, in that Fruitful, Pleasant, and Profitable Country, for its Inhabitants” (London: J. How, 1712) in Jack Greene, ed., *Selling a New World: Two Colonial South Carolina Promotional Pamphlets*, by Thomas Nairne and John Norris (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 92.

¹³ Thomas Causton to wife, 12 March 1732/3, Egmont Papers 14200, f. 22. The originals are found at the Hargrett Library, University of Georgia, Athens; the versions here are from digitized copies: <http://fax.libs.uga.edu/egmont/>.

The settlement stumbled along; by the summer, six months in, Oglethorpe became discouraged. He informed the Trustees that he had dismissed “the Negroes who Sawed for us,” people borrowed from South Carolina, because he found their presence sapped the work ethic of the colonists.¹⁴ He also reported high rates of drunkenness among the colonists and easy access to illegal rum (a substance prohibited in the colony), which he believed caused rampant illness among the settlers. (In later years, Oglethorpe repeatedly denounced the evil consequences of rum consumption, alleging that it caused sickness which would be unfairly blamed on Georgia’s hot climate.) He assured the Trustees that “by Degrees” he had “brought the People to Discipline,” but that he could not “revive the Spirit of Labour.”¹⁵

The following year, the Trustees amended the charter to include a firm but unpopular prohibition on slavery.¹⁶ Samuel Eveleigh of South Carolina, a merchant in the lumber business, tried to convince the Trustees that the amendment would ruin the colony. If the settlers “were to have no Negroes Amongst them,” this policy would be at least “a great prejudice” and at most “a means to Overset your Noble design.” He thought “persons that are not used to work” could never harvest the trees in Georgia and that it would be “very difficult for White people to hoe

¹⁴ Randall Miller argues that the Trustees believed slavery “induced laziness in the slaveholder” and caused small farmers to be absorbed by larger ones, something the Trustees wanted expressly to avoid in the colony (see Miller, “The Failure of the Colony of Georgia,” 7). The argument about slavery inducing idleness in slaveholders persisted over the following decades; Benjamin Franklin, writing about slavery in the British West Indies, argued that “The Negroes brought into the English Sugar Islands have greatly diminished the Whites there; [...] the white Children become proud, disgusted with Labour, and being educated in Idleness, are rendered unfit to get a Living by Industry.” (Quoted in Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 20). Also see Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 6.

¹⁵ James Oglethorpe to Trustees, 12 August 1733, Egmont Papers 14200, f. 39. For his later thoughts about rum, see Oglethorpe to Trustees, 12 February 1742/3, MS 595, GHS.

¹⁶ Up until this point slavery was discouraged, and Georgia settlers were prohibited from owning slaves, but slaves could be borrowed; but after the disastrous first year the Trustees codified the prohibition by writing it into the colony’s charter.

and tend their Corn in the Hot wether.”¹⁷ By the spring of 1735, some of Georgia’s “adventurers,” or men who had paid their own passage, joined in complaint to the Trustees. These men protested many of the restrictions the Trustees had placed on the colony. In fact, they liked none of the rules the Trustees had imposed to differentiate Georgia from other Atlantic colonies, and from South Carolina in particular. These Malcontents complained about the prohibition on rum and about the policy on landholding. But their most frequent complaint had to do with the restriction on African slavery.

“We all having Land, in your Colony of Georgia,” a group of them wrote to the Trustees in the early summer of 1735, “and having come here chiefly with a Design to Settle upon and improve our Land, find that it is next to an impossibility to do it without the Use of Negroes.” They offered two main reasons to support this complaint. “In the first place, most part of our white Servants not being used to so hot a Climate can’t bear the Scorching Rays of the Sun in the Summer when they are at Work in the Woods, without falling into Distempers which render them useless for almost one half of the Year,” they wrote. The Trustees had not allowed for a seasoning period; the servants were not yet “used to so hot a Climate” and could not work to their full capacity. “Secondly, There is a great Deal of Difference betwixt the Expence of white Servants & of Negroes.” This second point, actually, was the main one: the letter went on to detail all of the expenses European servants incurred in contrast to enslaved Africans. Servants, the Malcontents argued, required more expensive food, drink, and clothing than did slaves. And after such an investment, even the servants who did not run away or die before their indentures expired only stayed for a short time.¹⁸

¹⁷ Samuel Eveleigh to Trustees, 6 April 1733, Egmont Papers 14200, f. 26.

¹⁸ Tailfer complained that servants were “generally indented for four or at most five Years one of which at least is lost by their frequent Sickness.” Patrick Tailfer et al to Trustees [June? 1735], Egmont Papers 14201, f. 109-110.

The two grievances in this letter became the main sticking points in the dispute over slavery between the Malcontents and the Trustees. The first point underscored the difficulty of relying on unseasoned laborers. The Trustees wanted a healthy and industrious colony, but how could Europeans perform the intensive manual labor required of a new colony if their bodies had not yet adjusted to the environment? As Savannah resident Hugh Anderson wrote to the Trustees, “It will easily be believed that a removall from Brittain to so southern a latitude must very sensibly affect the constitution.”¹⁹

The climate itself, then, was not the problem. The Malcontents’ early letters did not assert that Europeans could never work in Georgia’s climate; they merely argued that freshly-arrived European bodies had had insufficient time to adjust to the new climate. The people were not used to either the heat or to manual labor, and none had any farming skills. Yet the Trustees expected Europeans to work immediately upon arrival, and this expectation raised the ire of prospective farmers in Georgia and aggravated their demands for slaves.²⁰

The second point reflected the Malcontents’ frustration over the hardships of keeping and the economic difficulties of caring for servants. Patrick Tailfer, one of the first and most vociferous Malcontents, had already sent other letters to the Trustees earlier in the year. In March he wrote with his initial complaint: he had lost 13 of his 18 servants before leaving England. “Having only three men a boy & woman servant left” upon arrival in Savannah, Tailfer felt he could not clear and settle his five hundred acres of land with such a small labor force. He would have to wait for more servants to arrive from England. In the meantime he had rented a house in Savannah and set up practice as a physician. Even so, he informed the

¹⁹ Hugh Anderson to Trustees, 3 March 1739, CO 5/640, f. 288, TNA.

²⁰ The Trustees’ secretary Benjamin Martyn assured Robert Johnson, the governor of South Carolina, that the Trustees had “sent none but people inured to labour” in the first transport to Georgia. Benjamin Martyn to Robert Johnson, 24 January 1732/3, CO 5/666, f. 2, TNA.

Trustees, he would have “employed my servants in clearing & cultivating my land,” but it was so far away from town (seventy miles) that he could not possibly begin to do so. He wrote requesting a new parcel of land, closer to town, as he was “now in a manner settled in this town.”²¹

Three months later, Tailfer wrote again to the Trustees, this time in a joint letter with three other men who all shared the same complaints. Their land was too far away to access easily, and they had received no provisions for their servants in spite of their expectations to the contrary. Finding no encouraging response from the Trustees, the men wrote again. They were able and willing, they contended, to cultivate their grants of land according to the Georgia plan. But with the land so far away, and with servants so problematic – constantly running away, and costing so much when they stayed – the men were growing increasingly frustrated.²²

Nearly everyone, as it turned out, had problems keeping servants. Francis Bathurst reported that he liked Georgia a great deal, but wished the Trustees would send him two or three more servants, having lost one of his to “ye scurveys and a dropsie” and the other “of a dropsie and an ulcer in his leg” not long after arrival.²³ Noble Jones complained to Oglethorpe that he had “had bad luck with servants,” as they were constantly falling ill, conspiring to rob him, or running away. Of the two he had re-captured, he was “forc’t to keep one of em with a chain on his leg” to prevent him from running away again.²⁴ John Brownfield also lost servants: one

²¹ Patrick Tailfer to Trustees, 15 March 1735, CO 5/636, f. 230, TNA.

²² Patrick Tailfer, Andrew Grant, Hugh Stirling, Patrick Houston to Trustees, 18 June 1735, CO 5/636, f. 228.

²³ Francis Bathurst to Trustees, 15 April 1735, CO 5/637, f. 53.

²⁴ Noble Jones to Oglethorpe, 6 July 1735, CO 5/637, f. 135.

drowned in the river, and the other stabbed Brownfield with a sword. Although Brownfield survived the attack, he lost the servant, who died in prison.²⁵

The Trustees continued to receive complaints against servants: they refused to work, or ran away, or spent too much time languishing in bed out of illness, laziness, or both. Still others were “corrupted”: Samuel Holmes, a bricklayer, found that his servants had been “corupted by sum evill persons,” causing him great expense as well as the loss of both of them; he asked the Trustees to send him a few more so that he could instruct them in the art of bricklaying.²⁶ Even William Stephens, who had been dispatched to Savannah by the Trustees so that he could send back accurate reports from the colony, had bad luck with servants. In January of 1738 he thanked the Trustees for sending over new servants because the ones he had kept falling ill. Still, he wrote, “if this, which they call a seasoning now, may happily preserve ‘em when the heats come hereafter, ‘twill be well enough still.”²⁷ But by September he was frustrated. Once his servants had recovered he found they had “grown so false and lazy, through the poisonous Influence of other idle Rascals,” that they were no longer worth their labor.²⁸

The Trustees tried to comply with requests for more servants when they could. In 1735 the Trustees’ secretary Benjamin Martyn wrote to the settler Elisha Dobree, who had moved to Georgia from South Carolina, expressing gratitude for Dobree’s apparent adherence to the Trustees’ principles. “The Trustees are very well pleas’d that you did not draw up a petition to them for Negroes,” Martyn informed Dobree. “They are taking proper measures to provide white servants for the Magistrates, and those people who take most pains to deserve them by

²⁵ John Brownfield to Trustees, 10 Feb 1736/7, CO 5/639, f. 142.

²⁶ Samuel Holmes to Trustees, 22 Aug 1738, CO 5/640, f. 154.

²⁷ William Stephens to Harman Verelst, 19 January 1737/8; CO 5/640, f. 47.

²⁸ Entry for September 16, 1738 in Allen D. Candler, ed. *William Stephens’s Journal, 1737-1740, The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, (CRG) vol. IV (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1906), 201.

their industry.”²⁹ Still, the shortage of servants remained. “We are in great want of servants,” Oglethorpe wrote in 1736. “If some 100s of [them could] be sent over by one of the next ships [that] comes, there are persons enough here, & to the south, who [would] be glad to purchase [them] immediately.”³⁰ New transports satisfied several Georgians, who wrote letters of thanks to the Trustees. But others remained disgruntled, complaining that even the servants who proved to be hard workers were just too expensive to maintain.³¹

Labor was not cheap, and the inhabitants of Savannah felt this to be a particular sore spot given the abundance of enslaved laborers across the river in South Carolina. Samuel Eveleigh, who spent the summer of 1735 in Georgia, complained about the cost of labor there. “I found the lumber to cost me (being cutt by white people) four times as much” as it would have cost in South Carolina, he informed Benjamin Martyn.³² In another letter, he wrote to an acquaintance that he had procured 70 tons of live oak timber from Georgia. The timber, though, “was cut by white people and has cost me a great deal of money,” he wrote. If the wood turned out to be good quality, Eveleigh continued, “I shall for the future employ Negroes,” which would be “a great deal cheaper.”³³

Martyn recommended Eveleigh use German servants in place of either English servants or enslaved African laborers. “If you consider it well,” he wrote, “you will find it much to your advantage to have German servants rather than Negro slaves. The Germans are a sober, strong, laborious people” who could become Eveleigh’s tenants at the end of their service, increasing the

²⁹ Benjamin Martyn to Elisha Dobree, 15 May 1735, CO 5/666, f. 63.

³⁰ Oglethorpe to Trustees, (rec’d 26 July 1736), CO 5/638, f. 350. Also see, for example, John Brownfield to Trustees, 10 February 1736/7, CO 5/639, f. 142; Brownfield to Trustees, 17 May 1737, CO 5/639, f. 355.

³¹ See, among others, Michael Burkholder to Trustees, 19 March 1745, CO 5/642, f. 5.

³² Samuel Eveleigh to Benjamin Martyn, 10 September 1735, CO 5/637, f. 224.

³³ Samuel Eveleigh to William Jeffreys, 4 July 1735, Egmont Papers 14201, f. 46.

quality and value of Eveleigh's lands.³⁴ But Eveleigh remained unconvinced, in large part because his experience in South Carolina had taught him that slave labor could be easily procured relatively cheaply.³⁵ It was easier to take this familiar route than to gamble on potentially unseasoned Europeans.

Some of Georgia's settlers did begin clearing and planting their lots in earnest, eager to take advantage of the land and to prove to the Trustees that they were hard workers. But because people had been assigned particular plots of land before crossing the ocean, and only some of those people began to clear and cultivate once in Georgia, the unevenness of the planted land aggravated the planters. "Many people who have cleared," John Brownfield informed the Trustees in June of 1737, "complain of their neighbours for not clearing because the vermin & insects bred in uncultivated lands destroy the crops of those who have planted." Furthermore, the trees in unimproved lots provided too much shade for neighboring cornfields, which meant that corn on the edges of the lots could not grow.³⁶

Other people complained about fencing. It took several years for surveyors to measure and allot all of the land the Trustees had assigned to people, and until they knew the bounds of their land most people did not want to build fences. But without fences to encircle their land and protect it from roaming animals, people found that both domestic and wild animals demolished

³⁴ Benjamin Martyn to Samuel Eveleigh, 1 May 1735, CO 5/666, f. 57.

³⁵ Thomas Stephens argued that "a Man at the end of 8 years, who plants with white men is £715.9.9 worse, than he would be were he to use Negroes" (quoted in Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 36). For an extensive analysis of the comparative costs of indentured versus enslaved labor, see Ralph Gray and Betty Wood, "The Transition from Indentured to Involuntary Servitude in Colonial Georgia." In their calculations, Gray and Wood take £30 as an average price for an unseasoned enslaved laborer, and £6 as the price of an indentured servant on a four-year contract. The cost of maintaining a servant (food, clothes, and housing) was roughly four times that of a slave (Gray and Wood, 356). Although the acquisition of an enslaved laborer was permanent, unlike an indentured servant's contract, Benjamin Martyn argued that "the Value of an unseasoned Negroe's Life cannot be computed at more than seven Years Purchase." See Martyn, *An Impartial Enquiry into the State and Utility of the Province of Georgia* in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 141.

³⁶ John Brownfield to Trustees, 19 June 1737, CO 5/639, f. 367.

their crops. “Many have suffered vast losses by their neighbours cattle breaking in & destroying: besides which the wild deer & insects devour abundance,” Brownfield explained in another letter.³⁷ Even those who did manage to raise and harvest crops found they could not bring their grain to town to sell because the province had no roads. In the Trustees’ scheme, everyone was supposed to be a small farmer, but without anyone to work on public projects such as building roads, the farmers could not subsist.

According to several settlers, the abundance of uncultivated land contributed to the unhealthiness of the place. The prevailing environmental view of health and disease meant that healthy places bred healthy people and vice versa. For colonists contending with apparently endless acres of woodland, the trees could be a problem. As several of the settlers pointed out, uncultivated land, including many of their neighbors’ lots, abounded with trees, which prevented “the free circulation of air” making these places “sickly.”³⁸ “Nothing more conduces to relieve either persons or vegetables than a free current of air,” one colonist wrote. But so far, because nothing had been done towards cultivating adjoining plantations, the “many small improvements made are butt out of a surrounding forrest which admitting no avenues of air the health of the inhabitants is impair’d and the hopes of the labourer disappointed.”³⁹ The stale, stagnant air caused colonists and servants to become ill and incapacitated.

Concern for the colonists’ health – and for Georgia’s subsequent reputation – interested the Trustees a great deal. Some Georgia settlers found that the Georgian climate agreed with them. “I should chearfully spend the remainder of my days here, being, I think, a very healthy climate, and agreeing the best with my constitution of any that I ever breathed in,” wrote one

³⁷ John Brownfield to Trustees, 10 February 1736/7, CO 5/639, f. 142.

³⁸ Joseph Avery to Trustees, 27 October 1742, CO 5/641, f. 178.

³⁹ Hugh Anderson to Earl of Egmont, 3 March 1739, CO 5/640, f. 288.

person.⁴⁰ Another assured his mother in the fall of 1736 that “the country seems to agree with me very well” while a Scottish merchant informed his uncle in February 1739 that he was “well & healthe.”⁴¹ In late July of the same year he wrote again: “I and familie keeps there health,” he wrote, “only Robt had a small tutch of the fever & ague.”⁴² Some people, then, had little trouble adjusting to the Lowcountry warmth, though others insisted on the need for a seasoning period so that their bodies could adapt.

Georgia could, in time, become the exceptionally healthy place promised in the promotional literature. But to achieve the robust, flourishing colony the Trustees envisioned, many of the settlers felt they faced a paradox. They needed to clear land to improve the health of the atmosphere and to plant crops, but they also needed to give their bodies time to adjust to the new environment. Servants who worked too intensively with no seasoning period fell ill, and those who allowed their bodies time to adapt left their land uncultivated and had to depend on the generosity of the Trustees for provisions. The early use of some of South Carolina’s enslaved laborers had confirmed the Trustees’ fears of laziness in Georgia’s colonists, but without seasoned laborers to clear the land, Savannah’s settlers felt they were at a loss. South Carolina had few indentured Europeans, and none were available to labor in Georgia. Fantasies of Native Americans and Europeans harmoniously working together fizzled almost as soon as settlers arrived in Savannah, and the colonists who were left to clear land, plant fields, and build homes for themselves were running out of patience. They began petitioning the Trustees in earnest, pleading for more European servants or the ability to purchase enslaved Africans. But

⁴⁰ Thomas Jones to Harman Verelst, 17 February 1738/9, CO 5/640, f. 282.

⁴¹ P. Thickness to Mother, 3 November 1736, CO 5/639, f. 41. A copy of the letter can also be found in Mills Lane, ed., *General Oglethorpe’s Georgia* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1990), 280; George Philip to William Nicoll, 8 January 1739, GB234/RH15/139, NRS.

⁴² George Philip to William Nicoll, 20 July 1739, GB234/RH15/139, NRS.

the Trustees held out, hoping the British settlers would realize the importance of cooperative labor and become as industrious as their neighbors to the northwest. For the Trustees had ample evidence of Europeans laboring in Georgia's climate, apparently with ease, from the rapidly growing Salzburger settlement of Ebenezer, 25 miles upriver from Savannah.

The first transport of Salzburgers, a group of German Protestants seeking religious refuge, arrived in Georgia in March of 1734.⁴³ Oglethorpe directed them to a plot of land northwest of Savannah, which they began clearing and planting almost immediately. The Salzburgers worked the land, trying to cultivate a mixture of European and local crops, but they found the soil too shallow and of too poor a quality to support extensive farming. After two years of fruitless efforts, in the spring of 1736 they relocated from Old Ebenezer to a new site six miles away, which they called New Ebenezer. Oglethorpe discouraged the move at first, but the Salzburgers proved excellent workers, and harvested impressive amounts of corn, peas, rice and potatoes within the first few years at the new site. In December 1740 John Martin Bolzius, the leader of the Salzburger community, wrote to Harman Verelst, the Trustees' accountant, requesting funds to support the construction of mills at Ebenezer. The Salzburgers, Bolzius informed Verelst, were hard at work building a second corn mill as well as a stamping-mill to process their rice.⁴⁴

The Trustees liked the Salzburgers, in large part because their labor formed the proof the Trustees sought. By late 1738, the Malcontents had grown increasingly vociferous in their

⁴³ For more on the Salzburgers, see George Fenwick Jones, *The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 1733-1783* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Karen Auman, "'English Liberties' and German Settlers in Colonial America: The Georgia Salzburgers' Conceptions of Community, 1730-1750," *Early American Studies* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 37-54.

⁴⁴ John Martin Bolzius to Harman Verelst, 29 December 1740, CO 5/640, f. 547-548.

complaints, and in December they sent the Trustees a petition signed by 117 inhabitants of Savannah.⁴⁵ Among other things, most notably a relief of restrictions on land tenure, the petitioners demanded the right to hold enslaved laborers in Georgia. Although earlier letters had pointed to the shortage of seasoned and reliable servants, this petition took a different angle. Europeans, the petitioners claimed, simply could not perform manual labor in Georgia's climate.

Both the Salzburgers and the Highland Scots living in Darien, Georgia, sent counter-petitions to the Trustees refuting the Malcontents' claims. "Tho 'tis here a hotter Season than our native Country," the Salzburgers wrote to Oglethorpe in March 1739, "yet it is not so extremly hot as we were told in the first Time of our Arrival." They had adapted their customs and working hours to the new climate, along with their bodies. "Since we have been now used to the country," the Salzburgers continued, "we find it tolerable, and for working People very convenient, setting themselves to work early in the Morning till Ten o'Clock, and in the Afternoon from Three to Sun-set." During the strongest heat in the middle of the day, people worked in their "Huts and Houses" taking care of "Business at Home."⁴⁶

Bolzcius also wrote to Verelst assuring him of the same thing. After five years in Georgia, Bolzcius explained, the Salzburgers knew "what wholesome, fruitful [...] & profitable climate this country is" when worked by "industrious honest people." The Salzburgers found that farming in Georgia was not only possible for Europeans; it could even be profitable. A fourth transport of Salzburgers was on its way, and Bolzcius expressed his certainty that the new arrivals

⁴⁵ Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 29. For more on this and other petitions, see Betty Wood, "A Note on the Georgia Malcontents," in *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 264-278.

⁴⁶ John Martin Bolzcius and Israel Christian Gronau to James Oglethorpe, 13 March 1739, published in Trevor R. Reese, ed. *The Clamorous Malcontents: Criticisms & Defenses of the Colony of Georgia, 1741-1743* (Savannah: The Beehive Press, 1973), 164-165. For more on the Darien settlers, see Harvey H. Jackson, "The Darien Antislavery Petition of 1739 and the Georgia Plan," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1977): 618-631; Anthony W. Parker, *Scottish Highlanders in Colonial Georgia: The Recruitment, Emigration and Settlement at Darien, 1735-1748* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 52-67.

would like the place. “They will be here as well satisfy’d, as we are,” he wrote, “having not the least reason now, to make any complaint about the hot season of the countrey, being not so very hot, as idle & delicate people endeavour to persuade themselves & others.” He implored the Trustees not to allow slavery in the colony because “the consequences of it would be very bad & the ruin of poor labourers.” Instead, “white people, if industrious” he believed “are capable enough to plant here every sort of countrey-grain without hurting their health in the summer season, of which is witness my whole congregation.”⁴⁷

The settlers at Darien shared many of the Salzburgers’ concerns. Slaves, they believed, were an unnecessary luxury that would bankrupt the small farmers. “We are not rich,” the settlers wrote, “and becoming Debtors for Slaves, in Case of their running away or dying, would inevitably ruin the poor Master, and he become a greater Slave to the Negroe-Merchant, than the Slave he bought could be to him.” They would farm the land themselves, they claimed. “We are laborious, and know a white Man may be, by the Year, more usefully employed than a Negroe.” Here they made an economic argument to counteract that of the Malcontents. They also hit upon an issue that would resurface later in the continued correspondence the Trustees received regarding slavery in Georgia: the potential power and stronghold of a slave merchant in the colony.⁴⁸

Others, including the Scottish soldiers on St. Simon’s Island south of Savannah, provided testimony that corroborated the Salzburgers’ claims about the ability of Europeans to labor in

⁴⁷ John Martin Bolzcius to Harman Verelst, 14 March 1739, CO 5/640, f. 301.

⁴⁸ See Darien Petition, “The Petition of the Inhabitants of *New Inverness*” 3 January 1738/9 in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 169-170. The Darien settlers also worried that should the Trustees allow slaves, the settlers would need to provide increased vigilance against potential insurgencies and desertions of enslaved people. The Malcontents complained that the Darien settlers had been bribed by Oglethorpe to sign the petition, as he promised them money and cattle if they signed, and some historians believe this bribery invalidates their signatures (see Anthony Parker, *Scottish Highlanders in Colonial Georgia*, 72-73). But whether they truly wanted slaves or not does not matter here so much as the arguments they made for slavery, and evidence suggests that if the Highlanders wanted slaves they did so for economic reasons, not because they felt constitutionally unable to labor in Georgia’s climate.

Georgia. Captain Hugh Mackay, who had commanded a group of 17 servants for two years, swore that in that time “the Said Servants work’d very hard, and that they never lay by in Summer by reason of the heat of the weather.” The previous summer, he continued, the servants had worked “in the open air and Sun, in falling trees, cross cutting and Splitting timber, and carrying it on their Shoulders when Split from the Woods to the Camp.” Mackay testified that this labor “did not occasion any illness among them.”⁴⁹ Lieutenant Raymond Demare, who oversaw a regiment of soldiers in the summer of 1738, told the recorder that the soldiers worked “in the Sun & Air” clearing land, hauling materials, and building huts. “During all the Said term, the Men continued very healthy,” Demare said, and added that he “never knew any man desire to be excused from labour on account of the heat.”⁵⁰ And Lieutenant George Dunbar explained that the soldiers under his command worked during the morning, had a break at midday, and resumed work again in the afternoon hours. He had never heard anyone make “the Heat a Pretence for not Working.”⁵¹

The chief drawback of European labor, according to an overwhelming number of letters coming from Georgia, lay not in its impossibility but in its exorbitant cost. All three of these witnesses, along with others, testified that Europeans could indeed labor in Georgia, even in the heat of the summer. Dunbar, for example, testified that even though European labor was possible, “in the Negroe Colonies the hire of white men is dearer than that of Negroes.” In South Carolina, he explained, “white Ship Carpenters & caulkers have about one third more wages than

⁴⁹ Deposition of Hugh Mackay, taken by Francis Moore, 19 January 1738/9, Egmont Papers 14203, f. 143. Another version, worded slightly differently, can be found in Allen D. Candler, ed. *Journal of the Earl of Egmont, first president of the Board of Trustees, from June 14, 1738 to May 25, 1744* (CRG vol. V; Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Company, 1908), 96-97.

⁵⁰ Egmont Papers 14203, f. 146. Also see Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 97.

⁵¹ “The Deposition of Lieutenant George Dunbar, taken upon the Holy Evangelists, before the Recorder of the Town of Frederica, Jan. 20, 1738-9,” reprinted in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 17. Also see Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 98.

a Negroe of the same trade & occupation.” Dunbar found the same difference in pay to be the case in other trades.⁵² In this regard, then, the Malcontents were not alone. Several people found economic arguments to be the strongest reason for allowing slavery in the colony although, as the Darien and Salzburger settlers pointed out, the long-term economic effects of slave societies could be even more devastating to the small farmer than the initial years of struggle without adequate labor forces or the relatively high costs of employing servants.⁵³ But unlike the Malcontents, the counter-petitioners unilaterally agreed that the warm climate was not a problem for industrious people willing to work.

The Trustees, heartened by this testimony regarding Georgia’s climate, believed that the costs of allowing slavery in Georgia would outweigh the benefits. They would recruit more European servants, and send them to the most hardworking settlers. Benjamin Martyn wrote to the Magistrates of Savannah explaining the Trustees’ determination; slavery, the Trustees believed, would destroy any industrious habits on the part of the settlers, as well as weaken the military strength of the colony.⁵⁴

But the letters from the Salzburgers and the Highland Scots at Darien only strengthened the Malcontents’ resolve as the slavery issue generated increasingly partisan arguments.

Although their complaints about servants had always combined expenses with climate, the Malcontents’ grumblings about the climate intensified. While earlier letters had emphasized the

⁵² Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 98.

⁵³ It is possible that the cultural makeup of the various settlements contributed to their views on slavery. At both Ebenezer and Darien the settlers worked from a community-oriented perspective and thus had less need to hire outside laborers. At Savannah, though, the residents tended to forego a communal approach in favor of a more competitive attitude. Unable to rely as much upon the help of their neighbors, then, these settlers had a greater need to hire laborers, and thus felt the servant shortage more strongly. On the clan nature of the Darien settlement, see Harvey Jackson, “The Darien Antislavery Petition,” 624-631 and Anthony Parker, *Scottish Highlanders in Colonial Georgia*, 24-37, 54-58.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Martyn, “An Answer of the Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America, to the Representation from the Inhabitants of Savannah, the 9th of December 1738, for altering the Tenure of the Lands, and introducing Negroes into Georgia,” 20 June 1739, reprinted in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 90.

lack of a seasoning period, advocates of slavery soon dropped the seasoning argument in favor of more starkly worded claims. According to several Savannah residents, European labor was, in fact, impossible in Georgia's climate. The Malcontents became increasingly strident about the inability of Europeans to labor in the Georgia heat even as a variety of testimony proved otherwise. The notion of bodily difference between Africans and Europeans, which before had been marginal to their case, became central to the Malcontents' claims.

Still, most Georgian residents clamoring for enslaved laborers based their cases on economic arguments. The Trustees received extended calculations comparing the costs of enslaved laborers with those of indentured servants, along with complaints about Georgia's situation relative to South Carolina. The Malcontents' petition of December 1738 asserted that Georgians could never prosper because the South Carolinians would undersell them every time, but this argument failed to sway the Trustees.⁵⁵ The Trustees had never conceived of Georgia as a colony intended for personal profit, and they had no particular desire to see Georgians become wealthy. They had, in fact, an express wish against Georgia becoming another South Carolina, and their policies regarding restrictions on both landholding and slavery were designed to stifle the growth of large plantations and significant gaps in individual wealth.⁵⁶

Although Oglethorpe and the Trustees had chosen Savannah as the site of settlement because of its proximity to Charleston, according to Oglethorpe this location turned out to be a disadvantage. Writing in response to the Malcontents' petition, Oglethorpe assured the Trustees that plenty of settlers in Georgia had no desire for slaves – that, in fact, they specifically

⁵⁵ Entry for 21 April 1739 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 155.

⁵⁶ The Trustees did not want another colony in which power and land was in the hands of a few and the population was spread out over a vast distance. They believed not only that this sort of societal model corrupted people, but also that the scattered population left the colony vulnerable to attacks from Native Americans, the Spanish and the French, as well as potential slave rebellions. The Stono Rebellion of 1739 only heightened the Trustees' fears and affirmed their decision to differentiate Georgia from South Carolina.

requested that the Trustees uphold the prohibition. One of the Trustees, the Earl of Egmont, kept a journal in which he described a letter Oglethorpe had sent in January 1739. The “idleness of the town of Savannah,” Oglethorpe informed the Trustees, “is chiefly owing to their seeing Negroes in S. Carolina.” Residents of places farther removed – Darien, Frederica, and Ebenezer – cultivated several different crops with a measure of success in the Georgia climate, and Oglethorpe believed these places’ locations away from Charleston bore some responsibility for their settlers’ industrious habits.⁵⁷

The ability of the Salzburgers to cultivate rice undermined some of the most ardent Malcontent complaints. It has also been largely ignored in the historical record, and this omission has provided fuel for subsequent interpretations of race-based climatic tolerance. Many of the Malcontents complained that they would never be able to make money because the products the Trustees most encouraged – silk and wine – were not the wealth-producing cash crops their neighbors grew across the river. As the colony’s recorder Thomas Christie explained, Carolina planters used enslaved laborers to produce voluminous amounts of rice, which the planters then sold for low prices. “They will always undersell us,” he wrote, so “we need not sow any.”⁵⁸ The following year, Samuel Eveleigh explained to Benjamin Martyn that the prohibition on people of African descent in Georgia was a great loss of potential income for the colony. “I observed whilst at Georgia great quantities of choice good land for rice,” he wrote, “and am possitive that, that commodity can’t (in any great quantity’s) be produced by white

⁵⁷ Oglethorpe to Trustees, 14 January 1738/9 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 94. Betty Wood notes that Thomas Stephens told Egmont that Oglethorpe had obtained many of these signatures “under duress” so that Egmont should not take them as an indication of people’s true feelings. But William Stephens argued for a similar situation regarding the Malcontents’ petition – either people had been convinced to sign something they did not believe in, or they signed “out of spite” and not out of “genuine concern for Georgia.” Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 33, 41.

⁵⁸ Thomas Christie to Trustees, 14 December 1734, CO 5/636, f. 91.

people, because the work is too laborious, the heat very intent, and the whites can't work in the wett at that season of the year as Negroes do to weed the rice."⁵⁹

In spite of Eveleigh's claims, the Salzburgers quietly went about the work of sowing, and later harvesting, many types of grain, rice included. As Bolzius reported, by 1740 the Salzburgers were building a stamping-mill for their rice, a sign that they had had several good harvests and expected such harvests to continue. But historians have in large part ignored this, instead taking the lack of production on the part of discouraged Savannah settlers as evidence to support Eveleigh's contention rather than as a reflection of an economic decision. Historian Peter Wood, for example, cites Eveleigh's comments as indicative of a clear and entrenched belief in the inability of Europeans to labor in Georgia's climate. "This interpretation," he writes, "remained a standard one throughout the eighteenth century."⁶⁰ The interpretation may have remained standard, but it was not borne out by the evidence. Early in Ebenezer's settlement, John Vat reported that he would attempt planting rice with seed obtained from Thomas Causton, but he had heard such a thing would be difficult to do. In Carolina, he wrote, "the Negroes" were "the only proper planters" for growing rice because "whenever white people are employed in that way of working, they die like fflies."⁶¹ But by March of 1739, the Salzburgers found these warnings to have no basis in fact. "We [were] told by several people after our arrival that it proves quite impossible and Dangerous for White People to plant and Manufacture any Rice, being a work only for Negroes, not for European people," they wrote to the Trustees in a petition requesting a continuance of the ban on slavery. "But having

⁵⁹ Samuel Eveleigh to Benjamin Martyn, 10 September 1735, CO 5/637, f. 224. Also in Egmont Papers 14201, f. 120.

⁶⁰ Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 84. For more on disease, differential immunity, and race, see Wood, chapter three.

⁶¹ John Vat to H. Newman, 30 May 1735, CO 5/637, f. 77. Letter also appears in Egmont Papers 14200, f. 349.

Experience of the Congregation we laugh at such a Tale seeing that several people of us have had in last Harvest a greater Crop of Rice, than they wanted for their own Consumption.”⁶²

In the following years the Salzburgers grew plenty of rice and had no problems harvesting it. In 1742, for example, they produced 733 bushels of rice, along with over 3,000 bushels of corn and several hundred more of peas and potatoes.⁶³ Other people in Georgia, especially those who kept a safe distance from influential Malcontents, also experimented with growing rice, particularly those with swampy lands.⁶⁴ Isaac Nuñez Henriquez produced 15 bushels of rice on his garden lot in Savannah in 1736, and nine on his farm lot two years later.⁶⁵ Bartholomew Londerbukler wrote to the Trustees in 1748 explaining his need for servants to help with the crops (of the two servants he had, one had run away and the other was sick). He had planted rice, corn, and potatoes the previous year, but had only reaped four bushels each of rice and potatoes, the corn being “devour’d at nights by the vermin” in the neighboring woodland.⁶⁶ Even Patrick Tailfer’s town lot proved to be a fertile one: in 1738, he had leased his town lot to Patrick Graham who apparently was able to produce 100 bushels of rice on the land.⁶⁷

But incentive to plant rice remained low. Some may have been convinced by the repeated claims of South Carolinians that they should not attempt it; others had been cowed by the Carolinians’ threats at the Georgians’ potential competition. In August 1740, William

⁶² Salzburgers to Oglethorpe, 13 March 1738/9, Egmont 14203, 395. This letter was signed by 50 Salzburgers.

⁶³ Bolzius to Trustees, 4 December 1742 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont, 1738-1744*, 674.

⁶⁴ See, for example, letter from Hugh Anderson to Adam Anderson, 15 June 1738, in which he explains that he cleared, fenced, and planted four acres of rice, among other crops. Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 38.

⁶⁵ “An Account of Charge and Benefits of Mr. Isaac Nunez Henriquez on the Improvements that he has made in the Colony of Georgia in America, from the 12th July 1733 it being the time of his Arrival” in Egmont Papers 14205, f. 285-286.

⁶⁶ Bartholomew Londerbukler to Harman Verelst, 2 August 1748, CO 5/642, f. 181.

⁶⁷ Egmont Papers 14203, f. 137.

Stephens wrote in his journal that he had received an unexpected visit from some South Carolinians. He showed them around Savannah as they conversed about the town's condition, and Stephens agreed with the men that Georgians should never turn their attentions to rice planting because the market was already glutted.⁶⁸ The visitors may have had just such a motivation in mind; in November several people provided statements under oath in Savannah's court on the condition of Georgia. Their testimony revealed a reluctance to enter Carolina's market. "It is not any Business of this Colony, nor any Benefit to the Trade of England, to interfere with what other English Plantations have produced, such as Rice," one person proclaimed.⁶⁹ In their efforts to discourage competition in the market, the Carolina planters had effectively dissuaded many of the Georgia settlers from even attempting to plant rice.

In the meantime, Oglethorpe tried to reassure the Trustees that many residents of Savannah did not actually demand slaves themselves; rather the Malcontents had used coercive tactics to solicit signatures for their petition. The Trustees had recently ousted their storekeeper Thomas Causton from the colony, and Oglethorpe believed that some people, annoyed that they would no longer receive special favors from Causton, had signed the petition in retaliation. Others signed because they had run out of money and believed that allowing slavery would boost Savannah's faltering economy. But, most dangerous of all, Oglethorpe explained, several people signed because Savannah resident Robert Williams had family ties to the slave trade and sought to benefit personally by introducing slavery into the colony. According to Oglethorpe, Williams had promised several Savannah residents "to let them have Negroes, if they could sell or mortgage [*sic*] their lands to him for them, which proved a bait for all those to sign the

⁶⁸ Entry for 7 August 1740 in Candler, *William Stephens's Journal, 1737-1740* (CRG vol. IV), 636.

⁶⁹ "A State of the Province of Georgia, attested upon oath in the court of Savannah, November 10, 1740," in *William Stephens's Journal, 1737-1740* (CRG vol. IV), 671. Also in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 11.

Representation for Negroes.”⁷⁰ William Stephens sent a separate letter to the Trustees stating the same thing: the Georgia residents’ requests for holding their land in fee simple were bound up with their demands for slaves, because if they could own the titles to their land, they could use them as credit to acquire slaves. Robert Williams “was engaged in partnership with others who dealt in Negroes,” Stephens explained, and was one of the two “chief Fabricators” of the petition. The other was Williams’s brother-in-law, Patrick Tailfer.⁷¹

The Trustees received several pieces of information suggesting the Malcontent leaders had ulterior motives for their petitions in favor of slavery. A number of letters from Savannah, as well as some personal visits from residents, drew the Trustees’ attention to Robert Williams’s connections to the slave trade. Colonel Cochran and Captain Thompson informed the Earl of Egmont in person that Williams “was urgent for Negroes because he trafficks in them.”⁷² Robert Howes, onetime clerk of Savannah, told Egmont that Williams, “being a Merchant,” had “a private Interest of his own” in instigating the colonists’ desires for slaves.⁷³ Oglethorpe explained to the Trustees that, having refused “to confirm a certificate signed by Mr. Causton in favour of Mr. Williams,” he had provoked Williams’s fury:

Mr. Williams is very angry and hath got the poor people of Savannah, many of whom are deeply in debt to him, to sign the petition for Negroes which affirms that white men cannot work in this Province. This assertion I can disprove by hundreds of witnesses, all the Saltzburghers, the people at Darien, many at Frederica and Savannah and all the industrious in the Province. The idle ones are indeed for Negroes[.] If the Petition is countenanced, the Province is ruined. Mr. Williams and Doctor [Tailfer] will buy most of the Lands at Savannah with Debts

⁷⁰ Entry for 14 January 1738/9 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 93. For more on Williams, see Carole Watterson Troxler, “William Stephens and the Georgia ‘Malcontents’: Conciliation, Conflict, and Capitulation,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (Spring 1983), 5-6.

⁷¹ Entry for 16 March 1738/9 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 140. For copy of letters, see Stephens to Trustees, 2 January 1738/9, CO 5/640, f. 247.

⁷² Entry for 29 April 1739 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 158.

⁷³ Entry for 6 June 1739 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 178.

due to them and the Inhabitants must go off and be succeeded by Negroes. Yet the very debtors have been weak enough to sign their Desire of Leave to sell.⁷⁴

Oglethorpe later elaborated on Tailfer's role in the scheme: as Savannah's main surgeon, he and Williams, who had apparently begun selling rum, "had almost all the town of Savannah indebted to them for Physick and Rum."⁷⁵ The two used this debt to convince – or, perhaps, coerce – Savannah's residents into signing the petition. Stephens reported to the Trustees that Williams was "in partnership with his brother & others at St. Kitts & Bristol, who made much in importing Negroes into the West Indies." Tailfer had made money in part by hiring out his servants, and in part through his practice as a physician, and he and Williams conspired to add to that wealth.⁷⁶ Through his family connections, Williams would provide Savannah residents with slaves, but knowing most people did not have the money to pay for them, he would take the titles to their land as payment. To do this, Williams and Tailfer needed to convince the Trustees to give people the titles to their lands and to allow slavery in the colony. Noting the repeated failure of their economic arguments in favor of slavery, Tailfer and Williams began to pursue the climate argument with increased vigor.

By late December 1740, the Malcontents had prepared another petition, this one signed by a number of former servants in Georgia. The petitioners had come to Georgia, they claimed, believing that "the Lands were so fertile We should be able to make a Comfortable Living by the Labour of White Men only." But they found "the heats in Summer" to be "so Excessive" that

⁷⁴ Oglethorpe to Trustees, 12 March 1738/9, General Oglethorpe's Letters, MS 595, GHS. Also CO 5/640, f. 297.

⁷⁵ Entry for 16 July 1739 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 209. Also see Egmont Papers 14204, f. 10.

⁷⁶ Stephens to Trustees, 2 January 1738/9, CO 5/640, f. 247. Several Savannah residents wrote to the Trustees about their debts, in some cases crediting Robert Williams with lending them money for other debts, thus indebting themselves to him. One such letter reads: "Mr. Robert Williams of this place who bought from the store for us every thing needfull & paid the debt I ow'd to the store without whose assistance I and all my family must have perish'd for want I am now working all the bricklayers business to endeavor to pay him the am't of his acco't which is in all thirty five pounds Ster." Isaac Young to Trustees, 29 March 1738, CO 5/640, f. 69.

vast numbers of people died, “free men as well as servants, of Distempers Contracted by the Laborious Work” they were “forced to go through in their Endeavours to raise a little Corn.” They had implored the Trustees for slaves, they wrote, and in the meantime believed the land would become healthier as it was cleared, but all to no avail. No ships would trade in Savannah because merchants could obtain every item for less money in Charleston, and still the petitioners suffered in vain.⁷⁷

By this point the Malcontents had gained considerable traction in the colony, and their repeated public complaints, as well as their tactics, could be intimidating. They told the Trustees that Oglethorpe had pressured the inhabitants of Darien into signing the petition against slavery; Oglethorpe blamed the Savannah Malcontents for similar tactics in soliciting signatures for their petitions. No doubt aware of this blame-trading, the December 1740 petitioners sought to absolve themselves and to assure the Trustees that their complaints were genuine. “It is Experience,” they wrote, “Seven long years Experience that has confirmed us of the Impossibility of White men being able to Work here and live.”⁷⁸ Here the petitioners appealed to the Trustees’ weak spot: other than Oglethorpe, none of the Trustees had ever set foot in Georgia, and they continuously sought reports to try to ascertain the truth about the climate. Could Europeans really labor in Georgia? Could industrious Savannah residents cultivate land successfully, as the Salzburgers had done? Or were the Malcontents right about the heat, and not purely profit-seeking in their insistence on enslaved African labor?

The petitioners tried to convince the Trustees of the latter alternative. “Consider the difference of the Climate,” they urged. “Think how unfit a British Constitution is to undergo hard labour in a country twenty-three degrees to the South of England.” Summer heat caused the

⁷⁷ Egmont Papers 14205, f. 241-242.

⁷⁸ Egmont Papers 14205, f. 248.

servants to sweat so much that it sapped all strength from their weakened bodies. “No Englishman can work in the field without endangering his life,” the erstwhile servants insisted.⁷⁹ And if the Trustees prohibited slavery on grounds of humanity, the petitioners had an answer for that too. “Inquiry may Easily Judge How Shocking must it be even to a person of the least humanity to See his own Countryman, perhaps his own Townsman Labouring in the Corn or Rice field, Broiling in the Sun, Pale and Fainting under the Excessive heat,” they pleaded. “And Instances there has been of their dieing on the very Spot.” On the other hand, the petitioners assured the Trustees that people of African descent enjoyed such labor. “The Negroes in the same fields [...] go through their Work with pleasure,” the petitioners wrote. They loved the sun; “their Spirits are at the Highest” during the middle of the day during the strongest heat.⁸⁰

The petitioners, then, pursued several angles in an attempt to persuade the Trustees that without enslaved laborers, the settlers’ very lives were at stake. They compared their bodies to robust enslaved Africans who worked in the sun “with pleasure.” In contrast, their frail English bodies apparently dropped dead in the fields. Most of all, they stressed the authority of experience in their appeal to the Trustees. Unlike the Trustees, who could not truly know what labor in Georgia was like, these people knew and had experienced it for themselves. In the 1730s and 40s this was exactly the kind of argument calculated to convince the Trustees. But the Trustees received many different reports, several of which contained conflicting information. Several Savannah residents as well as the Salzburgers, for example, had a different experience.

⁷⁹ Egmont Papers 14205, f. 249. Thomas Jones wrote to John Lyde from Savannah in the fall of 1740 explaining that the “several Falsehoods, which have been industriously spread in England, representing this Colony as Unfruitfull and Unhealthy” were “not worth the regard of the Government.” Lyde wrote that these rumors had been generated by previously indentured servants whose “Indentures being expired, Poverty began to stare them in the Face,” but unwilling to work for a living, they contrived to “raise discontents” and spread untruths about the colony. These were presumably the same ex-servants who signed the December 1740 petition to the Trustees. See Egmont Papers 14205, f. 132.

⁸⁰ Egmont Papers 14205, f. 250.

Which of these opposing claims could the Trustees believe?

The Malcontents solicited supporting testimony from residents of Savannah, which they sent to the Trustees as evidence to substantiate their claims. George Philip, a young Scottish merchant in Savannah, provided one of these testimonials. He claimed that he had heard from some Darien residents who had signed the earlier petition against slavery that they regretted their decision, “it being contrary to the *true* Interest of themselves and the whole Country.” According to Philip, the province in general was languishing, and even “the most industrious” settlers found that their harvests did “*not* answer the Expence of a *White-man’s Labour*.”⁸¹ Philip’s economic argument for slavery fit his occupation: he had gone to Savannah initially to set up a business in partnership with his uncle, who was a merchant in Edinburgh.

But Philip’s private letters to his uncle reveal both his personal interest in slavery in Georgia and the public knowledge of Robert Williams’s connections. Not long after the Malcontents submitted their first petition, Philip wrote to his uncle to tell him about it. “There is a petition made [that] goes home with a gentilman who brought to this colloney some £1000 with him,” he wrote. “He is determined to spend money upon it,” Philip added, “if the Trustees will not grant to fullfill the petition, to cary it to the Board of Tread, if not then to the King in Council.” The “gentilman,” Philip wrote, had “very good friends at home he is in partnership with some people at St. Christophers and is as great dealers as in that Iland, his name Robert Williams.” Philip himself favored the petition both because he hoped the Trustees would lift restrictions on trade if they sanctioned the petition, and because he believed access to slaves would bolster Savannah’s economy, allowing his own business to thrive. Many of the landholders in Georgia, he added, were beginning to abandon their efforts at cultivation because they could not hold the titles to their land. “The people will thro up all there [*sic*] improvements,

⁸¹ See testimony of George Philip, 16 February 1740, in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 305-306.

if they do not get a free title to there [*sic*] lands,” he explained.⁸²

Although the Trustees never saw Philip’s letters to his uncle, their existence suggests that Williams’s motives were no secret in Savannah. With enough evidence to fuel their suspicions of Williams from Oglethorpe and other residents of Savannah, the Trustees dug in their heels on the question of slavery. The Trustees wanted to increase Savannah’s population and turn Georgia into a thriving colony, but not by allowing slaves. Condoning slavery would open a path for wealthy merchants like Williams to take control of the colony, making it into a replica of other Atlantic plantation economies and the antithesis of the Trustees’ design. Their refusal to give in to the Malcontents’ demands eventually drove most of those Malcontents away; in the fall of 1740 Tailfer and Williams, along with several others, decamped for South Carolina.⁸³

Still, South Carolina was not far from Georgia, and the displaced Malcontents held out hope that they could effect a reversal of the Trustees’ decision. In 1741 they published *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia in America* in Charleston. This “scurilous pamphlet,” in Egmont’s words, caused no end of trouble for the Trustees, who found themselves forced to defend their colony in public.⁸⁴ The pamphlet made unequivocal claims regarding the Malcontents’ perceptions of the colony: Tailfer complained openly about the heavy costs of European labor in contrast with that of enslaved Africans. After railing against the expenses, Tailfer turned to the climate and the difficulties the early settlers had faced:

The *Felling of Timber* was a Task very unequal to the Strength and Constitution of White Servants, and the *Hoeing the Ground*, they being exposed to the sultry Heat of the Sun, insupportable; and it is well known, that this Labour is one of the hardest upon the Negroes, even though their Constitutions are much stronger than

⁸² George Philip to William Nicoll, 8 January 1739: GB234/RH15/139, National Records of Scotland. Also see George Philip to William Nicoll, 20 July 1739.

⁸³ Egmont Papers 14205, f. 174-176.

⁸⁴ Entry for 8 January 1741/2 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 583.

white People, and the Heat no way disagreeable nor hurtful to them; but in us it created *inflammatory Fevers* of various kinds both *continued* and *intermittent*, *wasting* and *tormenting Fluxes*, most *excruciating Cholicks*, and *Dry-Belly-Achs*; *Tremors*, *Vertigoes*, *Palsies*, and a long Train of *painful* and *lingering nervous Distempers*; which brought on to many a Cessation both from Work and Life[.]⁸⁵

The sickness of servants, Tailfer added, proved to be an unsupportable expense for most people – though not in medical costs (since he was the resident physician); instead because “each Servant, generally speaking, cost his Master as much as would have maintained a Negroe for *four* Years.”⁸⁶

In response to these charges, the Trustees published their own pamphlet. Benjamin Martyn, the secretary in London, compiled *An Impartial Enquiry into the State and Utility of the Province of Georgia* wherein he sought to “lay the naked Truth” before the public. Martyn identified five chief objections to the colony’s discredit, and informed his readers of his intention to investigate “the Reasons and Validity of them.” The first of these objections, and possibly the one which most frustrated the Trustees, related to the supposed unhealthiness of the climate. “The Reverse of this has been found by the People,” Martyn wrote, “even in their first Settling, in both Parts of the Province, and this was the Time of Trial. No general Illness has at any Time prevailed there (even when *South Carolina* has suffered by them) unless when Rum and other spirituous Liquors have stolen into the Province.”⁸⁷ Martyn conceded that during one year “many of the People” had died, but he attributed their deaths to excessive drinking, which “they confess’d at their Deaths.” As for the claims that Georgia’s climate induced fluxes, Martyn explained:

⁸⁵ Patrick Tailfer et. al., *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia in America* (Charlestown: P. Timothy, 1741), reprinted in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 57.

⁸⁶ Tailfer in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 57-58.

⁸⁷ Benjamin Martyn, *An Impartial Enquiry into the State and Utility of the Province of Georgia* (London: W. Meadows, 1741), reprinted in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 125, 129.

The Flux is a Distemper to which new Comers in most Countries are liable, and some of the People in *Georgia* had it. But it was chiefly owing to the Want of Reflection, how requisite it is for Men to regulate their Diet and Manner of Living, in a different Way in the Latitude of 31, from that which they were accustom'd to in the Latitude of 51[.]⁸⁸

In other words, people often experienced fluxes when they changed countries and climates, particularly if they neglected to adjust their habits and their diets. The flux was a form of seasoning, and was therefore to be expected. It was not, Martyn stressed, a function of Georgia's climate nor was it particular to Georgia. Martyn pointed to the success of the Salzburgers and the Highlanders at Darien, arguing that people "accustom'd to Hardship, and Labour" had no trouble cultivating provisions in Georgia. And as for the economic calculations of servant versus slave labor, Martyn suggested an adjustment. "The Value of an unseasoned Negroe's Life," he wrote, "cannot be computed at more than seven Years Purchase."⁸⁹

Here Martyn drew attention to a common belief that the Malcontents had ignored altogether in their arguments: an unseasoned person arriving from Africa would need to undergo the same seasoning process as someone arriving from Europe, yet the Malcontents conveniently ignored this situation in their petitions. Perhaps some of the petitioners believed they would acquire enslaved people from South Carolina, either people who had already been seasoned to the climate or (even better) enslaved creoles native to the region. But Robert Williams, for one, had no such designs. His entire business plan involved importing Africans into Georgia, with the help of his merchant brother in the West Indies who, as one Savannah resident explained, "carried on a Trade to Guinea for Negroe Slaves."⁹⁰ Someone coming from Guinea, then, or from anywhere else in Africa, would be unseasoned to Georgia's climate. The Malcontents

⁸⁸ Martyn in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 130.

⁸⁹ Martyn in Reese, *Clamorous Malcontents*, 132, 141.

⁹⁰ Thomas Jones to John Lyde, 18 September 1740, Egmont Papers 14205, f. 66/133.

based their comparisons on South Carolina's situation, and although Carolina imported people from Africa too, many enslaved laborers there were creoles native to the Lowcountry. Such would not be the case in Georgia.⁹¹

The Trustees hoped to silence the Malcontents with their pamphlet, and to dispel arguments that divided the Georgia populace. Although the Trustees remained curious about the actual nature of Georgia's climate, one of the Malcontents' chief supporters had himself inadvertently given the Trustees reason to doubt the accuracy of the Malcontents' claims. William Stephens's son Thomas, who enraged his father by publicly championing the Malcontents' cause, informed the Trustees that he needed to travel to England because he was ill in Georgia. The Trustees had sent Thomas out to assist his father, though not long after arriving in Savannah Thomas sided with the Malcontents against his father and the Trustees. The Trustees allowed him leave to return home, but once in London Thomas confessed the real reason for his visit. "It was not ill health that brought him from Georgia," Egmont fumed in his diary, "but resentment [against] Col. Oglethorpe and Mr. Tho. Jones, and to overturn the Constitution of the Province." Egmont was unimpressed with the "hot headed conceited & malicious Mr. Tho. Stephens" and refuted all of Stephens's arguments with simple logic. "I told him, if the Colony is so poor and distress as he represented, the Inhabitants would not be able to buy or borrow Negroes, if allow'd to have them." Egmont did not yet know of Williams's and Tailfer's scheme to take the colonists' land, and Stephens, if he was aware of the plan, did not enlighten Egmont. But if Stephens hoped to convey that the Georgia climate was dangerous to

⁹¹ See Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 96 on the differences in price between seasoned and unseasoned enslaved laborers in 1750s South Carolina and Georgia. According to Wood, Georgians did not end up importing slaves directly for several years, but kept up a trade instead with the West Indies and South Carolina (98). This would fit with Williams's business model if he lived in South Carolina and used his brother's ties in the West Indies to supply Georgia with enslaved laborers. For more on the origins of early slave imports to Georgia, see Gregory E. O'Malley, "Beyond the Middle Passage: Slave Migration from the Caribbean to North America, 1619-1807," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (January 2009), 150.

European constitutions, he did himself no favors in his trip. “His pretence for coming to England was sickness, but it soon appeared his errand was of another sort,” wrote Egmont. Perhaps, then, if Stephens was not ill as he claimed to be and in need of a change of climate to improve his health, Georgia was not unhealthy after all. If the Trustees had doubts as to the relative healthiness of Georgia’s climate, those doubts must have been quelled in some measure by Stephens’s deceit.⁹²

Unfortunately for the Trustees, the Malcontents kept up their battle from across the Savannah River. In October 1741 Captain Thompson from Savannah informed Egmont that several of the Malcontents, “do yet tho absent all they can to discourage any man from labouring and cultivating their land, lest they should be examples that Men can live and support themselves without Negroes.”⁹³ For the rest of the decade the Malcontents kept chipping away at the Trustees’ resolve, and the Trustees, to their dismay, saw Savannah’s population dwindle as the “idle” settlers left for slaveholding South Carolina.⁹⁴ At first the Trustees bade the deserters good riddance, but over time they began to lose hope for their struggling and recalcitrant colony.

In 1750, after struggling with the Georgia colonists for almost two decades, the Trustees ultimately sanctioned slavery in Georgia and relinquished control of the colony to Parliament. A variety of factors contributed to the eventual reversal of the Trustees’ policy and the transition to

⁹² Entries for 16 November 1739, 4 February 1740 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 254-255; 302, 304. For more on Thomas Stephens, see Betty Wood, “Thomas Stephens and the Introduction of Black Slavery in Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 24-40.

⁹³ Entry for 5 October 1741 in Candler, *Journal of the Earl of Egmont*, 557.

⁹⁴ Harman Verelst to James Oglethorpe, 29 March 1740, CO 5/667, f. 157.

slavery in Georgia.⁹⁵ Savannah's proximity to a colony where slavery was entrenched hurt Georgia's chances, and the lack of farming skills among its residents did not help.⁹⁶ Endemic problems with servants running away or falling ill because they had had insufficient time to become seasoned to the climate frustrated many potential planters. The vermin, insects, and trees of uncultivated land thwarted those who had worked to clear their own plots, as did the lack of industry on the part of their neighbors. Ultimately, the Malcontents felt frustrated by the Trustees' policies, which limited great wealth while Carolina planters prospered across the river. Although the Trustees never intended Georgia to be a profit-driven colony, the early colonists felt shunted from the surrounding market economy.⁹⁷ But after the Trustees turned a deaf ear to economic-based pleas, the Malcontents pursued the climatic argument, hoping that would sway the Trustees and the members of Parliament who oversaw the colony's charter.⁹⁸

The climate argument had two main factors in its favor: first, the Trustees, having never experienced it for themselves, could not entirely disregard negative reports of Georgia's climate. As Chapter One showed, the negative preconceptions they would have held about warm climates

⁹⁵ Stated most simply, the Malcontents wore the Trustees down. For some explanations of the Trustees' reversal, see Milton Ready, "The Georgia Trustees and the Malcontents: The Politics of Philanthropy," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (Fall 1976), 275-277; Miller, "The Failure of the Colony of Georgia," 13-15.

⁹⁶ Betty Wood notes that only three out of an initial transport of 44 British men sent to Georgia who stated their occupations "admitted to having any knowledge of agriculture." (Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 13; also see 94). William Stephens requested British servants who were "used to hard labour in the country" since they would make better agricultural laborers than Londoners. (Stephens, *A State of the Province of Georgia* quoted in Wood, *Slavery*, 40). Wood also notes that "the vast majority" of the Malcontents were either English or Lowland Scots, as opposed to the Highland Scots at Darien and the Salzburgers at Ebenezer, both of whom were presumably more familiar with agricultural labor. (Wood, *Slavery*, 51).

⁹⁷ Joyce Chaplin argues that southern Lowcountry planters were highly profit-driven (see Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*). More recently, Lorena Walsh has argued that Chesapeake planters were careful economic planners and that the transition from European indentured servitude to African slavery was a profit-driven move. See Lorena Walsh, *Motives of Honor, Pleasure, and Profit: Plantation Management in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1607-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). On Georgia's place in the Greater Caribbean from an economic perspective, see Paul M. Pressly, *On the Rim of the Caribbean: Colonial Georgia and the British Atlantic World* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

⁹⁸ Conflicting and contradictory reports about British America's hot climates, including a significant number of negative ones, made the Trustees wary of the Georgia environment even as they advertised its benign nature.

across the Atlantic would have also been known to several of Georgia's residents, priming the Trustees to accept such an argument. In addition, in spite of various "improvement" projects English settlers undertook in the Americas during the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, the settlers could not significantly change the climate.⁹⁹ They might be able to make it somewhat healthier by clearing brush and draining swampland, but Savannah lay in a semitropical region that, for the English, would always be a warm climate. The Malcontents' resort to the climate argument, then, was a strategic move aimed at convincing the Trustees of the need for slavery after their other arguments failed. But the pragmatic language the Malcontents used in their argument ended up having severe consequences for later eighteenth-century conceptions of biological bodily difference, and these conceptions only multiplied as studies of biological race exploded in the nineteenth century and beyond.

These consequences, in fact, continue to play a role in historians' interpretations of colonial Georgia. Of the several historians who offer explanations for the Trustees' reversal, many have sympathized with the Malcontents' climatic complaints, relying for evidence on modern medicinal findings that lend countenance to the Malcontents' arguments. In 1974, Peter Wood suggested that the "epidemiological advantages" of West Africans over Europeans in the Lowcountry (the former of which had some immunities and resistances to malaria and yellow fever) should not "be taken lightly with regard to the creation, or analysis, of a colonial labor force." He argued that European slave-holders "capitalized upon the physical resistances of people from a semitropical 'disease region' which bore a closer resemblance to coastal Carolina than did most parts of Europe."¹⁰⁰ Forty years after Wood's suggestion, historians have not

⁹⁹ For more on these improvement projects, see Jan Golinski, "American Climate and the Civilization of Nature" in James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, eds. *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 153-170.

taken this point lightly at all. In contrast, they have too liberally applied twentieth-century understandings of health and disease to an early eighteenth-century society, assuming that the Malcontents truly observed biological bodily differences between people of European and African descent.¹⁰¹ The evidence from Georgia does not support this assumption.

Most historians who have followed Wood's lead use yellow fever and malaria as examples to illustrate differential immunity between African and European populations. They argue that eighteenth-century inhabitants of communities struck by these diseases noticed patterns among victims. They suggest that yellow fever and some strains of malaria affected people of European descent more than those of African descent, and speculate that this difference may have contributed to the Malcontents' clamor for slaves. But there are several problems with these assumptions. It may be true that populations arriving in the Carolina Lowcountry from West Africa had different disease immunities from European populations. It may be true, too, that some of these diseases, particularly malaria, ravaged populations in tropical and semitropical plantation societies, and that people of African and European descent may have suffered in disproportionate numbers. But the argument that eighteenth-century Lowcountry inhabitants recognized this difference rests on two assumptions: first, that

¹⁰⁰ Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 91.

¹⁰¹ For example, Milton Ready writes, "Thomas Stephens, son of Trust Secretary William Stephens, maintained that Negroes would be profitable to the colony while surviving the intense heat and malarial conditions of the province better than white laborers." See Ready, "The Georgia Trustees," 266. In the source Ready cites, though, Stephens did not actually use the word malarial; see Egmont Papers 14210, f. 154, Feb 1740. John McNeill makes a similar argument for the West Indies. McNeill contends that yellow fever and malaria in the West Indies had a marked impact on the health and lives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century inhabitants and visitors. McNeill analyzes his sources from a modern perspective by examining patterns of mosquito behavior, but he also acknowledges that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, West Indian residents who "noticed the effects of differential immunity" thought about these differences in terms of bodily constitutions. He adds the concept of seasoning to his interpretation: "Most eighteenth-century observers were convinced that yellow fever affected different people differently for reasons both of race and 'seasoning,'" he writes. See J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67.

physicians routinely differentiated “fevers” from one another; and second, that residents believed particular diseases, or even fevers, affected Europeans more than they affected Africans.

Several historians have used physicians’ writings about yellow fever as proof of the second of these assumptions. Many cite publications ranging from South Carolina physician John Lining’s mid-century writings to Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush’s theories at the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁰² But a central problem with using yellow fever to support the Malcontents’ arguments lies in its lack of evidence: there were no recorded outbreaks of yellow fever in Georgia during the Trusteeship. Diagnoses of yellow fever from the first half of the eighteenth century were inconsistent at best, and even though observers did sometimes note its occurrence, it does not show up in any of the colony’s records from this period. William Stephens kept careful note of sickness in the colony, and his journal provides one record of the general health in Savannah. Although his reports may have been intended to pacify the Trustees, and therefore have a degree of bias, his characterizations of illnesses are nevertheless instructive.

During the 1730s and 40s, Stephens wrote of fevers and agues affecting Savannah. These illnesses, according to Stephens, resulted from “great vicissitude of weather”; “thick, unwholesome Air, and sultry Heat”; “heavy rains”; and “the Peoples Unwariness in taking cold when they are Hot.”¹⁰³ This combination of environmental conditions and incautious behavior

¹⁰² Although Lining’s most famous work, *A description of the American yellow fever, which prevailed at Charleston, in South Carolina, in the year 1748* did not appear in print until 1799, he wrote it a half century earlier, around the time he published “Description of Yellow Fever” in *Essays and Observations* (1753). See Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 82; J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, 67-68; Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 120-121.

¹⁰³ These entries from 25 and 26 May 1739; 27 June 1739; 27 July 1739. Also see entries from 24 August 1738; 7 and 8 September 1738; 1 and 2 November 1739; 10 and 11 April 1741; 23 July-24 August 1742. In Candler, ed. *William Stephens’s Journal, 1737-1740* (CRG vol. IV); E. Merton Coulter, ed. *Journal of William Stephens 1741-1743* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958); *Journal of Col. William Stephens, 1740-1741* (CRG supplement to vol. IV). The worst period of sickness, in the summer of 1742, Stephens described as “a Malignant Feaver of the worst sort, and near Epedemical.” Entry for 7 August 1742 in Coulter, ed., *Journal*, 117.

was consistent with medical thinking at the time.¹⁰⁴ Charleston, on the other hand, experienced a number of notable diseases during the same period. Stephens wrote of an outbreak of smallpox in August 1738, which “carr[ied] off a great Number of People, both White and Black.” The unfortunate town had barely recovered when Stephens heard of “a new Distemper [...] spreading itself among them, which was thought epidemical if not contagious.”¹⁰⁵ The following September Stephens received word of “a very terrible Calamity of Sickness” in Charleston, “which proved exceeding mortal, great Numbers dying weekly, and it is termed a contagious, malignant Fever.”¹⁰⁶ It was not until the following autumn that Stephens made note of a yellow fever outbreak. While Savannah experienced “Fluxes, dry Gripes, lingering Fevers, &c.,” word arrived from Charleston “of a dangerous Distemper raging there, which they call the yellow Fever, from the Corpse immediately so changing, after Death.” The fever, Stephens wrote, “proved most fatal to new Comers.”¹⁰⁷

Yellow fever, then, should not be taken as the norm. Even when physicians actually distinguished it from other illnesses, was apparently absent from Georgia in the early years of European settlement, making it essentially irrelevant to historians’ interpretations of the Malcontents’ charges.

The other disease historians often use in their arguments for African slavery is malaria. The problem with making this case, though, is that (unlike yellow fever) no one in the eighteenth century diagnosed malaria as such. In the 1730s and 40s, physicians and laypeople alike

¹⁰⁴ This last characterization, “taking cold” when people were “Hot,” would produce an imbalance in the bodily humors. For more on this, see Chapters One and Four.

¹⁰⁵ Entry for 26 August 1738 in Candler, ed. *Journal*, 190.

¹⁰⁶ Entry for 18 September 1739 in Candler, ed. *Journal*, 416.

¹⁰⁷ Entry for 23 October 1740 in *Journal* (CRG vol. IV supplement), 17.

described most illnesses simply as “fevers,” for patients of all origins.¹⁰⁸ Fevers could, as the Malcontents wrote in their tract, be “continued” or “intermittent,” and historians often interpret descriptions of “intermittent” fever as malaria. But – and this is the important point – eighteenth-century inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean did not usually differentiate fevers from one another nor did they ascribe the causes of these fevers to genetic traits. Instead, they blamed “fevers and agues” in general on environmental conditions, and on wet weather in particular. Whenever people became ill, physicians and other observers blamed swampy regions, rainy conditions, or changes in the seasons. William Stephens always attributed illness among Savannah residents to the weather (or sometimes to drunkenness) but never implied that people became ill because of their European origins unless they were not yet seasoned to the climate.¹⁰⁹ And planters from South Carolina and the West Indies who wrote about illnesses in African and European populations consistently blamed the weather for fevers of all kinds in both sets of people.¹¹⁰

In addition, as historian Gerald Cates points out, the symptoms of malaria do not differ significantly from those of typhoid.¹¹¹ If the symptoms of typhoid and malaria are so similar as

¹⁰⁸ As Betty Wood points out, most ailments in the early part of the eighteenth century “were lumped together under such headings as ‘pestilential fevers’ and ‘malignant diseases.’” See Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 150. Also see Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Stephens’s journal entry for 26 October 1739 when he noted that soldiers in Florida had “grown very sickly” but that “the Sickness did not prove mortal, being a Sort of Ague and Fever with regular Intermission, [...] such as is pretty common in these Parts, at certain Seasons, especially among fresh People from Europe, and is usually termed a Seasoning.” Candler, *William Stephens Journal* (CRG vol. IV), 438.

¹¹⁰ For more on this, see Chapter Four.

¹¹¹ Cates argues that Georgians did not experience much malaria during the colony’s early years of European settlement. He speculates that the early Georgia settlers probably felt the effects of beriberi and scurvy as well as dysentery (which colonists called the “flux” and the “bloody flux”). But in large part because the environmental conditions of Georgia differed from those of South Carolina, Cates argues that settlers during the Trusteeship did not suffer a great deal from malaria until after 1752. According to Cates, earlier accounts of fevers which historians have interpreted as malaria may have been typhoid instead. See Gerald L. Cates, “‘The Seasoning’: Disease and

to be almost indistinguishable, and if differential immunity between African and European populations is only relevant for malaria, then it would be a mistake to bolster the Malcontents' claims about the "need" for African labor retroactively. As historian Peter McCandless points out, it was not until the nineteenth century that writers began to justify slavery with claims of differential immunity. In the late seventeenth century, McCandless argues, Barbadian planters in Carolina "brought black slaves with them as a matter of course, not because they believed the place to be especially unhealthy." These planters' experience in the West Indies had taught them that "black labor was both cheaper and easier to obtain than white labor."¹¹² By the early part of the eighteenth century, African slavery was established as the norm in Atlantic plantation labor forces, and the Georgia Malcontents who clamored for slaves were attempting to join an existing market.

Although several historians have cited South Carolina merchant Samuel Eveleigh's arguments about the inability of Europeans to work in rice fields as evidence of differential racial immunity, Eveleigh made his claims *before* the Salzburgers and other Georgia residents managed to successfully cultivate rice, and he based them on his experience in South Carolina, a society in which African slavery was entrenched.¹¹³ The Trustees intended Georgia as a silk colony not so much because they believed that Europeans were incapable of growing rice, but rather because South Carolina had already cornered that market and they did not want to put the new colony in direct competition with its neighbor. The Salzburgers grew rice successfully for a while, but felt pressure from South Carolina to branch out; still, they cultivated a number of

Death Among the First Colonists of Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1980), 148-149, 151, 152.

¹¹² McCandless, *Slavery, Disease and Suffering*, 132.

¹¹³ For historians quoting Eveleigh, see Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 17; Trevor Reese, *Colonial Georgia*, 48; Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 84. Also see Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 119-122; on 119 she cites Peter Wood quoting Eveleigh.

grains with their own labor.¹¹⁴ A few other Savannah residents grew rice for a brief period, but were discouraged by Carolina's lower prices and perhaps frustrated by the Carolina planters' economic advantages in using enslaved laborers.

European labor in a warm climate, then, was not itself the main problem. In fact, much of the evidence historians cite to support the assumption that fevers affected Europeans more than they affected Africans can actually be interpreted differently. This evidence suggests differences in disease susceptibility between newcomers and longtime residents, or seasoned and unseasoned bodies. For example, Peter Wood quotes someone writing in 1706 about a yellow fever epidemic as being "very mortal especially to fresh Europeans."¹¹⁵ Wood takes this as evidence that yellow fever affected Europeans more than it did Africans. But rather than focus on the word "Europeans" here, the word "fresh" needs to be taken seriously. As Joyce Chaplin explains, residents of the Lowcountry "acknowledged the distinction between native and stranger" and recent arrivals "understood that they would get fevers until they were seasoned."¹¹⁶ And as William Stephens wrote in his journal in 1740, the yellow fever outbreak in Charleston "proved most fatal to new Comers."¹¹⁷

Moreover, Africans also had to be seasoned to the unfamiliar climate. Much of the evidence that historians have used to demonstrate an eighteenth-century belief in differential immunity between Africans and Europeans can be read as dividing seasoned from unseasoned

¹¹⁴ On the Salzburgers' frustrations with market pressure for rice, and the added difficulties of the 1740 war with Spain, see George Fenwick Jones, *The Georgia Dutch: From the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 1733-1783* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 214.

¹¹⁵ Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 81. For other evidence, see 80-84.

¹¹⁶ Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 103. In 1768, British physician John Lind published a popular tract advising Europeans traveling to hot climates. He advised that "sudden changes of climates are greatly the causes of sickness, and [...] a seasoned constitution in any part of the world is chiefly to be acquired by remaining there for some length of time." Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 188.

¹¹⁷ Entry for 23 October 1740 in *Journal* (CRG vol. IV supplement), 17.

people, both African and European. In her account of colonial Georgia, historian Betty Wood, who cites Peter Wood's argument about differential immunity as "equally valid for Georgia," notes that once Europeans in Georgia began importing enslaved laborers they worried about imported Africans' "resilience during the seasoning period" because they "might fall ill or die before their owners had seen any return on their investment."¹¹⁸ Differences between seasoned and unseasoned people, of both European and African origin, crop up repeatedly in the sources. Rather than ascribing differences in disease susceptibility to people's origins or biology, eighteenth-century observers more frequently attributed these differences to seasoning and bodily adjustment to the environment. All people were much more likely to become ill if they had recently arrived from a distant place, and all people needed to be seasoned to the local climate.

To conclude that the Malcontents' climatic claims, then, were anything more than an abuse of the Trustees' preconceptions of warm climates disregards contemporary understandings of health. With no people of African descent in Georgia under the Trustees (or at least none officially) it is impossible to know the exact measures of differential immunity and disease susceptibility among European and African populations. Historians have relied on neighboring South Carolina as evidence since Georgia's Lowcountry climate and disease environment approximate Carolina's. But while the two may have become similar by the late eighteenth century, in the earlier part, including during the Trustee period, Georgia's environment differed significantly from South Carolina's, and local inhabitants knew this. While both areas occupied

¹¹⁸ Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 101, 152. Todd Savitt, who writes about later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of racial susceptibility to disease in the American south, acknowledges that even Africans with some resistance to malaria required seasoning upon arrival in the Americas: "Even adult slaves from Africa had to go through a 'seasoning' period, because the strains of malarial parasites in this country differed from those in their native lands." Todd L. Savitt, "Slave Health and Southern Distinctiveness" in Todd L. Savitt and James Henry Young, eds., *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 124.

a similar disease environment broadly speaking, in the early part of the eighteenth century Lowcountry inhabitants held a keen awareness of differences in microclimates. In 1680 the town of Charleston relocated a few miles away to a new, healthier spot, and in the 1730s the Salzburgers found the soil and climate of New Ebenezer a great deal healthier than that of Old Ebenezer.¹¹⁹ Aside from a few exceptions, physicians and other observers attributed almost all of the sicknesses people experienced in the early eighteenth century to the local climate and environment, as well as to people's behavior; hence the need for a seasoning period and the idea that wet weather induced illness. Accounts of South Carolina's diseases, then, cannot be extrapolated to fit Georgia's.¹²⁰

Even though the Malcontents complained about the climate, they had little to no evidence of their own to support their claims. Betty Wood argues that Bolzius, the head of the Salzburgers, "concluded that the malcontents were using the climatic argument as an excuse for introducing slavery into Georgia."¹²¹ The sources suggest that this was indeed the case; there is little evidence to show that the Malcontents actually believed that the Georgia climate necessitated African labor. On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Tailfer and Williams had personal interests in bringing slavery to Georgia, and that both men held

¹¹⁹ For more on settlers' significant attention to microclimates, see Chapter Three.

¹²⁰ William Stephens's journal clearly shows the differences in illness and disease between Savannah and Charleston.

¹²¹ Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 66. Until late December 1745, Bolzius believed he had an ally in Savannah in the Reverend George Whitefield, who campaigned against the introduction of slavery along with Bolzius. Whitefield changed his mind, though, upon deciding that his orphanage would not survive without enslaved laborers, and Bolzius wrote expressing his disappointment. According to Bolzius, the Trustees' scheme was faltering in large part because of "the bad accounts & calumnies which were wrote & brought to England & Germany by the people of this & the neighbouring colony, by which our countrymen were discouraged to come hither." The hot climate, Bolzius explained, was a poor excuse for laziness on the part of people interested in slaveholding, and Germans had no trouble laboring in the heat. See Bolzius to Whitefield, 24 December 1745, CO 5/641, f. 519.

enough power in the colony to entice settlers to sign petitions that may not have reflected their true beliefs.¹²²

Hewatt's 1779 history of the colony exemplified the lasting impression Georgia's fate left on British and American theorists alike. The Trustees had attempted to create a colony without slaves or, indeed, anyone of African descent, but the "utter ineptitude" of the European laborers in the "burning climate" made enslaved African laborers a "necessity." Four years after Hewatt published his history, Anthony Stokes argued against Hewatt's story. "The pretence that sugar canes and rice could not be raised without the labour of Negroes, is erroneous," he wrote. Stokes cited the labor of "White Creoles" in Anguilla, Tortola, and Barbados as proof; he also noted the number of Euro-Americans in Georgia and South Carolina who grew crops "without the assistance of Negroes." Furthermore, people of African origin, far from labouring in rice fields "with pleasure," as the Malcontents tried to argue, felt the ill effects of the "sickly" swampy fields. "They are then turned out to work in the Rice Swamps," he wrote, "half leg deep in water, which brings on pleurisies and peripneumonies, and destroys numbers of them."¹²³ A traveling British soldier noted the same thing: "In general what part of South Carolina is planted," he observed, "is counted unhealthy, owing to the rice dams, and swamps, which as they occasion a great quantity of stagnated water in summer, never fails to [...] produce fall fevers and agues, dry gripes, and other disorders, which are often fatal to the lower set of people, as

¹²² Betty Wood argues, "from first to last, [the Malcontents'] pro-slavery argument hinged on the economic necessity of employing slaves." Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 205. She also notes the Trustees' skepticism regarding the Malcontents' intentions: "Egmont was not alone among the Trustees in believing that the growing clamor for slaves came from ungrateful and idle men who were unwilling to engage in the hard but morally uplifting work involved in implementing the Georgia plan and who deliberately falsified conditions in the colony in order to get their way." Betty Wood, "The Earl of Egmont and the Georgia Colony," in Jackson and Spalding, *Forty Years of Diversity*, 88.

¹²³ Anthony Stokes, *A View of the Constitution of the British Colonies in North America and the West Indies* (1783), 414-415.

well white as black.”¹²⁴ But the soldier’s observations, and Stokes’s arguments, went largely unheeded as the eighteenth century drew to a close. Instead, Hewatt’s interpretation remained, as Peter Wood argues, “a standard one throughout the eighteenth century.”¹²⁵

The discord between first-hand experience like the Salzburgers’ (and even observations like the soldier’s) and the reports transmitted back to London had lasting implications for the ways Britons and Americans conceived of bodily difference. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, scientists in London and Paris began conducting anatomical experiments on African and European bodies to try to determine biological differences between them.¹²⁶ The new sciences of anatomy and phrenology drew on earlier theories of bodily difference, and the legacy of the Georgia experiment only fueled these theories. Although in reality people’s experiences in Georgia under the Trustees did not confirm speculation about the inability of Europeans to work in a hot climate, the Malcontents’ persistent arguments expanded this myth. The Trustees placed great weight on the importance of actual experience, but with conflicting stories coming from Georgia they had a difficult time determining the validity of some of these claims. The argument – not borne out by experience – that Europeans were constitutionally unable to labor in a hot climate perpetuated and justified racial slavery across the Greater Caribbean. Instead of debunking this myth, the Georgia experiment provided fodder for these justifications for many

¹²⁴ “Journal of a Soldier,” Kings MS 213, f. 51, BL. As Betty Wood points out, it is perhaps impossible for historians to know either the rates of illness among enslaved populations or comparative resistance to disease among European and African populations in Georgia. Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 150. And according to Peter McCandless, “Contrary to the views of apologists for slavery, blacks endured as much or more sickness than whites. This was especially true of the great majority who cultivated rice.” McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*, 125-6.

¹²⁵ Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 84.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1996).

years to come as false reports from a handful of profit-driven men helped shape a lasting idea of biological racial difference across the British Atlantic world.

Chapter Three

“The Fever in Every Feature”: Healthy Places and Colonial Settlement

In 1754 a controversy rocked the Jamaican government. It erupted in Kingston, the burgeoning town not far from the once flourishing, but by then largely ruined, Port Royal. In the decades following the earthquake of 1692, a series of disasters – a fire and two hurricanes – had repeatedly devastated the port, and by mid-century Jamaican merchants had all but given up on the narrow spit of sand. They settled instead across the bay in Kingston, which lay nestled in the lowlands on the water. With hills sharply rising to the east and uplands to the north, what had once been a forested area sloping from the Liguanea plain to the sea was rapidly developing into a bustling port city.

Kingston’s rising status as the island’s major seaport and as a central hub for colonial merchants lay at the root of the problem. The merchants, along with many of the city’s residents, believed that Kingston’s increasing size and importance merited recognition. They asked the colony’s new governor, Admiral Charles Knowles, to consider moving the seat of government from Spanish Town to Kingston. Spanish Town, or St. Jago de la Vega, was the colony’s capital, an inheritance from Spanish control of the island a century earlier. It lay north and west of Kingston, some twelve miles or so into the uplands. The merchants argued that Kingston would make a better site for colonial activity: it had the largest population flow on the island, since nearly everyone who arrived in Jamaica sailed into Kingston’s harbor. It also had a more urban layout than Spanish Town, with its buildings situated close together and its streets laid out in a grid. Already the economic center of the colony, merchants argued, Kingston should also be the political center.

Residents of Spanish Town did not want to lose the seat of government to Kingston, so they too sent petitions to the governor and beyond, to the Board of Trade in London.¹ Knowles sided with the merchants, reasoning that for reasons of trade and convenience, Kingston would be the most sensible place to locate the capital.² Preoccupied with more pressing domestic and foreign affairs, the British government did not give these petitions much consideration until Knowles took matters into his own hands and declared Kingston the new capital.³ This bold move on the part of the new governor prompted the Board of Trade to conduct an inquiry. Drawing on the arguments presented in the petitions, the Board posed a number of questions to residents of both towns and the surrounding areas. Which of the two towns would be the best location for trade? Which could better protect the colony's papers and records from potential invaders? And, most importantly, which of the two places had the healthier climate? The answers to these questions would help determine whether moving the seat of government from Spanish Town to Kingston would be "for the general interest for the island of Jamaica the trade thereof and the Mother Country."⁴

The local climate of each place and the relative healthiness of the two towns concerned the Board a great deal. If imperial officials in London learned from the Trustees' struggle with Georgia, they would have taken note of the importance attached to a colony's reputation. In spite of reports to the contrary, the Malcontents succeeded in portraying Georgia as an unhealthy

¹ See "Petition of residents of St Jago de la Vega," 21 November 1754, MS 1644, no. 3, NLJ.

² Egerton Manuscripts 3490, f. 28-30, BL. A copy of Knowles's letter to the Board of Trade can also be found at CO 137/60 f. 90-92, TNA. Knowles had a personal stake in the matter since he occupied the governor's residence, and added to his letter of support his eagerness to have a new house.

³ For a more extensive discussion of this debate, see Jack P. Greene, "'Of Liberty and of the Colonies': A Case Study of Constitutional Conflict in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century British American Empire" in David Womersley, ed. *Liberty and American Experience in the Eighteenth Century* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 49-92.

⁴ Add MS 33029, f. 185, BL.

place for European laborers, a reputation that could easily dissuade both servants and other laborers from flocking to the colony. Already aware of Jamaica's unhealthy reputation in Britain, colonial officials had a distinct interest in countering this reputation in order to encourage the growth of the colonial population and economy. But one of the central problems with the Georgia experiment lay in the distance between the Trustees in London and the events unfolding in Savannah. Even if they sensed a discord between public reports and people's private experiences, without personal knowledge of Georgia's situation many of the Trustees found it difficult to determine the validity of the petitioners' claims. These problems – distance and a lack of personal experience – extended to other colonies as officials in London struggled to separate individual economic motivations from policies beneficial to broader colonial interests, and to extract truth from the many competing reports various officials received. At first glance, the location of Jamaica's capital appears a minor squabble compared to Georgia's problems. But as the arguments about bodily health in Georgia demonstrated the importance of geography as a barrier between colonial residents and the adjudicators, geographical considerations and their effects on bodily health lay at the heart of the Jamaica case.

Careful to consider Jamaica's reputation for ill health, the Board sent queries to local medical practitioners, who provided some of the most important testimony in the case. The physicians, familiar with the climate and diseases of each town, expressed various opinions: several argued that Spanish Town was the healthier spot and thus better suited for a capital, while others admitted that even though they found Spanish Town to be healthier, they thought Kingston would suffice.⁵ Based on their experiences with health and disease, most of the physicians agreed that significant health differences existed between the two places. Not a single person who testified seemed surprised that these two towns, roughly twelve miles apart, would

⁵ Add MS 33029, f. 186, BL.

have different climates or degrees of health. And nobody thought it strange that in considering the location for the seat of government in Jamaica, physicians would be called upon to describe the local climates and to help determine which was the healthier place.

This chapter examines settlers' ideas about place and bodily health in the hot climates of the Americas. The Jamaica debate illustrates the enormous importance colonial settlers and officials placed on the health – and reputation for health – of particular areas, and the ways in which the perceived health of places determined patterns of settlement. Colonial officials in Britain often had little or no first-hand experience with the areas they oversaw, but they understood the necessity of cultivating a favorable reputation of these places if they wanted to encourage future settlers to populate the colonies and strengthen the empire. The Jamaica case brought to light concerns about Jamaica's climate and its impact on bodily health, as well as the frustrations inherent in colonial governance for British officials and Jamaicans alike. It also reveals that residents of warm climates had strong concepts of microclimates. They believed that their local environments had substantial variations in climate and weather conditions, and that these variations affected all human bodies – African, European, and creole – in the same way.⁶ While ancient texts depicted the globe as a series of stratified bands or climatic zones, as Chapter One showed, by the late seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, colonial residents with experience in these hot climates, and to some extent colonial officials in Britain, had moved beyond basic latitudinal thinking.⁷

⁶ I use the term 'creole' in the eighteenth-century sense; that is, to refer to someone born in the colonies. A creole could have European, African, or mixed parentage; birthplace, rather than heritage, determined creolism.

⁷ Latitudinal thinking refers to the idea that the climate and temperature of a place depended solely on its latitude. For more on this, see Chapter One and Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period" *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 5 (Dec. 1982): 1262-1289.

The 1750s debate in Jamaica brought concerns about health and place to a public stage. In Jamaica, the issue divided the island, and in London colonial officials found themselves poring over testimonials from residents, physicians, and tradespeople with various opinions on the matter. But these concerns about the health of a place were not limited to a single debate. As this chapter shows, such concerns pervaded colonial settlement at every level and for many decades. The Kingston/Spanish Town dispute was one of the most contentious cases, but colonists took into account reports of a place's health in deciding where to build towns, homes, or hospitals throughout the British Atlantic, from the Lowcountry to the Leeward Islands.

British colonials believed that all places could be characterized according to varying degrees of healthfulness. Certain factors would determine the relative health of a place: most people believed that fresh air and water signified a healthy spot, while marshy, lowland areas could breed miasmas, a term for a particular type of noxious air that physicians believed caused disease.⁸ Several historians have pointed to the environmental causes of disease in hot climates, and to the steps colonists took to “improve” the climate through draining swamps, cutting down trees, and cultivating the land. While these “improvements” often did more harm than good, colonists, especially those in hot climates, seem to have pursued these methods with unusual vigor. Improving the landscape was a way for colonists to engage directly with their environment and to actually change the climate in an effort to preserve bodily health.⁹ But even

⁸ Other historians have gone into greater detail about what constituted a healthy or an unhealthy place in eighteenth-century thought. These ideas were not confined to the British colonies, but British physicians wrote a great deal about the climates and varying degrees of health in Britain's tropical colonies. For more on ideas about air quality and health in Britain, see Vladimir Jankovic, *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Medicine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 15-20, 87-9, 137-40; Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 62-63, 140-150, 158 and 185-87 on British American colonies; and in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, see Simon Finger, *The Contagious City: The Politics of Public Health in Early Philadelphia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 7-20.

⁹ Edward Long wrote that by the 1770s, the climate of Jamaica was “undoubtedly much altered from what it was at the first settlement by the English.” “The clearing of the mountainous tracts,” he explained, “has much contributed

given the serious efforts to tame or improve the land, European inhabitants of the Americas recognized the limits of their abilities.¹⁰ Residents of Britain's tropical and semitropical American colonies in particular possessed a strong awareness of microclimates, along with opinions about which places in those colonies would be the most conducive to health. These places, then, would become the best sites for settling, for building homes, and for encouraging future migration. The arguments presented by Jamaica's physicians provide a case in point: the particular situation of a location – its air, elevation, soil, winds, water, light, proximity to the sea, and surrounding forest or plant growth – all combined to determine a place's health. Drawing on Hippocratic theories, which maintained that personal health required a particular balance of both external and internal elements, physicians and others conducted careful observations of their

to this alteration;" specifically, the lack of rainfall. In contrast, he believed that some parts along the island's south coast which were newly covered in "thick woods" would soon "become the sources of unwholesomeness." See Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situations, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970 [1774]), vol. I, 357-358. For more on clearing trees to improve air flow, and for how this practice changed the climate, see Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65-67, 121-123, 208; J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28-29, 80; Jan Golinski, "American Climate and the Civilization of Nature" in Nicholas Dew and James Delbourgo, eds. *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 155, 162-167; Mart A. Stewart, "*What Nature Suffers to Groe*": *Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 62-63, 140, 155; Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33, 237. Draining swamps was another way of "improving" the air of a place; for more on this practice in the eighteenth-century lowlands, see Marion Stange, "Governing the Swamp: Health and the Environment in Eighteenth-Century Nouvelle-Orléans" in *French Colonial History* 11 (2010), 1-21.

¹⁰ For more on colonists' disillusionment with their attempts to manage the land, see Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 26-32. As other scholars have noted, English colonists in North America cleared land as part of another civilizing mission. This practice was both an attempt to "tame" the land, and to lay claim to it based upon use: if Native Americans did not clear and cultivate the land, the argument went, they had no real claim to it, in contrast with the European settlers. For more on this line of thought, see Golinski, *British Weather*, 4-5; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 97; Ken MacMillan, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1576-1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8-10. Also see Nicholas Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 52-3 on British settlers civilizing forests and people in Ireland prior to North America.

surroundings.¹¹ They noted the direction and timing of air currents, rainfall and moisture in the air, changes in temperature, and seasonal weather patterns, all in an attempt to analyze a location's specific climate so that they could choose to live in the healthiest spots.¹² Residents of Britain's Greater Caribbean colonies displayed a deep attentiveness to climatic nuance throughout much of the colonial period. From Charleston in the 1670s through Dominica in the 1760s, whenever these climatic nuances involved the placement of colonial capitals, even officials in London gave serious thought to arguments about the relative health of two nearby places.

These conceptions of microclimates extended from locating a colony's capital to planning an estate or situating a hospital. Planters thought carefully about the location of residences and other buildings on their estates, constructing them in healthy locations whenever possible. In the British West Indies in particular, planters during the mid-1780s realized that Parliamentary discussions about abolition might endanger the supply of new enslaved laborers and they began to take steps to ensure the health of their existing labor forces. One of these steps involved the construction and maintenance of hot houses, or hospitals for enslaved laborers.¹³

Although hot houses had long existed on many plantations, in several cases, as this chapter

¹¹ For more on this Hippocratic revival see Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30-33.

¹² This chapter focuses on the preservation of health, and on the effects of this approach, rather than on disease and the environment in the eighteenth-century tropics. For more on disease, medicine, health and climate, see Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire*; Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, eds. *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Trevor Burnard, "'The Countrie Continues Sicklie': White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780," *Social History of Medicine* 12 (1999): 45-72. Some newer work argues that as the eighteenth century progressed, people began to think of some types of disease and ill health as being behavioral, and thus deserving of a moral critique, rather than climate-induced. For more on this, see Trevor Burnard and Richard Follett, "Caribbean Slavery, British Anti-Slavery, and the Cultural Politics of Venereal Disease," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 2 (2012): 427-451; Golinski, *British Weather*, 138, 155-59; Jankovic, *Confronting the Climate*, 42-54.

¹³ Justin Roberts explains that hot houses were literally "hot" enclosures, with "little fresh air and tightly packed quarters," for housing sick enslaved laborers on plantations. See Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 166.

shows, planters expressed new concerns about the best places to locate these hospitals to protect the health of their occupants. Just as European colonists believed that they should locate their settlements and homes in dry, breezy places, planters also believed that slave living quarters and hospitals should be built in airy spots with adequate ventilation. The health of a place, therefore, could be measured on a general, universal level: some places were healthy for everyone, while damp, marshy spots bred disease for any body. Military physicians displayed similar concerns about barracks for soldiers in the warm climates of the British Atlantic. Unlike planters, though, who had the authority to construct, re-locate, or re-build structures on their estates, physicians found that their advice regarding the construction of living quarters often went unheeded.

Although conventional wisdom may have prompted would-be colonists to assume that African and European bodies would react differently to the Greater Caribbean climate, once those colonists arrived in plantation societies their experiences differed from their expectations. Letters from planters and plantation managers living in these places show a marked similarity in their perceptions of Africans' and Europeans' bodily reactions to weather and climate. Not every single body responded to the climate in exactly the same way, but for the most part, bodily similarity in response to climatic conditions trumped bodily difference. While the following chapter elucidates colonial ideas about constitutional differences among individual bodies, this chapter examines colonists' ideas about climatic differences among various locations. It shows how perceived differences on small geographic scales influenced the locations of towns, residences, and hospitals, and it demonstrates that planters often thought that the same environmental hazards that impacted their own bodies would affect those of enslaved laborers. But if planters understood that both sets of bodies would react in the same ways to environmental

conditions, this understanding could undermine concepts of climatic determinism and arguments about the necessity of African laborers in warm climates.

In the Jamaica debate, the petitioners from both Kingston and Spanish Town recognized that health played an important role in the dispute over the island's capital. In the merchants' petition to the King, they argued that in recent years Jamaica had suffered a declining state of trade. They attributed this decline largely to the fact that merchants on incoming ships were required to visit the governor at his official residence in Spanish Town. Not only did this journey of twelve miles over hilly roads constitute a considerable expense, they argued, it also endangered their lives. Merchants faced "the Risque of their health & lives which are too often lost thro' the violent heat of the climate by their journeys to and from St. Jago de la Vega," the petitioners wrote.¹⁴

Several members of the Kingston-based Jamaica Assembly agreed. They argued that Spanish Town's location inconvenienced residents of Jamaica as well as traveling merchants; anyone who needed to appear before the court was forced to travel to the capital. This journey deterred people, as "many of the prosecutors, & their witnesses, thro' the inclemency of the weather, & the heat of the climate, did lose their lives" so that "some chose to lose their debts, rather than run such risques."¹⁵ Residents of St. Andrews parish, which encompassed Kingston, expressed their concern for the "risque of the healths and lives" of anyone traveling to Spanish Town from Kingston. Both merchants and residents tried to impress upon colonial officials the

¹⁴ Egerton MS 3490, f. 19-20, BL; also CO 137/27 f. 153-156, TNA.

¹⁵ Council and Assembly of Jamaica to King, 17 May 1755, Fuller Family Papers, SAS-RF/20/3/9, East Sussex Record Office, Brighton.

idea that traveling posed such a danger that people would simply forego the journey and trade would suffer as a result.¹⁶

Advocates for Spanish Town, though, believed that they had the stronger footing when it came to arguing about health. In their own petition, they argued that “the said Town of Saint Jago de la Vega is one of the most healthy Places in America,” so it should doubtless serve as the capital of the colony. Kingston, on the other hand, was “one of the most unhealthy Towns in the Kings Dominions.” People often died there who “might have lived long in any other more healthy place.”¹⁷ As everyone knew, they wrote, Spanish Town’s reputation for health far exceeded Kingston’s. Even the Kingston petitioners admitted as much, although they emphasized that such was the reputation of the places rather than the actual fact. In a counter-petition to Spanish Town’s advocates, several merchants conceded the strike against Kingston in point of health, but argued that this objection was “stale and worn out.” “It must be owned,” they wrote, “that it was sickly for some few years, as most new settlements commonly are in this part of the world, especially such as are just cleared of the woods, as Kingston was.” But they claimed that this sickliness had since been overcome as the newly cleared ground had exhaled all of its harmful vapors. Other reports of sickness in Kingston, they wrote, had likely resulted from the after-effects of the Port Royal earthquakes, fires, and hurricanes, which left people without adequate shelter and food. Although the illnesses in Kingston that followed these disasters “brought a disreputation on the place,” in recent years the settlement had been “as healthy as any part of the West Indies.” Considering the size of the population, they wrote, “few have dyed

¹⁶ Egerton MS 3490, f. 21, BL; also CO 137/27 f. 157-158, TNA.

¹⁷ MS 1644 no. 3, f. 151, 168, NLJ.

there,” and those who had were mostly “transient persons & seamen,” many of whom brought illness and death upon themselves “by debauches.”¹⁸

Spanish Town’s petitioners proved just as eager to refute the claims against the dangers of the trek to their town, arguing that they found “not the least Danger from the nature of the Climate or Inclemency of the Air in going from Kingston to Saint Jago de la Vega and back again.” In fact, they wrote, the journey was “one of the Pleasantest passages and most salubrious that any country affords.” And just in case the colonial officials in Britain didn’t buy this argument and chose instead to believe that of the Kingston merchants, the petitioners pointed out that three quarters of Jamaica’s inhabitants lived in places that required a trip through or near Spanish Town in order to reach Kingston to conduct business. All of those people, then, would need to “undergo the Hazard of the Passage from Saint Jago de la Vega to that Town [Kingston] and back again which is represented (but without the least Formation in fact) by the Inhabitants thereof to be so Dreadfull and Dangerous to the Lives and healths of the Merchants.”¹⁹ In other words, the twelve-mile-long passage between the two towns was not at all dangerous. But if it was as bad as Kingston’s petitioners made it out to be, then most of the residents of Jamaica would be subjected to that danger if they had to go as far as Kingston to conduct their official business.

Both sides, then, hedged their bets: Kingston’s proponents argued that the journey between the towns caused illness, and while they acknowledged that their city used to be unhealthy, they maintained that by the 1750s it only suffered from a lingering reputation, not from any actual ill health. Spanish Town’s petitioners had less trouble presenting their town as the healthier of the two, but argued against the unhealthiness of the trip between the places.

¹⁸ Add MS 22676, f. 11, BL.

¹⁹ MS 1644 no. 3, f. 176, 165, NLJ.

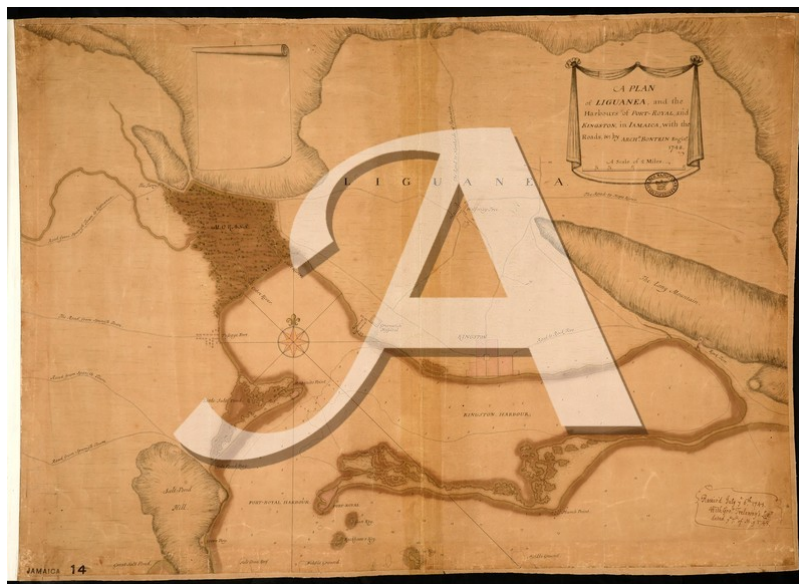
Inhabitants of each town tried to argue that for reasons of health, the colonial capital should be situated in their particular locale.

All of these competing claims confounded British officials with no experience of their own in Jamaica. Divisions within the Jamaica Assembly ran so deep that when the British government eventually involved itself in the dispute, it dissolved the fractured and biased Assembly. The Board of Trade took the health claims seriously. Gaining, and then maintaining, some reputation of good health in such a disreputable place could help a great deal to encourage future British settlement on the island, which would bolster the strength of the imperial power. With this aim in mind, officials in Britain called on physicians with experience in the two towns to submit their opinions about each place so that the government could make an informed decision.

One such physician testified that in his twelve years' residence on the island, he found that Spanish Town "was always a healthy" place, while Kingston, "from its natural situation being a flat and sandy soil and the reflection of the sun" had "a great deal of stagnated water" making it unhealthy. During the rainy seasons, he continued, "there is a sickness all over the country," although it was worse at Kingston, in part because of "a moras on the west where the water is stagnated." Spanish Town, on the other hand, was built "on an eminence near a fine running river."²⁰ Spanish Town's situation, close to mountains and moving water, made it a healthier place than a low-lying area with stagnant water. In fact, the doctor continued, "a great many" Kingston residents left the city to recover their health on a regular basis. He could not say the same for Spanish Town, which was, in his opinion, the better place for Jamaica's seat of government.

²⁰ Add MS 33029, f. 186, BL.

The doctor's arguments assumed a general and universal knowledge about the elements that made a place healthy or unhealthy. A higher elevation would invite breezes, which would provide a source of fresh air, an important consideration in places without extensive sewage systems. Running water also helped for similar reasons, and in both cases the idea of a steady flow of water or air formed an essential part of an elemental balance. Stagnant water, like stagnant or foul-smelling air, gave off miasmas. The morass, or marsh, to Kingston's west would produce miasmas, and, depending on the direction of the winds, could bring disease-ridden air to the low-lying town.²¹



(Kingston with morass to west (marked in dark brown))

Some of the physicians who spoke in favor of Kingston argued that the prevailing winds actually blew the swamp's vapors away from the town, so that miasmas did not affect most of the residents. "I can't pretend to say that stagnated water affect the town of Kins," one claimed. "The breezes generally carry the vapour from the town about two mile from the town." Another

²¹ Mark Harrison writes about a similar case in the eighteenth-century Dutch East Indies, in which a physician determined the health of a port town by the direction of the prevailing winds; air from the sea would make Batavia healthy, while breezes from the direction of the nearby marshes would bring ill health to the port. See Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire*, 37.

agreed on the direction of the winds, saying, “I know no moras that blows towards Kinstown but towards the mountains.” A third argued that “In a morning or evening there are stenches but they don’t affect Kinstown but to the west. Spanish Town lies west of these stenches but at some distance.” Any miasmas or vapors produced by this morass, then, blew away from Kingston rather than toward it, according to these doctors. The one who admitted that stenches – a sure sign of miasmas – affected Kingston dismissed concerns by arguing that these smells only appeared in the morning and the evening, and only in the western part of the town. Situating the government farther east and downtown, therefore, would not be a health hazard.²²



Here Spanish Town is shown on the left, in St. Catharine’s Parish, with Kingston at the north end of the harbor and the morass in the upper middle of the image, mostly in St. Andrew’s Parish but crossing the border with St. Catharine’s. These two portions of different maps merged together are from the John Carter Brown Library maps collection, both originals created by Thomas Craskell and published in 1763 in London. Acc. C-6514; Shelf En763 (1) & C-6515; Shelf En763 (3), JCB.

Several other doctors admitted that they found Kingston unhealthy, but the cause, they supposed, lay not so much in the town’s physical situation but rather in its position as a port city. There were “more illnesses at Kinstown than Spanish Town,” one physician reported, “from the

²² Add MS 33029, f. 183-186, BL.

greater number of strangers that first come to Kins.” Another agreed: “The strangers being more numerous at Kinstown there are more who have the yellow fever.”²³ These comments reflected the common assumption that yellow fever was a “stranger’s disease,” affecting not seasoned inhabitants of the island but new arrivals, especially the young and healthy ones. Some of the dissenting members of the since-dissolved Jamaica Assembly brought up similar points. Moving the courts to Kingston, they argued, would “endanger the lives of the Inhabitants [of elsewhere on the island], who will be frequently call’d from their distant country habitations to attend in a place unwholesome by the scituation, ill furnished with water & subject to infectious distempers brought ashore by the great Resort of Guinea Ships to the Harbour.”²⁴ West Indian residents commonly believed that slave ships, also known as Guinea ships, brought yellow fever to the islands, which flourished in densely populated areas.²⁵

If, as another physician argued, “where ever ships come they bring the yellow fever & small pox,” Kingston’s layout, with houses built in close proximity to one another, provided a better conduit for the spread of disease than did Spanish Town’s. “More than any other place,” this last physician continued, the homes in Kingston “are built [...] close together except at the top of the town which is not finished.” Another doctor agreed, arguing that the situation of Kingston’s buildings made the city “one of the most unhealthy.” The same arguments, then, that proponents of Kingston used to advocate for the town – its urban layout and considerable population flow as the island’s main harbor – could be used against the city. In contrast to the “fine air about Spa[nish Town],” to quote another physician, Kingston harbored disease. The

²³ Add MS 33029, f. 182-184, BL.

²⁴ “The Protest of President Grigory, Simon Clark and Henry Archbould Esq., members of the Council,” CO 137/29, f. 35, TNA.

²⁵ For more on eighteenth-century understandings of yellow fever, see McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*, chapters four and six.

number of people in Kingston meant that disease would easily spread from the ships through newcomers to the population at large.²⁶

The proposal divided the island. Even those who tried to remain neutral realized that they would have to choose sides in what was, in one person's words, "the most equal struggle that ever was in the country."²⁷ Inhabitants of Spanish Town protested that they would suffer greatly should the removal take place. The Assembly heard complaints from people who made their living renting out rooms to visitors to the capital, and from planters who argued that slaves in the surrounding parishes of St. Catherine, St. John, St. Dorothy, and St. Thomas in the Vale "would entirely lose a market for their provisions" should Spanish Town lose the seat of government. The planters warned that this loss of a market could have "evil consequences" for "the island in general," in essence implying that the removal would incite such anger on the part of enslaved people that they might revolt.²⁸ Those in favor of Kingston argued that as a harbor town surrounded by mountains, Kingston had better natural defenses than did Spanish Town, thus protecting the colony's records from potential invaders. But Spanish Town's defendants pointed out that these records had "been safely kept in the said town of St. Jago de la Vega, for almost a century last past" so there seemed to be no good reason to move them.²⁹

²⁶ Add MS 33029, f. 183, 192, BL.

²⁷ Robert Stirling to Archibald Stirling, 5 September 1754, Stirling family papers, T-SK 11/3, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Stirling had recently arrived in Jamaica from Scotland and eventually sided with the Kingston faction because it was "agreeable to my own inclinations & the Govern. & most of my best friends are engaged in it." See Robert Stirling to Archibald Stirling, 19 April 1755; also see letter of July 1757 regarding the fall-out with Knowles.

²⁸ See Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica, vol. IV (Jamaica: Alexander Aikman, 1797), 508: 22 April 1755. Also see SAS-RF/20/12, Fuller Family Papers, East Sussex Record Office.

²⁹ Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica, 509: 22 April 1755. Also see letter of Stephen Fuller to gentlemen at Jamaica, 9 February 1757, in which he reported on the hearings on the matter at the Board of Trade. According to Fuller, the Board found "That what had been alledg'd against the safety of keeping the records in St Jago de la Vega could have but little weight, when they had been there near an hundred years without the least accident." SAS-RF/21/93, Fuller Family Papers, East Sussex Record Office.

The Board of Trade had several sides of the proposal to consider. Merchants and other business people showed strong support for Kingston, rallying no small force of allies from Liverpool, Bristol, Lancaster, Philadelphia and New York to their cause.³⁰ Kingston did indeed function as the economic center of the island, but, located right on the harbor, its position left it more exposed to the same natural disasters that had devastated Port Royal.³¹ Spanish Town, on the other hand, because of its elevated position further inland, would be unlikely to fall into the ocean in an earthquake or hurricane. But its location, farther from the harbor, made it accessible only by overland roads, which could sometimes be difficult to traverse. The testimony by the physicians, while far from conclusive or unanimous, raised an important point. Would it be worth the convenience of governing from Kingston given the risk of disease? The Board received a flood of petitions and letters insisting that it was not; complicating matters further, Governor Knowles acted without direction from the Board, and at times without informing its members of his actions. In the end the Board, deciding that Knowles had overstepped his own authority, moved the seat of government back to Spanish Town in spite of continued protests from local merchants.³²

The Board's decision demonstrated that economic concerns did not always constitute the primary consideration in determining the shape of the empire. The extensive investigation conducted by the Board, and the entire debate, which lasted for several years, focused to a large

³⁰ Lord of Trades' Report to Privy Council, 3 July 1755, SAS-RF/20/3/10, Fuller Family Papers, East Sussex Record Office. Also see James Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory: Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1534-2000* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005), 90, although Robertson mentions Glasgow, not Lancaster, as the fifth of these cities.

³¹ For more on the debates about rebuilding Port Royal after each disaster, see Matthew Mulcahy, "That Fatal Spot": The Rise and Fall – and Rise and Fall Again – of Port Royal, Jamaica," in Carole Shammas, ed. *Investing in the Early Modern Built Environment: Europeans, Asians, Settlers and Indigenous Societies* (Boston: Brill, 2012): 191-218.

³² PC/2/106, f. 179-190, TNA. For details of the Jamaica Assembly's proceedings, see Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica, vol. IV, 502-646; also see CO 137/29 and Fuller Family Papers, East Sussex Record Office.

extent on both the natural and the built environment of the two neighboring towns and the effects of the environment on bodily health. The breezes, direction of the winds, location of standing water, and the layout of the buildings all created significant differences between the local climates of the two towns. The environment held enormous importance in determining the use of any given space, and the Board of Trade considered information about the relative health of different places essential in deciding the future of the colony.

Because it occurred a century into English settlement on the island, the Jamaica debate divided large portions of the populace with a personal stake in the outcome. The issue took on political and economic dimensions, in addition to concerns about health and safety. But for the British government, locating a colonial capital in the healthiest spot was an important part of settling a colony. Eighty years earlier, for example, the Lords Proprietors of Carolina thought that finding a healthy place for the new colony's capital could determine the colony's success. In 1671, a group of colonists arrived on the Carolina coast, hoping to attract other settlers from England, Barbados, and New York. They surveyed the area from a temporary settlement near the mouth of a river, staking out a place for a permanent capital.

As the group considered the layout of the future colony, Lord Ashley, one of Carolina's Proprietors, wrote to John Yeamans in Carolina with detailed instructions for settling a town. "Let me recomend to you," Ashley wrote, "to chuse such a place as may [be] healthyest & seated upon ye highest ground." The existing settlement was "so moorish that it must needs be unhealthy," a disadvantage certain to doom the fledgling colony.³³ Four months later, a colonist assured Ashley that the location the group had chosen for the new fort town of Charlestown (later changed to Charleston) "must of necessity be very healthy being free from any noisome

³³ Lord Ashley to Sir John Yeamans, 18 September 1671, PRO 30/24/48, vol. 2, f. 185, TNA.

vapours, and all the summer long refreshed with continued coole breathings from the sea.”³⁴ The colonists had settled upon a site along the Ashley River, further upriver from their initial settlement but still close enough to benefit from sea breezes. But after several summers and autumns, increasing numbers of people suffered from fevers and agues and prevailing opinions about the healthiness of Charleston’s location began to change. Concerned about the colony’s survival, the Lords Proprietors ordered the inhabitants of Carolina to settle new towns further upriver, and to move the seat of government to a healthier location.³⁵ In 1680, a decade after establishing the first settlement on Lord Ashley’s instructions, the colonists moved the town to a new spot across the river, only a few miles away.

Fifty years later, when James Oglethorpe landed with the first Georgia settlers in 1732, he also tried to select a healthy location for settlement. Upon arriving in the territory, Oglethorpe “fixed upon a healthy situation about ten miles from the sea” on which to build the town of Savannah. “The landskip is very agreeable,” he informed the Trustees, “the stream being wide and bordered with high woods on both sides.”³⁶ A visitor from Charleston agreed, noting that the spot destined to become the capital city was “a beautiful prospect” and “a wholesome place, for a town or city.” The area had “rich ground” and “good choice planting land,” he wrote.³⁷ Several years later, a visitor to the nearby island of St. Simon observed that Frederica, the fort

³⁴ Jos. Dalton to Lord Ashley, 20 January 1671/2, PRO 30/24/48, vol. 3, f. 84, TNA.

³⁵ McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*, 22.

³⁶ James Oglethorpe to Trustees, 10 February 1732/3, MS 595, James Edward Oglethorpe Papers, Item 5, no. 13, GHS.

³⁷ “An account of a visit to Georgia, from Charlestown, in South Carolina, from whence it is dated, 22 March, 1732-3,” Georgia History Extracts, MS 1038, GHS.

and principal town of the island, had been built in an ideal location. “The air is pure and serene,” he wrote, “and, perhaps never was a better situation, or a more healthful place.”³⁸

Far from fortunate happenstance, these towns’ healthy locations owed much to careful planning on Oglethorpe’s part. In his written plan for Georgia, Oglethorpe explicitly tried to model the Roman Empire at its height, hoping Georgia could fulfill the Trustees’ vision of an idyllic place. In his account of Georgia’s plan, Oglethorpe explained that the founder of a city should choose “a healthy situation” far from marshes so as to avoid their noxious exhalations. To “build a strong convenient and magnificent City,” Oglethorpe observed, a person should “consult the wholesomeness of the Air and Waters.”³⁹ In choosing the location of Savannah, Oglethorpe believed the colony would be best served by settling upon the healthiest spot. He therefore fixed upon a place close to running water, and away from marshes.

By insisting on healthy locations and layouts of towns in Georgia, Oglethorpe hoped to strengthen the colony as well as the empire. Savannah’s town plan famously incorporated open squares with green spaces designed for airing out the city so that residents would never be far from fresh air. In contrast, forty years later in the West Indies, Edward Long felt certain that the towns were “not well adapted to health.” Ignoring prescriptions for health, he thought, would virtually ensure disease-ridden towns. Such was the case in too many places, particularly in Kingston. “The contiguity of buildings, the frowzy atmosphere of many inhabitants assembled within a small compass, the lowness of their situation, the easy communication of infectious distempers”: all contributed to an atmosphere rife with disease.⁴⁰

³⁸ August 1745, William Bacon Stevens Papers, MS 759, Folder 14, Item 58, GHS.

³⁹ James Edward Oglethorpe, *Some Account of the Design of the Trustees for establishing Colonys in America*, ed. Rodney M. Baine and Phinazy Spalding (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990) [written 1730/1], 33-36.

⁴⁰ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 425.

Long expressed particular frustration because colonists had the opportunity to take climatic variations into account when developing a region. “That a West-India town,” he wrote, “should be irregularly planned is, indeed, almost inexcusable, not only on account of health, which ought to be principally regarded, but because it is formed as it were at once.” For Long, it was inconceivable that anyone with the opportunity to plan and develop a town would ignore health factors. Since it was essentially common knowledge that certain places promoted health and others detracted from it, why would anyone choose to construct a town otherwise? “In laying out the surveys of these townships,” he wrote, “every convenience ought to be attended to, in respect of water, or springs, goodness of soil, and healthiness of situation.”⁴¹

By the later part of the eighteenth century, when it came to the health of a place, Kingston appeared to be a lost cause. In 1799 planter Simon Taylor of Jamaica wrote to a friend advising him that his son, who was preparing to travel to the island, should avoid Kingston entirely. “Should he come by the way of London,” Taylor wrote, upon arrival in Kingston “he should have particular directions not to come on shore immediately” but instead write to a neighbor announcing his arrival. Once friends received word of the visitor’s arrival, they would bring him directly from the ship to Taylor’s house, “which is in the country about three miles and a half from Kingston and where there is no risque of getting” yellow fever, Taylor wrote.⁴²

Taylor, as with the physicians contributing to the Kingston/Spanish Town debate, believed that

⁴¹ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 4; vol. I, 424. Richard Ligon recorded a similar complaint about Barbados over a century earlier. Bridgetown, the colony’s capital, was situated entirely without regard to people’s health, he wrote; “If they had considered health, as they did conveniency,” he grumbled, the founders of the town “would never have set it there.” Ligon refused to believe that anyone could “have been so improvident, as not to forsee the main inconveniences that must ensue, by making choice of so unhealthy a place to live.” Instead, he explained, the town sprung up without regard to health, though he considered building a town “upon so unwholsome a place” to be a serious mistake. See Ligon, *True and Exact History*, 25.

⁴² Simon Taylor to George Hill, 15 June 1799, Simon Taylor Letterbook C, ICS 120/1/C/10, ICS.

Kingston harbored yellow fever, so was especially dangerous for newcomers, while the countryside had an undeniable health advantage over the town.

But beyond obvious divides between harbor cities and country estates, most people believed that incremental differences in distance could produce noticeable differences in health and climate. Physician John Rollo, who believed that islands in the West Indies varied “considerably in climate, and in respect of health” from one another, stressed that even the “most unhealthy country has its healthy situations.”⁴³ And as one planter wrote from Jamaica in 1777, “the different parts of this Island are as various in the weather or what they here call seasons as Green-Land & Bombay.”⁴⁴ This belief in the variability of regional health and climate prompted planters who wrote natural histories of the tropics to devote lengthy portions of their work to descriptions of wind patterns, rainfall, and seasonal changes in different regions. Details about specific locations could help potential planters or financiers determine a place’s agricultural viability, but they could also inform future settlers about a region’s precise climatic nuances. In his *History of Jamaica*, for example, Edward Long wrote extensively of the island’s microclimates. According to Long, the mountains in Jamaica, “occasion a great variety of climate in the different parts, whether in respect of rain or dry weather, heat or coolness.”⁴⁵ In such a large country, he continued, and with such mountains, “heat and cold are relative qualities, there being perhaps not two places, two miles distant from each other, where the

⁴³ John Rollo, *Observations on the means of preserving and restoring health in the West-Indies* (London: C. Dilly, 1783), 6-7, 29. For further discussion of this idea, see James Lind, *An Essay on Diseases Incidental to Europeans in Hot Climates. With the Method of preventing their fatal Consequences* (London: T. Becket and P.A. De Hondt, 1768), 204.

⁴⁴ J. Jackson to Henry Jackson, 27 October 1777, Spanish Town, Jamaica, C 110/141, TNA.

⁴⁵ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 352. Long was not the first to write about Jamaica’s varying climatic regions, or to devote lengthy descriptions to the weather (John Taylor’s 1687 manuscript, for example, described Jamaica’s climate in detail). But Long’s work appears more calculated to suggesting and directing settlement than some others (Taylor’s included). For another description of the climate changing incrementally in mountainous areas of the West Indies, see Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (New York: Arno Press, 1972 [1793]), vol. I, 179-180.

sensations of heat and coolness are precisely alike. In advancing from the sea-coast towards the mountains, every mile produces a sensible change towards a cooler temperature.” The coast itself was the same, “more or less hot, according as it is more or less open” to breezes.⁴⁶

Elevation and air currents, proximity to water (moving or stagnant), surrounding forest growth, and the temperature and moisture in the air all produced different microclimates with specific effects on people’s health. As one former West Indian resident cautioned in his advice to a friend traveling through the area, “a West India climate may be suspected to be dangerous to a person making a tour there. With care and observation, however, joined to a liberty of choosing the place of residence, it will be found not at all inconvenient or disagreeable.”⁴⁷ The choice of a healthy spot was key here; it could make all the difference to someone’s health.

With some of these same convictions in mind, Long devoted a large portion of his three-volume history to descriptions of the island’s different regions. He recounted in great detail the weather conditions of each parish, including the types of water, elevation, temperature, and general health of the various regions. Significant variations among places existed: hills, which in Jamaica were “scattered every where” he found “universally healthful” while the “air of the low grounds,” especially that which was “swampy, or not drained” was “by no means to be reckoned healthy.” He admitted that Kingston had “been accused of being an unwholesome spot,” particularly the land west of town which was “low and flat, interspersed with lagoons,” and

⁴⁶ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 358. Bryan Edwards found that between Kingston and “a villa eight miles distant, in the highlands of Liguanea” there was a midday temperature difference “of ten degrees in eight miles; and in the morning and evening the difference was much greater.” See Edwards, *History*, vol. I, 179. Robert Renny repeated this claim in his own history of Jamaica a decade and a half later. See Robert Renny, *An History of Jamaica. With observations on the climate, scenery, trade, productions, negroes, slave trade, diseases of Europeans, customs, manners, and dispositions of the inhabitants. To which is added, an illustration of the advantages, which are likely to result, from the abolition of the slave trade* (London: J. Cawthorn), 83.

⁴⁷ “Hints drawn up for the use of a gentleman on the point of making a tour through the West India Islands,” Benjamin Vaughan papers, series III, APS.

“contiguous to marshes.”⁴⁸ Conceding that the temperatures at Spanish Town were significantly lower than those in Kingston, Long explained that a person uncomfortable in Kingston could simply travel a few miles into the hills and be refreshed: “if the air of the towns is, at any time, found of a degree of heat inconvenient to health and ease, a person, who travels only a few miles inland, to the hilly or mountainous situations, is sure to meet with a temperate and refreshing air.”⁴⁹ His voluminous *History* provided no shortage of explanations as to the range of microclimates on the island, along with advice about where a person could seek out a healthy place. “From this variety of climate it must appear,” he concluded, “that heat and cold are here entirely local and relative; depending on situation, whether low and level ground, or elevated and mountainous; on the propinquity or distance of hills, open to a free current of air, or barricaded round; [...] on the nature of the soil,” etc. “This shews the absurdity,” he emphasized, “of conveying an idea of the climate of any country in general, by a description which is only applicable to certain parts of it.”⁵⁰ In other words, the very idea of a “Jamaican climate,” let alone a West Indian or a tropical one, was ridiculous. Too many variations existed; so many as to make the idea of generalizing among them impossible.

Many other eighteenth-century observers around the Atlantic shared Long’s conviction that great disparities existed between the climates of neighboring places. These differences resulted in large part from the natural environment and features of the landscape, but human

⁴⁸ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 132, 169, 107.

⁴⁹ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. III, 599.

⁵⁰ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 359. Long argued that even seasonality was entirely inconsistent between the northern and southern parts of Jamaica: “On the North side of the island the climate and seasons are very different; it being dry weather in general on this side, when there is rain on the South side, and *vice versa*.” (vol. I, 365). William Beckford made a similar argument: “The seasons, on the southern and on the northern sides of Jamaica, are almost as opposite in their periods of harvest, as are their points upon the compass; insomuch that about the time that the crops are terminated on the former, the process of sugar-making begins in the latter.” Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica* (1790), vol. II, 286.

intervention also played a role. Oglethorpe's thoughtful planning, for example, seemed to pay off: as the engineer and surveyor William Gerard de Brahm explained some decades after Georgia's founding, "The city of Savannah continued from its first settlement, for near 30 years to be accounted a very healthy place. The South Carolinians used to come there for recruiting [recovering] their health," since Savannah appeared free of the distempers that ravaged Charleston. De Brahm attributed the disparity in health between the two cities to the forests around Savannah. Although Savannah had swamps and marshes nearby, de Brahm wrote, trees attracted the vapors rising from the swamps, and the poisonous air then disappeared "on the road of the wind." Since the treetops rose higher than the buildings, "none of [the swamps'] vapours could touch the inhabitants."⁵¹

De Brahm's assessment in this particular regard differed from that of the early Georgia settlers, who complained that the trees made Savannah unhealthy. It also deviated from other theories about the effect of trees on an environment: many writers and physicians believed that trees prevented a flow of fresh air to an area, trapping miasmatic air instead and endangering the health of a place. A decade before de Brahm wrote, for example, physician George Millegan Johnston published a tract on the climate and diseases of South Carolina. He argued that diseases in Charleston were "proportionably less frequent, and milder than in the Country; for here we are pretty clear of Trees, have a large Opening to the Sea, a Kind of Ventilation in the Streets," and cooking fires which dried the air. Johnston credited Charleston's healthiness with the lack of surrounding trees because an open prospect allowed for fresh air to circulate.⁵²

⁵¹ William Gerard de Brahm, *Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America*, Kings MS 210, f. 94, BL.

⁵² [George Millegan Johnston], *A Short Description of the Province of South-Carolina, with an account of the Air, Weather, and Diseases at Charles-town* (London: John Hinton, 1763), 44-45.

In the same year, 1763, a report from the new British colony of Dominica explained that the climate was “very unhealthy & subject to fevers & agues” but that “this evil” would “be in a great measure removed when the country is cleared; as those parts already cleared are by many degrees the most healthy.”⁵³ Settlers in parts of Carolina outside Charleston expressed similar opinions; in 1773 Robert Duff believed that the land around St. Stephen would become “more healthy & agreeable” as it was cleared, and the following year George Ogilvie explained to his sister that his plantation in Santee would “in a few years be both pretty and pleasant” as he cleared the trees away.⁵⁴

But clearing the trees, as it turned out, could have unintended consequences. As several historians argue, colonists in the West Indies believed that clearing the land of woods, an action meant to increase air flow, actually decreased rainfall in those areas, and sometimes created drought conditions.⁵⁵ After experiencing this problem in heavily settled colonies such as Antigua, settlers in other islands took note. In St. Vincent, for example, John Farquharson wrote to his family in Scotland in 1788 describing a plot of land he hoped to sell. The soil, he explained, was “excellent,” but “for some time to come the air will be humid and the climate wet – when the lands are cleared that will of course cease to be the case in a great degree.”⁵⁶ Two years later he wrote again, this time commenting on the climate of the island in general: “we reckon it particularly fortunate that in this island there falls, in all seasons of the year, a sufficient

⁵³ CO 101/1, f. 91, TNA.

⁵⁴ Robert Duff to George Duff, 2 September 1773, Duff Family Papers, MS 3175/Z/204/1, University of Aberdeen Special Collections, Aberdeen, Scotland; George Ogilvie to Margaret Ogilvie, 22 November 1774, Ogilvie Family Papers, MS2740/10/5/2, University of Aberdeen Special Collections. The names of some places – such as Santee – may have also purposely evoked a sense of health associated with the place.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30-31, 67, 208.

⁵⁶ John Farquharson to James Farquharson, St. Vincent, 20 August 1788, Farquharson of Invercauld Papers, Box 115, Braemar, Scotland.

quantity of rain to keep the young plants healthy and to give us eternal verdure,” he informed his family. “In the interior part of the Island there is an immense map of very high rugged and impracticable mountains, mostly covered with impenetrable woods – the lofty tops of these attract the clouds and give us abundance of rain.” This natural irrigation made St. Vincent better off than some of its neighbors. “In some of the old settled and better cleared islands, where the land is in general of a more level surface, this is not the case. Some of these suffer extremely from dry weather. In Antigua, for instance, and St. Kitts the sugar crop will this year be so scanty that the planters there will be badly off.”⁵⁷ But thanks to planters like Farquharson who cleared their own plots of land, St. Vincent was headed down a dangerous course and would, according to some residents, soon become as deforested as some of the other British Leeward Islands.⁵⁸

To try to counteract this impending drought, in the winter of 1791 the legislature of St. Vincent met and voted on a bill regarding this very issue. According to the bill, a piece of forested land in the parish of St. George known as the King’s Hill benefited many surrounding planters because the trees “attract[ed] the Clouds and Rain” to the area. But “Encroachments” had “been made thereon,” which the council and assembly found “highly injurious” to the quantity of rainfall in the area. To address this concern, the legislature passed a bill proclaiming that “the Timber and other Trees and Wood growing, or that may grow” on the King’s Hill would be “hereby reserved and appropriated for the Purpose of attracting the Clouds and Rain.”

The assembly and council ordered a survey of the property, and directed planters whose land

⁵⁷ John Farquharson to William Farquharson, St. Vincent, 25 December 1790, Farquharson of Invercauld Papers, Box 115.

⁵⁸ Deforestation had serious consequences for Caribbean islands. Some animal species disappeared, other invasive species proliferated (such as weeds and rats), and soil erosion became widespread. Rainstorms could result in massive soil loss to hilly areas, and in some islands soil nutrients quickly depleted. For more on this, see J.R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28-29.

bordered the King's Hill to plant hedges delineating their property and to maintain this boundary marker or else face a stiff penalty. Anyone caught taking wood from the hill, or attempting to clear, plant, or cultivate it, would be fined for the offense. The government of St. Vincent did not want to risk creating drought conditions on the island.⁵⁹

In the Carolina Lowcountry, on the other hand, planters created a different environmental problem altogether. As increasing numbers of planters flooded their land to create rice paddies, the standing water attracted disease-carrying mosquitos, which made the environment unhealthy for the inhabitants. As Georgia began to catch up to South Carolina's rice culture, it too faced a similar problem. De Brahm, who had praised Savannah's trees for their healthy properties, explained the problem thus: once the residents of Savannah cut down the surrounding trees and converted the lands into rice fields, the miasmatic air had nowhere else to go "and all the streets and houses filled with them, to the prejudice of [Savannah's] inhabitants, whose diseases [became] in every respect similar to those in the neighbouring province of South Carolina."⁶⁰

By the time de Brahm wrote in the 1770s, South Carolina's flourishing rice culture and its accompanying swampy land had established a clear divide between the health of the city and that of the country. In Jamaica, the planters found the country healthier than the towns, but in South Carolina people believed the opposite. The rice paddies, which, in one visitor's words, "occasion a great quantity of stagnated water," made plantations unhealthy spots.⁶¹ To make

⁵⁹ "An Act, to appropriate for the Benefit of the Neighbourhood the Hill, called the King's Hill, in the Parish of St. George, and for enclosing the same, and preserving the Timber and other Trees growing thereon, in order to attract Rain." 9 February 1791, in *The Laws of the Island of Saint Vincent and its dependencies, from the first establishment of a legislature to the end of the year 1787* [addendum] (Saint Vincent: Joseph Berrow, 1788).

⁶⁰ William Gerard de Brahm, *Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America*, Kings MS 210, f. 94, BL. Edward Long had a similar assessment regarding the parish of Hanover in Jamaica: the air, he explained, "is esteemed healthy, and will be more so, when greater progress is made in cutting down its woods." Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 211.

⁶¹ "Journal of a Soldier," Kings MS 213, f. 51, BL.

matters worse, inhabitants of country estates built “their Houses near their Rice-Fields, or Indigo-Dams, where they must always keep stagnating Water.”⁶² The combination of heat and stagnant water was a particularly unhealthy one, and rice plantations became notorious for their ill effects on people’s bodies, especially during certain times of the year. Both summer and fall in the Lowcountry constituted the “sickly season,” when wealthy planters often lived in their town homes rather than on plantations. In his travels through the area in 1765, John Bartram observed that affluent planters lived in their town homes during the summer, while another visitor, the year before Bartram, noted that planters escaped to their town homes in the fall.⁶³ And as John Vaughan wrote in his commonplace book in the early 1780s, “The town of Charles Town very healthy, gentlemen retire to it from the country in the sickly seasons.”⁶⁴ But if the rice paddies in Carolina and Georgia, like the towns in the West Indies, actively contributed to a disease environment, how could inhabitants ensure their own health?

Although individual residents of the Lowcountry or the West Indies could not always control the construction of towns or their neighbors’ crops, many of them could build their homes with an eye to the climate. Edward Long, for example, believed that houses in warm climates “should be placed on sufficiently-dry and elevated spots, far from swamps or morass, and where there is a free circulation of air.” Homes should be kept away from “all low,

⁶² [G.M. Johnston], *A Short Description*, 44-45.

⁶³ See Lord Adam Gordon, “Journal,” *Travels in the American Colonies* (ed. N.D. Mereness), 397, cited in Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 30. For more on seasonal movement in South Carolina, see Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering*, 22, 30, 37, 249-252, 261-262; John Duffy, “The Impact of Malaria on the South,” in Todd L. Savitt and James Harvey Young, eds. *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 38.

⁶⁴ John Vaughan Papers, BV462, Series II, Commonplace book c. 1783, p. 16, APS Library. For more on South Carolina’s reputation as an unhealthy place, see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 62-69.

unventilated situations,” which “in this part of the world” he thought “most unwholesome.”⁶⁵

Planter Joshua Steele, who moved from England to Barbados in 1780, agreed. The ocean breezes he felt on his property, he wrote, made his estate “the finest climate in the world.”⁶⁶ And in 1788, John Hunter, who published a tract based on his experience as an army physician in Jamaica, informed his readers that “the inhabitants [of Jamaica] never set down their houses in such [marshy vaporous] bottoms, but constantly make choice of a lofty situation.”⁶⁷

Residents not only elevated their houses, they also ensured a constant flow of air through the buildings, a measure of which Hunter approved. “Every house in the country is constructed so, as to give as free admission to the air as possible, which the great heat of the climate renders necessary,” he wrote. “By this means a constant perflation [air flow] is kept up, and the air that is breathed by the sick changes every moment, and therefore never acquires, by stagnation and confinement, those noxious qualities, which prove the cause of the hospital fever.”⁶⁸ In this case, the heat of the country virtually guaranteed that residents would make provisions for air flow in their homes, which drove away disease; cold places, on the other hand, encouraged residents to shut in stale air, thereby provoking the spread of disease. Lowcountry residents, too, incorporated features in their homes to moderate the temperature and encourage fresh air. In his trip through the Lowcountry colonies in the 1760s, John Bartram noted the number of houses with wraparound sleeping porches. “Ye inhabitants of both Carolinas & Georgia generally builds piazzas at one or more sides of their houses which is very commodious in these hot

⁶⁵ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 424.

⁶⁶ Joshua Steele to Joseph Banks, 20 June 1786, Add MS 33978, f. 70, 71, BL.

⁶⁷ John Hunter, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Jamaica, and on the Best Means of Preserving the Health of Europeans, in that Climate* (London: G. Nicol, 1788), 16.

⁶⁸ Hunter, *Observations on the Diseases*, 104.

climates,” he wrote. “They screen off ye violent scorching sunshine & draws ye breeze finely.”⁶⁹

By selecting places away from stagnant water, and by encouraging a flow of fresh air, inhabitants of the colonies could work to ensure their own health.⁷⁰

These various sources, which ranged from private letters to published natural histories and medical manuals, demonstrate a widespread and pervasive belief in climatic nuance across the Greater Caribbean. If Edward Long insisted that a “Jamaican climate” could not be adequately expressed because of vast differences across small distances, the idea of a “hot climate” or even a “West Indian climate” would have been all the more misleading. As all of these writers conveyed, certain places in the Greater Caribbean could be healthy for European bodies. Travelers and colonists just had to be careful about where they settled to be sure they

⁶⁹ John Bartram Diary, 26 September 1765, APS.

⁷⁰ Although by the time Long, Bartram, and Hunter wrote several residents of the Lowcountry and the West Indies considered the climate when constructing homes and buildings, for many decades inhabitants had insisted on replicating English-style buildings in spite of their unsuitability for hot climates. For more on some of the ways South Carolinians ignored or refused to adapt to the climate (particularly hurricanes) in building, see Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society*, 132-136. In the sixteenth century, Richard Ligon found the situation of buildings in Barbados deplorable. He complained about the tendency of planters to build homes in a style he believed to be antithetical to the demands of the climate: rather than digging deep cellars and incorporating many windows and high ceilings, he found small homes, low to the ground, with windows concentrated on the western sides of buildings. Describing this apparent absurdity, he wrote, “the wind blowing alwayes one way, which was Eastwardly, they should have made all the openings they could to the East, thereby to let in the cool breezes, to refresh them when the heat of the day came. But they, clean contrary, closed up all their houses to the East, and opened all to the West; so that in the afternoons, when the Sun came to the West, those little low-roofed rooms were like Stoves, or heated Ovens.” See Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*, 40. It is quite possible that these residents built their homes low to the ground because of the potential damage to tall buildings from hurricanes; those lower to the ground were more likely to be spared damage from high winds, or at the very least be easier to re-build. As Hans Sloane explained about Jamaica, “The Buildings of the *Spaniards* on this Island were usually one Story high [...] with Posts put deep in the ground [...]. The Lowness, as well as fixing the Posts deep in the Earth, was for fear their Houses should be ruin’d by Earthquakes, as well as for Coolness.” The English, on the other hand, showed less adaptability: “The Houses built by the *English*, are for the most part Brick, and after the *English* manner, which are neither cool, nor able to endure the shocks of Earthquakes.” (Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands*, vol. I, xlvi). As for the windows open to the west in Barbados, Ligon wrote, “at last I found by them, the reasons of this strange preposterous manner of building, which was grounded upon the weakest and silliest foundation that could be: For they alledged, that at the times of rain, which was very often, the wind drave the rain in at their windows so fast, as the houses within were much annoyed with it; for having no glass to keep it out, they could seldom sit or lye dry; and so being constrained to keep out the air on that side, for fear of letting in the water, would open the West ends of their houses so wide, (as was beyond the proportion of windows to repair that want) and so let in the fire; not considering at all, that there was such a thing as shutters for windows, to keep out the rain, that hurt them, and let in the wind to refresh them, and do them good at their pleasure.” Ligon did not believe this argument, and concluded that the real reason for the apparent negligence was the inhabitants’ “poverty and indigence” which caused them to suffer the effects of the climate. See Ligon, *True & Exact*, 40-41.

were in a healthy place. But this was not difficult to do as long as people understood regional variations. Moreover, the health of particular places was not a concept limited, in settlers' minds, to Europeans. In choosing healthy places, colonists and planters saw no differences between African and European bodies, and believed that the environmental conditions in the Greater Caribbean affected all bodies in the same way.

Planters tried to find the best and healthiest places on their plantations to build their own homes, and they also tried to select healthy spots to construct cabins for enslaved laborers. Samuel Martin, a planter in Antigua, wrote to his son in England in 1775, assuring him that his plantation lay in a healthy tract of land. "You seem to be apprehensive," he wrote, "that the sand pits [...] may, by being fill'd with stagnated water, be injurious to the health of the inhabitants of my plantation." Because Antigua lacked abundant sources of fresh water, planters often dug pits to collect rainwater for the people, animals, and crops on the plantations. But these pits collected standing water, which any informed person believed could produce noxious vapors. "You may be easy when I assure you," Martin informed his son, "that those pits are at the North side of my plantation from whence the exhalations can never pass to my dwelling, or the negro houses."⁷¹ So situated, out of the way of any potentially dangerous miasmas, the living spaces on the plantation could sustain the health of their inhabitants.

Martin paid particular attention to the situation of the slave cabins on his plantation, explaining in his *Essay on Plantership* the necessity of selecting "airy, dry situations for their houses." To preserve the "strength, and the longevity of negroes," planters should ensure that their cabins were "perfectly water-tight" because "the inclemencies of weather generate the most malignant diseases." Choosing a healthy location over an unhealthy one for enslaved laborers'

⁷¹ Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin Esq., 24 February 1775, Add MS 41348, f. 210, BL.

homes cost little to nothing for a planter, but would reap significant benefits. As Martin explained, such care would benefit the planter who would have a healthier, longer-working group of laborers.⁷²

In Jamaica, planter Simon Taylor wrote to a friend advising him about the purchase of new enslaved laborers, and emphasized the need of situating their lodging carefully. “Buying Negroes is a lottery,” he wrote, “sometimes a person in buying a lott of ten or 12 will lose the greatest part of them or the whole within the first three years.” To increase the chances of their survival, Taylor informed his friend, “a great deal depends on [...] the situation of their houses.”⁷³ Edward Long believed that in the parish of St. Thomas in the East, the unhealthy air of coastal lowlands had detrimental effects on its enslaved inhabitants. “The Negroes on the plantations which border on Plantain Garden River are subject to frequent mortalities,” he wrote, “especially if their huts are placed on the levels, which are damp, and annoyed by constant exhalations.”⁷⁴ In contrast, those who lived in the island’s interior benefitted from the “exceedingly healthful” climate of the region. Long knew the climate was healthy, he wrote, because of “the good appearance and longevity of those persons, Whites or Negroes,” who lived in the area.⁷⁵ Several years later, in 1787, Taylor advised a friend against sending new laborers to a specific location. “The Penn near Spanish Town,” he explained, “is not healthy in the latter end of the year, being so much in the draft of the river.” Instead, Taylor advised his friend to

⁷² Samuel Martin, *An Essay on Plantership* (Antigua: S. Clapham, 1765), 3.

⁷³ Simon Taylor to David Reid, 10 March 1801, Simon Taylor Letterbook D, ICS.

⁷⁴ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 169.

⁷⁵ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 404.

rent that particular parcel of land out to someone else and to keep his own enslaved laborers in a healthier place.⁷⁶

Other planters and managers also attempted to situate plantation buildings in spots they reckoned to be healthier than others. The hot house, or slave hospital, was perhaps the most important of these buildings as it housed sick enslaved laborers. During the eighteenth century in Europe, as well as in the hot climates of the Americas, the situation of hospitals caused a great deal of debate as physicians began to embark upon the new field of public health. Physicians, particularly in cities, declared that the situation of most hospitals was nothing short of abysmal: they bred disease much more rapidly and more thoroughly than they cured it, and they often lay next to overflowing graveyards which stank in the summer months. Following a line of thought that associated bad smells with disease, these physicians and public advocates insisted that hospitals be moved to healthier areas.⁷⁷ In the West Indies, these concerns were magnified because of the constant heat; smells and noxious air circulated all year round, and physicians believed that heat intensified the effects of bad air. Particularly after Parliamentary discussions

⁷⁶ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 1 May 1787, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1787/5, ICS.

⁷⁷ These concerns were particularly strong in Paris, where historically hospitals had been built next to churches (and hence cemeteries) because more often than not, hospitals were places people went to die rather than receive medical treatment, and they were usually tended by nuns. On moving the Hôtel-Dieu, a Paris hospital on the Seine which lay downwind of tanneries and other foul-smelling businesses, see David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). On the link between foul smells and ill health, see Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). On the development of public health in Paris, see Dora B. Weiner, *The Citizen-Patient in Revolutionary and Imperial Paris* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and Sean Quinlan, *The Great Nation in Decline: Sex, Modernity and Health Crises in Revolutionary France, c. 1750-1850* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007). On locating hospitals and other buildings in Saint Domingue away from tanneries, butcheries, and cemeteries, see Karol Weaver, *Medical Revolutionaries: The Enslaved Healers of Eighteenth-Century Saint Domingue* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 29. In Britain, historians tend to view public health more as a nineteenth-century project (although as historian Carlo M. Cipolla points out, British adoption of public health measures followed earlier efforts in Italy; see Cipolla, *Miasmas and Disease: Public Health and the Environment in the pre-industrial Age* trans. Elizabeth Potter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)). A few historians do treat British public health concerns in an earlier period; historian James Riley, for example, argues that in Britain, the 1733 publication of John Arbuthnot's *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* marked the start of a public health campaign focused on the links between "bad air" and poor health; see James C. Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign to Avoid Disease* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

about the abolition of the slave trade reached the West Indies in the mid-1780s, planters, conscious that they might face an impending end to their labor supply, sought to preserve the lives of laborers with increased vigor.

Letters from planters around this time show careful attention to the location and layout of hot houses, as well as increased medical care on their plantations. In 1788, Samuel Cary of Grenada wrote to absentee owner Charles Spooner about moving the hot house on his plantation “to a more healthy situation.” The building needed repairing anyway, Cary added, so with Spooner’s approval he would demolish the old one and build a new one in a healthier place.⁷⁸ A couple of years later, Simon Taylor of Jamaica informed Chaloner Arcedeckne, whose properties Taylor managed, that one of his plantations was in desperate need of a new hot house. “We must build the Hott House, the present one is exceeding bad,” he wrote. The location was important: “upon a dry place, near water, where it can be kept clean, and [where] we can use the warm bath.” The new hospital would have several different rooms, including one for men, another for women, a third, separate one for venereal patients, one for “the black doctor,” and another for bathing. “All filth will be discharged into running water,” he added, “so there will be no risk of infection.”⁷⁹

Joseph Foster Barham’s manager in Jamaica also recognized the need to move the hospital to a healthier spot. He wrote to Barham that he had “long had a wish of removing the hospital to a spot very near the great House on account of its healthy air & superiority over the present one which is actually in a swamp.”⁸⁰ The old building’s location made its occupants too vulnerable to illness from the wet, marshy surroundings. Similarly, Charles Gordon Gray, who

⁷⁸ Samuel Cary to Charles Spooner, 31 July 1788, Samuel Cary Letterbook, volume 6, Ms. N-1997, MHS.

⁷⁹ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 6 October 1790, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1790/31, ICS.

⁸⁰ H.W. Plummer to Joseph Foster Barham, 16 March 1803, MSClardepc357, bundle 3, Bod.

managed his family's estate in Jamaica in the early nineteenth century, informed his father of the need for a new hospital. "I have considered our Hospital to be very badly situated," he wrote, "and I have been recommended by the Medical Man to remove it. I shall do so and bring it to the top of the Hill."⁸¹ Gray's father thought that building an entirely new hospital was an exorbitant expense, and Gray repeatedly tried to justify the cost to his father. "The Expences about the Works & the Buildings were absolutely necessary," he wrote. "A new Hospital had been long wanted, I delayed it 'til 'twas evident the Health of the Negroes were of more value."⁸² The following winter, he tried again to persuade his father of the long-term value of the expense. "The Cause why such heavy expences have been incurr'd were of the first consequence. A new Hospital was absolutely necessary, the old one was not a fit place for a sick Negroe," he wrote.⁸³

Gray's father, long absent from the Jamaica plantation, did not understand the necessity of moving or rebuilding the hospital, but Gray, who recognized the value of improving health care for enslaved laborers, refused to apologize for the expense. The slave trade had been abolished by Parliament several years earlier, right around the time Gray arrived in Jamaica. New laborers were not easy to procure, and preserving the estate meant maintaining the health of its existing labor force. Gray, like the other plantation managers, believed that one of the best ways to ensure the health of enslaved laborers was to situate the estate's hospital on the healthiest tract of land available. Enslaved laborers would respond no better to marshy areas than would planters, and to sustain everyone's health, living quarters should be constructed in the healthiest places on plantations.

⁸¹ Charles Gordon Gray to Father, 4 August 1814, MS 2008, NLJ.

⁸² Charles Gordon Gray to Father, 15 November 1815, MS 163, f. 60, NLJ.

⁸³ Charles Gordon Gray to Father, 22 February 1816, MS 163, f. 64, NLJ.

These same concerns applied to soldiers' barracks: every military physician who published a treatise concerning health in tropical climates insisted upon the need to carefully consider the location of barracks. As physician John Hunter pointed out, "what has the greatest influence, of all the circumstances that affect the health of soldiers in those climates, is the kind of quarters in which they are placed." In Jamaica, he thought, Spanish Town was better than Kingston, though neither compared to the healthiest places, which consisted of "dry sand-banks, surrounded either wholly, or in part, by the sea, and out of the reach of noxious winds blowing from swamps and marshes; and elevated stations in the mountains."⁸⁴ Hunter's fellow physicians agreed. Robert Jackson noted that soldiers who camped downwind of marshes fell ill, while those who did not remained much healthier. The conclusion was obvious, he wrote: "instead of exposing encampments to streams of air, which blow from rivers or swamps, it ought to be our principal business to guard against those noxious effluvia" by building barracks out of the way of such air streams. "So great is the importance of preserving the health of an army in the field," he continued, "that the choice of encampments ought to be made a subject of particular enquiry."⁸⁵ During the eighteenth century, as military postings in the West Indies held a reputation as probable death sentences for British soldiers, military physicians placed great importance on the location of soldiers' living quarters. They believed that building barracks in healthy spots could preserve the health and lives of large numbers of men who otherwise sickened and died. But an imperial army more concerned with expedient military strategy than with the health of its members did not always attend to these physicians' concerns.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Hunter, *Observations on the Diseases*, 71-72.

⁸⁵ Robert Jackson, *A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica, with some observations on the Intermitting Fever of America, and an appendix, Containing some Hints on the Means of preserving the Health of Soldiers in hot Climates* (London: J. Murray, 1791), 86-88.

Yet this neglect of colonial soldiers' health rankled observers in the islands. Edward Long wrote that although the "nature and exigencies of the service" prevented troops in Jamaica "from being kept on any one particular spot, which might be selected on account of its good air," the military should still take all possible precautions to preserve health. When soldiers constructed barracks "in very improper situations; near swamps, the oozy banks of rivers, and stinking lagoon waters," healthy troops fell ill in strikingly high numbers.⁸⁷ In the parish of St. Elizabeth, for example, in 1764 a company of the 66th regiment was "attacked with putrid fevers and dysenteries, so fatal to them," that in that one year they lost "no less than one hundred and two men." The 36th regiment, on the other hand, whose soldiers had arrived in Jamaica at the same time but stayed on higher ground, lost only thirty men in the same year. The "ravage" of the 66th regiment, Long explained, "is to be ascribed to no other cause than the exhalations reeking from the marshy soil around them" which "imparted an evil disposition to the atmosphere" in the swampy coastal lands surrounding their barracks. The evidence spoke for itself. Troops, especially those newly arrived in the islands, should only be stationed in healthy spots, away from "swampy places."⁸⁸

Sometimes experienced soldiers who had risen in rank tried to impress upon others the value of healthy living quarters. In 1781, Lord George Germain, who had been active in the British military for many years and who had served in several wars, wrote from London to John Dalling, the governor of Jamaica at the time. British soldiers in the West Indies were falling fast, and Germain expressed concern about their health, attributing the rate of illness in large part to

⁸⁶ John McNeill writes that British army officials in mid-eighteenth-century Jamaica and London did not "express any remorse over the sufferings and deaths of so many Britons and colonials" in spite of the "grim odds" of British soldiers' survival in the West Indies. See McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, 166-168.

⁸⁷ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 313.

⁸⁸ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 190-191.

the situation of their housing. “The greatness of the mortality among the troops & the continuance of the sickness,” he wrote, “afford but too melancholy proofs of the unhealthiness of the situation of the barracks in which they are quartered.” Germain thought it “inhuman” of the British government to send soldiers to Jamaica, “only to arrive & die,” and urged Dalling to convince the Jamaica assembly to pass a measure for the construction of new barracks. “If the calamity can be avoided by removing the barracks to other parts of the island,” Germain instructed, “it surely is incumbent on the assembly to dispose of the present buildings & employ the money in erecting others where the troops may be expected to live.”⁸⁹

Dalling, although in agreement with Germain as to “the melancholy mortality of the soldiers here, even in times of peace,” explained that he had done all he could for them but that he needed more funds to construct better lodgings for the soldiers. He attributed the most recent death toll to the “deplorable state” of the troops upon their arrival on the island, in addition to inadequate shelter. Many of the townspeople had to house the weak and unhealthy soldiers because the colony simply lacked the appropriations to build proper barracks. Dalling pleaded with Germain for funds to purchase land on which to build, writing that the island would never be “in a state of safety, till the Barracks are erected in the proper places, as no force can be considered as a preservation unless a tolerable share of Health can be established.”⁹⁰ Germain and Dalling shared the same concern. British troops in Jamaica were falling ill at astounding rates, and both men blamed the unhealthy situation of the barracks. Their separate experiences had led them to believe that re-building housing in a healthier place would significantly improve the health of the troops, enabling them to better defend the island.

⁸⁹ Lord George Germain to John Dalling, 7 March 1781, CO 137/80, TNA.

⁹⁰ Dalling to Germain, 24 May 1781, CO 138/29, TNA.

At times the British government responded, giving careful attention to the health of colonial soldiers and stationing troops based on the health of a place. At the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, for example, Britain acquired several new territories from the French and the Spanish, both in the West Indies and on the North American mainland. Following these acquisitions, the Board of Trade commissioned extensive reports on all of these places. Among other things, the Board instructed colonial governors to describe the climate of each place, both on a large scale (an entire island or territory) and more locally (the capital city, or center of trade). Did Dominica, for instance, differ in climate and soil from other islands of the West Indies? If so, in what ways did it differ? Where might be the healthiest place to locate a colonial capital, and to house troops?⁹¹

Colonial officials inspected the existing barracks in these newly acquired territories, reporting on the varying health conditions they found. In Grenada, the governor found several different places with soldiers' barracks. One of these places, Santeur, had its barracks built on the side of a hill, "perfectly exposed to the trade wind." "With respect to health," the governor wrote, the area appeared "to have every advantage." On the other hand, another place lay "in the middle of a swamp," which, of course, made it "extreamly unhealthy." The governor found this settlement – Marquis – sparsely inhabited, and the faces of the residents confirmed his suspicions of the place's ill health. "The complexions of the inhabitants are wan and sallow," he wrote, "and denote the fever in every feature." Although the government initially sent soldiers to both towns to occupy the existing barracks, after a short time the governor found it necessary to remove the soldiers in Marquis to Santeur "after losing a number of men" on account of the

⁹¹ "Heads of enquiry relating to the state of the island of Dominique," CO 101/1, f. 91, TNA. Physician James Lind explained that "the temperature of the climate, the colour, strength and activity, the constitutions and health of the inhabitants greatly depend" upon "the nature of the soil" in any particular region (Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 198). For more on this, see Chapter Four.

sickly climate.⁹² In St. Vincent, the governor described a number of different towns, offering his opinion as to their relative health and suitability for housing troops. He found Waslabau Bay “so sickly, that the people who have attempted to settle there, have either died or been obliged to leave it for want of health.” He thought it proper to remove the troops stationed there to barracks elsewhere on the island, choosing Troumaca, which in contrast he found “very healthy.”⁹³

In some cases, colonial governors changed the location of soldiers’ barracks or set up capital towns before any substantial British settlement could be established, thereby avoiding a repeat of the Jamaica debacle. Acting governor of Grenada Robert Melville, for instance, traveled to Tobago in the autumn of 1764, where he “fixed on a very commodious place for a first town settlement” which had “a river of wholesome water running into it.” An adjoining piece of land “projecting into the sea” he thought “an excellent & healthfull situation for the placing of his Majesty’s troops.”⁹⁴ Some years later, as British settlers began moving into the colony, another report noted that Tobago’s climate was “rather Hott, owing to the want of a free circulation of air occasioned by the standing of the woods between the several plantations now settling.” Still, the inhabitants did not seem to mind, “well knowing that when once the island is tolerably clear of wood they will enjoy the healthiest climate in the West Indies.”⁹⁵

But settled places proved more difficult to uproot. In 1763, shortly after Britain had taken possession of Dominica, colonial Governor Campbell Dalrymple sent a report to the Board of Trade regarding the situation of the island. He found Roseau, the existing capital, “so

⁹² “State of the Island of Grenada, 1 April 1765,” Add MS 13879, f. 7-8, BL. The aptly named Santeur presumably refers to the present-day town of Sauteurs, located in St. Patricks parish in the northern part of the island.

⁹³ “Report of St. Vincents, 27 April 1765,” Add MS 13879, f. 12, BL.

⁹⁴ Robert Melville to Board of Trade, 3 January 1765, CO 101/1, f. 181, TNA.

⁹⁵ “Queries relating to his majesty’s islands of America, Answered for Tobago 20 October 1773,” CO 318/2, f. 51, TNA.

deficient in every necessary, for health, convenience, security & trade, that I resolve'd on establishing ourselves in a bay about a mile to the southward of it," where he hoped "all these defects will be remedy'd."⁹⁶ He ordered the few British troops in Dominica to relocate to neighboring Loubiere, which he believed had better quality air and water. But Dalrymple left Dominica immediately after issuing the report, and did not stay long enough to oversee the move away from Roseau. Two years later, another colonial official sent a report to the Board of Trade describing the state of Grenada, St. Vincent, and Dominica. In Dominica, the official reported, Roseau still acted as the capital of the island. It was situated on low, unhealthy ground, and its residents found the water there so bad that they refused to use it, preferring water from a source a mile away. The official credited Dalrymple with recognizing Roseau's unhealthiness, which "caused him to take the resolution to change the place of Trade from hence to the Bay of Loubiere, where he imagined all those inconveniencies were greatly remedied."⁹⁷ But these officials found their attempts to preserve health frustrated by a lack of resources and colonial support. The logistics of changing the location of a town proved no small obstacle, and Roseau, as unhealthy as it was, was already inhabited and its residents were reluctant to move.

West Florida had an even more complicated history. Because the British government created West Florida out of a conglomeration of ceded French and Spanish territories, the colony had two central towns, Mobile and Pensacola. Over the course of several years following British occupation of the territory, both military officers and medical doctors formed opinions as to which of the towns would be the most proper place to station British colonial troops. General Haldimand, who commanded British troops in Pensacola, received a number of letters in 1767

⁹⁶ Campbell Dalrymple to Board of Trade & Plantations, August 1763, CO 101/1, f. 87, TNA.

⁹⁷ "Report of Dominica," 12 July 1765, Add 13879, f. 18, BL.

and 1768 referring to Pensacola's "dangerous & inhospitable climate."⁹⁸ One correspondent wrote that he was glad to hear Haldimand kept his health in "that vile country," while another was similarly impressed that Haldimand had remained so healthy during the summer in "so curs'd a soil & climate."⁹⁹ But as bad as Pensacola seemed, most people agreed that the climate and situation of Mobile was even worse. John Lorimer, the chief surgeon to the military hospitals in West Florida, wrote to Haldimand in 1769 describing the sickly situation of Mobile. "From the East to the North of it," he wrote, "swamps and marshes," surrounded the town, and on the western and southern edges "pine trees & thickets" encircled the area. The town itself was situated on the lowest spot of land around, and the fort on the lowest point of the town. An observer would think, Lorimer wrote, "that the commandant who built it there neither had consulted a surgeon nor an engineer" about the location, "or if he did, he thought it derogatory to his authority to pay any regard to either of their opinions."¹⁰⁰

Lorimer believed that even though "the close & marshy situation of Mobile" could be held responsible for causing high rates of fevers among the soldiers, it would be impractical to move the entire town with limited time and resources. Instead, he recommended a detailed plan for improving the health of Mobile: forests should be thinned or leveled to encourage a flow of fresh air, and the construction of new buildings should be carefully regulated so as to ensure that they were built upon healthful plots of land, with enough space between them for air to move.

⁹⁸ Thomas Willing to General Haldimand, 26 October 1767, Add MS 21728, f. 182, BL.

⁹⁹ William Shirreff to General Haldimand, 16 November 1767, Add MS 21728, f. 188, BL; John Ross to General Haldimand, 22 February 1768, Add MS 21728, f. 235, BL.

¹⁰⁰ John Lorimer to General Haldimand, 2 December 1769, letter including "A General Report of observations made upon the Diseases which the troops in Garrison at Mobile have annually been liable to; and some proposals for the improvement of the situation of that town, and for the more effectual preservation of the health of the soldiers and settlers," 14 February 1769, Add MS 21675, f. 81-83, BL. Both towns were, apparently, much less healthy than those in East Florida, and in 1769 one observer noted that East Florida had been made the seat of government "on account of the healthiness of the air." See John Fraser to Simon Fraser, 18 April 1769, Simon Fraser Papers, HCA/D238/D/1/17/5, Highland Archive Center, Inverness, Scotland.

But Lorimer had, apparently, offered his advice too often and with too inconsequential results to expect military officials to pay any attention. “But as it is not likely that any thing of the kind will be seriously attempted in our day,” he noted bitterly, “I know that I am now writing this, as I have formerly done other pieces of the same kind, to no purpose.”¹⁰¹

At the same time that Lorimer wrote to Haldimand about the unhealthy situation of the barracks in Mobile, naval physician James Lind described the unfortunate Greenwich Hospital, a military hospital that had served Jamaica during the earlier part of the eighteenth century. This “commodious and excellent marine hospital” had been “built near a marsh, upon a most unhealthy spot of ground. The effects of this unhealthy situation were, that when a patient was sent thither, with only a gentle or intermitting fever, this mild indisposition was apt to be changed either into a malignant fever, a bloody flux, or some other mortal distemper.” These ailments, Lind explained, clearly proceeded from the hospital’s situation. Contrary to the experience of the luckless Lorimer, though, British officials had, a couple of decades earlier, heeded the advice of correspondents in Jamaica who insisted upon the unhealthy situation of the hospital. With such a high mortality, and with “the cause of it so obvious,” the military

¹⁰¹ John Lorimer to General Haldimand, 2 December 1769, Add MS 21675, f. 81-83, BL. In his *Concise Natural History of East and West-Florida*, which he published in 1776, Bernard Romans explained that, contrary to popular belief, Mobile was not in itself unhealthy. Instead, he wrote, in 1765 British troops arrived from Jamaica, bringing with them a “contagious distemper,” and drank copious amounts of alcohol and stagnant water. The resulting “fatal disorder has been followed by the entire ruin of Mobile, and had nearly spoiled the reputation of Pensacola, which though situate in as fine, airy, dry and healthy a site as any on the continent, and at least at a distance of sixty miles from Mobile, had yet the misfortune to be confounded with it, and to be thought liable to the same misfortunes.” The climate, he continued, had a “sickly character” but, in fact, this reputation was entirely due to the troops’ poor decisions and circumstances. Others who lived there, including the French, who were more careful about drinking clean water and living temperate lifestyles, “adapted their constitutions to it” and lived reasonably healthy lives. See Captain Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West-Florida. Containing, An Account of the Natural Produce of all the Southern Part of British America, in the Three Kingdoms of Nature, particularly the Animal and Vegetable. Likewise, The Artificial Produce now raised, or possible to be raised, and Manufactured there, with some Commercial and Political Observations in that Part of the World; and a Chorographical Account of the same* (New York, 1776), 10-13.

abandoned the hospital and built a new one, “in a better air,” where the mortality rate dropped sharply.¹⁰²

Lind did not explain how the British government became persuaded that a new hospital should be financed and built in Jamaica. But in what later proved to be an ironic twist to the Kingston/Spanish Town debate of the 1750s, the person who advocated most vociferously for the new hospital was none other than Rear Admiral Charles Knowles, the future Governor of Jamaica. In 1748, Admiral Knowles had been on a ship stationed near Kingston. Along with some fellow officers, Knowles sent a letter to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty assessing the health of the area, with particular attention to the situation of Greenwich Hospital, located just west of Kingston. In the letter, Knowles stated in no uncertain terms that he found it “next to an impossibility to remedy the unwholsomeness” of “the unhealthy situation of the Hospital at New Greenwich.” The hospital was “surrounded with morasses from whence constantly arises a noxious vapour which in the daytime is exhaled in great quantities.” Physicians found this vapor “very prejudicial to the sick who become faint and languid,” Knowles explained, and the resulting “fevers & colds” which were “the natural consequences” of such vapors affected even “the most robust and most healthy” of men, let alone “sick folks or men just upon the recovery.” Even Marines who had “only been sent ashore as Guards to the Hospital” ended up dying “within a few days after being upon duty,” Knowles wrote, concluding

¹⁰² Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 173-175. Edward Long also wrote about the hospital’s history: “The hospital of Greenwich, situated little more than a mile from the town, upon part of this low land, is remarkable for a bad air, and the mortality which always prevailed there.” Long then inserted Lind’s words verbatim (although he cited Lind, he did not bother to put the following in quotes): “The effects of its unhealthy situation were, that, when a patient was sent thither with only a gentle or intermitting fever, this mild disposition was apt to be changed into either a malignant fever, a bloody flux, or some other mortal distemper.” Recovery of patients was “tedious and uncertain” even with few patients in the airiest parts. “The mortality in this house was so great, and the cause of it so obvious, that there was a necessity for deserting it; no more sick were permitted to be sent thither,” Long explained. “The cause of this *endemia* has been, with great appearance of reason, ascribed to the salt-marshes and swamps, the putrid fogs or exhalations, which infest this part of the country, and are naturally adapted in a hot climate to produce all these baleful effects.” Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 108.

that the hospital was “rather a hurt to the service than a relief.” Instead, Knowles strongly suggested that the military build a new hospital at Port Royal, which he found to be “the most healthful” place “in all the Island for lodging sick seamen.” He himself felt healthier in Port Royal than he did anywhere else in Jamaica, and he pointed out that many local residents moved there for the restoration of their health.¹⁰³

Seven years after Knowles’s report, in the midst of heated debate between Kingston and Spanish Town, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty sent a copy of this letter to the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations as proof of “the unhealthiness of the town of Kingston,” confirmed by none other than Governor Knowles himself.¹⁰⁴ Knowles, who sided with the merchants advocating for Kingston, had written a scathing report of a nearby hospital less than a decade earlier. How, then, could the Lords Commissioners take his position seriously? It was true that the old hospital was not in downtown Kingston. But the morass that Knowles blamed for New Greenwich’s unhealthiness was the same tract of marshland as the one physicians blamed for the unhealthy vapors in Kingston in their testimony. In the debate with Spanish Town, Knowles’s apparent disregard for the concerns about Kingston’s unhealthy environment rang false in light of his earlier report. The Board of Trade concluded that Knowles had been influenced by the merchants, and displayed too little concern for the health of the residents of Jamaica.

Perhaps Knowles’s letter undermining his own case for Kingston played a part in the Board’s decision to keep the capital in Spanish Town. Perhaps the Board was swayed by the climatic arguments, or by the protests of people unhappy with the potential new arrangement. Or

¹⁰³ “Copy of a report made to the Lords of the Admiralty & ye rest of the Commanders of His Majestys ships stationed at Jamaica in 1748, concerning ye unhealthfulness of ye town of Kingston, & ye state of the Hospital belonging to His Majesty’s Navy near that town,” CO 137/29, f. 15-16, TNA.

¹⁰⁴ CO 137/29, f. 11-12, TNA.

perhaps it had other motivations altogether. But as the debate and other evidence about the location of towns, homes, and other buildings showed, the health of a place formed a serious concern, both for the Board of Trade and for colonial residents in particular.¹⁰⁵

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the unhealthy reputation of the West Indies was well established in Britain. But the debate over Jamaica's capital drew attention to some of the differences between British and West Indian residents with regard to conceptions of the tropical climate. Rather than thinking of the tropical and semi-tropical Atlantic colonies as one hot region, unhealthy for British bodies, residents of these places held a nuanced and complex understanding of the local climate. Some areas were indeed unhealthy, but these places had the same types of climatic features that made any area of the world dangerous, such as standing water and miasmas. But inhabitants of the Lowcountry and, especially, the Caribbean, stressed the variability of climate across short distances and insisted that several of these microclimatic regions were healthy places where residents could expect to enjoy long and fruitful lives. Unlike the seventeenth century, when individual experiences of good health became obscured by popular reports, by the second half of the eighteenth century, texts such as Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* or James Lind's *Essay on Diseases*, both of which detailed the variety of health conditions on the islands, were widely cited as authoritative sources on the colonial climate.

In fact, inhabitants of the British West Indies and the Lowcountry considered the preservation of health to be crucial to the construction of Atlantic colonies. Convictions about the variability of regional climate over short distances led to careful consideration about the

¹⁰⁵ In the early nineteenth century, Robert Renny recounted in brief the story of Kingston and Spanish Town in the 1750s under Knowles. He claimed that for several reasons, including the fact that Kingston was "more unhealthy than Spanish-town," Knowles had been "necessitated to abandon" the proposed move. See Renny, *History of Jamaica*, 64-65.

placement of colonial capitals in Jamaica, South Carolina, Tobago, and Georgia. Considerations of climate and health affected the makeup of empire at every level – from the construction of private homes, to hospitals, to places of trade and government. The Jamaica debate illustrates the fervency with which people sometimes argued in favor of or against certain places, while evidence from personal correspondence demonstrates both the persistence and consistency of health concerns from a macroscopic to an individual level.

Planters believed that neither African nor European bodies “naturally” suited the Greater Caribbean climate, but both could potentially thrive in healthy places within that environment. As planter and natural historian William Beckford put it, the “alternations of stifling heat and trembling cold” in the West Indies were sometimes “prejudicial to the health of the white people, and inimical to the constitutions of the negroes.”¹⁰⁶ But at the same time, according to Long, “the settlers who live nearest the central region of the island, and their Negroes, are as healthy as a like number in any given part of Great Britain.”¹⁰⁷ This awareness of the climate’s impact on bodily health influenced the placement of hospitals for enslaved laborers and for soldiers, as well as the layout of planters’ estates. The same environmental threats affected all bodies, and the same conditions could best preserve health. Within these environments, individual bodies sometimes reacted differently from one another, and the next chapter examines individual perceptions and their implications in greater detail. But on a large scale, certain types of places in the Greater Caribbean were healthy or unhealthy for every body: African, European, and creole.

The only trouble for West Indian residents like Beckford and Long was that their insistence on the healthiness of warm climates had the potential to undermine their own

¹⁰⁶ William Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica*, 178-79.

¹⁰⁷ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 404.

subsequent justifications for African slavery. These writers had to find a delicate balance between explaining that particular areas could be healthy or unhealthy for Africans and Europeans alike, and reiterating their convictions about the need for enslaved Africans on West Indian plantations. For if Europeans could be healthy in these places, what would happen to arguments about Africans' particular bodily suitability for warm climates? Beyond Long's attempt to convince British readers of West Indian climatic nuance, much of the evidence shows that planters believed that environmental conditions affected all people in the same ways. Planters who struggled to convince Britons that the hot climates of the Atlantic could be healthy for British bodies forged careful but often contradictory arguments about bodily health in plantation societies. The following chapters show the instability of the foundations upon which these defenders of slavery based their claims.

Chapter Four

A “great risque in seasoning”: The Unsettling Nature of Bodily Change

On a warm February day in 1795, Doctor James Chisholme wrote a letter from his residence in Jamaica to a fellow physician back home in Scotland. He described to his friend the curious case of a twenty-eight-year-old man, one of Chisholme’s “Negro servants.” The man, by trade a bricklayer, had been “seized with a violent pleurisy” and fever after several days of “hard drinking, and dancing in the open air.” In an attempt to cure the bricklayer’s illness, Chisholme subjected him to a grueling but common treatment: he blistered the sick man’s skin in several places, and in others made incisions to drain blood from his body. After undergoing this healing process for several days, the man began to show signs of improvement, at least according to Chisholme’s observation. But he continued to complain, and Chisholme soon found evidence of a pulmonary illness, a “matter” in the patient’s right lung, which caused him to periodically spit up “ill digested matter” mixed with blood. Believing the case to be serious, Chisholme moved the bricklayer out of his home and into Chisholme’s, where he could keep a close watch on the sick man. For two months the man stayed in Chisholme’s house, showing no signs of improvement. As he appeared to be approaching death, the bricklayer requested to be moved back into his own home to die.¹

Discouraged, Chisholme made one last suggestion: perhaps the man should try a short sea voyage. The man agreed, and Chisholme sent him twenty miles overland to the nearest harbor, with instructions to board the first small vessel sailing from the port. The bricklayer complied, and spent roughly the next six weeks at sea, purportedly for a change of air, and especially for the beneficial effects of the sea air. But the man fell seasick almost as soon as he boarded the

¹ James Chisholme to Doctor Ewart, 16 February 1795, Chisholme Papers, MS 5464, f. 174, NLS. Chisholme wrote in response to Ewart’s inquiry about the case, which had begun several years earlier, in December 1787. By 1795 the man was still alive, and Ewart’s inquiry demonstrates that the case was unusual enough to warrant multiple transatlantic letters.

ship. Unable to stand the motion on deck, he spent the entire voyage in the ship's hold, "lying on the top of the cargo, where the air is necessarily very bad," keeping company with barrels of sugar and rum, or salt beef and pork. He ate only powdered "ship biscuit" mixed with water as the vessel slowly made its way along Jamaica's coastline. Upon landing again in Jamaica, the bricklayer appeared to be even closer to death than when he began the voyage, and stayed for several days at port as Chisholme sent a chaise for his return. When the chaise returned four days later, Chisholme noted that the man was in astonishingly good spirits, "and seemed convinced he would recover." After three months' convalescence and a diet of milk, rice, and broth, the man recovered entirely, with no more pulmonary complaints.²

Chisholme confessed his bafflement over the case to his fellow physician, Doctor Ewart. How could the man have recovered under such circumstances? It seemed unlikely that the stifling air below deck could have helped a lung complaint. And ship's biscuit, essentially stale and mealy flour, did not exactly constitute a nourishing diet. Perhaps it was the "frequent vomiting" occasioned by the seasickness, Chisholme mused, that had done the trick. It could well have been the period of convalescence, though Chisholme saw no difference between the man's care before and after the voyage.

One factor in particular struck Chisholme as inexplicable: the sick man had spent the entirety of the sea voyage below deck instead of above it. In the late eighteenth century, every other detail of the case followed the tenets of contemporary medical theory and practice. According to British-trained physicians in the West Indies, illness resulted from an imbalance in bodily humors. These could be thrown off balance by a person's improper, irresponsible, or otherwise unfortunate interaction with the outside elements – in this case, drinking and dancing for several nights, coupled with exposure to the dangerous night air. The best way to correct an

² Chisholme to Ewart, 16 February 1795, MS 5464, f. 174, NLS.

imbalance in the body's internal humors was to readjust that balance through bodily evacuations, such as bleeding and purging. If these failed, physicians often suggested a change of air as a means to regain bodily health, and they believed that sea air had particularly healthy qualities. But the bricklayer had not had much exposure to sea air; he had, instead, almost the opposite: weeks of breathing the stuffy, foul-smelling air below deck. The man's mysterious recovery led Chisholme to speculate on the unlikely health effects of "lowered air," a doubtful proposition he put to Ewart as he relayed the case. Only two other possibilities presented themselves: the constant purging induced by seasickness, or else the peculiarities of the patient's bodily constitution, and of the specific environmental conditions necessary for his recovery.

The bricklayer's case was indeed unusual. The strange circumstances of his revival stand out in the archives as remarkable; many other patients in the eighteenth century went to sea for the beneficial effects of the air, but none reported recovering after lying seasick alongside the ship's cargo for weeks. Chisholme's attentiveness to a "Negro servant" also distinguishes the case. While other examples of such attentions exist, they are rare in the historical record, in a place and at a time when distinctions of skin color, class, birthplace, family connections, and economic means played a role in determining who traveled for constitutional health and how far. But the bricklayer's case does reflect the significant degree of uncertainty that physicians faced in diagnosing and treating various maladies during the late eighteenth century. This uncertainty existed in large part because doctors believed that treatment depended upon an individual's often unknown and unpredictable bodily constitution.

The case also reflects a belief in the power of the environment to influence people's bodies. The bricklayer had become ill, Chisholme concluded, because drinking and dancing had

weakened his body and rendered it more vulnerable to environmental forces. Eighteenth-century physicians like Chisholme regularly warned of the dangers of night air for people's health, especially in the West Indies. Exposure to bad air, or air that disagreed with a person's body in some way, could make that person sick, and often the best cure involved moving to different or healthier air.³ The environment, then, was almost always responsible for causing illness, and was at the same time frequently the best cure.

As Chapter Three demonstrated, inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean had a strong sense of microclimates, and went to great lengths to find healthy places in which to settle. This chapter expands that argument by examining the extent of environmental influences on people's bodies. If the bricklayer's health could be affected by the variations of air within and around Jamaica, Atlantic travelers experienced even greater changes in larger-scale moves across the ocean. Since bodies were calibrated to particular environmental conditions, the process of bodily adaptation to a different environment, often known as seasoning, loomed large in the minds of eighteenth-century travelers. As bodies responded to changing environmental conditions, people sometimes became ill as their bodies struggled to adjust to the new environment.⁴

Although physicians and European travelers held various beliefs about exactly what seasoning entailed, all understood it as a permanent bodily change. The environment could determine people's health, appearances, and even characters, so adapting to a particular place

³ Sea air was especially beneficial, though generally any significant change of air would cause changes in the body.

⁴ For some different interpretations of the seasoning process, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience" *William and Mary Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (April 1984), 215; Philip D. Curtin, "Epidemiology and the Slave Trade" *Political Science Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (June 1968), 211; Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 22-34; Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, "Of Agues and Fevers: Malaria in the Early Chesapeake" *William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 1976), 43; Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 151-152; Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 188-189.

held significant stakes. Most colonists thought of their bodily adjustment as local in scale; rather than suiting merely the Caribbean environment as a whole, bodies conformed to their particular locales, with specific qualities of the air, water, and soil. Once a person had become seasoned to a particular place, that change was irreversible without another period of seasoning to a different place, or in the case of people who returned home, a re-seasoning.

Other historians have written about the seasoning process for Europeans crossing the Atlantic, but they have tended to interpret African seasoning differently. Rather than considering African seasoning as bodily adaptation to the climate, most historians explain the seasoning process for Africans as an adjustment to the severe work regime enforced on plantations. Planters, though, understood the process of seasoning enslaved laborers as two-fold. Newly arrived Africans would have to become seasoned to plantation work, but the climate of any African point of origin differed enough from the West Indian or Lowcountry environment that African bodies, like European transplants, would have to be seasoned to the change in climate as well. Although scholars have understood the process of seasoning as divided along racial lines, planters did not conceive of it in such divisive terms: all bodies, arriving in the Greater Caribbean from anywhere else, would take time to acclimatize to the different environment, whether or not they labored.⁵

The process of seasoning for all bodies was both nuanced and unpredictable. People's bodies had particular constitutions, with certain balances of bodily humors that suited particular environmental conditions. Whether or not people's bodies had the capability to adjust to different places was often a matter of chance, dependent upon a person's individual constitution.

⁵ On seasoning enslaved laborers, see Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the British West Indies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 131-134; Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 298; Alexander X. Byrd, *Captives and Voyagers: Black Migrants Across the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 61, 70.

Beyond the basic tenets of good health (avoiding wet weather, for example, or night air), bodies responded in different and often unpredictable ways to environmental conditions. People's bodies suited different types of environments, and the conditions that created good health in one person might not do so for another. While some physicians understood a few of their patients' bodily constitutions, most patients had an unknown interior balance of elements. This uncertainty left a portion of treatment up to chance – perhaps a physician would guess a person's constitution accurately and a remedy would work, but chances were often equally good that the unknown nature of a person's constitution would render treatment ineffective. Although physicians frequently prescribed travel over various distances or exposure to sea air, hoping that the treatment would result in the restoration of a person's health, at a deeper level such matters depended upon a person's individual bodily makeup and its response to the environment.

The belief that everyone had to be seasoned to unfamiliar climates had greater implications than many settlers acknowledged. If Africans had to be seasoned to the West Indian climate, their bodies did not naturally suit the local environment, an argument planters often used to justify racial slavery. Equally unnerving for European planters, if both African and European bodies had adapted to the same climate, this adjustment raised unsettling questions of bodily similarity in the minds of those planters dependent upon a system of racial slavery. European planters found themselves mired in contradictions as they struggled to reconcile the climatic arguments they made to substantiate their dependence upon enslaved African laborers with their beliefs that Africans did not, in fact, suit the West Indian climate. As Chapter Two demonstrated, economically motivated Europeans in Georgia managed to manipulate climatic rhetoric in their favor in spite of evidence to the contrary. For the next several decades, planters in the Greater Caribbean took advantage of prevailing climate theories in Europe to mask their

actual beliefs about African bodies. Moreover, Euro-Caribbean planters were well aware that these same climate theories held that bodies, once seasoned to a particular environment, altered substantially. Europeans distanced themselves from their creole kinsmen, claiming that people of European descent born in the West Indies differed significantly from their relatives living in Europe. But if climate and local environment determined bodily characteristics, including both physical makeup and temperament, then descendants of Africans born in the Caribbean would resemble those of Europeans born in the same place. Euro-Caribbean residents, then, found themselves having to downplay climate theories accounting for bodily difference and similarity to insist that they were not becoming too much like their African neighbors, while at the same time relying upon climatic excuses to justify a continued and growing dependence upon the African slave trade. This chapter examines planters' ideas about bodily adaptation and seasoning, ultimately suggesting that eighteenth-century planters believed in a greater similarity between African and European bodies than they cared to admit. Faced with the prospect of Euro- and Afro-Caribbean residents eventually becoming indistinguishable, European planters encouraged the development of racial theories they did not actually believe.

When Beville Granville arrived in Barbados in 1703 to assume his position as the colony's new governor, he fell ill from an endemic sickness ravaging the island. Upon recovering a short time later, he believed that the illness had for him been a form of seasoning. "No one comes hither without a seasoning," he wrote to his brother a couple of months into his residence. "I have had mine," but recovered; "the sickly part is over with me." To a friend he explained, "my distemper is what they tell me is wholesome & instead of shortning will prolong

my life.” His bout of illness, he believed, had left him healthier than he was before, as long as he remained in Barbados.⁶

Robert Hamilton, moving to Jamaica from Scotland in the summer of 1736, experienced a similar rude awakening. “I have had a very severe fever,” he wrote five months after his arrival. “It is the first sickness I have had since my arrival in this island and as it was very hard upon me, I hope it will answer for what they call here a thorough seasoning.”⁷ And in 1765, John Pinney wrote from Nevis, “I have had what they call a seasoning, & am but just recover’d.” A few months later he seemed certain of his body’s successful adjustment. “I shall enjoy my health here, as well as in England,” he assured a friend.⁸

For Granville, Hamilton, and Pinney, all of whom experienced an initial period of illness upon arrival in the West Indies, the jolt their bodies received in relocating from Britain to the tropics had upset their internal balance of bodily humors and caused sickness. Since health depended upon the balance of a person’s internal bodily humors with one another and with the external elements, the change in environment had thrown their bodies out of balance.⁹ As long as people stayed in one place, this environmental nature of bodily health posed no great threat.

⁶ Beville Granville to George Granville Esq., 3 August 1703; Beville Granville to Sir John Stanley, 3 August 1703, PRO 30-26-90, f. 14, 16, TNA.

⁷ Robert Hamilton to James Buchanan, 29 November 1736, AA/DC/17/2, Hamilton Family Papers, Ayrshire, Scotland.

⁸ John Pinney to Harry Puncy, 2 March 1765; John Pinney to Edward Jessup Esq., 2 May 1765, Pinney Family Papers, volume 3, Letterbook of John Frederick Pinney I and John Pinney, f. 67, 70, University of Bristol.

⁹ While Mark Harrison argues that “physicians had abandoned the humoral theory of disease” by the middle of the eighteenth century in Europe, (see Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600-1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 76) this does not appear to be the case either in West Indian medicine or popular thinking. Writing about nineteenth-century California and bodily adjustment to the climate, Linda Nash argues that “health derived from humoralism” and “humoralism was the basis for Western medicine from the time of ancient Greece until nearly the end of the nineteenth century.” See Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 24. Harrison discusses the Hippocratic revival in seventeenth-century British medicine in *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30-33 and its application by West Indian physicians, 44-49.

The problem lay in movement and migration, particularly if people moved to a place with a significantly different environment from the one to which their bodies were accustomed. Then people's bodies would be thrown out of balance and they could become ill, sometimes severely so, until their bodies gradually adapted and adjusted to the unfamiliar environment.

The collective experience of these British travelers, whose migrations spanned over 60 years, squared with contemporary medical interpretations of bodily adjustment to the climate. The intervening years had witnessed the expansion of medical literature for Europeans traveling to hot climates; when Granville arrived in Barbados in 1703 only one such text existed (Thomas Trapham's, discussed in Chapter One), but by the mid-1760s the genre had grown immensely.¹⁰ According to these medical writers, seasoning could either manifest itself as an initial illness or else through a gradual recalibration of the body's internal workings to match the external elements. Three years after Pinney's journey to Nevis, the naval physician James Lind published what was arguably the most popular of these treatises, *An Essay on Diseases Incidental to Europeans in Hot Climates*.¹¹ Lind explained that the seasoning process would either occur naturally over the course of a year or two, or else through "repeated attacks of sickness" when migrants first arrived in a different climate.¹² Either way, Europeans who traveled to the tropics

¹⁰ Although physicians published a few medical treatises in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century, the 1750s and 60s witnessed a veritable explosion of such texts. See, for example, John Huxham, *An Essay on Fevers, And their Various Kinds, As depending on Different Constitutions of the Blood* (1750); William Hillary, *Observations on the Changes of the Air, and the Concomitant Epidemical Diseases in the Island of Barbadoes* (1758); John Fothergill, *Rules for the preservation of health* (1762); James Grainger, *An Essay on the more common West-India Diseases* (1764); and James Lind's influential treatise, *An essay on the Most Effectual Means of preserving the Health of Seamen, in the Royal Navy* (1762). For full titles, see bibliography; for more on these medical practitioners, see Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire*.

¹¹ Harrison points out that Lind's treatise "became a standard work of reference for half a century. It went through many editions (the last in 1811) and was translated into German, Dutch, and French." See Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire*, 72. Many contemporary writers also cite Lind, in both medical treatises and natural histories. See, for example, Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 506-508.

¹² James Lind, *An Essay on Diseases Incidental to Europeans in Hot Climates, With the Method of preventing their fatal Consequences* (London, 1768), 146.

would experience “some change and alteration” in their bodily constitutions.¹³ A little bit later in his text, though, Lind softened his position. Adopting a different tone, Lind wrote that actually prospective travelers need not concern themselves too much with becoming ill, because contrary to popular belief, “a seasoned constitution” was “chiefly to be acquired” through extended residence in a place. Possibly to reassure potential travelers that with the proper care and attention they could remain healthy in a different climate, Lind downplayed the dangers of gradual climatic change, dismissing reports of sickness as the result of drinking too much rum or of changing climates too quickly.¹⁴

Either way, though, seasoning signified a permanent change. Lind stressed this permanence, explaining that seasoned settlers would have to undergo the process in reverse should they choose to return “home.” Many seasoned travelers, he wrote, “dreading what they may be exposed to suffer from a change of climate, choose rather to spend the remainder of their lives abroad, than to return to their native country.”¹⁵ Travelers’ accounts corroborate Lind’s explanations, as many seasoned settlers expressed trepidation at the idea of returning to their native lands. George Barclay, for example, planned to return to Britain after spending several years in Jamaica. Barclay, a native of northern Scotland, worried that the change in climate would be too great for his body to bear; he had spent many years in the West Indies and did not look forward to the sudden drop in temperature. He would stop in London on the way home, he wrote, but was “undetermin’d whether to fix there or in Scotland” as he was “under some

¹³ James Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 3.

¹⁴ James Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 189. For more on the link between drinking alcohol and becoming ill in warm climates, see Chapter One.

¹⁵ James Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 146-47.

apprehensions that so cold a climate as that of Aberdeen will not be agreeable to one of my age after having liv'd so many years in the West Indies.”¹⁶

Other West Indian residents felt a similar ambivalence; wanting to return to Britain after many years away, they worried that the change of climate might be too great a shock for their bodies to bear. William Smalling, who managed plantations in Jamaica for absentee owner Joseph Foster Barham, seemed less than eager to leave the island in 1771. “I should be glad to see my old friends again,” he wrote as he considered a return to England. But he feared the change of climate might prove too much for both himself and his wife, both of whose constitutions were “so well suited” to the Jamaican climate.¹⁷ For the next few years, Smalling continued to put off the trip. “I much question if England would agree so well with me,” he mused the following year. “Mrs. Smalling as well as myself has been upon the whole much better here than in England.”¹⁸ In 1774 he repeated his concerns. “Perhaps the climate of England may not agree with us,” he informed Barham. If either of the Smallings fell ill upon landing in London, he continued, they would return immediately to Jamaica.¹⁹ Similarly, when a friend of the planter Charles Gordon Gray left Jamaica for Europe, Gray expected his imminent return. “I should not be at all surprised to see him back again,” he confided to his father, “the English Climate after so many years residence here does not suit his Constitution.”²⁰

All of these letters, and many others like them, expressed Euro-Caribbean residents’ deep conflicts with their predicament. On the one hand, Britons traveling to an unfamiliar climate,

¹⁶ George Barclay to Charles Gordon, 30 June 1739, Gordon Family Papers, MS1160/5/3, University of Aberdeen Library, Special Collections.

¹⁷ William Smalling to Joseph Foster Barham, 30 March 1771, Barham Papers, Ms.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 1, Bod.

¹⁸ William Smalling to Joseph Foster Barham, 10 November 1772, Ms.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 1, Bod.

¹⁹ Smalling to Barham, 2 February 1774, Ms.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 1, Bod.

²⁰ Charles Gordon Gray to father, 31 December 1816, MS 163, f. 74, NLJ.

unsure of how their bodies would react but uneasy at the likelihood of impending illness, would be relieved to have experienced a seasoning. Once acclimatized, these migrants would feel more certain of their bodies' affinity for the Caribbean climate. But many did not intend to stay for the rest of their lives, and having grown older in the warmer weather they dreaded another climatic change that might no longer agree with their bodies.

Some planters, like Samuel Martin of Antigua and Simon Taylor of Jamaica, decided that they had become permanently suited to the Caribbean and were unable to transition back to Britain. Much as he longed to visit friends and relatives in England, after living in the West Indies for nearly thirty years Taylor feared the effect of cold air upon his body. "I should dread a winter," he wrote to a friend, "which I hardly can think but must be too severe a tryal to a constitution, that has been sun drying 30 years in the Torrid Zone."²¹ Although Taylor visited England a few years afterward, he never again returned. Several years later he wrote to his brother that he intended to live out the rest of his life in Jamaica. "It is highly improbable that I shall ever leave this country," he wrote. "I am persuaded that a voyage to Europe would hasten my end for I really could not bear the cold nor the vicissitudes of the British climate."²²

Similarly, John Pinney found that his wife, used to life on Nevis, fell ill in Bristol. Her doctor thought "she ought to avoid the winter, by going into a warm climate," Pinney wrote to his son. "She has therefore an idea of going to Nevis."²³ Samuel Martin had a similar experience; after many years in Antigua he found the northern climates no longer agreed with

²¹ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 26 January 1788, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1788/1, ICS.

²² Simon Taylor to Robert Taylor, Esq., 9 June, 1810, Simon Taylor Letterbook, Reel 9, ICS/120/1/J/9, ICS. Also see letter of Francis Grant, who worried "whether Scotland would suit either my health or habits" after years spent in Jamaica. Francis Grant to Charles Gordon, 4 April 1785, Gordon Family Papers, MS1160/6/36, University of Aberdeen Library.

²³ John Pinney to Azariah Pinney, 28 October 1789, Pinney Family Papers, Letterbook 11, f. 254, University of Bristol Library.

him. His children lived in Britain and in North America, but each time he visited them, intending to stay, the rheumatism that plagued his joints in New York and the cough that racked his body in England left him convinced that the rest of his life would be “miserable” if he did not return to Antigua for good.²⁴ As he told Janet Schaw, who visited him from Scotland, he had become “so absolute an exotick” that in spite of being kept “in a greenhouse” in England, his body was unable to stand the cold, and he returned to Antigua to preserve his health and life.²⁵

Seasoning and bodily adjustment to the West Indian climate had complex and significant implications. All of these correspondents had grown up in Britain, and all moved to the West Indies at some point during the eighteenth century.²⁶ And for all of them, a trip “home” caused great concern. Having undergone a seasoning, people no longer suited their native climates as well as they did their adopted ones. In a sense, this change in bodily suitability signified a more fundamental change: a person was no longer a Briton, but a West Indian, with a body attuned to the Caribbean environment. This bodily change was also a change in a person’s identity; Martin had become “an exotick,” a particular type of person, different from his previous self, who suited a particular place.²⁷ Many of these migrants wrote that they had changed because their bodies had altered and conformed to a different environment. Seasoned West Indian settlers were transformed people with altered bodies, and these bodily changes betrayed their climatic homes.

²⁴ Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin Esq., 31 January 1774, Add MS 41348, f. 157, BL.

²⁵ Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality; Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the years 1774 to 1776*, ed. E.W. and C.M. Andrews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 105.

²⁶ Although Martin was born in Antigua, he spent much of his youth in Britain.

²⁷ On creolization, see Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*; also see Trevor Burnard’s “Thomas Thistlewood Becomes a Creole,” in *Varieties of Southern History: New Essays on a Region and Its People*, ed. Bruce Clayton and John A. Salmond (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 99-118.

An environmental understanding of bodily health tied people to places in significant ways. Related to their belief in microclimates, Caribbean inhabitants also believed that seasoning was a local phenomenon. Small variations in climate could make significant differences in people's bodies, and these differences extended to bodily types. That is, different places produced different types of bodies, which varied according to the specific nature of the local environment. Cool, wet climates produced different types of bodies than did hot and dry climates, or hot and wet; particular soil types could breed certain types of bodies, with sandy soils generating different bodies than loamy earth. The elevation of a place, along with the amount and angle of sunlight mattered, as did the direction and strength of winds, the location of moving or stagnant water, and surrounding plant life.

In his treatise, James Lind stressed both the variability of climate over short distances and its profound effects on a region's inhabitants by referencing parts of Africa. He wrote, "the colour, strength and activity, the constitutions and health of the inhabitants greatly depend" upon "the nature of the soil" in a particular place. "This truth is well known to those who trade for slaves on the African coast," he explained. Enslaved people stolen from Africa differed in character, health, and appearance "according to the nature of the country or the soil from whence they are brought."²⁸ Lind was hardly alone in this assessment. Planter Bryan Edwards devoted a substantial portion of his natural history of the West Indies to a description of the differences among nearly a dozen types of African bodies, and slaveholders commonly expressed their preferences for enslaved laborers from various regions over others.²⁹ Planters' private letters

²⁸ James Lind, *Essay on Diseases*, 198.

²⁹ See Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), vol. II, 58-71, for example; also see Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 403-404. For examples of slaveholders' preferences, see letters of Henry Laurens (in South Carolina) or Simon Taylor (in Jamaica), both of whom commented prodigiously on the various qualities of Africans, including bodily shape, personality type, skin color, etc.

support the notion that people, like plants, displayed particular traits according to their native soil. Local variations in climate created tangible, and often visible, differences among a place's inhabitants.

If the various climates and parts of Africa produced such different types of bodies, then all Africans arriving in the West Indies would need to adjust to the unfamiliar climate. One physician in the West Indies, James Grainger, explained as much in his medical treatise. After describing the different types of people from the Guinea coast, including their susceptibilities to illness, Grainger explained the need for seasoning new arrivals in the West Indies. "No Negroe can be said to be seasoned to a West India climate, till he has resided therein for at least a twelvemonth," he wrote.³⁰ Grainger explained that the process of adjustment required as much care as possible to ensure the new arrivals ate familiar foods and had adequate clothing.

As Chapter Three showed, Caribbean residents believed that the local climate varied significantly across even short distances. Once seasoned to a particular place, then, enslaved people would suffer if relocated elsewhere, even within the same region. "Those who are accustomed to one island," Grainger wrote, "run no small risqué of their lives when transported to another." This advice held not only for saltwater slaves, or those imported from Africa, but also for creoles, or those born in the West Indies. "A gang of Creole Negroes, being transported from the place of their birth to another island, most commonly undergo a seasoning," Grainger wrote. On an even smaller scale, "slaves carried from one plantation to another, though on the same island, are apt for some time to droop and be sickly."³¹ Because seasoning depended upon an area's particular environmental conditions, it was a decidedly local phenomenon. People's

³⁰ James Grainger, *On the Treatment and Management of the More Common West-India Diseases* (London, 1764), 11.

³¹ Grainger, *On the Treatment and Management of the More Common West-India Diseases*, 11-13.

bodies adjusted to the microclimate in which they lived, and people who were seasoned to one place would experience bodily changes if they relocated, even if that relocation was slight.

Planters' correspondence demonstrates that many of those living in the Greater Caribbean well understood the local nature of seasoning. In the mid-1780s, absentee planter Charles Spooner instructed his plantation manager Samuel Cary to purchase a gang of enslaved laborers for his plantation in Grenada. Spooner preferred seasoned laborers, he explained, since he calculated that the lower cost of newly arrived Africans was not worth the risk of seasoning them to the West Indian climate.³² Too many Africans would fall ill or die as they changed climate, Spooner believed, but those already living in the West Indies would be healthier. In Grenada, Samuel Cary tried to locate such a group, informing Spooner that "a seasoned Gang would ease me exceedingly," but had trouble finding locally seasoned slaves. Although he heard of a group of enslaved laborers for sale in Antigua, he explained that the climate of Grenada was far too wet for those who had been seasoned to the drier Antiguan climate. He had his eye on a group of laborers from St. Vincent as he thought that climate more closely approximated Grenada's, but the sale fell through. After a further search with no apparent prospects, Cary informed Spooner that the laborers from Antigua appeared to be the only option. Still, he stressed his reluctance to acquire them as Antigua was too dry to hope for a smooth transition to Grenada. "It seems to be the opinion," he informed Spooner, of "all your Attorneys, that [Antiguans] will run as great risque in seasoning, as New Negroes."³³ In other words, the climate of Antigua was so different from that of Grenada that the laborers might as well be arriving from Africa. It made no sense, then, for Spooner to spend more money on "seasoned" laborers who would have to be seasoned

³² Charles Spooner to Samuel Cary, 8 June 1786, Samuel Cary Papers, Ms. N-1997, Box 2, MHS.

³³ Samuel Cary to Charles Spooner, 31 March 1785; 30 July 1786; 25 October 1786; 20 November 1786, Samuel Cary Letterbook, volume 6, MHS.

all over again; Cary strongly recommended buying Africans instead because they would cost him less money and require the same amount of seasoning.

Other plantation managers held similar beliefs. One planter informed his father that he had no desire to buy a group of laborers from an acquaintance, in large part because “removing them so far up the country they require nearly the same seasoning as a New Negroe from the ship; the climate differing so much here from Montego Bay.”³⁴ Another thought that “the transfer of slaves from one Estate to another” in Jamaica was “sometimes precarious” because the two places might have different temperatures.³⁵ A third thought much along the same lines as Samuel Cary. James Kerr, who managed Hugh Hall’s Jamaica plantation, advised Hall to purchase saltwater slaves for economic reasons. Seasoned slaves cost more, “and if they are from a Distant part of the Island they are very little easier season’d than New Negroes,” he explained.³⁶

Joseph Foster Barham’s managers expressed similar concerns over the difficulty of re-seasoning laborers. One pair of managers wrote to discourage Barham from the purchase of enslaved laborers living in St. Ann’s parish, a fair distance from Barham’s plantation in Westmoreland. The climate in St. Ann, they wrote, was entirely different from that of Westmoreland, and moving laborers from one place to the other might have “serious consequences.”³⁷ If a similar group were to be offered for sale closer to Barham’s plantation, the managers added, they would make the purchase. On another occasion, when Barham suggested moving laborers from one of his plantations in Westmoreland to another in St. Elizabeth’s, his

³⁴ Charles Gordon Gray to father, 12 March 1812, MS 2008, NLJ.

³⁵ Thomas Mills to Francis Graham, 4 April 1810, MS 132, f. 93, NLJ.

³⁶ James Kerr to Hugh Hall, 24 September 1777, MS 1069, no. 3, NLJ.

³⁷ John Blythe and James Grant to Joseph Foster Barham, Jr., 12 September 1813, MS.Clar.dep.c.358, bundle 1, Bod.

manager dissuaded him. “I do not think the Negroes could be removed from Mesopotamia [in Westmoreland] to the Island [in St. Elizabeth’s] without great risk,” he wrote. “Neither do I suppose that those Negroes that are advanced in life would be able to withstand the change of climate.”³⁸

On the other hand, when managers encountered slaves for sale from similar climates, they jumped at the chance. In 1773, Simon Taylor wrote to Chaloner Arcedeckne informing him that a neighboring planter wanted to sell Arcedeckne his enslaved laborers. Taylor thought this sale would be a particularly good match for Arcedeckne because of the proximity of the two plantations. Because the laborers had been seasoned on an adjoining plantation, they would not have to be re-seasoned, and potential survival rates would be high.³⁹ Fifteen years after the completion of this sale, Taylor again informed Arcedeckne that he had bought some enslaved laborers for another plantation. “They [have] been seasoned near the place,” Taylor wrote, “and will I am hopefull by and by establish there a good gang.”⁴⁰ Another of Barham’s managers displayed the same caution with regard to obtaining new laborers. In 1789, Charles Rowe, who managed Barham’s Island plantation, wrote that he had heard of a group of laborers for sale, and prospects looked good: “being for many years inured to a mountain clime a good deal similar to that of the Island [plantation],” he wrote, “induces me to believe they would [...] suit better than most others to be obtained.”⁴¹

Seasoning, then, was indeed a local process. Both Europeans and Africans had to be seasoned to the West Indian climate, and the phenomenon extended beyond that; the local nature

³⁸ Charles Webb to Joseph Foster Barham, Jr., 28 August 1803, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 3, Bod.

³⁹ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 1 May 1773, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1773/12, ICS.

⁴⁰ Taylor to Arcedeckne, 29 May 1788, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1788/10, ICS.

⁴¹ Charles Rowe to John Foster Barham, Jr., 4 July 1789, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 2, Bod.

of bodily adjustment depended upon an area's specific climatic and environmental attributes. Many of these letters between plantation managers and absentee planters, though, demonstrate that managers, themselves residents of the Caribbean, had a more nuanced view of the local climate than did plantation owners living in Britain. Often managers had to explain, as Samuel Cary did, that enslaved people living on one island or plantation would not automatically suit another because of the difference in environment. But even if absentee planters did not always have a clear idea of the microclimates in the Caribbean, all planters – both on the ground and in Britain – universally acknowledged the need for seasoning Africans. None of them believed that any part of Africa would produce people whose bodies were naturally suited to the West Indies.

After visiting Samuel Martin's Antigua plantation, Janet Schaw continued her tour of the West Indies and North America before returning to Scotland. As she traveled from the Caribbean to the Carolinas, Schaw noted stark differences between people's appearances in the Americas and those in Britain. In North Carolina she was unimpressed by the "sallow complexions and languid eyes" she observed among "the peasantry," and was equally dismissive of their "flat" feet, "loose" joints, and "uneven" gaits, as well as with the "wan looks" of a Scottish man she met. The climate, it seemed, was the culprit, at least in the latter case: "while he is in this climate," she wrote, "he is under the power of an Ague" which altered his appearance significantly.⁴² Her assessment of Antigua was no better; as she noted in her diary, many former Britons living on the island had "so entirely changed as not to be known."⁴³ As

⁴² Janet Schaw, *Journal*, 153, 182. In the eighteenth century, "ague" was often a term used to describe illnesses, often (but not always) in conjunction with fevers. It usually meant chills, aches, or general feelings of lassitude. Historians have tended to link descriptions of ague with malarial symptoms. For a more thorough description, see Valencius, *Health of the Country*, 79.

⁴³ Janet Schaw, *Journal*, 116.

Schaw's observations reveal, becoming truly seasoned to a place often involved visible bodily changes, especially for people of European origin. The environment, it seemed, could change people's appearances as well as their health.

For Jamaican planter Edward Long, the issue of people's appearances was particularly troubling. After several years in Jamaica, Long returned to England, where he began work on his three-volume *History of Jamaica*, published in 1774. Long's personal notes, full of crossed-out passages and re-written sentences, show that he put a great deal of thought into what he wrote; none of his comments, even if buried in the text, should be dismissed as oversights.⁴⁴ Although historians often characterize Long's text as the ravings of an ardent racist, a close reading of his work displays a wealth of contradictions on the subject of race. The inconsistencies throughout the text reveal Long's deeply conflicted agenda in writing his *History*; he sought to correct European "prejudices" about the effects of the West Indian climate on British bodies, but several passages still describe hierarchical distinctions between Europeans and creoles, or those born in the West Indies. He went to great lengths to insist upon the healthiness of the Jamaican climate for Britons, but tried to maintain careful distinctions between bodily health and the ability to labor. And although he reiterated that Africans "naturally" suited the West Indian climate, his own experience in Jamaica had shown him that this was not the case. Long cautioned, for example, that "native Africans" who were "unseasoned to the climate" would be "less able than Creoles" to labor in Jamaica.⁴⁵ Like other planters, he also noted the local nature of bodily adaptation, explaining, "The removal of Negroes from a dry to a damp situation, from a South side to a North side parish, has often been fatal to many. [...] Even the

⁴⁴ Long has notes that appear to be early drafts of his text in the British Library. See, for example, Add MS 12407, BL.

⁴⁵ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 526.

Creoles do not bear these removals from places where, perhaps, they have resided from the time of their birth.”⁴⁶ Even Edward Long, then, believed that Africans and their descendants had changeable bodies, receptive to environmental influence and responsive to climatic change.

Like many of his contemporaries, though, Long was most concerned with European bodies, and parts of his text acknowledged that European bodies would fundamentally alter in the Caribbean climate. Although Jamaican-born children of Europeans were “in general tall and well-shaped,” Long wrote, their eyes differed noticeably from those of their British-born relatives. According to Long, British creoles possessed particularly deep eye sockets, which were set far back in their heads to protect them from the “strong glare of sun-shine.” Their sight was “keen and penetrating” and their joints supple. “Although descended from British ancestors,” Long explained, creoles were “stamped with these characteristic deviations,” which he attributed in large part to the climate.⁴⁷

Yet Long understood that his claims about European bodily change might cause alarm or concern for Britons considering travel to the West Indies. It was one thing for Britons to acquire more supple joints or deeper eye sockets; it was an altogether different concern if they believed their skin would blacken under the influence of the sun. Skin color, then, formed an important exception for Long. Although he admitted that “brunettes [...] become browner” after time spent in the West Indian climate, he insisted that “the genuine English breed” retained a “pure

⁴⁶ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 435. Long explained that “new Negroes” should be “gradually seasoned to the change of climate.” See Long, vol. II, 433. Bryan Edwards seems to have copied this view in writing his own natural history a couple of decades later. According to Edwards, creoles displayed a “peculiar cast of character impressed by the climate.” “I am of opinion,” he wrote, “that the climate of the West Indies displays itself more strongly on the persons of the Natives [...] They are obviously a taller race, on the whole, than the Europeans; but I think in general not proportionably robust.” They had supple joints, he explained, which enabled a gracefulness and ease of movement; they also had cold and pale skin, and their eye sockets were “considerably deeper than among the natives of Europe,” a feature Edwards credited to protection from the “strong glare of sun-shine.” See Bryan Edwards, *History of West Indies*, vol. II, 11-12.

⁴⁷ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 261-262. Long ascribed most, though not all, bodily changes to the climate: others resulted from diet. For example, Long wrote that Creoles, both white and black, had particularly good teeth, which Long credited to the high quantities of sugar they consumed. See Long, *History*, vol. II, 273.

and delicate” skin in Jamaica. Contrary to widespread rumors in England, Long insisted, Jamaican-born children of British parentage were not “converted into black-a-moors,” nor did they even turn “swarthy” from exposure to the sun.⁴⁸ Likewise, Long also declared that “Creole blacks” did not change skin color in the Americas. As evidence, Long offered that the descendants of Africans in northern climates, even after several generations, were “not at all different in colour from those Negroes who are brought directly from Africa” in spite of continuous time spent in a cold climate. Long concluded that “the dark membrane which communicates that black colour to their skins,” unlike other bodily features, was a permanent characteristic; an indelible stain.⁴⁹

In Long’s view, then, West Indian-born children of British parents could and did have some bodily adaptations to the climate, such as taller stature. Some characteristics of West Indian inhabitants – white, black, and brown – even seemed to be approaching one another in kind. The “supple” joints of white creoles approximated the bodily makeup of black creoles, and all West Indian natives seemed to have remarkably good teeth. But, significantly for Long, the offspring of white parents did not acquire darker skin in a warm climate. Britons and their descendants, Long insisted, could live in the West Indies unblemished and with their essential whiteness – and thus superiority – unthreatened. Similarly, creoles of African origin living in northern climates did not, after several generations, whiten. Even so, Long still proclaimed that the West Indian climate did have noticeable effects on all of its inhabitants.⁵⁰ Both Europeans

⁴⁸ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 274.

⁴⁹ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 351-352.

⁵⁰ While Edward Long made a point of insisting that the American climate did not change the outward appearance of Africans or their descendants, he still acknowledged differences between native Africans and creoles which he attributed to the difference in climate. To take one example: “The climate of Jamaica is temperate, and even cool, compared with many parts of Guiney; and the Creole Blacks have undeniably more acuteness and better understandings than the natives of Guiney.” See Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 477.

and Africans would change as a result of living in a different climate, and the bodies of children born there would inherit these adaptations. Long's text, then, even if shot through with racist invectives, still reiterated two essential points: first, that Africans had to be seasoned to the West Indian climate just as Europeans did, and second, that residence in the West Indies fundamentally altered people's bodies, regardless of their origins.

Letters from West Indian travelers reflect some of Long's contentions, while others appeared to offer evidence to the contrary. Ann Appleton Storrow, who left Boston for Jamaica in the 1790s, found her children altered by the change in climate. Her son, she informed her sister, had become "a true sallow faced creole," so transformed that she was sure her sister would no longer recognize him.⁵¹ A few years earlier, Francis Grant wrote that after many years' residence in Jamaica, his Scottish brother and sister were "both much altered in their looks [...] the consequence (no doubt) of much sickness & long residence in a hot climate."⁵² When Charles Gordon Gray settled in Jamaica, he wrote to his father that in spite of fears that the strong sun might adversely affect his health, "the sun has no effect on me but tanning."⁵³ James Savage found that after spending time in the West Indies, "my gait has not altered in this climate, but I am as black, as a Spaniard."⁵⁴ And in the 1780s, William Leckie, who had recently arrived in Jamaica from Scotland, assured his brother-in-law Walter Ewing that the effects of the climate on his appearance were better than Ewing had feared. "You ask me if the sun has hurt my complexion or dimmed my eyes," he wrote. "I answer that the sun & climate together had nigh dim'd them effectually." On the contrary, he found that "the sun so far from dimming a person's

⁵¹ Ann Appleton Storrow to sister, 29 January 1793, Ann Appleton Storrow Papers, MHS.

⁵² Francis Grant to Charles Gordon, 6 April 1789, Gordon Family Papers, MS1160/6/64/3, University of Aberdeen Library.

⁵³ Charles Gordon Gray to father, 16 May 1811, MS 163, f. 18, NLJ.

⁵⁴ James Savage to Mary Lincoln, 17 March 1806, James Savage Papers II, MHS.

eyes generally lights up new fires that you in the frozen regions of the North are unacquainted with.”⁵⁵

In spite of Leckie’s assurances, he did not deny that the climate had changed his appearance, and no one doubted that a move to the West Indian climate changed people. John Mair wrote of “a supineness and indolence” common to inhabitants of Barbados that was “visible in both sexes which I attribute to the climate.”⁵⁶ The heat also “relaxed” people’s bodily fibers; Long believed this, as did Caribbean residents Simon Taylor and Samuel Martin who lived to an old age in the islands. Several West Indians contrasted this relaxation with the “bracing” effects of colder climates. Walter Tullidelph, for example, wrote that he hoped to take a trip from Antigua to Europe to “renew” his constitution and to “brace up” his relaxed bodily fibers.⁵⁷ Simon Taylor believed that after “near 23 years in a hott climate” his constitution was “exceedingly relaxed indeed, and requires the assistance of a little cold weather to brace it up again.”⁵⁸ James Walrond, manager of Charles Tudway’s plantation in Antigua, attributed his ill health to his “long continued residence in this warm climate.” He hoped to spend a winter in North America to “brace & strengthen” his “solids which in all constitutions are constantly relaxed & loose much of their elasticity by so continued a warmth as we live in.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ William Leckie to Walter Ewing, 1783, Orr Ewing Papers, Bundle 36, Port of Menteith, Scotland.

⁵⁶ Extracts from John Mair’s journal, Barbados [August 1776], MS 1920, NLJ.

⁵⁷ Walter Tullidelph to Alexander Campbell, 23 April 1739, Walter Tullidelph Letterbook, f. 103, NRS.

⁵⁸ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 26 June 1783, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1783/23, ICS.

⁵⁹ Stephen Blizard to Charles Tudway, 26 October 1766, Tudway Family Archive, DD\TD Box 15/6, Somerset Heritage Centre. In the late 1790s George Brissett wrote from Jamaica to his uncle that he planned to visit England in June of 1801 because his constitution “absolutely require[d] a change of climate.” George Brissett to John Tharp, 10 June 179? [torn], R55/7/128(c)/1/1. A few years later, Brissett wrote again because his mother planned to leave Jamaica for a trip to England, and he feared “the cold weather will not altogether agree with her constitution.” Brissett to Tharp, 14 April 1805, R55/7/128(c)/1/6, Tharp Papers, Cambridgeshire archives, Cambridge.

This relaxation could be beneficial for older people, whose fibers, according to Edward Long and some physicians of the time, tightened naturally. “Old age contracts the fibres; this climate relaxes,” wrote Long. “Aged persons on coming hither find themselves renewed as it were in youth,” he insisted, as their bodies recharged due to “this atmosphere.”⁶⁰ In fact, many planters found the heat of the West Indies beneficial for elderly bodies, and some recommended the place as a health resort for English people no longer able to stand cold winters.⁶¹ “This is the finest climate in the world for an old man,” wrote John Campbell from Jamaica to his nephew in London.⁶² Caleb Dickinson agreed. “Considering the bleak weather in England,” he wrote to his wife, Jamaica “is a better climate especially for people in declining years.”⁶³ Samuel Martin urged his son to consider moving from London to Antigua as he grew older, believing that the Antiguan “climate may be more agreeable to the old age when you arrive at that period.”⁶⁴ Simon Taylor believed that Jamaica was “the best country for old people, as the climate is so much milder than it is in England.”⁶⁵ He urged his nephew to visit Jamaica to try the effects of the climate. “I really believe that this climate is more congenial to health than any part of Europe to people that have attained the age of 50 and upwards,” he wrote. If his nephew, who suffered from gout, was unable to recover in England, he encouraged him to visit Jamaica, as “you can then chuse which you will preferr as best suiting your constitution.”⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. I, 362.

⁶¹ See, for example, Joshua Steele to Joseph Banks, 20 June 1786, Add MS 33978, f. 71, BL.

⁶² John Campbell to John Campbell, 14 August 1797, Campbell Family Papers, AGN 321, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

⁶³ Caleb Dickinson to wife, 15 July 1756, Dickinson Family Archive, DD\DN/231, Somerset Heritage Centre.

⁶⁴ Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin Esq., 15 January 1768, MS Add 41348, f. 2-3, BL.

⁶⁵ Simon Taylor to Lady Taylor, 9 January 1803, Simon Taylor Letterbook F, ICS.

⁶⁶ Simon Taylor to John Taylor Esq., 1 August 1799, Simon Taylor Letterbook C, ICS.

These letters demonstrate residents' beliefs about the strong links between climate and health in the late eighteenth-century Greater Caribbean. At times the connections were even visible: Samuel Martin, for example, noticed the difference in people's faces across the Atlantic when he visited New York in 1768. In contrast to the "rosy complexion" he associated with the English countryside, Martin found in his travels through North America, hardly "a florid countenance either male, or female." He attributed these looks to people's winter diets of salt meat, as well as to "the violent heat of summer."⁶⁷ And the physician Alexander Hamilton, who traveled in the North American continent in the 1740s, ascribed the "washed countenances" of Maryland residents to rampant illness in the "sickly, convulsed state."⁶⁸

As many of these writings have shown, seasoning signified a lasting, often visible, change in a person's body, and it was a local phenomenon that applied equally to Africans and Europeans. But these beliefs alone do not explain Chisholme and the bricklayer. Chisholme's letter does not say whether the man was African-born or creole, though his position as a skilled laborer suggests he was a native of the West Indies. Either way, seasoning was not the issue. In the late eighteenth century, both planters and physicians characterized most illnesses in the West Indies as fevers, fluxes, or ague.⁶⁹ With few exceptions, namely smallpox, yaws, or yellow fever, doctors and planters attributed almost all illnesses to environmental causes (and even those diseases contained environmental aspects).⁷⁰ Planters' letters consistently explained illness

⁶⁷ Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin Esq., 15 January 1768, Add MS 41348, f. 2-3, BL.

⁶⁸ Alexander Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Carl Bridenbaugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 199.

⁶⁹ Sometimes physicians also diagnosed illnesses as dysentery or jail fever, or occasionally other illnesses, but the majority they simply labeled as fevers.

among a plantation's inhabitants to excessive amounts of rain or otherwise wet conditions; second to moisture they blamed the wind, which brought a change of air, or other sources of noxious vapors, such as air wafting from unhealthful places like swamps or wooded areas. Countless letters explained that both Africans and Europeans were equally susceptible to illness from environmental changes; sometimes Africans more so if they had greater exposure to the elements. But trying to avoid excessive moisture or otherwise manage environmental conditions marked the limitations of generalized efforts to control bodily health in the late eighteenth century. Beyond that, the ability of bodies to adjust to climates appropriately, as well as bodily responses to particular conditions, was unpredictable and dependent upon the hidden inner workings of a person's bodily constitution. While everyone had to be seasoned to a particular place in order to be healthy there, sometimes people's bodies did not adapt. Other times changes in the external environment wrought havoc on certain bodies but not others. Just as different local climates had varying effects on bodies, individuals had different bodily constitutions, or particular combinations of internal humors that determined the healthiest or best place for their bodies, and whether they would be healthy or not in varying environmental conditions.

Medical practitioners recognized the importance of these differences in assessing and treating a sick patient. As one physician explained, the "Difference of Conformation" between individual bodies affected the kinds and quantities of medicine people received. "Without a particular Knowledge of these Constitutions," he wrote, physicians could not expect "any tolerable Success" in treating a patient. "It ought therefore to be one chief Care of Physicians, to

⁷⁰ Physicians regularly blamed moisture, or, even more, the dangerous combination of heat and moisture, for illness. For examples, see William Sandiford, *An Account of a Late Epidemical Distemper, extracted from a letter addressed to Gedney Clarke, Esq.* (Barbados, 1771), 3, 14-16; Robert Jackson, *A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica, with some observations on the Intermitting Fever of America, and an appendix, Containing some Hints on the Means of preserving the Health of Soldiers in hot Climates* (London, 1791), 77-78; John Hunter, *Observations on the diseases of the army in Jamaica; and on the best means of preserving the health of Europeans, in that climate* (London, 1788), 15-17; Thomas Trotter, *Medicina nautica: an essay on the diseases of seamen: comprehending the history of health in His Majesty's fleet* (London, 1797), 434-443.

enquire into the peculiar Constitution of each Patient,” he explained.⁷¹ Other doctors agreed. In William Hillary’s treatise on Barbados, he noted, “Constitutions differ here as much as they do in England,” and “these different Constitutions [...] require different Methods of Cure.”⁷² In fact, individual bodily difference, in combination with environmental factors, lay at the root of eighteenth-century medicine. The varying balance of humors in a person was, in some ways, essential to that person’s core being and individuality.

Personal correspondence shows that laypeople, too, understood that people’s bodies differed in constitution, and therefore in the conditions that would promote bodily health. In 1777, for example, Benjamin Vaughan wrote to his younger brother, who was about to embark on a trip to Jamaica. His letter contained behavioral and dietary advice he hoped his brother would follow, but, perhaps guessing that his brother might share the advice, he emphasized its individual nature. “This letter is founded upon, and addressed, to, a particular character,” he wrote, “and relates also to a particular country and situation.”⁷³ Lest others should assume the advice pertained to travelers in general, Vaughan wanted to caution other potential readers that his proscriptions depended upon knowing his brother’s constitution, as well as the specifics of the place to which he was headed.

Clues to a person’s inner workings sometimes had outward markers. If a person seemed to have a fiery personality, for example, she or he might have a sanguine constitution with an abundance of hot blood; others with high amounts of bile were bilious. Ann Appleton Storrow,

⁷¹ This quote is from a letter from John Radcliffe to the Duke of Ormonde, printed in the back of *The Practical Physician for Travellers, Whether by Sea or Land. Giving directions how Persons on Voyages and Journies, may remedy the Diseases incident to them, without the sorry Assistances they often meet with on the Seas or Roads* (London, 1729), 238-39.

⁷² William Hillary, *Observations on the Changes of the Air and the Concomitant Epidemical Diseases, in the Island of Barbadoes* (2nd ed., London, 1766), viii; also see John Huxham, *An Essay on Fevers, And their Various Kinds, As depending on Different Constitutions of the Blood* (2nd ed., London, 1750), 117.

⁷³ Benjamin Vaughan to Charles Vaughan, 24 October 1777, Benjamin Vaughan Papers, Series II, APS.

for instance, convinced her sister that their mother should not attempt the trip to Jamaica, as “this climate would be death to a person of her bilious habit.”⁷⁴ In England, John Hubbard consulted a friend about the prospect of a relative’s visiting the West Indies in 1799. But his friend, who had spent time in the West Indies and who knew the person in question, apparently thought “the climate by no means suitable to her Constitution.”⁷⁵ Charles Gordon Gray, on the other hand, assured his father not to worry about his young brother’s unfitness for Jamaica, “As to his being bilious,” he wrote, “his Constitution is not so fixed that with care and attention it may be brought to inure any Climate.”⁷⁶ And Samuel Martin believed he was “by constitution much more prone to Sanguine expectations” than his son, a difference that affected their personalities as well as their fitness for certain climates.⁷⁷

Francis Farley also found that his son had a different constitution from his own. Farley, who managed Charles Tudway’s estate in Antigua, reported with some distress his son’s apparent inability to stand the climate. His son was so sick, he wrote, that Farley feared “he will never be able to live in this Country.” In contrast to his son’s good health in colder climes, “the hot weather in this part of the world does not agree with him.”⁷⁸ And Robert Hamilton, who lived for several years in Jamaica, wrote to his mother in Scotland expressing distress at his three-year-old daughter’s unsuitability for the climate. Although she had been born in Jamaica,

⁷⁴ Ann Appleton Storrow to sister, 29 January 1793, MHS. (Of course, Storrow may have had other reasons for not providing her mother with a home, and her climatic justification may have been an excuse, but either she believed it or else she believed in its legitimacy as a reason for discouraging her mother’s travel.)

⁷⁵ John Hubbard to Gardiner Greene, 13 August 1799, Hubbard-Greene Papers, Ms. N-312, MHS.

⁷⁶ Charles Gordon Gray to father, 7 November 1817, MS 163, f. 82, NLJ.

⁷⁷ Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin Esq., 22 May 1748, Add MS 41346, f. 4, BL.

⁷⁸ Francis Farley to Charles Tudway, 25 July 1765, Tudway Family Papers, DD\TD Box 15/6, Somerset. One of Joseph Foster Barham’s plantation managers, Mr. Wells, also found that “his constitution does not agree with this climate.” See John Vanheelen to Joseph Foster Barham, 4 July 1783, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 1, Bod.

Hamilton found that in spite of moving her around the island to try different places, “this climate will not do for her.” Instead, he determined to send her to his family in Scotland.⁷⁹

Many of those who could afford the luxury traveled in search of a climate that fit their constitutions.⁸⁰ Most people, though, could not afford such a drastic move in climate, and many found that movements on a smaller scale created noticeable improvements in their health. Samuel Cary’s family in Grenada, for example, fell ill in the fall of 1785; to recover, they went to “the North side [of the island] where it is healthy.”⁸¹ A few years later Cary reported a similar circumstance with one of his laborers. “Capt. Mann the Carpenter is still very weak and low,” Cary wrote. “He is on the North side for change of air.”⁸² Charles Gordon Gray found late one summer that many people on his plantation suffered from illness. “Of late we have had more rains there than sufficient,” he wrote, “which has I am sorry to say been the cause of much sickness.” To encourage the recovery of the sick, he tried several methods. “I am obliged to furnish fresh meat, rice, to all with fever, which has now nearly gone through the whole,” he explained to his father, who, Gray knew, would ask about the extra cost in purchasing so much

⁷⁹ Robert Hamilton to mother, 15 October 1740, Hamilton Family Papers, AA/DC/12/4, Ayrshire Archives.

⁸⁰ Some examples: In 1779 Betty Harding consulted her physicians about traveling from England to the West Indies. If they thought “it necessary her changing the climate,” wrote Catherine Harding from Jamaica to a friend in London, “she is to be sent over to me.” See Catherine Harding to William Gale, 24 May 1779, Gale-Morant Family Papers, EUL MS 44/1/d/7, University of Exeter Special Collections. Walter Tullidolph offered similar advice to a relative. He believed “that this climate would be more friendly to cousin Peggie’s constitution,” he wrote, “therefore advised her to come out.” See Walter Tullidolph to Walter Sydsferfe Esq., 5 July 1740, Walter Tullidolph Letterbook, GD205/53/8, f. 140, NRS. Others feared the effects of drastic climatic changes. In 1789 one woman contemplated leaving England to visit relatives in Jamaica, but “dread[ed] a sea voyage, and still more the effects of a hot climate in her very nervous and shattered state of health.” See George Anne Cook to Henry Shirley, late July 1789, Shirley Papers, DE2638/44/2, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland. In 1791, James Stormonth explained to his sister Margaret that a friend “would have gone home” from the West Indies to Scotland “long ago, but he finds a warm climate agrees best with his constitution.” See James Stormonth to Margaret Darling, 27 October 1791, Stormonth-Darling Papers, NRAS1881, bundle 56, NRS. And in 1788, John Farquharson wrote from St. Vincent to his cousin William Farquharson in Scotland, “I find this warm climate agree with myself as well as I can, in reason, wish.” See John to William, 10 December 1788, Farquharson of Invercauld Papers, Box 115, Invercauld Estate, Braemar, Scotland.

⁸¹ Samuel Cary to Charles Spooner, 13 December 1785, Samuel Cary Letterbook, volume 6, MHS.

⁸² Samuel Cary to Charles Spooner, 30 January 1788, Samuel Cary Letterbook, volume 6, MHS.

food. “After leaving them, [the illness] assumes an intermittant [fever] with ague, great debility arises from this. I have at this moment one here, one at Moor Park, and another at the Bay for change of air, all my best People.”⁸³

Movements of short distances were far from uncommon. In Antigua, George Ottley wrote that his wife had “been lately so much indisposed” that “she was advised by the Doctors to change the air for a short time without delay.” Ottley accompanied her from Antigua to Barbuda, “which is a very short distance from this, & a place noted for the salubrity of its air.”⁸⁴ Grace Campbell traveled from her family’s plantation in Jamaica to Kingston and found the difference in her health striking. Although she had heard reports of the town’s unhealthiness, she wrote to her father, “I believe it to be the most healthy spot in the island – it agrees so well with me.”⁸⁵ Simon Taylor also made a short trip within Jamaica at one point to regain his health and strength; other planters and managers often did the same.⁸⁶

People in the Lowcountry, too, relocated for a change of air as they tried to find a climate – sometimes an unexpected one – that suited their health. The physician Alexander Garden of Charleston wrote that in spite of the fact that many people found the “fine salubrious air” of Newport, Rhode Island, beneficial to their constitutions, he himself felt so ill there that he had to

⁸³ Charles Gordon Gray to father, 8 September 1814, MS 163, f. 43, NLJ.

⁸⁴ George Ottley to Clement Tudway, 17 December 1808, Tudway Family Archive, Box 11, bundle 7, Somerset Heritage Centre.

⁸⁵ Grace Campbell to Archibald of Knockbuy, 30 December 1766, Campbell Family Correspondence, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

⁸⁶ When Sam Rogers, either a close friend or the “natural” son of Samuel Martin, arrived in Antigua at the end of March 1769, “extremely ill and weak,” Martin tried to nurse him back to health. He first placed Rogers in the home of a neighboring doctor, but as his recovery seemed slow, after a couple of weeks he moved Rogers to his brother’s plantation a few miles away in the hopes that the “change of air” would better suit his constitution. See Samuel Martin to Samuel Martin Esq., 30 March 1769; 26 April 1769, Add MS 41348, f. 40, 44, BL.

return to Charleston, where he regained his health.⁸⁷ Thomas Pinckney, also of South Carolina, found that although the sea air seemed to restore the health of some of his family in the summer of 1789, the gardener suffered from a fever so severe that Pinckney sent him to town to recover.⁸⁸ And absentee planter Pierce Butler sent extensive instructions to William Page, his manager in South Carolina, regarding the health of the enslaved laborers on his plantation. Not trusting the local doctors, Butler wrote out prescriptions for the enslaved, varying the ingredients according to the complaints, symptoms, and bodies of the patients. For “women of delicate constitutions” he instructed Page to change some of the ingredients in a cordial, and to vary the amount of calomel depending upon the person.⁸⁹ In another letter, he instructed Page, “when any of the negroes at the rice island [plantation] are taken ill, remove them to Hampton ‘till they are quite [recovered]; change of air from fresh water to salt has often a great effect.”⁹⁰

Many people, in fact, took sea voyages, hoping that the air would restore them. Francis Farley left Antigua for Tobago in the spring of 1779 “for the benefit of the sea air,” hoping that the salt and the “change of climate would recover him.”⁹¹ And in 1792, John Graham, Joseph Foster Barham’s plantation manager in Jamaica, wrote expressing concern over a sick enslaved person on one of Barham’s plantations. Cupid, the man in question, had been “for some time past in a bad state of health.” His illness appeared to have begun with a “complaint in his head; which puzzled the medical gentlemen, and the disease has unfortunately settled on his lungs.”

⁸⁷ Alexander Garden to George Ogilvie, 17 November 1799, Ogilvie Family Papers, MS 2740/10/7/28, University of Aberdeen Library.

⁸⁸ Thomas Pinckney to Harriott Horry, 25 June 1789, Pinckney Family Papers, Box 3, folder 2, Library of Congress.

⁸⁹ For example, Butler directed Page to “put rhubarb instead of jallop” in some of the women’s medicines. Pierce Butler to William Page, 4 June 1798, Pierce Butler Letterbook Am. 0368, vol. 2, f. 237, Butler Family Papers, HSP.

⁹⁰ Pierce Butler to William Page, 26 June 1798, Pierce Butler Letterbook Am. 0368, vol. 2, f. 242, HSP.

⁹¹ Main Swete Walrond to Clement Tudway, 18 April 1779; Alexander Hillock to Clement Tudway, 21 April 1779, Tudway Family Papers, DD\TD Box 15/6, Somerset Heritage Centre.

Concerned about Cupid's declining health, Graham consulted the doctors about possible options for a cure. They advised him to send Cupid on a ship to America as soon as possible, and in the meantime to send him to another parish. Graham did so, but the immediate change seemed not to have helped, and Graham feared Cupid might die. Should that happen, Graham informed Barham, "you will sustain the loss of one of the very best of slaves."⁹²

But Graham reported that he was taking no chances with Jackie, another enslaved laborer who showed similar symptoms. He would send Jackie directly to North America, on a fleet set to sail in three weeks' time. "The Doctors advise and think the Negroe will be much benefited by the voyage," Graham wrote.⁹³ A few weeks later, Graham wrote again, to say that in spite of "every attention," Cupid had died. Jackie, though, was on a ship bound for North America, and Graham hoped the trip would restore him.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, even a significant change of air proved insufficient to save Jackie, and several months later, Graham wrote again to report the sad news. "I am truly sorry to acquaint with the loss of your negroe Jackie," he wrote, who, after getting "considerably better" from the "change of air," died in North America.⁹⁵

It almost goes without saying that Cupid and Jackie were surely the exceptions rather than the rule, along with Thomas Pinckney's gardener, Samuel Cary's carpenter, and the bricklayer Chisholme described. Although every person had an individual constitution, not everyone could afford to indulge its whims or understand its nuances. But regardless of whether or not people – enslaved, free, European, African, or creole – could attend to their health on an individual basis, West Indians of European origin believed that all people had particular bodily

⁹² John Graham to Joseph Foster Barham, Jr., 25 June 1792, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 2, Bod.

⁹³ John Graham to Joseph Foster Barham, Jr., 25 June 1792, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 2, Bod.

⁹⁴ Graham to Barham Jr., 8 August 1792, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 2, Bod.

⁹⁵ Graham to Barham Jr., 6 January 1793, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 2, Bod.

constitutions, and that they were all subject to varying environmental conditions. Although it seemed far-fetched, Chisholme speculated that the “lowered air” below deck might have played a part in the bricklayer’s mysterious recovery. Chisholme did not know the nuances of the man’s constitution, and though stuffy, stale air seemed to Chisholme an unlikely cure, it might have been possible that some unknown element had triggered a part of the man’s inner workings that brought him back to health.

Most significantly, though, Chisholme did not think of the man’s health or recovery in racial terms. According to his letter, Chisholme had no reason to believe the bricklayer’s condition had anything to do with his skin color or origin. He supposed the man’s recovery might have been induced by purging, a theory in line with the necessity of balancing the body’s humors.⁹⁶ But he wondered if his Scottish correspondent could enlighten him on the potentially “beneficial effects of lowered air,” a quality the Scottish physician had apparently studied.⁹⁷ Race, or fundamental bodily difference on any kind of collective level, played no part in Chisholme’s assessment of the case. Moreover, Chisholme’s theory as to the origins of the illness aligned with contemporary understandings – for both physicians and planters – of universal reasons for ill health. The bricklayer had over-exerted himself dancing in the night air, and had drunk too much. As other chapters have shown, these activities were the most commonly cited causes of all types of sickness for both blacks and whites in the Caribbean. The only aspect particular to the bricklayer, and the only unknown condition plausible enough to explain his peculiar circumstances, was his individual bodily constitution.

⁹⁶ Purging would rid the body of an excess of a particular humor, restoring internal balance.

⁹⁷ James Chisholme to Doctor Ewart, 16 February 1795, Chisholme Papers, MS 5464, f. 174, NLS.

In the late eighteenth century, planters' private correspondence overwhelmingly demonstrates an environmental conception of health and illness. Every person entering the West Indies from a different place needed to be seasoned to the climate, and the course of seasoning was unpredictable and individually determined. These letters did not contain claims that Africans seasoned more easily than did Europeans, or that they were somehow immune or better adapted to the unfamiliar environmental conditions. Instead, managers consistently wrote of the need for seasoning newly arrived enslaved laborers, claiming that the process required sustained care and attention. As John Stirling explained to his father, "tho' you have given me liberty to purchase negroes immediately their effect will not be felt for 3 years, as they are never reckoned properly seasoned until that time."⁹⁸ And as Simon Taylor warned a friend who wished to become a planter, "no great dependance can be laid on the labour of new Negroes for the first three years untill they are seasoned to the country."⁹⁹ Planters also recognized the advantages of seasoning people in a healthy location. George Ogilvie expressed to his sister his delight at the unexpected healthiness of his new plantation in South Carolina. It was a healthy place, he wrote, but before he had spent much time there he was "so much afraid of its being sickly at first that we sent all the New Negroes intended for this Place to be seasoned at my Uncles old Plantations." Pleasantly surprised at the healthy air, Ogilvie prepared to move the laborers to his own property, where he believed they would be just as healthy.¹⁰⁰ Seasoning people was a tricky and unpredictable process; better to try it in as healthy a place as possible, and to allow multiple years for the body's internal workings to properly adjust.

⁹⁸ John Stirling to William Stirling, 24 May 1791, Stirling Family Papers, T-SK 11/3, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

⁹⁹ Simon Taylor to David Reid, 10 March 1801, Simon Taylor Letterbook D, ICS.

¹⁰⁰ George Ogilvie to Margaret Ogilvie, 22 November 1774, Ogilvie Family Papers, MS 2740/10/5/2, University of Aberdeen.

Everyone believed, though, that creoles, both black and white, were best suited to the Caribbean climate. Describing Samuel Martin's plantation, for example, Janet Schaw noted that he had only creoles on his plantation; he told her that he "had not bought in a slave for upwards of twenty years." "These slaves," she wrote, "born on the spot and used to the Climate, are by far the most valuable, and seldom take these disorders, by which such numbers are lost that many hundreds are forced yearly to be brought into the Island."¹⁰¹ Schaw's statement attests both to the dangers of seasoning Africans in the West Indies (and the enormous numbers lost in the process) and to the fact that creoles had bodies particularly suited to the environment.

The makeup of the British West Indian army also reflected the belief that birthplace, rather than skin color, determined climatic suitability. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, when Schaw wrote, inhabitants of the Greater Caribbean islands found themselves repeatedly embroiled in international war. Britain had enemies both in Europe and in North America, and the British government feared that other European enemies would try to take the lucrative West Indies as a prime possession. Because of these external conflicts, as well as internal ones such as maroon wars, for much of this period the colonies gathered standing militias comprised of soldiers both from the islands and from Britain. Many West Indians petitioned for a creole army, claiming that native soldiers – black, white, and brown – would be best suited to the West Indian climate. Notably, they did not claim that Africans (or even their descendants) would be fit for the environment by virtue of their skin color; instead they argued that because of their place of birth, natives of any color and parentage would be the most suited to the local conditions.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, 104.

¹⁰² Several petitions argued that "raising a battalion of free mulattoes" in Jamaica would benefit the colony because "being natives" the men would be "used to the climate." See, for example, "The Memorial of William Henry Ricketts et al," [1779], to Governor John Dalling, CO 137/77 f. 78, TNA. Dalling agreed with the petitioners, and sent letters to that effect to his superiors in London. See John Dalling to Lord George Germain, 3 June 1780; 2 July 1780; 14 April 1780; CO 137/78, f. 1, 168, 16.

Reporting every example from the thousands of planters' letters that survive in archives would take up far too much space and add little to the overall picture. Caribbean planters did not always agree on much – their opinions varied as to how and when to plant and harvest particular crops, whether to purchase seasoned or saltwater slaves, how many new laborers to add to a plantation at a time, as well as the origin of these laborers – in short, the workings of a plantation differed according to the experience, attitudes, and whims of a particular planter. But their letters demonstrate universal agreement on the need for seasoning newly arrived Africans to the significantly different West Indian climate. No one would arrive with a body prepared for the local environment, and whether or not a person – European or African – would adjust appropriately was a matter of chance.

By the end of the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth, ideas about seasoning had not changed much from Beville Granville's time. When William Hind arrived in Jamaica in 1792, he informed his sisters Mary and Eliza Hind that he had fallen ill with a fever, but that "it is what they call a seasoning in this Island."¹⁰³ A decade after that, Mary Hind received another letter from Jamaica, this one from her brother-in-law. He had moved to the island in late February with his family and, he assured his sister-in-law, they would all be "sufficiently inured to the climate before the fall of the year."¹⁰⁴ Planters remained conscious, too, of the dangers of re-seasoning after the body's initial adjustment. Writing to his father about a friend's plantation, Charles Gordon Gray recounted, "His Negroes which were taken from hence have, I hear,

¹⁰³ William Hind to Eliza and Mary Hind, 1 February 1792, Powel Family Papers, collection 1582, Series 12, Box 59, folder 1, HSP.

¹⁰⁴ John Taylor to Mary Hind, 9 March 1802, Powel Family Papers, collection 1582, Series 12, Box 59, folder 1, HSP.

suffer'd much by their removal, they appear to me not the same looking People.”¹⁰⁵ The process of seasoning altered people, both Africans and Europeans, neither of whom naturally suited the West Indian climate.

What had changed, though, was that in the last decades of the eighteenth century, planters made public, unwavering assertions that only African bodies could labor in hot climates. These planters claimed on the record that African labor was necessary to the cultivation of the West Indies because the climate of the Caribbean naturally suited Africans’ – and not Europeans’ – bodily constitutions. Planters appeared to stand united on this issue. The Council of Barbados, for example, wrote that Europeans lacked “constitutions adequate to support the heat.” The Governor of St. Vincent agreed, claiming that Europeans “would be absolutely unable to bear that intense degree of heat to which they must be exposed” if they were expected to labor in the West Indies.¹⁰⁶ As one planter put it, “The European might be stronger at first and do more work, but he would die sooner. The constitution of a Negro is fitter for a hot climate.”¹⁰⁷ And as the Jamaica Council explained, “the same exposure to the sun which cheers the African, is mortal to the European.” The Council later elaborated, claiming that “the climate of Guiney” was “analogous” to that of the West Indies.¹⁰⁸

Yet alongside this testimony, Edward Long, Stephen Fuller, and other members of the Jamaica Council also acknowledged that “New Negroes,” or those just arrived from Africa were “necessarily” of “inferior value” because upon leaving the shores of Africa and arriving in the

¹⁰⁵ Charles Gordon Gray to father, 11 June 1812, MS 163, f. 23, NLJ.

¹⁰⁶ Testimonies of Council of Barbados, Governor of St. Vincent, BT 6/11, TNA.

¹⁰⁷ Testimony of John Braithwaite Esq., 11 March 1788, BT 6/9, TNA.

¹⁰⁸ Report of Jamaica Council, 1 April 1788, BT 6/10, TNA.

West Indies, “they enter into a new climate.”¹⁰⁹ Others agreed: the captain of a slave ship, for instance, attributed the high rates of illness on the part of both British sailors and African captives to the “change of climate” they experienced in sailing from Africa to the Caribbean.¹¹⁰ Several physicians corroborated the captain’s testimony independently: it was, in fact, no secret that the climates of various parts of Africa and those of the West Indies differed not only from each other, but also varied widely on a local level. But this portion of the testimony remained hidden in the postscripts and the afterthoughts. What appeared to come through with absolute certainty was the idea, entertained by Europeans and perpetuated by planters, that all African bodies “naturally” suited the West Indian climate.

If we look back at the evidence – at the private correspondence between absentee planters and their managers, and between planters and families – it is clear that West Indian residents did not actually believe this claim. But making this assertion served them well financially, as planters believed their economic futures hung on Parliament’s decision during the abolition debates. Crucially, it also assuaged any suspicions that Africans and Europeans might have bodies approaching one another in kind once they had both become seasoned to the same environment. In part, a late eighteenth-century insistence on innate and permanent biological racial difference served to quell any such speculation. But neither of these claims – about permanent, fixed, racialized bodies, or about the natural suitability of African bodies for the West Indian environment – reflected the reality that planters lived and observed in the islands. An African body might come to suit the West Indian climate through the seasoning process, or it might not, depending on that person’s constitution and the particular location in which he or she lived. The same could be said for a European. The concept of seasoning was complex and

¹⁰⁹ Report of Jamaica Council, 1 April 1788, BT 6/10, TNA.

¹¹⁰ Testimony of Captain Hall, 22 February 1788, BT 6/9, TNA.

contingent, dependent on a person's body, a location's environmental conditions, and luck. But once people's bodies had altered to suit a particular environment, the alteration was both visible and unchangeable without a re-seasoning. Bodies seasoned to the West Indian islands suited those islands better than any other bodies, anywhere in the world. As the next chapter shows, the testimony of planters during the abolition debates had severe consequences for decades to follow, but they had little basis in experience from the past.

Chapter Five A Climatic Debate

In the midst of a gray London winter, a group of British politicians convened to discuss the future of people living far from the cold, damp stone Houses of Parliament along the Thames. Should these people, the men considered, continue to be captured in Africa, packed into ships' holds below deck, transported across the Atlantic, and sold in Caribbean colonies as slaves? It turned out to be a difficult question to answer. The politicians, members of the Committee for Trade and Plantations of the Privy Council, only partially recognized that they were discussing the fate of Africans. Although abolitionists decried the abysmal conditions both aboard slave ships and on West Indian plantations, participants in the hearings on the state of the African slave trade saw the question at hand as hinging not only on African lives, but on the fortunes of planters and, thanks to the efforts of anti-abolitionists, on the future of the British economy.

In February 1788, when the Privy Council began to conduct the inquiry, both supporters and opponents of abolition had substantial contingents advocating their causes. Abolitionists drew upon an expanding network of contacts across Britain, while various West India interest groups, particularly in London, Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow, coalesced as merchants and absentee planters increasingly joined forces.¹ Both sides published scores of pamphlets to publicize their agendas, abolitionists portraying the slave trade and slavery itself as abhorrent and anti-humanitarian, and the merchant-planter coalitions defending and refuting abolitionists' claims.² Although the hearings ostensibly considered only the continuance of the slave trade,

¹ For a detailed study of the various West India Committees, Societies, and Associations, which together may be considered the "West India interest," see Alexandra Franklin, "Enterprise and Advantage: The West India Interest in Britain, 1774-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992).

² On the extensive pamphlet war between the two sides, see Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

and not slavery itself, the evidence both sides mustered to promote their interests exposed an underlying conviction that the institution of slavery was under scrutiny and in danger.³

The Privy Council's investigation proved remarkably thorough. In spite of the initial deadline of May, when the House of Commons resumed its session, the Council continued its investigation for over a year, soliciting evidence from planters, governors, and governing boards of every Atlantic colony under British rule. Ship captains, sailors, and surgeons familiar with the Middle Passage also gave testimony, as did merchants, slaveholders, and physicians in the West Indies. Some of these witnesses provided oral statements to the Council, while others mailed responses to lengthy questionnaires from the colonies. The colonial respondents reported on enslaved peoples' home lives, religion, diet, and medical care, suggesting a variety of reasons for their apparent lack of fecundity and variable health on plantations. This combined written and oral testimony served as the evidence upon which the Council would base its recommendation for the future of the slave trade in the British Empire.

Although some of their answers differed from one another's, the planters, physicians, and governors who answered the Council's inquiries appeared unified and unwavering on one particular issue. As members of the Council considered that ending the slave trade might necessitate alternative forms of labor in the colonies, they asked about the possibility of European labor on plantations. The responses were unequivocal. Planters pronounced such a proposition "impossible" because Europeans could never "subsist in such a climate."⁴ As the Council and Assembly of Grenada put it, "Few white persons not even creoles can bear

³ Franklin, "Enterprise and Advantage," 127; also see David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 158.

⁴ See, for example, testimony of Dr. Adair, 16 May 1788, in which "he does not hesitate to declare it to be his firm belief that European constitutions could not subsist in such a climate under the labour necessary for cultivating a West India plantation." BT 6/10, f. 435, TNA.

exposition to the intense sun of this climate, for a few hours with impunity; It would be impossible for them to bear it, for the many hours which those must unavoidably do who undertake to cultivate the soil.”⁵ The Jamaica representatives explained that “The nature and constitution of an European are not well adapted to retain even life; much less, to support field labour,” in the West Indian climate.⁶ And the Council of Barbados insisted that “There has been no single instance of an European dedicating himself to any thing like hard labour, or exposing himself to the sun, who has been able to support the heat of this climate; nor do we think it possible.”⁷ On the question of European labor in the Caribbean, the colonial representatives were united.

The Committee’s investigation proved to be only the beginning of a decades-long debate over labor in the British sugar islands. Historical scholarship that analyzes the causes behind abolition points to political, economic, and/or social reasons instigating this debate.⁸ In much of this scholarship, the question of climate figures only marginally, if at all; climate was not a driving force for abolition, and scholars tend to focus on the causes of abolitionism rather than on the arguments of the slaveholders. Moreover, historian Eric Williams’s seminal work on

⁵ Testimony of Council and Assembly of Grenada, 30 May 1788, read by the Privy Council 23 September 1788, BT 6/11, TNA.

⁶ “The report drawn up by Stephen Fuller Esquire, with the Assistance of Messrs Long and Chisholme in Answer to the several heads of enquiry transmitted by their Lordships order to Mr Fuller – delivered in the 1st April 1788” (hereafter Jamaica Report), BT 6/10, f. 54, TNA.

⁷ Testimony of Council of Barbados, read by the Privy Council 23 September 1788, BT 6/11, TNA.

⁸ On the political context of abolition, see Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). On economic arguments regarding the prudence of abolition to the British economy, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*. For arguments regarding British fears of strengthening slave rebellions in the colonies and their contributions to abolition, see Michael Craton, ed., *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997); Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Claudius K. Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation: Slavery and Abolitionism in the British West Indies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

abolition dismissed planters' climatic arguments as essentially absurd because they were blatantly false.⁹

But the rhetoric of climate had lasting implications beyond the abolition debates. Although the question of European labor in hot climates began as one small element of the debates, it developed into a substantial point of contention between slavery's advocates and abolitionists. It also exposed a central contradiction of slaveholders' arguments. Planters argued, on the one hand, that Africans naturally suited the West Indian climate while Europeans did not; that sugar cultivation was "light" compared with much of the work that the "laboring poor" performed in Europe; and that Europeans had never labored in the West Indies. At the same time, they attributed the high death rates of newly arrived African captives to the seasoning process and bodily adjustment to the unfamiliar climate; they claimed that Europeans might be able to work as artisans but that they could never handle the arduous labor of sugar cultivation; and they insisted that if Europeans had ever actually physically labored in the West Indian climate before, they had surely died from such rigor. And in spite of leaning heavily on the climate argument to deny the possibility of European labor in the islands, planters also insisted that free Africans and their descendants could not possibly cultivate plantations without coercion. In other words, sugar cultivation was such light labor that it required the use of force and the condition of enslavement; Africans naturally suited the West Indian climate but died as their bodies struggled to adapt to the environment; and Europeans had never labored in the West Indies but certainly perished from exertion if they ever had.

⁹ The existence of white indentured servants in the Caribbean, Williams wrote, "completely explodes the old myth that the whites could not stand the strain of manual labor in the climate of the New World and that, for this reason and this reason alone, the European powers had recourse to Africans. The argument is quite untenable." Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 20. Still, as Alexandra Franklin pointed out, the climatic argument (along with the benevolence of Britons rescuing Africans from Africa) became "the standard defense of slave and bonded labor in the Caribbean for the next century." See Franklin, "Enterprise and Advantage," 131.

As arguments over the slave trade exploded, abolitionists and defenders of slavery found themselves embroiled in a debate over who was fit to labor in the West Indian climate, and under which types of conditions. The uncertain history of labor in hot climates served as a touchstone in these arguments, as did the nature of labor, the environment, and the effects of both on the health of West Indian inhabitants. As the debates over slavery and abolition increased in intensity, advocates for both sides found themselves forced to articulate the precise nature of bodily difference and the ability of people to labor in specific ways in certain places. Meanwhile, prior uncertainties and varied opinions about the effects of hot climates on European bodies developed into a coherent ideology. Both absentee and resident planters, along with merchants and slave traders, many of whom had never shared ideas or principles before, and several of whom had in the past expressed various beliefs about the Caribbean climate, found common ground on the question of European labor on plantations, and presented a united front to the Privy Council.

Members of the Committee posed several questions about alternative forms of labor, as well as about enslaved people's health on plantations. In many of their publications, abolitionists drew attention to planters' inhumane treatment of enslaved laborers, and pointed out that planters had no incentive to care for laborers who could be easily replaced. Ending the slave trade, they argued, would force planters to improve living conditions for enslaved laborers already on plantations, and to rely upon reproduction, rather than replacement, as a way of procuring new laborers. At the same time, Council members pressed planters to consider labor alternatives such as machinery, or else free laborers, either African or European.

One of the first to provide testimony in the Council's hearings, absentee planter Charles Spooner declared that the cultivation of the West Indies by Europeans was "impracticable." The Council persisted. "Could not a white man, who lives very temperately," the inquisitors asked, working "only in the cooler hours of the day" labor in the West Indies? Spooner, who owned several Leeward Island plantations but who lived in Britain, asserted that such a person could not. "The climate would soon wear out his constitution," he explained. European labor in the islands, he added, "appears, in fact, to have been already tried. See Ligon's *History of Barbados*."¹⁰ Spooner did not elaborate or cite specifics, but some of his contemporaries also referred to Ligon's text as "proof" of their claims. Stephen Fuller, who compiled answers for the Jamaica Council, quoted the inventory of Ligon's plantation assets, including "96 Negroes" and "28 Christian white servants." Fuller also included in this list the land on Ligon's plantation. The cultivated portion of this land consisted of 200 acres of sugar cane, 70 acres of provision grounds, 30 planted with tobacco, and five each of ginger and cotton. "From the above account," Fuller wrote, "I am unavoidably led to conclude, that 200 acres in canes, could not be cultivated by 28 white servants." Furthermore, he added, since the English had only been in Barbados for less than a quarter of a century by that point, it seemed "perfectly clear" that "the island of Barbados was cultivated by Negro slaves, and not by white people, as have been asserted (I think) without foundation."¹¹

Fuller and Spooner in fact marshaled Ligon's book to make different arguments. Spooner, who claimed authority based on his Grenada and St. Christopher plantations despite living four thousand miles away, implied in his testimony that Ligon's experience was a test case

¹⁰ "The Examination of Charles Spooner, Esq., taken on the 1st of March, 1788," BT 6/9, f. 205, 208, TNA.

¹¹ Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 103-106, TNA. Although he had never visited the Caribbean, Stephen Fuller had family plantations in Jamaica and represented the island's interests as its agent in London.

with dismal results: Europeans had, in the seventeenth century, attempted to work in the West Indies, and failed. Fuller, on the other hand, offered a different interpretation. Admitting at the outset that he had never visited Jamaica and only represented it, Fuller hedged his testimony by acknowledging that his answers might be “imperfect, and in some instances possibly erroneous.” At the same time, he reminded the Council that the property and livelihoods of most Jamaican planters was at stake in the hearings, and urged them not to take “any decisive measures, affecting their property” on the basis of “these very imperfect answers.” Still, Fuller expressed strong doubts about whether Barbados, as “has been asserted with confidence,” could ever actually have been cultivated by Europeans. He assumed from reading Ligon’s inventory that the “Christian white servants” would have cultivated the tobacco, ginger, or cotton on the plantations, but not the sugar, leaving that to African slaves.¹²

Yet Fuller based his assumption upon an understanding of late-eighteenth-century labor hierarchies. By the time Fuller wrote, sugar was cultivated on large plantations entirely by Africans and their descendants, and sugar cane had taken over all of the low-lying land formerly allocated to other crops, ginger, tobacco, and cotton among them. Sugar required the hardest labor and turned the biggest profit for large plantations; most of the land that was not planted with sugar was too steep to support the canes so planters used it to grow coffee instead. Fuller assumed that the social stratification and labor divisions of the late eighteenth century held true for the mid-seventeenth. He also may have assumed that Europeans could perform some types of labor, such as cultivating lighter crops, but not others, such as growing sugar cane.

Edward Long, who contributed to the Jamaica report, wrote an addendum supporting Fuller’s contentions. Responding to murmurs that the English islands had indeed at one time been cultivated by servants from the British Isles, Long insisted, “we have no one evidence

¹² Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 1-2, TNA.

either historical, traditional, or inductive, to ascertain as a fact, that at any period of time, from the first discovery by Columbus, a single acre of ground, in that part of the world, has ever been labored and planted with the sugar cane by the hands of white men.” Pressing further, Long continued, “The notion therefore, that Barbadoes or any other West India island was first planted by white persons, without the aid of Negroes, or of Indians, is absolutely, and entirely unfounded.”¹³ Although Long conceded that he based his argument on conjecture, admitting that he could not be certain what would happen to a European who labored in the heat since he had no actual evidence, he nevertheless proclaimed that “an Englishman cannot labour in the field without imminent [*sic*] danger to his life.”¹⁴ Long, then, like Fuller, began by insisting that Europeans could not grow sugar, but then expanded that argument to encompass all types of labor. From one perspective, this leap was neither enormous nor outrageous, since sugar was the primary West Indian crop. But by making a comprehensive assertion in absolute terms – Europeans could not labor in the West Indies – planters opened the door to a variety of challenges to this blanket statement.

In fact, Ligon’s accounts did not prove that Europeans had not cultivated sugar, and nowhere in his text did he claim that Europeans definitively could not labor in the West Indies. Writing in response to Fuller’s and Spooner’s testimony, abolitionist witness William Dickson, the former secretary to the governor of Barbados, denied the accuracy of their claims. Insisting that he based his observations on personal experience, and touting the value of testimony written by someone “who has *resided* among the people he means to describe,” Dickson refuted Fuller’s assertions. “*That all the lands in Barbadoes originally were, and that part of them still are,*

¹³ “Additional information given in by Mr. Long relative to various matters, and tending to illustrate some of the answers in Mr. Fullers report dated the 28th of March 1788,” BT 6/10, f. 209, TNA.

¹⁴ Edward Long, additions to Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 202-204, TNA.

cultivated by WHITES,” he wrote, proved slavery’s defenders wrong. Barbados was “originally cleared and cultivated by [white] bond-servants,” Dickson raged, and many poor whites still cultivated, “*with their own hands*” plots of land on the island.¹⁵ In a subsequent argument, Dickson used Ligon’s text to fuel his exasperation, referring to parts of the text in which Ligon described Europeans cutting down woods and traveling or laboring ten hours a day. These white servants, he pointed out, were ““put to *very hard labour.*””¹⁶

Members of the Privy Council were no doubt befuddled by the contradictory testimony they heard. Having published his *History of Jamaica* over a decade earlier, Edward Long’s wealth, experience, and family connections gave him considerable standing as an authority on life in the West Indies and his testimony carried significant weight. He had also lived for a number of years in Jamaica so, unlike Fuller, he had personal experience in the islands. Yet Dickson drew upon his own experience to make reasonable arguments in direct opposition to those of the pro-slavery planters. The Council valued first-hand experience, but found it difficult to reconcile Long’s and Dickson’s contradictory testimony. Each side also had only limited historical evidence – Richard Ligon’s 1657 text – and both argued that this work justified their own accounts. The two interpretations of Ligon’s text, and the dual usage of his work as historical precedent revealed the scarcity of hard evidence the Privy Council had at its disposal. Ligon’s text was well over a century old, but both the abolitionists and the planter coalition drew upon it as the sole existing “proof” that Europeans either had, or had not, ever labored on West Indian plantations.

¹⁵ William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (London: J. Phillips, 1789), 60, 40-41 (emphasis in original). Even more startling, Dickson claimed that women also labored in the heat: “in Barbadoes many whites *of both sexes*, till the ground, without any assistance from negroes, and poor white women often walk many miles loaded with the produce of their little spots, which they exchange in the towns for such European goods as they can afford to purchase.” See Dickson, *Letters*, 41.

¹⁶ Dickson, *Mitigation of Slavery, in two parts* (London: R. & A. Taylor, 1814), 430 (emphasis in original).

History, then, provided insufficient evidence, since it invited multiple interpretations. The Council had more pressing questions in any case, and expressed deeper concerns about contemporary workers than the labor regime of the distant past. If planters seemed united in their vehement denial about the ability of Europeans to labor in the West Indies because their bodily constitutions could not stand the climate, then, the committee wanted to know, how did African bodies fare? In truth this was a tricky question, and planters recognized it as such. They insisted that Europeans would become ill, and possibly die, under the labor required for cultivating sugar in the Caribbean climate. Yet to claim that Africans flourished in the West Indies was a difficult stance to take, as many planters well knew. The proof was in the numbers: account books and plantation ledgers showed that enslaved Africans often fell ill on plantations, and almost no labor force was self-sustaining. That is, enslaved women consistently bore fewer children in any given year than the number of slaves who died. This net loss, which happened on nearly every plantation each year, meant that the system of slavery depended upon the African slave trade. It simply could not survive without a constant influx of new laborers. But if planters conceded this lack of fertility and their dependence upon fresh captives, they would have to provide a reason for the ill health of the current laborers. And that reason either had to be poor and severe treatment at the hands of slaveholders – something planters were keen to deny – or else unsuitability to the West Indian climate, an admission with the potential to undermine planters' larger claims about the necessity for African laborers in the first place.

Some planters did admit, without any trace of irony, that the environment contributed to illnesses upon plantations. Charles Spooner listed the climate of the West Indies as one cause of illness among enslaved laborers, and a physician acknowledged the dangers of enslaved workers

“laboring during nine hours exposed to the rays of the sun.”¹⁷ The Grenada Council believed that slaves exposed to the elements, especially through “their labour under an intense sun” and “from that labour being frequently carried on in moist swampy places” were particularly susceptible to dysenteries, and the Barbados Council wrote that enslaved people were “more liable to Diseases, from the abundance of Rain” in the autumn months than were free people, either white or black.¹⁸ The governor of St. Vincent explained that laborers in the West Indies “certainly are more subject to diseases from the vicissitudes of the weather in the rainy season than are labouring people in Europe,” and noted that “the creole Negroes or those seasoned to the climate” survived much longer than native Africans.¹⁹ Some planters did acknowledge, then, that atmospheric conditions were responsible for fevers, fluxes, and dysenteries, and that enslaved laborers suffered more than others because they had the highest level of exposure to the elements. Some also admitted that Africans suffered from the “change of climate” upon arrival in the West Indies.²⁰ But lest these admissions become grounds for condemning the institution of slavery, planters hastily offered additional causes for illness, focusing especially on behavior.

Enslaved people who fell ill, planters claimed, had only themselves to blame. According to the testimony, enslaved people brought about their own illnesses through “neglect in not

¹⁷ “The Examination of Charles Spooner, Esq., taken on the 1st of March 1788,” BT 6/9, f. 176; Testimony of Dr. Adair, 16 May 1788, BT 6/10, f. 432-435, TNA.

¹⁸ Testimony of Council & Assembly of Grenada; Testimony of Council of Barbados, BT 6/11, TNA.

¹⁹ Testimony of Governor of St. Vincent, BT 6/11, TNA. Another copy can be found in the Farquharson of Invercauld Papers, Box 115, “Answers,” with letter dated 17 June 1788, Invercauld Estate Archive, Braemar.

²⁰ See, for example, The Examination of Captain Hall, who testified on 22 February 1788 that both Africans and British seamen suffered from the “change of climate” in traveling from the River Calabar to Jamaica, BT 6/9, f. 71, 78, TNA. The physician Robert Thomas, who lived in the Leeward Islands for nine years, explained that in traveling from Africa to the West Indies “the change of climate produces very great effects on the constitution of the negroes,” and the Jamaica Council reported that Africans were “of inferior value” to creoles “because they enter into a new climate.” See The Examination of Mr. Robert Thomas in *Abridgement of the Minutes of the Evidence, taken before a Committee of the Whole House, to whom it was referred to consider of the slave-trade* (copy at the Library Company of Philadelphia), Number II, 88-91; Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 41, TNA.

covering their bodies,” from “negligent cookery,” “improper diet,” a “habit of rambling,” and, especially, “the imprudent use of spirituous liquors” or “excessive” dancing, drinking, and “acts of sensuality.” Spooner blamed enslaved people’s illnesses on “drinking new rum, intemperance and running out in the night,” and one physician attributed most illnesses to slaves’ poor provisions and to nighttime travels, which left them “exposed to the noxious night dews.” The Grenada Council also saw people’s attendance at “nocturnal assemblies” which exposed them to the night air as a culprit in causing disease, and the governor of Barbados claimed that enslaved people suffered from “the too free use of rum which they steal.”²¹

Even those witnesses who noted the harmful consequences of labor in such climatic conditions downplayed climate as a factor when compared to people’s behavior. Blaming behavior seemed the best way for planters to preserve their livelihoods while admitting illness among enslaved populations. Immoral or irresponsible behavior could, according to contemporary medical thought, cause ill health, and it was something that gave planters a moral high ground as they absolved themselves of responsibility for enslaved laborers’ health. As the Privy Council had to admit, nocturnal ramblings were beyond planters’ immediate control, and therefore they could not be blamed. Planters did not explain that enslaved people tended to visit one another during the night because that was the only time they had to see family members on other plantations, nor did they take responsibility for the lack of nourishment that people suffered, even though at other times they willingly took credit for providing food. Even the rum, which the Barbados governor blamed for illness among enslaved people, could be, according to him, stolen – an accusation that both exculpated planters and underscored the immoral behavior of the enslaved. No one mentioned that planters themselves sometimes handed out rum as an

²¹ Testimony of Council & Assembly of Grenada, BT 6/11; Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 20, 22; Examination of Charles Spooner, BT 6/9, f. 176; Testimony of Governor of Barbados, BT 6/11; Testimony of Governor of St. Vincent, BT 6/11; Examination of Dr. Adair, BT 6/10, f. 432-435, TNA.

incentive to keep laborers working long hours during the sugar harvest. Instead, by insisting that enslaved people voluntarily exposed themselves to night air and were “negligent” in their food provision and preparation, planters shifted the blame for enslaved laborers’ ill health onto the laborers themselves.

These explanations, although conceivable for adults, did not address the health of enslaved children. If planters blamed enslaved people’s illnesses on their behavior, then what about high mortality rates among infants and children? Did the children of enslaved people suffer from any particular disorders or diseases that did not affect free-born children of either Africans or Europeans? And what accounted for the low birth rates on plantations?²² The Jamaica Council responded that one-third of enslaved infants born on the island died of lockjaw, or tetanus, within nine days after birth. Of the remaining children, half died of worms or yaws before their fifth birthday. In contrast, children “of the white inhabitants” were “in general not liable precisely to the same distempers; such as the yaws, for example, and venereal and other hereditary taints, which unquestionably conduce so much to the mortality observed among the children of the slaves.”²³ The Governor of Barbados blamed high infant mortality rates on “great defects in the conduct of mothers,” and the Council of Grenada, which included Charles Spooner’s friend and manager Samuel Cary among its six members, answered that lockjaw, or the “jaw fall” disproportionately affected enslaved children because of the “pernicious custom” new mothers apparently had “of denying the breast to an infant for many hours” after birth – an

²² All of the questionnaires sent to colonial governors included these questions, as did many of the in-person examinations of witnesses. See, for example, the Examination of Charles Spooner Esq., 1 March 1788, BT 6/9, f. 182, 184, TNA.

²³ Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 21-26, TNA.

answer, like the others, that placed the blame for infant deaths squarely on the mothers.²⁴

Spooner himself referenced physician Benjamin Moseley's 1787 *Treatise on Tropical Diseases* as he speculated about causes for lockjaw, including specific page numbers in his testimony.²⁵

Moseley, like the planters, cited behavioral causes, writing that the malady could be "attributed either to the intemperance of the mother during pregnancy, or to the irritation of the navel after birth; or to the smoke of the lying-in room, or to the dampness of its situation; or to the carelessly letting in cold air upon the child."²⁶ Most of these answers kept the blame with enslaved people: if they were not making themselves ill, they were endangering their children, either through "hereditary taints" like venereal disease and yaws, or else through various behaviors, whether intentional or not, that caused tetanus in infants.

By emphasizing the negligence of enslaved people in causing illness, planters sought to exonerate themselves from any accusations of ill treatment. The Council of Barbados, for instance, wrote that although slave populations suffered a negative birthrate, the decrease "cannot be owing to hard labour or ill treatment." Instead, the Council suggested polygamy, "excess," "natural indolence," hurricanes, "carelessness of mothers," a lack of cleanliness, and sometimes "the injudicious situation of their Houses" (which could not be remedied) as causes of low fertility.²⁷ The Jamaica Council blamed yaws and venereal disease, along with "menstrual

²⁴ Testimony of Governor of Barbados; of Council & Assembly of Grenada, BT 6/11, TNA.

²⁵ Examination of Charles Spooner, BT 6/9, f. 185, TNA.

²⁶ Benjamin Moseley, *A Treatise on Tropical Diseases; and on the Climate of the West-Indies* (London: T. Cadell, 1787), 509. This is one of the two pages to which Spooner referred in his testimony. Also, although planter Simon Taylor built a "lying-in room" for pregnant women and new mothers upon his plantation, he thought Moseley was a worthless quack. In March 1790, two years after Spooner referenced Moseley in his Parliamentary testimony, Taylor wrote, "I cannot conceive of how the people in England have got the idea of Dr. Mosely, he was here a man in no manner of reputation in his profession, but a forward man, and fond of spouting [...and was responsible for] two or three thousand soldiers [whose lives] were lost. Mosely before was a common apothecary in Kingston." Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 31 March 1790, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1790/5, ICS.

²⁷ Testimony of Council of Barbados, BT 6/11, TNA.

obstructions,” “promiscuous venery,” worms, and a disproportionate number of males to females for low birth rates among enslaved populations. Yet after listing these “great impediments to natural increase,” the Council members insisted that, in fact, “many” enslaved children were born in Jamaica. With an air of resignation, they wrote, “if they could get over the locked jaw, small pox, measles, yaws and worm diseases, a greater proportion of Negro children would be reared in Jamaica, than is usual in Great Britain.” As if these contradictory statements were not enough, the Council continued by claiming that, “hereditary taints” aside, enslaved children were actually not more prone to diseases than were children of either European or free Afro-Caribbean populations.²⁸ Similarly, Charles Spooner, after testifying that lockjaw “carries off, I should suppose near one half of the children of all Negroes whether free or slaves” while “white children are in general free from it,” four weeks later amended his testimony. “In speaking of diseases peculiar to the children of Negro slaves,” he explained, “I have said that the disease called the jaw fall, is peculiar to black children, but I find it is also common to white children.”²⁹

Both the Jamaica Council’s and Spooner’s answers reflect the evasive and ambiguous stance planters took in response to the Privy Council’s questions. Again they found themselves in a dilemma: to answer that enslaved children suffered more than others from illness might

²⁸ Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 32-34, TNA. In soliciting material for these answers, one member of the Jamaica Council wrote to William Wright, a physician who practiced in Jamaica from 1761-1786. Wright’s confused answers may have contributed to the confusion in the official report. Wright, for example, answered the first question this way: “*The Negroe Slaves are subject to some diseases from which the White Inhabitants are exempted. The seeds of such diseases are brought with them from Africa, and entailed on their posterity viz. the Leprosy of the Greeks, the Leprosy of the Arabians, and Elephantiasis. The Yaws is an African complaint, but now common in Jamaica and many Negroes die under the best management in that disease. Negroes are not more subject to diseases than White People or free Negroes. Most of their disorders as Fevers, Fluxes and Pleuriseys are owing their going to distant parts to Negroe Plays in the night where they dance immoderately, drink to excess, sleep on the cold ground or commit many acts of sensuality and intemperance*” (Underlining in original; italics added). See William Wright to Chaloner Arcedeckne, “Answers to Queries, concerning Negroe Slaves in the Island of Jamaica,” 1 March 1788, Vanneck-Arc/3G/3 (ii), ICS. Wright’s other answers also correspond closely with those of the Jamaica Council’s as a whole.

²⁹ Examination of Charles Spooner, 1 March 1788, BT 6/9, f. 184-185, and Spooner’s additions to his testimony, 29 March 1788, BT 6/9, f. 528-529, TNA.

indicate poor treatment, malnutrition, or a lack of humanity on the part of slaveholders. But to deny any difference in rates of illness or disease among enslaved children would, on the one hand, stand in direct defiance to plantation ledgers, or, on the other, provoke an obvious question: why could not Euro-Caribbean children, born in the West Indian climate, be suited to labor there? Planters would not begin to entertain this last question. Their answers had to reflect a delicate balance between evoking the difficult conditions of labor in the West Indies and downplaying their own role in exacerbating these conditions.

Only the governor of St. Vincent offered answers that acknowledged both the climatic and the labor difficulties enslaved people endured in the islands. Africans suffered from stomach disorders, he wrote, more than Europeans did, a likely effect of their poor quality diet. Moreover, the governor reported that enslaved Africans fared worse than free people did because of slaves' inferior food and clothing. Children born into slavery did not survive as often as free children did because they lacked provisions that would enable them to thrive.³⁰ The governor of St. Vincent was an outlier in his responses because he admitted that the conditions of slavery were less than adequate to support life and health in the islands. The poor diet and scanty clothing with which enslaved people were provided contributed to their ill health on plantations.

The governor also admitted that the climate of the West Indies contributed to enslaved peoples' suffering. "The West Indian climate," he wrote, "is greatly injurious to the constitutions of all children," a factor which impeded the "natural increase" of slaves on the island. He also implicated the "constant labour" slaveholders demanded of enslaved women, along with the poor quality of their food, for the lack of population growth on plantations. As enslaved children who survived infancy grew, they continued to feel the effects of the climate.³¹

³⁰ Testimony of Governor of St. Vincent, BT 6/11, TNA.

Yet in spite of his acknowledgement of the effects of demanding labor, insufficient diet, and climate upon enslaved laborers' health, the governor still claimed that slaves who were "indolent and lazy" became ill in greater numbers than did their more "industrious" counterparts, who could cultivate their own grounds and thereby supplement the meager food rations provided by slaveholders. And his testimony echoed that of the other governors, planters, and council members throughout the West Indies as he insisted that European cultivation of the islands "would be impossible" because Europeans would be "absolutely unable" to stand the heat.³²

Still, the governor's apparent defection – admitting the brutal labor conditions enslaved plantation laborers faced – was enough to cause him concern over other planters' reactions. As the governor sent the Privy Council his answers in late spring of 1788, planter John Farquharson, who had helped to compile the answers, also mailed a copy to his cousin in Scotland. He did so with a caveat: the papers, Farquharson explained to his cousin, were not "of a secret nature"; indeed, they were "the reverse" as they were to go directly into the public record as part of the Privy Council's investigation. Yet "notwithstanding of this," Farquharson pleaded with his cousin not to share the answers with anyone aside from a few "confidential friends." If others should obtain a copy of the answers and interpret them as a condemnation of planters, Farquharson explained, "it would be rather awkward." Farquharson emphasized that although the answers suggested that improvements to the system of slavery could, and perhaps should, be made, the "many good regulations & restrictions" that "may be proposed for the benefit of the slaves" could be "adopted without any material prejudice to their owners."³³

³¹ He believed, for instance, that enslaved people suffered from prolonged exposure to wet weather, especially during the rainy season.

³² Testimony of Governor of St. Vincent, BT 6/11, TNA.

³³ John Farquharson to William Farquharson, 17 June 1788, Farquharson of Invercauld Papers, Box 115, Braemar.

Farquharson was careful to articulate his position. The brutal conditions of slavery could certainly stand to be improved, and the negligence of particular slaveholders remedied through regulations. But free labor was not an option: “That an entire Emancipation of the slaves will take place,” he wrote, “is an idea, that no person well acquainted with the circumstances of the West Indies can admit for a moment.” Should the idea be debated with any seriousness, Farquharson added, “it would be impossible to substitute the means of conducting the business of Estates here.”³⁴ The West Indies as sugar islands would be ruined.

It seemed that planters presented a strong case. Enslaved African laborers were necessary for the cultivation of the West Indies, in part because European laborers were not an option; they were simply not suited to the heat of the climate. But the reality was far more complex. In spite of their insistence that Africans would naturally suit a warm climate, most of the planters acknowledged the difference between Africans and creoles, recognizing that captives arriving from Africa would have to be seasoned to the different climate of the West Indies. They admitted that creoles of African descent lived longer and were healthier than African natives, a difference owing in large part to the change of climate and the subsequent seasoning African bodies underwent upon transplantation. If, as planters seemed to agree, people born in the West Indies had bodies best suited to the climate, then could European creoles labor on plantations? The proposition, though seemingly a legitimate one, was out of the question. As the Council of Grenada insisted, “not even creoles” of European descent would be able to stand prolonged exposure to the Caribbean sun should they be put to work in the fields. On the surface, this claim might appear to be one approaching biological racial difference. But planters’ answers reveal no such beliefs.

³⁴ John to William, 17 June 1788, Farquharson of Invercauld Papers.

The questionnaires had asked whether Africans, either adults or children, suffered from any diseases that did not also afflict Europeans. If planters had believed in biological differences between Africans and Europeans, one of the simplest arguments would have been for them to claim that the two groups suffered from different illnesses. If their bodies had fundamental differences, these disparities could be evident in variable health or sickness. All planters would have had to do would be to emphasize irreconcilable bodily differences by pointing to inherent susceptibilities to illness. But in their fervent attempts to protect the institution of slavery, many planters denied any instances of enslaved people suffering from any particular diseases.³⁵ Those who did admit that any such differences existed pointed to behavior, or occasionally insufficient nutrition, as causes. Eager to refute the reputation of slaveholders' ill treatment of their laborers, planters also denied that the children of enslaved people suffered from sickness in disproportionate numbers compared to free black populations.³⁶ But it would be a mistake to conclude that planters and other defenders of slavery missed an opportunity to rely on, or blame, biological differences between black and white bodies for any differences in rates or types of illness. Instead, the evidence is telling: planters simply did not have a notion that any such differences existed. Their answers reflect an attitude directed solely towards protecting their assets and increasing their own wealth.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that planters insisted upon slavery for economic reasons, and not because they believed in biological racial difference, can be found in their answers about the potential for free African labor. If Europeans could not work because they could not stand

³⁵ The Council of Barbados, for example, wrote that there were "no diseases to which slaves are subject, which Free Negroes or white inhabitants are not liable to" and the Governor of the island answered that slaves were "not peculiarly subject to any disease which does not also attack the white inhabitants." See testimonies, BT 6/11, TNA.

³⁶ Aside from those illnesses that colonial governors attributed to behavioral causes, the reports insisted that there was no difference in the health of enslaved and free children.

the climate, then, the Privy Council wanted to know, what if planters were to free slaves and pay them for their labor? Surely this plan would benefit everyone: planters could no longer complain about the high costs of new laborers, or of housing and feeding them, and workers would be more willing to labor if they received payment. Such a plan would prove impossible, planters insisted. The Council of Barbados claimed that free people of color lacked “the proper industry required to cultivate the lands,” while the governor responded that they were too “proud and indolent.”³⁷ The Jamaica Council wrote that they were “averse to labour,” and planter John Braithwaite doubted “whether without some compulsion they would be induced to work.” Elaborating, he explained, “in warm climates the disposition both of whites and blacks is more averse to labor than in colder countries.”³⁸ William Hutchinson of Antigua also pointed out the need for coercion. “Free Negroes,” he mused, “seem as little inclined to submit to labour, as white people.”³⁹ Absentee planter James Tobin “never knew a free negro do field labour” and Robert Hibbert agreed that although “a great number of free negroes and tradesmen” lived in Jamaica, he “never knew free negroes offer to do field labour.”⁴⁰ Sugar cultivation was such difficult labor that it required the use of force.

Field labor, especially cane holing and harvesting, also had a significant class component. “As to free Negroes,” the Council of Grenada explained, “not a single instance ever occurred of a free Negro [doing field work]. The very becoming free, is considered as an exemption from every labour of that nature, and a free coloured person would think himself disgraced by it.”⁴¹

³⁷ Testimony of Council of Barbados and of Governor of Barbados, BT 6/11, TNA.

³⁸ Jamaica Report, BT 6/10, f. 53; the Examination of John Braithwaite Esq., continued, 15 March 1788, BT 6/9, f. 402, TNA.

³⁹ Testimony of William Hutchinson, BT 6/10, f. 503, TNA.

⁴⁰ Testimony of R. Hibbert, Esq., and of James Tobin, Esq., in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 134, 92.

As William Beckford argued, “To suppose that the land in Jamaica, or any portion of it, can be worked by the free negroes, or the people of colour, is absurd in the extreme.” Enslaved people who became free, he wrote, would refuse to perform field labor, while “the colour of the mulatto, his birth, and education, naturally exclude him from the possible severity of toil.”⁴² Europeans would be no better: as Alexander Willock of Antigua complained, “The lower whites are so drunken, there is no dependence on them.”⁴³ Physician Samuel Athill clarified the social effects of a system dependent on slavery. “White domestics have so many negroes about them,” he told the House, “that they soon become gentlemen;” so much so that “they are generally deemed useless.”⁴⁴ Athill’s grievance attested to the tendency of European servants to perceive and join a racial hierarchy, refusing to do the same work that slaves did. Henry Ellis, onetime governor of South Carolina, wrote to the Privy Council expressing his horror at the suggestion that Europeans work alongside Africans as field laborers on plantations. “To imagine that white people are to be found,” he informed the Council, “willing to degrade themselves so far as to work in the field with Negroes, is being very ignorant of men and things.”⁴⁵ As another witness put it, it was “morally impossible for Europeans to do the necessary field labour.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Testimony of Council & Assembly of Grenada, BT 6/11, TNA.

⁴² William Beckford Esq., *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica: with remarks upon the Cultivation of the Sugar-Cane, throughout the different Seasons of the Year, and chiefly considered in a Picturesque Point of View; also Observations and Reflections upon what would probably be the Consequences of an Abolition of the Slave-trade, and of the Emancipation of the Slaves* (London: T. & J. Egerton, 1790), vol. II, 322.

⁴³ Testimony of Alexander Willock, Esq. in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 130-131.

⁴⁴ Testimony of Doctor Samuel Athill in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 127.

⁴⁵ Henry Ellis to Lord Hawkesbury, 27 March 1788, BT 6/10, f. 218, TNA.

⁴⁶ Testimony of Thomas Norbury Kerby in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 114. Kerby later worked as a plantation manager for Clement Tudway in Antigua, and in 1805 wrote to Tudway about allowing a “mulatto man named Mick” to purchase his own freedom. Kerby was passing along the request from someone else, and did not know the man, but wrote, “I presume the man in question is merely a house servant & under this situation he may be parted with, under less detrimental circumstances than if he was a tradesman or field negro.” The man would have

These comments hit upon one of the central reasons planters insisted upon the need for enslaved African laborers on West Indian plantations. By the late eighteenth century, plantation labor, and sugar cultivation especially, had become so associated with African slavery that no person would agree willingly to undertake such work. Enslavement was a necessary prerequisite for compelling people to labor, and distinctions of class and skin color were bound up with those of a labor hierarchy. The issue at heart, then, was not so much that European bodies would not be able to physically withstand any sort of labor in the heat because, in fact, some of them had done so for centuries.⁴⁷ The concern was rather that neither Europeans nor free people of color would stoop to labor that was so closely tied to slavery as well as to blackness.

Some planters also openly admitted the economic benefits of slavery for slaveholders. Robert Hibbert, for example, explained that free labor by Europeans, Africans, or creoles would not be economically viable. “A sugar estate, at the present prices,” he testified, “could not afford proper food and accommodation for the necessary number” of laborers. William Hutchinson argued that if planters had to pay laborers even as little as one shilling a day, an amount so small, he wrote, that “it cannot be conceived” that either “an European or free Negro [...] would work for,” they would give up on their plantations as unprofitable and the source of inevitable financial ruin.⁴⁸ Alexander Campbell, who owned plantations in Grenada, explained that “very

been exempt from field labor because of his skin color. Thomas Norbury Kerby to Clement Tudway, Esq., 11 September 1805, Tudway Family Archive, Box 11, bundle 7, Somerset Heritage Centre.

⁴⁷ According to some witnesses, such as William Dickson, poor whites in Barbados had cultivated land since the seventeenth century. For more on the poor whites of Barbados, sometimes known as ‘redlegs,’ see David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 100-102. Hilary Beckles writes that Barbadian planters “knew that in the formative years of sugar cultivation, 1644-50, white servants working in field gangs were the backbone of the industry. Indeed, on some sugar estates, gangs of poor-whites were still to be found in the cane fields during the second half of the eighteenth century.” Indeed, Beckles argues that planters had “no ideological problem” with the substitution of white laborers for African slaves during the abolition debates, though from the sources I have found, it seems that these planters were not actually keen to make these opinions known to Parliament. See Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian settlement to nation-state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 48.

few whites are employed on the estates, as formerly at Antigua, the wages and expences of a white man, being double that of a black.”⁴⁹ And Admiral Shuldham testified that the cultivation of the West Indies by Europeans “must be attended with immense expence.”⁵⁰

But if planters admitted that saving money was their central concern in maintaining slavery, they had much less of a chance of winning over the House of Commons. Fabulously wealthy planters complaining about the high costs of hiring laborers, and insisting that they own workers instead, might not make a strong case. So to protect themselves and their assets, defenders of slavery always reverted back to the climate. In climatic arguments, defenders of slavery had the upper hand: unlike members of the Privy Council and even most supporters of abolition, who had never traveled to the West Indies, planters could claim greater experience and knowledge of the Caribbean climate. As with colonial governors in the late seventeenth century and the Malcontents in Georgia, planters understood the power of climatic ideology in Britain, and used it to their advantage in the abolition debates.

Simultaneously downplaying the rigors of plantation labor while refusing to consider the possibility of European laborers, planters made increasingly outrageous arguments. In his testimony before the House of Commons, Alexander Campbell claimed that although “the cutting of canes is not very hard, tying them easy,” it would be “impossible for Europeans to

⁴⁸ Testimony of William Hutchinson, BT 6/10, f. 486, TNA.

⁴⁹ Testimony of Alexander Campbell Esq., in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 72.

⁵⁰ Testimony of Lord Admiral Shuldham in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 157. Other sources also note the expense of European laborers throughout the eighteenth century. John Frederick Pinney, for example, wrote to the attorney on his Nevis estate in 1755 complaining about the high cost of paying a “white cooper” for a job. “For God’s sake, Sir,” he wrote, “buy me a negroe cooper or two,” or “put out two or three young Negroe Boys prentice to that trade immediately.” Otherwise, he added, he would rather buy casks already made than pay the extravagant wages of a white cooper. See J.F. Pinney to James Browne, 27 October 1755, John Frederick Pinney Letterbook, vol. 1, Pinney Family Papers, University of Bristol Library. And in the 1760s, promotional material encouraging Britons to settle in Florida noted “the excessive price of labour in the West-Indies.” “In the islands, the wages of a carpenter, mason, &c. run up as high as ten shillings a day;” the author wrote, explaining that in Florida settlers would face no such prices for laborers. See William Stork, *An Account of East-Florida. With Remarks on its future Importance to Trade and Commerce*, (London: G. Woodfall, [1766]), 61-62.

stand W. India field-work of any kind.” Samuel Athill believed that cane cutting was “done with such alacrity and good spirits that it seems trifling,” and that it was, in fact, “so easy, that often more than one cane is brought down by a stroke of the bill.” Yet “from the excessive heat” he thought Europeans would be “incapable of field labour in the W. Indies.” Planter Gilbert Francklyn also claimed that “the labour of a negro” was “slight compared with any field labour in Europe,” but that the Caribbean climate made European labor impossible.⁵¹

Advocates of slavery argued that Europeans would never undertake field labor, in part because their bodies would not be able to withstand the climate, and in part because they would not degrade themselves to such an extent. But this left a large and murky zone of other types of manual labor in the West Indies up for debate. What could Europeans actually do in hot climates? Some witnesses claimed that many of them worked as carpenters, blacksmiths, joiners, copper-smiths, masons, or sawyers, although the degree to which these tradesmen actually labored varied according to the politics of the witnesses.⁵² The abolitionist Reverend James Ramsay, for example, argued that “white handicraft men” in the West Indies “have all more laborious employments than ordinary plantation work,” including the work required for sugar cultivation.⁵³ Lieutenant Baker Davison informed the House that it was “well known, that the [European] ship-wrights and other tradesmen, in the king’s-yard, Port-Royal, often work all day long,” and did not seem to suffer particularly from this labor. “White artificers certainly do

⁵¹ Testimony of Alexander Campbell, 57; Dr. Samuel Athill, 123; and of Mr. Gilbert Francklyn, 29-32, all in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II.

⁵² James Ramsay, for example, testified that white men worked in the West Indies as blacksmiths, masons, carpenters, and sawyers. See BT 6/10, f. 622, TNA. Similarly, the Reverend Robert Boucher Nicholls testified that “Many whites in Barbadoes exercise handicraft trades; such as carpenters, joiners, masons, copper-smiths, blacksmiths, shoemakers, &c. and also some of the poorer whites spin cotton for the lamps in the boiling houses. Whites are also employed in the coasting vessels, and as fishermen.” See Testimony of Nicholls in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number III, 135. Other witnesses who sided with planters argued that Europeans only oversaw the work of Africans and did not physically exert themselves too much.

⁵³ Testimony of James Ramsay, BT 6/10, f. 621-622, TNA.

work at their trades, in the West Indies, without materially hurting their health,” he argued.⁵⁴ Planters told a different story. Alexander Campbell testified, “White tradesmen there seldom work, in, or out of doors. They direct negro tradesmen how to lay out the work, and do light, nice jobs.”⁵⁵ Another witness claimed that “Europeans may do carpenter’s or other work, under cover.” “Whites, in the W. Indies,” he explained, “work as plumbers, masons, &c. and many negroes work under their direction.”⁵⁶

Accounts about the use of the plow differed the most wildly. Some planters insisted that it could never be used at all, either on particular islands or in the West Indies in general because the soil was too rocky and the land too steep. Others argued that they had seen it used in Jamaica, but that it could not be relied upon to do all the work of soil preparation and cane cultivation. Many planters did, in fact, use a plow, but feared that if they admitted that fact, members of the House might see it as a replacement for human laborers. Samuel Athill testified that when European “Plough-men and boys were brought out to estates where the plough was tried,” they “could not stand the labor.”⁵⁷ Athill claimed that he “Never knew a black ploughman in Antigua,” though another witness stated that in Jamaica the plough was “often worked by negroes.” Elaborating, he explained, “When a plough is first used, a white man is mostly employed,” but then trained slaves to do the work. Still, economics played a role in this transition since “White ploughmen and tradesmen have very high wages.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Testimony of Lieutenant Baker Davison, in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number IV, 87.

⁵⁵ Testimony of Alexander Campbell in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 64.

⁵⁶ Testimony of Sir Ashton Warner Byam in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 49, 54.

⁵⁷ Testimony of James Baillie, Esq., and of Dr. Samuel Athill in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 79, 122.

⁵⁸ Testimony of Samuel Athill and of R. Hibbert in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 127, 134, 137.

Personal correspondence from planters confirms some, but not all, of this testimony. Edward East, for example, who managed Anna Eliza Elletson's plantations in Jamaica, wrote in the spring of 1776 asking her to "send out a plowman" from Britain "as soon as possible." "It will be best," he wrote, "to get a man that has been used to work horned cattle."⁵⁹ Three years later, though, he informed her that she need not send out another plowman as the plantation slaves carried on the work themselves. Maintaining a British plowman, he wrote, would "not be worth the expence" as the slaves had mastered the technique.⁶⁰ In 1789, when the Privy Council's questions about the use of plows on Jamaican estates reached Simon Taylor, he hurried to ensure that nothing would threaten his continued use of slaves. "You say a question has been asked about working by Europeans, and how it is managed by Ploughmen," he wrote to Chaloner Arcedeckne in London. "I know of no white ploughing man working by themselves." Although he admitted that "they may indeed for the first day when they go on an Estate hold the plough for half an hour or so, to show the Negroes how to hold it upright," Taylor insisted, "I never saw a plough going in my life held by a white man an hour, neither did I ever know a ploughman keep his health, but have known two or three go mad, having been struck with coup de soleil in the field from having held it for some little time, and it putting their blood in a ferment."⁶¹

Taylor was enraged at the abolition debates, and adamant that members of the House who considered even for a moment the possibility of European labor be entirely silenced. Adding to his earlier answers, Taylor wanted to be certain that he had made his point: "it would be as certain Death," he wrote to Arcedeckne, "to work white people in the field to digg cane holes,

⁵⁹ Edward East to Anna Eliza Elletson, 16 May 1776, Roger Hope-Elletson Letterbook, MS 29a, f. 23, NLJ.

⁶⁰ Edward East to Anna Eliza Elletson, 16 June 1779, Roger Hope-Elletson Letterbook, MS 29a, f. 46, NLJ.

⁶¹ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 5 July 1789, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1789/20, ICS.

and cutt canes, as to turn them off the ladder at Tyburn with a band about their necks with a ship knott and to hang an hour.” He could hardly have been more forceful. “At this present time,” he concluded, “I know but of three Estates that use the plough constantly and the work is done by Negroes.”⁶²

Yet in other letters – those intended solely for his absentee employer, and not for Parliamentary reports – Taylor gave a more measured account of plowing. A few months after his earlier insistence, Taylor wrote again to Arcedeckne to inform him that the British plowman employed on Arcedeckne’s estate had left. Explaining the process of plowing, Taylor wrote that plowmen generally started “as early in the morning as possible” and worked until nine, at which point they stopped, and then started again at three in the afternoon and worked until dusk. “This partly accounts how ploughmen live,” he wrote, “for by this you see they are not out in the sun in the middle of the day.”⁶³ Taylor still believed that British plowmen tended to be unhealthy in the West Indies, but this later letter – which was private, and not part of the public record – at least acknowledged that they could work.

The discrepancy between Taylor’s private correspondence, in which he not only admitted that British plowmen existed, but even explained how they worked, and his statements to the House of Commons exemplifies the extent to which planters tried to protect their own economic interests. Five years after his statements to Parliament, Taylor again wrote to Arcedeckne asking him to send laborers from Britain to Jamaica. “It will be necessary for you to send out a good plough man if you can get one, that has been used to plough with cattle,” he wrote. But Arcedeckne should search for prospects carefully. “The people we want,” Taylor explained, “are

⁶² Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 5 July 1789, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1789/20, ICS. Tyburn was the name of the site for public executions of British prisoners.

⁶³ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 14 November 1789, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1789/27, ICS.

those that have been bred up hardily in the country, on poor meagre fare, been used to work hard, and get up early, therefore we prefer Scotch young lads to any others.”⁶⁴ Given Taylor’s earlier statements, in which he claimed that British plowmen worked “half an hour or so,” it would seem an absurd investment to find and send a Scottish laborer to the West Indies to work for a mere half hour.

Other planters expressed similar preferences in their demands for laborers. In 1795, for example, Joseph Foster Barham’s manager requested a cooper and a carpenter, along with bookkeepers, for Barham’s Jamaica estates. “If they can be procured from Wales, or from the Country part of Scotland, they are to be preferred,” he wrote.⁶⁵ In fact, much of the correspondence from the eighteenth century demonstrates planters’ desires for Scottish laborers or those who would be inured to difficult labor. In this case, the climate seemed less of an issue than did the ability to work under harsh conditions. Planters and managers assumed that people used to one kind of grueling outdoor labor would be able to adapt to plantation life.

Letters from other plantation managers earlier in the century also expressed concerns about the high costs of hiring European laborers. Rowland Ash, for example, wrote to Charles Tudway asking him to send “a sober good workman” or “a good country workman” to be a smith on Tudway’s estate in Antigua, but warned him not to pay anything approaching the wages of the wheelwright who, in Ash’s opinion, demanded far too much money. Over a decade later a different manager wrote to Charles’s son Clement, who had inherited the estate, explaining the high turnover rate of servants on the plantation. “Some of them leave the plantations to get

⁶⁴ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 10 October 1794, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1794/19, ICS. Taylor explained that he did not want anyone from London because such men “have been used to too much good eating and drinking there, and love to talk and jaw away better than to work.” Others agreed about Londoners’ poor habits; in 1755, for example, Samuel Hewat wrote from Jamaica to his employer in London requesting a carpenter, a “sober industrious man” to work on the plantation, warning him that “Londoners generally turn out bad servants.” See Samuel Hewat to Gibson Dalzell, 27 March 1755, Duff Family Papers, MS 3175/Z/183/1, University of Aberdeen.

⁶⁵ John Graham to Joseph Foster Barham Jr., 11 August 1795, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 2, Bod.

better wages elsewhere,” the manager reported, “the people in the new islands give such large salaries, that a great many of the best servants have quitted this island, & it is now very difficult to get proper people for the estates.” The manager urged Tudway to send out “boys from England,” for he believed that it would “very soon be impossible to get white people enough to do the common business of the plantations.”⁶⁶ In their private correspondence, then, planters and managers wrote of a different scenario than the one they presented to the Privy Council. Despite their public claims that Europeans could never labor in a tropical climate, letters demonstrate planters’ beliefs that Britons used to hard work – such as Scots – could labor on plantations. Planters’ concerns lay instead with the high costs of hiring workers, and with the greater economic benefits of purchasing them and owning their labor and their bodies.

Some abolitionists who testified before Parliament presented withering criticism of slaveholders’ arguments in an attempt to showcase the absurdity of their claims. In June of 1788, Parliamentary member Henry Beaufoy spoke before the House of Commons in opposition to recent planters’ testimony. Appealing to the humanity of his listeners, Beaufoy deliberately used Britons’ assumptions about the dangerously hot West Indian climate in his speech. “Some of us imagined,” he explained of the condition of slave ships, “that when to the burning atmosphere of the torrid zone, is added the suffocating heat of numbers crowded into a narrow space, the suffering must be dreadful.” Instead, he added, his tone dripping with sarcasm, “we were mistaken [...] the witnesses say that the additional warmth is the very thing which the Africans desire.” Pointing out the ridiculousness of the slaveholders’ testimony, Beaufoy added, “One would think from the evidence at the bar, and from the arguments of the counsel upon it,

⁶⁶ Rowland Ash to Charles Tudway, 22 July 1761; Main Swete Walrond to Clement Tudway, 23 April 1773, Tudway Family Archive, DD\TD Box 15/6, Somerset Heritage Centre.

that the solid pestilence, the thick contagion, the substantial rottenness of an African ship is congenial to the constitution, and exhilarating to the spirits of a negro.” Beaufoy continued, drawing attention to the inconsistent, irrational, and often ludicrous arguments that slaveholders put forth. Given slaveholders’ Parliamentary testimony regarding the benevolent treatment of the enslaved, Beaufoy mused, listeners might “almost be tempted to conclude [...] that the fetters on the hands of the Africans, and the irons on their feet, are intended to check the wild expressions of tumultuous and frantick joy, rather than to counteract the gloomy purposes of despair.”⁶⁷

Beaufoy published his speech at a London press with abolitionist leanings, ensuring that the abolition debates were not confined to the chambers of Parliament. In fact, writings on the issue stretched across the Atlantic to audiences in North America as presses in Britain and in the States spewed forth a string of publications on both sides of the debate. Sometimes these publications consisted of summaries or minutes of the debates themselves. At other times they contained impassioned arguments by either slaveholders or abolitionists, often in direct conversation with the ongoing testimony and with one another.

James Ramsay, for example, testified in Parliament and also became engaged in a print battle over the abolition question with an anonymous West Indian planter. In his testimony, which he gave in early June 1788, Ramsay spoke with the authority of two decades of experience in the West Indies as a surgeon and as a clergyman. Pointing out the hypocrisy of planters’ claims, he argued that many European artisans, tradesmen, and dock-workers already labored in the West Indies, often outdoors for much of the day. He could think of no physiological reason,

⁶⁷ *The speech of Mr. Beaufoy, Tuesday the 18th June, 1788, in a Committee of the whole House, on a Bill for regulating the Conveyance of Negroes from Africa to the West-Indies. To which are added Observations on the Evidence adduced against the Bill* (London: J. Phillips, 1789), 9-10.

he added, why Europeans could not also cultivate the land.⁶⁸ This testimony echoed some of Ramsay's earlier arguments. In a 1786 publication, Ramsay had insisted that plantation labor "might be done by *white men*" if they would just "resolve to be sober."⁶⁹ As proof, he argued that seventeenth-century Europeans in the West Indies had cut through forested land to begin plantations, and that "the clearing of land from wood is *beyond all comparison harder* than the ordinary field work in a sugar plantation."⁷⁰ Although planters might try to persuade Britons otherwise, social and economic factors, not climatic concerns, kept Europeans out of the sugar fields.

Yet Ramsay did concede one point, at least in part. Edward Long had argued that Europeans could not be employed in "cutting down woods, or clearing the ground from trees," without endangering "their health and lives." Pointing to an example of British soldiers falling ill after clearing ground in Dominica, Long cited James Lind, writing that such labor "has always proved destructive to Europeans in those Climates."⁷¹ Ramsay acknowledged that clearing forests was dangerous labor, but, crucially, he pointed out that it proved as dangerous for Africans as it did for Europeans. Both populations suffered equally in such a demanding job, he wrote, so simply arguing that it was a dangerous job for Europeans did not justify the use of African labor.

Writing in response to Ramsay, an anonymous "West India planter" published a defense of African slavery. The author attacked Ramsay, both personally and as an abolitionist, although

⁶⁸ Testimony of James Ramsay, BT 6/10, f. 621-622, TNA.

⁶⁹ James Ramsay, "A Letter from Capt. J.S. Smith to the Revd Mr. Hill on the State of the Negroe Slaves. To which are added an introduction, and remarks on free negroes, &c. by the editor" (London: J. Philips, 1786), 43 (italics in original). Included in Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes* (copy at the Library Company of Philadelphia).

⁷⁰ James Ramsay, "A Letter," 41-42 (italics in original).

⁷¹ Edward Long, additions to Jamaica Report, 28 March 1788, BT 6/10, f. 206-207, TNA (underlining in original).

he did not disagree with Ramsay's characterization of labor in the West Indies. The planter agreed that the "disforestation" of land in the West Indian climate was dangerous labor for both white and black bodies. But there his agreement with Ramsay ended. In the first place, he wrote, since most of the land in the West Indies had already been cleared, he predicted that mortality rates would soon drop in accordance with the lessening demand for such labor. And in the second place, in what may be one of the most blatant admissions of the slaveholder mindset, the author argued that it was beside the point to complain that Africans suffered through hard labor because that was, in effect, their purpose. Labor, he wrote, was "inseparable from the condition of a slave," and such hard labor would doubtless cause infertility and death among enslaved populations. But any attempts to mitigate labor and to avoid its inevitable effects on the body would undermine the entire purpose of the sugar colonies. Abolitionists, he complained, wanted "so great a relaxation of labour as is totally incompatible with the purpose for which negroes are purchased." Any concerns about the harsh conditions of slavery or the inability of enslaved people to reproduce were misplaced, he continued, as though abolitionists completely missed the point of slavery. "Negroes are not, in the first instance, bought for the increase of the species, but for their work;" he wrote. "And, if a certain quantity of work be not done, their owners must be ruined; therefore, the condition of slaves being such as necessarily exposes them to accidents conducing to depopulation, we need not be surprised that their numbers do decrease."⁷²

This argument is remarkable for its boldness and for its unapologetic tone. Rather than offer excuses for the inhumane conditions of slavery, as many other planters did, the writer simply argued that it was reasonable to expect slaves to be treated with brutality precisely

⁷² Anon., *Considerations on the Emancipation of Negroes and on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: J. Johnson & J. Debrett, 1788), 13-19.

because they were slaves (and, by extension, he implied, not fully human). Backpedaling slightly, he also threw in some familiar excuses for enslaved women's infertility for good measure. Depopulation resulted from immoral behavior, he explained, as well as from "exposure to the weather" and an imbalance in the numbers of females and males.⁷³ But the writer's cloak of anonymity allowed him to profess a truth that many other planters were too ashamed or afraid to admit outright: Laboring, not reproducing, was the purpose for which planters purchased slaves, and without forced labor, the sugar colonies would not survive.

Ramsay wrote back, with a point-by-point refutation of arguments against abolition advanced both by the anonymous author and by slaveholders at large. For Ramsay, humanitarian concerns should not fall by the wayside in the face of economic prospects. He also pointed to the numerous contradictions inherent in the pro-slavery arguments. Aside from the anonymous author of *Considerations*, most planters insisted that enslaved laborers were content and received fair treatment at the hands of masters. But how could such people be happy, Ramsay wondered, and yet also be unable to reproduce? Could such claims "be reconciled to common sense?" he asked. "Can it be the cause of truth, which requires such contradictory assertions to establish it?" Ramsay thought not, and endeavored to expose the contradictions that ran through planters' testimonials, contesting them one by one.⁷⁴

Both climate and economics figured among the systematic objections Ramsay presented in his text. Taking issue with the claim that Europeans could not labor in the West Indian climate, Ramsay argued that although hard labor would destroy anyone, black or white, "white men kept from new rum, may, in the morning and evening, perform double the present task of

⁷³ *Considerations*, 14.

⁷⁴ Reverend James Ramsay, *Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with Answers. To which are prefixed, strictures on a late publication, intitled, 'Considerations on the Emancipation of Negroes, and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, by a West India Planter.'* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 2nd ed., 6.

slaves, without suffering from the climate.” Indeed, Ramsay continued, “white men” had settled the islands of Barbados, St. Kitts, and Nevis. Citing the historian Robert Robertson, Ramsay explained that seventeenth-century West Indian planters had, in fact, been loath to use enslaved laborers in place of Europeans, lamenting “that England refused to continue to supply them with white servants.” In Ramsay’s telling, planters had switched to slaves only when other sources of labor dried up, and then reluctantly so. Regardless of the sequence of cause-and-effect, the fact remained that Europeans could, had, and sometimes did, labor in the fields. “Poor white men work along with their slaves,” Ramsay wrote, a glaring factor that alone disproved slaveholders’ assertions about the dangers of the climate for European bodies.⁷⁵

Ramsay did not ignore the social hierarchy dictating labor patterns, acknowledging that “free negroes or mulattos” would refuse to work in the fields on the basis of class difference. Still, he rejected the flimsy climate argument, even using Long’s *History of Jamaica* as counter evidence. Long himself, Ramsay explained, had written that Africans took three years to adjust to the West Indian climate, and that up to one half of them died during the seasoning process. In the first place, a three-year adjustment period, both to climate and labor, was proof that Africans did not naturally suit the West Indian climate. And second, the dangers of the seasoning process, along with the startling losses it entailed, seemed to Ramsay to be a highly unprofitable enterprise. He calculated drastic economic losses through the ever-increasing purchase price of slaves, followed by several years of uncertainty in regard to their health and lives. It seemed much more economically viable to Ramsay to hire laborers already present on the island than to keep up a constant importation of captives, many of whom would die in the process of transportation or seasoning.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ James Ramsay, *Objections*, 43.

Perhaps the most notable part of Ramsay's argument lay not in his insistence that Europeans could labor in the heat, but in his assessment of bodily difference. For Ramsay, the supposed ability of Africans to labor in warm climates had nothing to do with any natural or biological traits, but rather with an acquired adaptation. "The negroe," he explained, "is not endowed with any powers for enduring heat, but what *habit* would in time impart to a Tartar or Lapland tribe, if settled between the tropicks."⁷⁷ In other words, even people from the coldest regions of the earth would, over time, become accustomed to tropical heat. There was no natural difference in bodily ability between Africans and the inhabitants of northernmost Europe; it was merely a matter of time and adjustment to the climate.⁷⁸

Ramsay's ardent and radical beliefs in the cruelties of slavery placed him on the far end of a spectrum of ideas surrounding abolition, climate, labor, and bodily difference. Not everyone who wrote in favor of abolition was as unorthodox as Ramsay and, indeed, several of those who argued against slavery included in their arguments the same climate theories that slavery's defenders professed. Robert Nickolls, for example, in 1788 published an abolitionist tract in which he argued that it was the very suitability of Africans for warm climates that revealed the horrors of slavery. Hot places were "congenial" to Africans, he wrote, and less so to Europeans; given this climatic circumstance, it was all the more appalling that Africans failed to reproduce in the West Indies. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Nickolls speculated, "whites, in a climate less favourable to them, have lost only one half of their original stock, [whereas] the

⁷⁶ James Ramsay, *Objections*, 18, 21. Others cited statistics for seasoning losses at anywhere from two-fifths to one-third or one-half. Ramsay cited Robertson on the two-fifths number as well.

⁷⁷ James Ramsay, "A Letter," 40.

⁷⁸ These arguments regarding bodily adjustment to the climate, of course, echoed the experiences of many Atlantic travelers and residents throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For more on this, see Chapter Four.

blacks have lost it four or five times over.” He could only conclude that these proportions (although he acknowledged their relative inaccuracy he believed they were representative) meant that Africans suffered from extreme “mal-treatment” on West Indian plantations.⁷⁹

Planter Gilbert Francklyn seized the opportunity that Nickolls had left open. The following year, Francklyn published a defense of slavery in which he used Nickolls’s climatic argument against him. Quoting Nickolls, who admitted Africans’ fitness for warm climates, Francklyn argued, “if negroes are not incommoded with the heat,” as Nickolls had written, “they are much better adapted to the cultivation of the lands in the West Indies than white people, who certainly are.”⁸⁰ Granting that illnesses struck enslaved people, Francklyn blamed familiar culprits: rainy weather, and the slaves’ own behavior, particularly dancing all night. Still, Francklyn wrote as a landholder dependent upon enslaved labor. “The planter knows too well,” he wrote, “the impossibility of inducing white men to attempt supporting the labours of the field, in this part of the world, to consent to the experiment being tried at his expence.” Francklyn’s bottom line lay in concern for his own property. If abolitionists succeeded, and were “willing to run the risqué” of attempting to cultivate plantations with European laborers, “the planters will not, I dare say, make any objections to it, but cede their property to be conducted according to any new mode which shall be adopted, on being paid a reasonable price for their property.”

Francklyn warned his readers that, “Should such proposal be approved of, it may not be

⁷⁹ Robert Boucher Nickolls, *A Letter to the treasurer of the society instituted for the purpose of effecting the abolition of the slave trade* (London: James Phillips, 1788), 17, 20-21.

⁸⁰ G. Francklyn, *Observations, occasioned by the attempts made in England to effect the abolition of the Slave Trade; shewing, the manner in which Negroes are treated in the British Colonies in the West-Indies: and also, some particular remarks on a letter addressed to the treasurer of the society for effecting such abolition, from the Rev. Robert Boucher Nicholls, Dean of Middleham, by G. Francklyn, Esq.* (Kingston, Jamaica, Printed. London: reprinted at Logographic Press, 1789), 53-54. Francklyn joined the illustrious company of men such as Edward Long, Chaloner Arcedeckne, Stephen Fuller, Charles Spooner, John Braithwaite, and Simon Taylor (among others) as part of a subcommittee of the Society of West India Planters and Merchants, formed in February 1788 in response to the abolition question. See David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, 191.

improper to state what will, probably, be the amount of the planters claims on the public.” In other words, taxpayers should be wary of approving any measure that might induce a planter to demand payment for lost property and labor, as the resultant costs to the public would be significant.⁸¹ Francklyn repeated these arguments in testimony before Parliament a year later. The House minutes noted that Francklyn believed “the only practicable” way to cultivate West Indian islands was through “the labour of the negroes.” Not surprisingly, Francklyn seemed most concerned with his own economic prospects: “If he had understood the importation of negroes was to be prohibited,” the minutes noted, “he would not have bought lands he could make no use of.”⁸²

At the end of the initial Parliamentary session, the Privy Council announced its recommendation. The Committee members had determined that it was “absolutely impossible to cultivate the West India islands, so as to produce any commodities that would enrich the mother-country, by white labourers. Fatal experience demonstrates the fallacy of such an expectation.”⁸³ European labor would not be economically or socially viable. The Committee seemed persuaded by a handful of sporadic and inconsistent “trials” that appeared to show the impossibility of European bodily health in hot climates. The Committee cited several of these trials in its summation: in 1749, for example, in spite of legislation that encouraged Britons to settle in the islands, “very few families” relocated, and of those who had, “not a vestige is left.” Furthermore, the Committee continued, other European experiments had failed. The Committee cited the French attempt to settle Cayenne, or Kourou, “by means of white labourers” in 1763

⁸¹ Francklyn, *Observations*, 85.

⁸² Testimony of Gilbert Francklyn in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 29-32. Others made similar claims regarding their property; see, for examples, testimonies of Alexander Campbell, James Baillie, and John Castles in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 55, 74, 80.

⁸³ *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 200.

with disastrous results (“twelve thousand miserable people were the victims of this impolitic scheme”).⁸⁴ The sieges of Cartagena and Havana had proven equally fatal to British troops, the Committee reported. And if the climatic evidence against European labor was an insufficient reason to end the trade, the Committee was convinced that the economic consequences of abolition would be enormous. Planters would expect to be compensated for their loss of property, shipbuilders might find themselves out of work, and British merchants, particularly those involved with the sale of colonial products in England or those who made a living shipping goods to the colonies, would be economically devastated. As a whole, the Committee explained, Britain itself would suffer a considerable loss, since the value of property in the West Indies contributed to the national wealth of Britain. As property values in the islands would plummet if abolition took place, so too would the overall wealth of the Empire.⁸⁵

In spite of this setback, abolitionists refused to retreat. In an attempt to drum up popular support, many spokesmen for the abolitionist cause continued to publish pamphlets on both sides of the Atlantic. Curiously, abolitionists, more than pro-slavery advocates, drew upon the history of Georgia to bolster their case. In an early contribution to abolitionist literature, in 1774 John Wesley published his *Thoughts Upon Slavery* in both London and Philadelphia. Wesley framed his tract as an imaginary discussion with a defender of slavery. This prototypical defender,

⁸⁴ Emma Rothschild argues that nineteenth-century physicians attributed the rampant deaths in Kourou largely to typhoid fever, which the European colonists brought with them, but that in the decades following the disaster many people interpreted the mass mortality as evidence that Europeans could not labor in place of Africans in the hot American climate. Notably, and perhaps particularly so for the Privy Council, Victor Malouet, a colonial administrator who surveyed the remains of the settlement in the 1770s, published an account in which he concluded that Europeans could not “be substituted for slaves” in the year 1788. Yet Rothschild also points out that “informed observers of the time” believed that blaming the climate for the European deaths was inaccurate; the climate of Guyana was not particularly unhealthy, and whites and blacks suffered from the same illnesses. See Emma Rothschild, “A Horrible Tragedy in the French Atlantic,” *Past & Present* 192 (Aug 2006), 88-89, including Malouet quote from his *Mémoire sur l’esclavage des nègres* (1788), Rothschild, 88. Nevertheless, the tragic event was widely interpreted to constitute evidence that Europeans could not survive in such a climate without enslaved Africans to perform heavy labor.

⁸⁵ *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number II, 200.

according to Wesley, would argue that slaves were “necessary for the cultivation of our islands; inasmuch as white men are not able to labour in hot climates.”⁸⁶ On the contrary, Wesley explained to his imagined antagonist, “the supposition on which you ground your argument is false. For white men, even *Englishmen*, are well able to labour in hot climates,” he wrote, “provided they are temperate, both in meat and drink, and that they inure themselves to it by degrees.” Wesley himself had had such experience, he explained. Comparing the summer heat in Georgia to that of the West Indies, Wesley related his experience in 1730s Savannah, when, along with his family, he spent his “spare time” in the burgeoning colony “in felling of trees and clearing of ground, as hard labour as any negro need be employed in.” The eight Wesleys, along with forty Germans, engaged “in all manner of labour” in the province. And yet, Wesley wrote, “this was so far from impairing our health, that we all continued perfectly well, while the idle ones all round about us, were swept away as with a pestilence. It is not true therefore that white men are not able to labour, even in hot climates, full as well as black.”⁸⁷

James Ramsay quoted from this portion of Wesley’s tract in his own 1786 anti-slavery work, and other abolitionists also took up the cause. William Bell Crafton, for example, published a summation of abolitionists’ arguments, including in his pamphlet a call to British residents to boycott West Indian sugar and rum, products both dependent upon and directly supportive of the slave trade and slavery.⁸⁸ The book appeared in London and in Philadelphia in

⁸⁶ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (Philadelphia: Joseph Cruickshank, 1774), 39.

⁸⁷ Wesley, *Thoughts*, 40-43.

⁸⁸ William Bell Crafton, *A Short Sketch of the Evidence for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, delivered before a committee of the House of Commons. To which is added, a Recommendation of the Subject to the Serious Attention of People in General* (London, 1792, reprinted Philadelphia 1792). West Indian planters were less than thrilled at this approach; John Frederick Pinney, who owned estates in the Leeward Islands, wrote to a fellow planter expressing his concern over the sugar boycott, which the “demagogues for the abolition are now preaching” as the most effective means of destroying the slave trade. See J. F. Pinney to John Taylor, 24 October 1791, Pinney Family Papers, Letterbook 9, f. 248, University of Bristol Library.

1792, but the Philadelphia version contained an additional section: extracts from Trustee Secretary Benjamin Martyn's 1741 report on Georgia.⁸⁹ The selections from Martyn's report gave a brief history of Georgia's founding, including the Trustees' reasons for prohibiting slaves, and continued with accounts of the petitions sent by both the Salzburgers and the Highlanders at Darien in opposition to slavery. The reasons for Crafton's inclusion of the Georgia material were clear. Abolitionists in Philadelphia hoped to draw upon a chapter of American history free from slavery to show not only that the states could exist without slavery, but that such "truly deserving" people as the Salzburgers and Darien petitioners had argued a just and noble cause, and could serve as examples for abolitionist societies and slaveholders alike throughout the United States.⁹⁰

The arguments for and against abolition escalated, as advocates of both sides continued to publish pamphlets and open letters in the late 1780s and early 1790s. Although climatic theories formed only one part of the debate, most slaveholders and abolitionists used the climate in their arguments. Some, like Nickolls and Francklyn, argued that Africans could move seamlessly across the Atlantic to the West Indies with no noticeable change. Others acknowledged or highlighted the change: as one defender of slavery wrote, although Africans were "removed from their native climate," they "exchange it for one by no means unfavourable to their constitutions." Arguments like these tended to stress the greater suitability of Africans over Europeans for warm climates in general (as this writer put it, "the labour of the field, while it soon exhausts every

⁸⁹ For more on this report and on Georgia's early history, see Chapter Two.

⁹⁰ Crafton, *A Short Sketch*, Philadelphia edition, postscript. Christopher Brown argues that the abolitionist cause in Britain became a signifier of the Empire's moral worth in the aftermath of the American Revolution (see Brown, *Moral Capital*, esp. 258, 312, 456-457). Crafton's inclusion of the Highlanders' and Salzburgers' anti-slavery petitions as proof of the morality of some early American settlers may have been an attempt to call upon the moral worthiness of those in the States as well.

European constitution, has no effect upon that of the Africans”) rather than deny any difference between Africa and the West Indies.⁹¹

On the other side, abolitionists listed the “change of climate” that African captives suffered in their transportation to the West Indies as a factor in their high death rates.⁹² Several abolitionists pointed out Edward Long’s work in particular as hypocritical and illogical; William Dickson, for example, used direct evidence from Long’s 1774 *History of Jamaica* to undermine Long’s own testimony. Dickson pointed especially to Long’s explanations of the seasoning process. As for Europeans, “We must yield the point for which our Jamaica writer contends,” Dickson wrote, “That unseasoned Europeans, cannot hold out, for any time, under the heavy labour of felling trees, digging cane-holes, and carrying out dung, in the West Indies.”⁹³ Yet the problem was not that people would be unable to work because they were Europeans; instead, they were merely unseasoned to the climate and unaccustomed to manual labor. Europeans “inured to the common labour of digging and carrying burdens” could “cultivate these lands very well,” Dickson explained, since “The constitution of the human body, when brought up to hard labour, soon accommodates itself to this climate.”⁹⁴

Long’s testimony regarding Africans was even more galling. In both his testimony and his book, Long had emphasized the need for seasoning Africans to the West Indian climate, a point that did not elude Dickson. If all people arriving in the West Indies needed to be seasoned

⁹¹ *A Letter to Granville Sharp, Esq. on the Proposed Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: J. Debrett, 1788), 9, 12.

⁹² See, for example, William Roscoe, *A General View of the African Slave-Trade, demonstrating its injustice and impolicy: with hints towards a bill for its abolition* (London: R. Faulder, 1788), 9.

⁹³ William Dickson, *Mitigation of Slavery*, 431.

⁹⁴ Dickson, *Mitigation of Slavery*, 164. Dickson quoted letters written by planter Joshua Steele of Barbados, who later became an abolitionist. Steele wrote in direct answer to the questions posed by the Privy Council about the theoretical ability of Europeans to labor in the West Indies, but although his answers are published here they are not preserved in the Board of Trade papers with the pro-slavery answers.

to labor and to the climate, then Dickson saw no reason why Europeans could not labor as Africans could. He had personally witnessed people of European descent in Barbados laboring on “rough ground where they are exposed to the scorching sun.”⁹⁵ Moreover, as other abolitionists pointed out, if Africans had to be seasoned, then perhaps they didn’t naturally suit the West Indian climate after all.

Abolitionists managed to turn the climatic argument against slaveholders, mainly by pointing out gaping holes in slaveholders’ claims. If Africans were so suited to the climate of the West Indies, why did they so consistently fail to reproduce, and why did they have such high mortality rates? Some witnesses referenced the Carolina Lowcountry in support of their arguments. If planters argued that Africans naturally suited hot climates, then they would have to agree that the West Indian islands were hotter than the Lowcountry. And no one could safely argue that the Lowcountry, with its rice swamps, was in any way healthy land. Yet enslaved people in South Carolina seemed more able to reproduce than did those in the West Indies. Therefore, if the West Indian climate suited Africans even better than the North American climate did, the failure of enslaved women to reproduce must indicate cruel and brutal treatment at the hands of slaveholders.

As the abolitionist movement grew in strength, Parliamentary hearings continued. Given that slavery’s defenders had pointed to the mortality of British soldiers as evidence of Europeans’ bodily frailty in warm climates, the testimony from naval captains contradicting this claim might have made some impact on the House. Even more significant was the testimony of naval physicians, who presumably had the greatest authority in determining the impact of the

⁹⁵ Dickson, *Letters*, 41.

climate upon soldiers' bodily health.⁹⁶ Physician Robert Jackson, for instance, testified before the House that "white artificers may, and actually do, work at their trade in the West Indies" and "that Europeans are, with proper caution, equal to the ordinary field labour, without any material injury to health." Jackson claimed that he knew "from personal experience" that Europeans in the West Indies could "safely walk 20, 30, or more miles a day." Asked about the high, and at times staggering, mortality rates of British troops in the Caribbean, Jackson placed the blame entirely on avoidable circumstances: illness resulted, he argued, from the placement of camps "on unhealthy spots," from the "immoderate use of spirituous liquors," and from a general lack of discipline. There were "perhaps" a few "defects in the medical department," Jackson admitted, but under no circumstances should the House assume that the poor health of troops was a result of the climate.⁹⁷ Other physicians expressed similar concerns; writing from St. Lucia, Sir John Moore complained that the troops under his command were "extremely sickly." He implored his superiors in London to send out fresh troops, taking pains to explain that the poor health of the soldiers "will be imputed to the climate, but it in a great measure proceeds from a total want of interior discipline."⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the continuation of the hearings only provoked a heightened sense of outrage on both sides of the abolition debate as printing houses published a flurry of pamphlets arguing each side's cause. The publications were not limited to pamphlets, either; both planters and those in favor of abolition used natural histories and medical treatises to advance their arguments. Planter William Beckford, for example, published a natural history of Jamaica in

⁹⁶ As one defender of slavery wrote in 1789, "Whites, according to the testimony of medical writers and others, cannot undergo the common field-duty," though the anonymous author declined to provide any specific information regarding this testimony. See pamphlet entitled *Thoughts on civilization, and the gradual abolition of slavery in Africa and the West Indies* by 'Friend to commerce and humanity' (London: J. Sewell, 1789), 11.

⁹⁷ See examination of Doctor Jackson, in *Minutes of the Evidence*, Number IV, 30-33.

⁹⁸ Sir John Moore to Sir Robert Brownvigg, 4 September 1796, Add MS 57321, f. 58-59, BL.

1790. Addressing the issue of land cultivation, Beckford wrote, “That the land in Jamaica can be cultivated by white people, is a suggestion that I know not how to reconcile to common sense or reason.” Britons who attempted to work the land would be overcome by the sun’s heat, he wrote, and those who claimed that Europeans already cultivated land in the Caribbean were simply mistaken. “Europeans are no farther employed in the cultivation of the land than as gardeners or ploughmen,” he wrote, and “To suppose that Europeans could cultivate the land in the islands, or negroes that of England, would be to acknowledge that climate has not any effect upon bodily exertions, upon national distinctions, or upon endemial feelings.” Beckford painted a terrifying picture of the consequences of British labor in the West Indies: “If the colonies were to be attempted to be cultivated by white people,” he warned, “the whole population of Great-Britain would be unequal to the object, and would in the course of a century be melted down and become extinct.”⁹⁹

Beckford’s dire prophecy may have been extreme, even by the standards of self-interested and economically-minded planters. But even as he tried to impress upon his readers the catastrophic consequences of attempting to cultivate the sugar islands with European laborers, Beckford admitted the difference in climate between Africa and the West Indies. Yet Beckford’s climatic reasoning was inconsistent. First, explaining the high death rates of African captives, Beckford sought to exonerate planters by ascribing one cause of mortality to the “change of climate” they experienced when transported across the Atlantic.¹⁰⁰ Africans, then, could not naturally suit the West Indian climate if the difference between the two places was so great as to cause deaths. And second, earlier in his text Beckford assured British readers that the “dread of a seasoning” they might feel at the thought of leaving England for the West Indies was

⁹⁹ William Beckford, *Descriptive Account*, vol. II, 328-331.

¹⁰⁰ Beckford, vol. II, 307.

actually worse than the change itself. The “impending terror,” he explained, produced “imaginary” illnesses that were due less to a change in latitude than they were to “the alarm which that latitude occasions.”¹⁰¹

Beckford, then, wanted to have it both ways. English people “imagined” that they would suffer from a change of climate by traveling to the West Indies when in fact they only hurt themselves through these imaginings. At the same time, Africans suffered so much from the change of climate that many of them died from the exertions of climatic adaptation. Yet Europeans would never be able to stand the climate of the West Indies were they to be put to hard labor, but for Africans, the climate of the West Indies was “congenial to their natural feelings.”¹⁰² In fact, several West Indian planters found themselves in an unexpected position. After years of publishing natural histories that tried to convince Britons of the benign nature of the Caribbean climate, these same planters had to stress how dangerous that same climate actually was to Europeans.¹⁰³ Bryan Edwards, apparently without a shade of irony or self-consciousness, in 1792 published a book containing first, a poetic ode to Jamaica which praised its “fragrant” woods, “salubrious” hills, and pleasant shady valleys and streams, followed by a copy of a speech against the abolition bill which warned of the “baneful effects” of the island’s swamps and the dangers of woodland vapors.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Beckford, vol. II, 283-284.

¹⁰² Beckford, vol. II, 65.

¹⁰³ For a different interpretation of this switch, see Trevor Burnard, “‘The COUNTRY Continues Sicklie’: White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780,” *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 12, no. 1 (1999): 45-72. Burnard argues that Europeans in the West Indies exaggerated the healthiness of the climate until “the onset of abolitionism in 1788 changed all the rules of the game” and planters began to acknowledge the climate’s unhealthiness for Europeans (64). Yet my reading of personal correspondence suggests different reasons for the switch; in 1788, I argue, Europeans felt pressured to insist upon the climate’s unhealthiness for Europeans because they were afraid of losing their access to enslaved African laborers. Rather than feeling forced to exaggerate healthiness earlier and then later admitting true unhealthiness, then, I see the later reports of unhealthiness as purposefully exaggerated.

Physician Robert Jackson also disseminated his opinions on abolition through the publication of his medical treatise. In 1791, the same year he testified in front of Parliament, Jackson published a treatise on “the fevers of Jamaica” with advice for “preserving the health of soldiers in hot climates.” Jackson had served for nearly a decade as a physician to British soldiers in Jamaica, and wrote his treatise with the intention of adding to a small but growing corpus of medical literature for British soldiers in hot climates.¹⁰⁵ At the end of his treatise, Jackson added his stance on the question of climate then being debated in Parliament. As a physician who had spent time in the West Indies observing and treating British soldiers, Jackson was specially placed to offer his opinion and evaluation about the climate’s effect on northern bodies. Those who claimed that Britons could never survive in hot climates had not the slightest inkling of the truth, Jackson argued. “An idea has been long entertained, that the European constitution cannot bear hard labour in the sun, or perform military exercises with safety, in the hot climates of the West-Indies,” he wrote. As a result, the British government had seen fit to furnish soldiers with “people of colour to do the drudgery of the soldiers.” Jackson was entirely against this policy, believing first, that it encouraged laziness on the part of soldiers, and second, that part of the job of any good soldier was to become “inured” over time both to the work and to the climate or environment in which he served. Unless the British government was prepared to

¹⁰⁴ These were published in the same volume though with different dates; the first may have been originally published separately, but was reprinted here in the 1792 version: Edwards, “Jamaica: Book the First” in *Poems, written chiefly in the West-Indies* (Kingston: Alexander Aikman, 1792), 5; Edwards, *A Speech delivered at a free conference between the Honourable the Council and Assembly of Jamaica, held the 19th November, 1789, on the subject of Mr. Wilberforce’s Propositions in the House of Commons, concerning the Slave-Trade* (Kingston: Alexander Aikman, 1789), 23.

¹⁰⁵ In the preface to his treatise, Jackson wrote that during his time in Jamaica (1774-1782) he had only “the insufficiency of Dr. Hillary’s work, the most esteemed book on the diseases of the West Indies,” prompting him to write his own, but that in the intervening years Doctors Hunter and Moseley had published works on the subject; still, he added, their views differed from one another and from his own, a circumstance which he believed justified his publication. See Robert Jackson, *A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica, with some observations on the Intermitting Fever of America, and an appendix, Containing some Hints on the Means of preserving the Health of Soldiers in hot Climates* (London: J. Murray, 1791), iiv-iv.

let people of color fight in the army, Jackson believed their presence was detrimental to the cultivation of “military discipline.”¹⁰⁶

Moreover, Jackson explained that although it was “common opinion” that “the fatigues of an active campaign in the West-Indies, would be fatal to the health of the troops,” this opinion had not been given a “fair trial.” Indeed, Jackson wrote, contrary to this belief, “an Englishman is capable of sustaining fatigue in the West-Indies, equally well with the African, or the native of the islands.” As proof Jackson recounted a three-day-long, hundred-mile journey he once made across the island of Jamaica on foot. Such a trip, he argued, was incontrovertible evidence “that the European constitution is capable of sustaining common military fatigues in the climate of Jamaica.”¹⁰⁷

In spite of the earnest personal accounts of Robert Jackson and John Wesley describing their own ability to withstand severe physical exertion in the heat, and regardless of the testimony of several other witnesses, in April 1791 the House voted 163 to 88 to continue the slave trade.¹⁰⁸ No matter how compelling these witnesses’ testimony, they could not compete

¹⁰⁶ Jackson, *Treatise*, 403. Jackson believed, as did several of his contemporaries, that the presence of Afro-creoles encouraged laziness on the part of European soldiers and that it would be better to let them serve as soldiers in the army. At the time Jackson wrote, the formation of a ‘black corps’ to serve in the islands was a hotly debated topic. Sir John Moore, for example, wrote from St. Lucia of his frustrations commanding European soldiers there; “the greatest use may be made of black corps,” he wrote, “they may be made, be assured of it, excellent soldiers.” (Moore to Brownvigg, 4 September 1796, Add MS 57321, f. 58-59, BL). A group in Jamaica sent a series of petitions to the British army and government, arguing that “Mulattos, being natives,” would make good soldiers because they were “inured to the climate,” having been born in the Caribbean and so would not need seasoning. (See Memorial of William Henry Ricketts et al to Major General John Dalling, CO 137/77, f. 78; another copy, addressed to Archibald Campbell, can be found in CO 137/82, f. 204; as well as other copies throughout the CO 137 series and beyond). Planters, though, fought the proposal on the grounds that arming slaves was a dangerous proposition. As one person reflected, “I did highly approve the measures adopted by Government to raise black corps,” but “How could they hope that planters could be brought to support such a measure? when it must be clear that a slave holder must dread to see a sword in the hands of a man who has been his slave.” (Add MS 59239, f. 89, BL). For more on these regiments, see Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, *Treatise*, 404, 406.

with powerful planters who had far-reaching networks, family connections in Parliament, and a great deal of money. In addition, planters who gave testimony on the condition of slavery in the West Indies had a distinct advantage over all but a few abolitionists: they could imbue their arguments with the authority of lived experience. They could claim to know the conditions of Caribbean plantation life in ways that Britons could not.¹⁰⁹ They were also biased, with vested interests in seeing the continuation of the slave trade and the institution of slavery in the sugar islands. Yet although their testimony differed from one another's in several respects, on one particular point all planters agreed: European bodies could not stand hard labor in the tropics. The climate simply would not fit their constitutions. And members of Parliament, the vast majority of whom had never visited the West Indies, were inclined to believe them. Although they may have seen the holes in planters' arguments and been persuaded by the economic aspects of the slave trade more than anything else, Britons had been hearing about the dangerously hot climate of the West Indies for centuries, and the climatic argument remained a powerful one.

Without exception, those with significant financial investments in the West Indies insisted that the islands could never be cultivated by anyone other than enslaved African laborers. But, significantly, their arguments reveal no coherent sense of racial difference between African and European bodies. For both social and economic reasons, planters believed that African slavery was necessary for the cultivation of West Indian plantations. Still, they knew the value of climatic rhetoric, and in formulating their arguments planters drew upon

¹⁰⁸ *The Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, in the House of Commons, on Monday and Tuesday, April 18 and 19, 1791, reported in detail* (London: W. Woodfall, 1791), 123.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Taylor, for example, fumed that it was "the highest presumption" among Britons, "who know nothing about the West Indies, to give their opinions upon what they know nothing about." Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 30 December 1792 and 6 January 1793, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1792/19, ICS.

centuries of climatic lore that presented hot climates as dangerous and debilitating for northern European bodies. By grounding their pleas for slavery in notions of climatic danger, planters appealed to their fellow Britons' sensibilities. Planters, themselves familiar with stories about the dangers of the West Indian climate, counted on the power of the climate's reputation to bolster their case.

Despite this resounding defeat, abolitionists continued their campaign. Planters may have breathed a short sigh of relief upon hearing the outcome of the House's vote, but abolitionists took the opportunity to gather steam and to widen their circle of influence. While concerns over abolition took a back seat as the French and Haitian Revolutions erupted across the Atlantic, by the turn of the nineteenth century, some planters, taking note of the abolitionists' resurgence, expressed deep concern for the future of sugar plantations.¹¹⁰ Many tried to sell their estates, only to find that the market had dried up. But if the trade was to be abolished, and Africans simply could not reproduce at sustainable rates, how could planters procure laborers to cultivate their plantations? To hire Europeans was, by that point, no longer a viable option. Not only would such a move completely undercut all of the arguments planters had so vehemently made to Parliament, but because these arguments had reached such wide audiences through their extensive publication, planters would be hard pressed to find Europeans willing to travel to the West Indies to perform such labor. Planters had both insisted upon the climatic dangers for

¹¹⁰ John Frederick Pinney, for example, wrote to his plantation manager in Nevis with some concern. "The present alarming crisis, respecting, the abolition of the African trade," he wrote, "operates so strongly on my mind, that I am resolved to contract, with the utmost expedition, all my concerns in the West Indies. Never again, upon my own private account, will I enter into a new engagement in that part of the world." To another friend, he wrote that "If there should be a total abolition, I am afraid it will be attended with fatal consequences in some of our islands – at any rate it will be very injurious to West India credit and property. It will make me anxious to lessen my concern in that part of the world." A few years later, he wrote to another friend expressing his concern over the "truly alarming" situation in the West Indies. See J.F. Pinney to William Coker, 9 February 1788; J.F. Pinney to Ulysses Lynch Esq., 29 January 1788; J.F. Pinney to Thomas Pym Weekes, 21 March 1792, Pinney Family Papers, Letterbook 9, f. 17, 18, 319, University of Bristol Library.

European laborers in the Caribbean and explained to the Privy Council the class and color divide in plantation societies.

They had also propagated and internalized these divisions themselves. For example, managers sometimes wrote to absentee planters informing them that a (European) acquaintance who had fathered a child with a plantation slave wished to purchase the child. These managers nearly always counseled the planter to sell since a lighter-skinned child would be socially unfit for field labor. As one manager in Jamaica explained to his employer, a neighboring man “has offered me two prime slaves for a brown girl and a son of his [...] The two negroes that I will receive will be able people and capable of doing field work” while the man’s son and daughter had never worked. The girl, he wrote, was “nearly white” and thus would only ever do housework, and the boy was “so near white that he will not be of use to the property.”¹¹¹

Another manager in Antigua advised his employer to consent to the proposed sale of his “girl child by a Mulatto Woman.” The child in question, the manager wrote, was “of so fair a complexion, that she can hardly be made anything of but a sempstress.”¹¹² As plantation correspondence made clear, these labor restrictions resulted from social and racial divisions in plantation societies. Climate could not be the issue; many planters pointed out the distinction between enslaved creoles and native Africans, emphasizing that since creoles experienced “no change of climate” they were “of course more highly valued” than Africans.¹¹³ But this high value decreased significantly if they had enough European blood that they looked too light-

¹¹¹ F. Graham to Thomas Milles Esq., 10 December 1807, MS 132, f. 22, NLJ.

¹¹² George Ottley to Clement Tudway, 1 February 1809, Tudway Family Archive, Box 11, bundle 7, Somerset Heritage Centre.

¹¹³ William Leigh, *Remarks on the Slave Trade, and the Slavery of the Negroes. In a series of letters* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), Letter the fourteenth, 68.

skinned for field labor; in those cases the people in question considered themselves exempt, as did everyone else, by virtue of their color.

Although planters had advocated vociferously for African slavery in their testimony, arguing that Europeans would never be able to survive labor in the West Indian climate, their private writings told a much more complicated story. Rather than believing that Africans naturally suited the West Indian climate, planters universally acknowledged the need for a seasoning period, to the climate as well as to labor. They also noted high rates of illness among enslaved people and, contrary to their Parliamentary testimony, the vast majority of the time planters and managers did not actually blame behavior for these illnesses. Instead, they implicated climatic conditions, the effects of which were exacerbated by peoples' exposure to the elements either through field labor or insufficiently insulated homes.¹¹⁴ And rather than believing that Europeans could not labor in the West Indies at all, planters reacted to a dwindling supply. As Simon Taylor put it in one letter, "we cannot get a sufficiency of white people from England or Scotland."¹¹⁵ Those who did arrive demanded high wages, which planters proved reluctant to pay.

While combating the climate arguments, some abolitionists laid bare the virulent racism and resolute economic mindset that underlay planters' arguments. Some writers, for instance,

¹¹⁴ For more on this, see Chapter Four. Eighteenth-century medical treatises commonly blamed illnesses on people's exposure to wet weather; see, for example, William Hillary, *Observations on the Changes of the Air and the Concomitant Epidemical Diseases, in the Island of Barbadoes* (London: 2nd ed. 1766), 18, 26; James Grainger, *An Essay on the More Common West-India Diseases, and the remedies which that Country itself produces. To which are added, some hints on the management, &c. of negroes* (London, 1764), 12; John Hunter, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Jamaica, and on the Best Means of Preserving the Health of Europeans, in that Climate* (London, 1788), 23, 45, 188. Simon Taylor wrote that he would "rather save Mr. Wilberforce or anyone else the trouble of abolishing the trade" but that it was "impossible in a wett country to keep up the stock of Negroes by birth." Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 31 March 1790, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1790/5, ICS.

¹¹⁵ Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 23 March 1793, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1793/4, ICS.

argued that although Europeans had suffered in the past from clearing land in the islands, Africans had not fared any better. By pointing to the similar deadly consequences that both Africans and Europeans faced in clearing land in the West Indies, abolitionists forced planters to admit, as one did anonymously, that they saw Africans as laborers, and no more than that. Yet by the early nineteenth century the outlook for planters reliant on only the darkest-skinned laborers looked increasingly dim. Plantation correspondence reveals slaveholders' growing desperation as prospects for abolition of the trade began to intensify. Planters seemed to have backed themselves into a corner. Arguing, as some did, that it was "absolutely impossible" for the sugar islands to exist without the African slave trade, left planters in a difficult position as renewed hearings on the abolition of the trade began in earnest.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 21 July 1788, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1788/19, ICS.

Conclusion

In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the Haitian Revolution ignited British West Indian slaveholders' greatest fears. The enslaved population of a Caribbean sugar colony had gained control of the island, and the European residents were largely exiled or dead, many of their plantations reduced to smoldering ruins. The turn of the nineteenth century confirmed this momentous change: by 1804 Haiti had emerged as the first independent nation in the Caribbean, one governed by ex-slaves and their descendants, and one that prohibited slavery altogether.

Still, most planters in the British West Indies clung with determination to the enslaved people on their own plantations. They had managed to save the slave trade before, and not until 1806, when abolitionists finally gained the upper hand in Parliament, did many slaveholders see the imminent end of the trade looming. Yet most planters still refused to acknowledge the possibility of alternative forms of labor on the islands. Fifteen years earlier, St. Vincent inhabitant Thomas Fraser had witnessed the arrival of a ship from Scotland, brimming with migrants eager to find work. He marveled that the ship was a “Scotch Guinea man,” overflowing with “white negroes from Scotland enough to cultivate our plantations without buying them.”¹ Upon visiting Jamaica in the early 1800s, former resident Robert Renny noted a similar possibility. “Turn your eyes, Ye legislators of Jamaica!” he wrote, to “the crowded shores of Scotland and Ireland! Here, an immense, an incalculable accession of strength, power, and security, awaits you.” Renny urged Jamaicans to offer “allurements” to potential migrants “sufficient to counterbalance their terror of the climate.”² Populating the Caribbean with Scottish and Irish laborers, he reasoned, would increase the cultivation, industry, and security of

¹ Thomas Fraser to Simon Fraser, 8 April 1791, Simon Fraser Papers, HCA/D238/D/1/17/6, Highland Archive Centre, Inverness.

² Robert Renny, *An History of Jamaica* (London: J. Cawthorn, 1807), 183-184.

the islands. But if Scots poured into the West Indies in 1791, by 1807, when Renny published his ideas as part of a history of Jamaica, most planters no longer considered his proposal a viable option. They were not willing to offer allurements, in part because they had themselves created such high stakes for migrants in the first place. Without their insistence upon the unhealthy nature of the climate for British constitutions, the suggestion might have had a chance at success. But given their Parliamentary testimony, which had been published and circulated around Britain, planters could not imagine fulfilling such a plan.³ While some made desperate pleas to legislators about their own financial futures, others tried to sell previously lucrative plantations that they now saw as a liability. Few planters believed they could continue to turn a profit without a continued influx of enslaved African laborers. A nascent and inchoate climatic ideology justifying African slavery had become an article of faith.⁴

Yet sensing an impending end to the trade, one absentee planter proposed another idea. Arguing that “the climate of our provinces in the East is in many parts similar to that of our W.I. possessions,” Joseph Foster Barham, owner of two large plantations, suggested importing laborers from parts of China or India to cultivate sugarcane in Jamaica. In consultation with his plantation managers, he designed a plan to carry out a trial run in which one of his plantations would be wholly devoted to experimenting with free laborers recruited from Asia.⁵

³ On anti-abolitionist literature, see Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 127-170; David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 202-207.

⁴ Historian Seymour Drescher notes that in Adam Smith’s 1776 *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, which “furnish[ed] a distinctive economic argument to the British abolitionist movement,” Smith “did not challenge the general climatological rationale for the utility of African slaves in tropical areas.” See Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21, 26.

⁵ Barham Papers, MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 5, Bod. Historian Barry Higman traces the origins of the plan for Chinese and Indian laborers in Trinidad to British Naval captain William Layman in 1802, though he also notes that the idea first appeared in *Gentleman’s Magazine* in November 1792. See B.W. Higman, “The Chinese in Trinidad, 1806-1838,” *Caribbean Studies* 12, no. 3 (1972), 21-22. Barham’s papers show a connection with Captain Layman,

Barham billed his scheme as an alternative to slavery, and began soliciting funds and support for his plan from people in England with abolitionist leanings. Realizing that he would need Wilberforce's endorsement to win over significant numbers of investors, in the summer of 1806 Barham wrote to Wilberforce outlining his plan. He stressed his commitment to "free labor," explaining how his idea dovetailed with the abolitionist agenda. As an added bonus, the "civilized free men" from India and southern China would be "already inured to a hot climate."⁶ To Barham's great disappointment, though, Wilberforce declined to support the endeavor. The problem, he explained, was that other planters would try to thwart Barham's design. Migrants would be subject to other planters' "hostile operations" intended to "disgust & deceive them," to "obstruct ye plan" and "frustrate" its fulfillment. As a result, Wilberforce wrote, "I fear the issue will be regarded as a fair trial & a complete decision against us, of the important question whether sugar estates in the West Indies can be profitably cultivated by any other system than that which now prevails." Barham implored Wilberforce to reconsider, but Wilberforce remained convinced of the plan's potentially disastrous consequences. "If the scheme fails," he wrote, "it will be said, [...] that it proves practically, that the West Indies can only be worked by slaves labour."⁷

and it seems likely that Barham proceeded with his plan based on discussions with Layman. See in particular a letter in bundle 6, in which a contractor declines Barham's proposition in part because the figures quoted differed from those suggested by Captain Layman, MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 6, Bod. For details of Barham's plan, see Fred B. Lincke to J.F. Barham, 1 July 1806, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 3; J.F. Barham to William Wilberforce, n.d., MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 2. For evidence of Barham's earlier thoughts on the matter, see a letter from Charles Webb to Barham, 28 August 1803, MS.Clar.dep.c.357, bundle 3.

⁶ "Outline of a Plan for the better Cultivation, security, and Defence of our West India Colonies," bundle 5; "Prospectus," Barham Papers, MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 4, Bod.

⁷ William Wilberforce to Joseph Foster Barham, 26 August 1806, MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 2; Wilberforce to Barham, 2 September 1806, MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 2 (underlining in original). Seymour Drescher explains that the abolitionist James Stephen "convinced Wilberforce that the experiment's failure would discredit all who sponsored it, including abolitionists" as he "foresaw nothing but disaster in being associated with such a venture." See Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 109.

Wilberforce had sufficient reason for concern. Although Barham pressed ahead with his venture, he met with stubborn resistance from Jamaican planters. Other problems surfaced as well: contractors refused to ship laborers to the West Indies, or demanded enormous sums for doing so. The British government had begun a simultaneous experiment with Chinese laborers in Trinidad, and because that would only work if migrants could send positive reports back to Asia, one official pointed out that they should arrive “in a healthy situation” to give them the best chance of flourishing in the Caribbean environment.⁸

Both this concern that migrants be initially settled in a healthy spot and Barham’s insistence that South Asian laborers were already suited to hot climates demonstrate the continued importance of health, climate, and the environment in the early nineteenth century.⁹ In part, the plan’s success would hinge on migrants’ health, which could be optimized by choosing a healthy location, and Barham pushed the climatic reasoning with potential investors, insisting that people from “the East” would thrive in the Caribbean. As Wilberforce had predicted, though, slaveholders desperate to retain the slave labor system wrote scathing critiques of early experiments with Asian laborers, insisting that they were not, in fact, suited to the West Indian climate.¹⁰

⁸ “Speculative observations of Mr. Farquhar Lieutenant Governor of Prince of Wales’s Island and agent to the Governor General with the Malay States, on the proposed plan of introducing Chinese settlers at Trinidad and our other West India Islands, and of opening a direct intercourse of trade between the East and West Indies,” Add MS 13879, f. 43-73, BL.

⁹ For more on Indian laborers in the West Indies, see David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 16-17. For a comparison of Indian labor and transportation with African slavery, see Verene A. Shepherd, “The ‘Other Middle Passage?’: Nineteenth-century bonded labour migration and the legacy of the slavery debate in the British-colonised Caribbean,” 343-376 in Shepherd, ed., *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

¹⁰ An editorial in the *St. Jago Gazette*, for example, argued that the Chinese laborers who had recently arrived in Trinidad were “indolent, worthless, vagabonds” who, far from laboring industriously, spent their time “loitering about the fields all day with parasols over their heads, to protect them from the rays of the sun, and refusing to do any kind of labour.” The migrant workers, the writer complained, were useless, and the editorial urged the House of

Planters' fervent attempts to show, as Wilberforce feared, that the Caribbean islands could indeed only be cultivated by enslaved laborers echoed those of the Georgia settlers seventy years earlier. Just as the Malcontents had contrived to discourage Europeans from laboring in Savannah in order to persuade the Trustees to allow slaves in the colony, Jamaican planters tried to prevent the success of Barham's plan. They feared that if Asian laborers could work successfully in the Caribbean, the slave trade had no hope of continuing, because "free" Indian and Chinese workers could supplant enslaved Africans. The language Barham used to describe his plan – "for trying by experiment whether our sugar islands might not be successfully cultivated" by Indian or Chinese laborers – was strikingly reminiscent of that used to describe the plan for Georgia under the Trustees. Georgia's Trustees had attempted to determine "what improvements in land were practicable by white servants," but the efforts of people bent on slavery obscured any accurate representations of the results and subverted the experiment.¹¹ Whether consciously or not, Wilberforce worried that Barham's venture might follow a similar trajectory. Without enough control, and without sufficient resources and popular support, Wilberforce feared that Barham's experiment would "prove" that only Africans could cultivate land in the West Indies, dooming any further abolitionist movements.

As things turned out, Parliament voted to end the trade before any substantial indentured labor schemes took shape. Slavery remained the dominant labor system in the islands, but even as planters continued to oppose alternative forms of labor, some indentured labor programs did come to fruition. The British government imported laborers first from China, and then from India, to Trinidad, followed by Jamaica and other West Indian islands. Although Barham's plans

Commons not to pass a bill encouraging Chinese labor in Jamaica. See clipping from *The St. Jago Gazette*, 11 May [1811?], in Barham's papers, MS.Clar.dep.c.366, bundle 1, Bod.

¹¹ Quote from "Description of Frederica in 1741," William Bacon Stevens papers, MS 759, Folder 14, no. 57, GHS.

for his own property never materialized, his extension of the climatic rhetoric remained an important justification for the transportation of hundreds of thousands of Indian and Chinese indentured laborers to the Caribbean region.¹²

The arguments planters had made before Parliament and the importation of these laborers implied that only black or brown bodies could labor in a hot climate. But although the large-scale transportation of laborers from South Asia had racist underpinnings, it was not based on a universal, fixed conception of biological bodily race, at least not among British planters. West Indian inhabitants of European extraction unquestionably held prejudices against dark-skinned people, but even by the early nineteenth century most of these residents held no clear conception of innate biological and heritable racial differences among bodies. Notions of racial difference were neither fixed nor uniform; instead, most planters in the Greater Caribbean still saw bodies as malleable entities, prone to change. Their beliefs in a racial hierarchy coupled with no clear sense of biological race relied upon climatic rhetoric as a convenient excuse and justification for African and Asian labor.

The distinctions between environment and climate, and between seasoning and race, formed a crucial difference between planters' private beliefs and public claims. Environment – but not climate – and seasoning – but not race – played fundamental roles in eighteenth-century conceptions of health and bodily difference. Subsequent interpretations of planters' claims, though, along with a loss of the concept of seasoning, has resulted in scholars giving too much weight to race as a marker of difference in the eighteenth century. Some scholars suggest that differing rates of illness, especially in the case of yellow fever, demonstrate a sense of racial

¹² For more on Barham, see Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. 10-40.

awareness, or fundamental bodily difference between white and black bodies. It is true that a few eighteenth-century physicians speculated on the links between skin color and immunity.¹³ But historians have focused more on these scattered statements, and less on the far greater number of other comments surrounding the ambiguity of yellow fever, including the substantial number of physicians who did not distinguish it from other types of fevers. Instead of understanding differences in people's susceptibility to diseases by virtue of skin color, medical practitioners and laypeople believed it was a matter of seasoning.

In Robert Jackson's 1791 treatise on the fevers of Jamaica, for example, his discussion of yellow fever at first glance appears to conform to racial lines. Explaining that neither native Africans nor creoles (native West Indians, though Jackson did not specify skin color) tended to contract the illness, he noted that Europeans "suffer from it soon after their arrival in the tropical countries." But this was not, in fact, a racial disease. Rather it was a difference of seasoning: after Europeans had "remained for a year or two in those hot climates," he wrote, only rarely did they contract yellow fever. Similarly, if "Creoles or Africans" traveled to a cold place, Jackson explained, they were entirely susceptible to yellow fever upon their return to the West Indies.¹⁴

¹³ Historians tend to cite two examples in particular – one of the physician John Lining, who published a treatise on yellow fever in 1799, and one of a yellow fever outbreak in Philadelphia in the same decade. Both Benjamin Rush (in Philadelphia) and Lining (in South Carolina) speculated that black bodies were immune to the disease, or at least less susceptible than white bodies. Peter Wood cites a passage in Lining's essay which claims that the people most affected by yellow fever were "especially strangers lately arrived from cold climates," (quoted in Wood, *Black Majority*, 82). Also citing Rush, Wood speculates that Rush's "convictions about black immunity [...] may have had their roots in Lining's observations about South Carolina," particularly as Rush quickly backpedaled after many of Philadelphia's black residents contracted yellow fever after tending others (see Wood, 82, footnote 70). Wood's suggestion that Rush may have drawn upon Lining is particularly intriguing, because several other historians have cited the two physicians independently of one another as evidence of a more widespread belief about yellow fever's racial divisions. This potential over-reliance only on physicians' manuals to estimate a general population's beliefs about immunity and race is part of the reason I have relied more heavily on planters' correspondence, which was less likely to be repeated.

¹⁴ Robert Jackson, *Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica* (1791), 249-251. John Hunter, another military physician in Jamaica, also wrote that "Europeans, after remaining some time in the West Indies, are less liable to be affected by the causes of fevers than on their first arrival" because over time they acquired some resistance. "The negroes afford a striking example," he continued, "of the power acquired by habit of resisting the causes of fevers; for, though they are not entirely exempted from them, they suffer infinitely less than Europeans." (See John Hunter, *Observations on*

The difference in susceptibility, as Jackson made clear, was one of adaptation or seasoning. Once Europeans had become accustomed to a tropical environment, they were no longer likely to contract yellow fever. By the same token, if people spent enough time in a different place for their bodies to adjust, even if they were natives of Africa or the West Indies, they would be susceptible to the illness upon returning to the Caribbean. Jackson was no particular exception; both personal correspondence and medical treatises show that many other planters and physicians who noted differences in people's susceptibilities distinguished not among skin colors, but between inhabitants of a particular place and "strangers" to that place. They believed that fevers, yellow or otherwise, affected recent arrivals, or unseasoned people.¹⁵ In order to understand the nuances of eighteenth-century conceptions of health and bodily difference, then, we should be careful not to conflate distinctions of seasoning with those of race or skin color.

Greater Caribbean residents believed that illness rates were directly related to people's exposure to the elements.¹⁶ As Edward Long explained, "Negroes are in general the first seized with those distempers which become epidemic," especially after significant amounts of rain, because they had "indifferent cloathing" and were exposed "to the inclemencies of weather."¹⁷

the Diseases of the Army in Jamaica, 24). Seasoning and acquired resistance, then, played a much larger role than did racial difference in immunity to disease.

¹⁵ In 1796, planter Simon Taylor of Jamaica noted a recent change in yellow fever cases, which he attributed to the environment: "Some time ago," he wrote, "no people fell by the Yellow Fever but new comers." Lately, though, a "number of old standards have been carried off." Taylor attributed the change to "the excessive drought, having contaminated the air." Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 26 November 1796, Vanneck-Arc/3A/1796/22, ICS. Plantation owner Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina wrote in the early autumn of 1794 that there had been "a malignant but not a contagious fever in Charleston, it proved fatal to strangers but not to the natives." In another letter, he explained, "To strangers & persons from the Country this City has during the Summer and Fall been generally fatal, but to the inhabitants it has been very healthy." Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to Thomas Pinckney, 13 September 1794, 5 October 1794, Pinckney Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Library of Congress.

¹⁶ See, for example, the letters of Charles Gordon Gray, who in 1814 wrote, "The Constant rain has made the Parish sickly, white as well as black." The week before, he noted, 28 people had been in the plantation hospital; "fever is the complaint." A month later, with continued wet weather, the situation had not improved. The plantation's inhabitants had suffered "much sickness, fevers from the continual rains & sores from the same cause," he wrote to his father. See Charles Gordon Gray to father, 4 August 1814; 8 September 1814, MS 163, NLJ.

Long's reputation among historians as a blatant racist, along with the arguments he made in the abolition debates, makes it all the more significant that he did not take every opportunity for drawing distinctions between black and white health. Even as he claimed, for instance, that the "bodies and constitutions" of African and Afro-Caribbean people "seem peculiarly adapted to a hot climate," he did not claim that this climatic fitness was innate. On the contrary, he mused, "perhaps, they owe their health not more to this adaptation, than to their mode of living," since Jamaica's "native Whites," provided they remained sober, were "equally healthy and long-lived."¹⁸ As Chapter Four demonstrated, Long admitted that the climate changed people. By acknowledging this visible bodily change, and by using the phrase "adaptation" to describe Africans' fitness for hot climates, Long revealed a more tempered view of the climate and of humanity than that for which he is most remembered – insisting that "the White and the Negroe are two distinct species."¹⁹ The extent to which he wrote about the similarities among African and European creole bodies, in particular their "equal" health in relation to the climate, betrays a less rigid and more malleable view of bodily difference than Long himself might have cared to admit.²⁰

¹⁷ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. III, 614. Physician William Hillary also warned that "frequent and epidemical" dysenteries appeared in the rainy months, affecting "both white and black People, but especially the latter, who are often but little clothed, and more exposed to the Inclemency of the Weather." William Hillary, *Observations on the Changes of the Air and the Concomitant Epidemical Diseases, in the Island of Barbadoes* (1766), 18. Long may have drawn upon Hillary in writing his own work, given the similar wording of their texts.

¹⁸ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 29.

¹⁹ Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, 336.

²⁰ In fact, Long undermined his own claims repeatedly throughout the text. A passage often cited as evidence of Long's virulent racism – his claim that mixed-race people could not reproduce – is called into question by his reference to a "Mulatto wet nurse." Women could only be wet nurses if they were themselves nursing a baby – a sure indication of their ability to reproduce. The same passage also discloses his hesitation about the human body's fixedness or racial divisions. Berating British creole women for neglecting their infants by "disdaining to suckle" them, Long expressed his discomfort with these women handing their children "to a Negroe or Mulatto wet nurse, without reflecting that her blood may be corrupted, or considering the influence which the milk may have with respect to the disposition, as well as health, of their little ones." See Long, *History*, vol. II, 276. Long's concern that

In the seventeenth century, planters began to favor enslaved African laborers over indentured Europeans for reasons of economy and convenience. Africans were becoming easier to obtain than servants from the British Isles, and planters decided the long-term investment was economically prudent. Planters did not believe that Africans would be any healthier than Europeans on plantations; if the transition had anything to do with the Caribbean climate, it was only that servants may have heard rumors of its unhealthiness, increasing their reluctance to travel. The situation in Georgia was similar: English settlers wanted enslaved Africans for economic, not climatic, reasons. The Malcontents turned to a climatic argument by appealing to existing climatic lore only after their initial pleas went unheeded. Finally, during the abolition debates, in spite of a history of European labor on plantations, regardless of their notions of seasoning, and notwithstanding their recognition of substantial climatic and bodily variation, planters insisted categorically that Europeans could not labor in hot climates. They did so for economic reasons and out of racial prejudice, not because they believed their own arguments.

While planters' private letters demonstrate their deep convictions about the connections between bodily health and atmospheric conditions, they reveal no such beliefs that Europeans had an inherent inability to labor or be healthy in the heat. Instead, correspondence demonstrates a consistent discrepancy between the dominant, public climatic rhetoric and planters' actual beliefs about climate and bodily health. Planters did not note differences in health between black and white bodies on a grand scale, nor did they believe that Africans or their descendants were particularly healthy in the West Indies. As planter Matthew Lewis noted in 1818, "Whether it be the climate not agreeing with their African blood (genuine or inherited), or whether it be from some defect in their general formation, certainly negroes seem to hold their lives upon a very

women of color could transmit something of their "disposition" to white babies through their breast milk indicates the dubious nature of his insistence upon unbridgeable differences between black and white bodies.

precarious tenure.”²¹ If even as late as 1818 planters doubted the West Indian climate’s suitability for African bodies and noted their high death rates, it is difficult to imagine that planters themselves ever believed in the climate arguments they presented to Parliament.

Given their widespread beliefs about bodily adaptation and climatic variation, it seems highly probable that planters, well knowing the power of the climatic argument in the British collective imagination, drew upon it in spite of the fact that they did not believe it. Over time it became ingrained first as a colonial maxim, and then as a historical explanation for racial slavery. The reality was closer to an observation made by a late eighteenth-century traveler to Virginia. “Virginians assert their country cannot be cultivated without slaves,” he wrote, “yet we see many freeholders in that state who gain their living by bodily labor.”²² Although Virginia’s climate was not quite as hot as that of the Lowcountry or the West Indies, the principle was the same: Europeans *could* labor in these places, but preferred not to if African slave labor was an option. And in spite of their proven ability to labor (the “redlegs” of Barbados, for example, or the Salzburger in Georgia), people with an interest in buying, selling, and using enslaved laborers insisted repeatedly that hot climates were incompatible with laboring European bodies.²³

Published material reinforced planters’ claims, giving them undue authority.

Interpretations of the Georgia experiment offer a case in point. In a 1768 account of the British

²¹ Matthew Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1834]), entry for 3 February 1818, p. 331.

²² John Vaughan Papers, Series II, BV462, Commonplace book, c. 1783, p. 9, APS.

²³ Of “redlegs” in Barbados, William Dickson wrote that although the climate “should be more suitable to black labourers,” in actuality “white labourers are found to bear the hardest labour that is necessary, without any inconvenience” (that is, until they ruined their constitutions by excessive drinking). See Dickson, *Mitigation of Slavery* (1814), 155. Similarly, Anthony Stokes wrote, “The White Creoles of Anguilla and Tortola, and the Ten Acre men in Barbadoes, who have been bred up in active life [...] prove that white men can cultivate lands in a tropical climate; and many of the poor White people in Carolina and Georgia raise grain without the assistance of Negroes.” Stokes, *A View of the Constitution of the British Colonies in North America and the West Indies* (1783), 415. For more on the “redlegs” of Barbados, see Jill Sheppard, *The “Redlegs” of Barbados: Their Origins and History* (New York: KTO Press, 1977), and David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 100-102.

Empire, writer Oliver Goldsmith explained that the initial regulations on Georgia “were made without sufficiently consulting the nature of the country or the disposition of the people.” Georgia’s climate was “excessively hot, and field work very laborious in a new colony,” he wrote, and “the load was too heavy for the White men, especially men who had not been seasoned to the country.” Subsequent historians repeated Goldsmith’s explanation in their own published works, and the language they used suggests that they drew directly upon Goldsmith’s text. But Goldsmith’s account went further. He acknowledged that all of Britain’s North American colonies had originally been “settled without the help of Negroes.” In all of these instances, Goldsmith explained, “The White men were obliged to the labour, and they underwent it, because they then saw no other way.” Yet it was human nature, he wrote, “not to submit to extraordinary hardships” if an alternative presented itself, and when slavery offered European laborers in Georgia “a much more easy condition,” it was inevitable that they would want the same advantages as “their neighbours.”²⁴ Later writers who used Goldsmith’s texts in writing their own histories neglected to add this last part, choosing instead to perpetuate the climatic reasoning.

The vast majority of people on plantations did not differentiate people’s health along racial lines, as letters from these places make clear. According to prevailing historical scholarship, conceptions of bodies changed from fluid and malleable to rigid and closed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. If such a shift occurred, people’s experiences in

²⁴ [Oliver Goldsmith], *The Present State of the British Empire in Europe, America, Africa and Asia* (London: W. Griffin, 1768), 333. For other writers offering select interpretations, see Jonathan Carver, *The New Universal Traveller* (London, 1779), 607, and William Russell, *The History of America, from Its Discovery by Columbus to the Conclusion of the late War* (London, 1778), vol. II, 305. A separate 1770 history also drew upon the Georgia experiment, concluding that it made “certain, that Africans, or their descendants, are better able to support severe labour in hot countries than any of European blood.” See John Huddleston Wynne, *A General History of the British Empire in America* (London, 1770), vol. II, 541.

plantation societies did not direct this change. Any alteration in conception was Euro-centric in nature, and not based upon evidence from the colonies. Moreover, historical explanations dependent upon disease as a factor in the development of biological race risk downplaying the racial prejudice involved in systems of Atlantic slavery. They also rely heavily on a handful of medical texts and public claims, even as planters' private correspondence tells a different story. These letters reveal the persistence of environmental understandings of health and of ambiguous ideas about bodily difference even in the early nineteenth century.²⁵

Why, then, did planters insist so strenuously in Parliamentary hearings that only Africans could labor in hot climates, and Europeans could not, in spite of their conceptions of seasoning? They did so in part for economic reasons, since they believed that enslaving someone was cheaper than paying the wages of a laborer, and in part to draw a distinction between black and white that their own experiences threatened to undermine. For as African and European bodies became seasoned to the same climate, suffered from the same environmental conditions, and as a growing mixed-race population, even if barely mentioned, blurred the lines between black and white and exemplified the commonalities among all bodies, Europeans looked for another way to confirm racial differences. Anatomical studies in Europe may have developed precisely because Europeans wanted a way to measure, define, and articulate bodily difference. And as West Indian creoles exhibited bodily similarities to one another, a denial of Europeans' ability to labor in hot climates functioned as a denial that their bodies had or could become like African bodies.

²⁵ Scholarship discussing the shift from porous to closed bodies in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries is almost exclusively European in nature, while works that examine the concept in the Americas argue for a later timeline (e.g. Linda Nash's *Inescapable Ecologies*, Conevery Bolton Valencius's *The Health of the Country*). Much of this work, however, exists regionally, and I have found no work to date that looks at the development of these ideas in an Atlantic context, whether comparative or cohesive; instead, scholars of Europe and America simply record different historical processes. This inconsistency demonstrates the importance of an Atlantic perspective.

To insist that they could not labor where Africans could was to maintain a strict divide between black and white bodies, in spite of evidence to the contrary.

Important differences between planters' public claims and private attitudes existed, as did differences between ideas developing in Europe and in the Americas. Yet the political power structure of the colonial setting ensured that the public claims prevailed over private beliefs, and that speculation prevailed over experience. Seasoning was an Atlantic concept rather than a British one, and by selectively omitting a full understanding of seasoning from the public record, planters sought to preserve their economic interests by urging the continuance of the slave trade. Moreover, in a post-Revolutionary context, West Indian planters who might once have identified as West Indian, or perhaps as residents of the Americas, took every opportunity of reasserting their British-ness. Downplaying seasoning allowed planters to align themselves with Britons rather than acknowledging that they had adapted to the Americas either culturally or bodily.

Climate functioned as a convenient excuse for racial slavery, and it persisted as a veneer and a justification all the way through slavery's existence in the Atlantic. Plantation correspondence reveals no clear sense of biological bodily difference between Africans and Europeans. But the legacy of the climatic rhetoric had real and lasting effects, extending throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, justifying continued patterns of labor and subjugation, and fueling a thriving culture of racism.

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Kings Manuscripts

Reports on the state of the British colonies in North America and the West Indies: Kings MS 205
William Gerard de Brahm, 'Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North
America': Kings MS 210-11
Journal of an officer traveling to the West Indies and North America: Kings MS 213

Sloane Manuscripts

Henry Barham, 'Account of Jamaica': Sloane MS 3918
Letters on Barbados: Sloane MS 2302
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Evidence submitted to the committee for Council of Trade and Plantations in the course of their enquiry into the state of the African slave trade: BT 6/9 (1788), BT 6/10 (1788), BT 6/11 (1788-89); Report of the committee with supplementary evidence to 28 June 1789: BT 6/12
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