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"The Worke Wee May Doe in the World"
the Western Design and the Anglo-Spanish Struggle for the Caribbean, 1654-1655

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“THE WORKE WEE MAY DOE IN THE WORLD”
THE WESTERN DESIGN AND THE ANGLO-SPANISH STRUGGLE FOR THE
CARIBBEAN, 1654-1655

By

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ABSTRACT

In the spring and summer of 1655, Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector of England and with the authority of the Council of State, dispatched an English fleet under the command of Sea General William Penn and General Robert Venables to conquer and settle the target of their choosing among Spain’s colonies in the Caribbean. A Spanish defending force of perhaps 400-600 men, mostly militia, repulsed a landing force of 9,000 men. Demoralized and defeated, the much-reduced force boarded their ships and sailed to the more weakly held island of Jamaica, where the Spanish who chose not to surrender faded into the interior to join their runaway slaves in a guerrilla campaign that would last five years before the English completed their conquest of the island. When Oliver Cromwell heard the news of the defeat at Hispaniola, observers in London reported that he shut himself in his room for an afternoon, before placing Penn and Venables in the Tower of London; but later recovered to call for godly Englishmen to settle the new colony of Jamaica. Few chose to answer, while most followed the example of the New England colonists, who felt they had enough trouble fulfilling God’s mission in the North American wilderness, without sailing through a war zone to an uncertain future in disease and hunger-ridden Jamaica. Meanwhile, the war Cromwell felt he could avoid in Europe broke out with Spain, gaining him Dunkirk but costing money and men. This ambitious and spectacularly unsuccessful project to colonize the Spanish Caribbean has come to be known as the Western Design.

The Western Design represents a key turning point in the history of the Caribbean and development of England’s American colonial empire. Through an unprecedented use of state-commissioned force, England struck against a continental enemy across the Atlantic, and added what would become a valuable sugar island and buccaneering base to a growing American empire. The event has long been looked at by historians of Commonwealth England, both in exploring Cromwell’s religious psychology, and in debating its foreign policy. However, with
the growth of an Atlantic approach to history, new fields have opened within which the Western Design should be considered. One development has been the blurring of the formerly rigid historiographical distinctions of what constituted English, colonial American, and Caribbean history. A growing Atlantic empire including all three areas has begun to be explored, and events in one place have been examined as to how they affected events in the others. One example has been an analysis of the early seventeenth-century Caribbean as a target for Puritan colonization, much as New England has been viewed for decades and even centuries.
INTRODUCTION

In the spring and summer of 1655, Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector of England and with the authority of the Council of State, dispatched an English fleet under the command of Sea General William Penn and General Robert Venables to conquer and settle the target of their choosing among Spain’s colonies in the Caribbean. A Spanish defending force of perhaps 400-600 men, mostly militia, repulsed a landing force of 9,000 men. Demoralized and defeated, the much-reduced force boarded their ships and sailed to the more weakly held island of Jamaica, where the Spanish who chose not to surrender faded into the interior to join their runaway slaves in a guerrilla campaign that would last five years before the English completed their conquest of the island. When Oliver Cromwell heard the news of the defeat at Hispaniola, observers in London reported that he shut himself in his room for an afternoon, before placing Penn and Venables in the Tower of London; but later recovered to call for godly Englishmen to settle the new colony of Jamaica. Few chose to answer, while most followed the example of the New England colonists, who felt they had enough trouble fulfilling God’s mission in the North American wilderness, without sailing through a war zone to an uncertain future in disease and hunger-ridden Jamaica. Meanwhile, the war Cromwell felt he could avoid in Europe broke out with Spain, gaining him Dunkirk but costing money and men. This ambitious and spectacularly unsuccessful project to colonize the Spanish Caribbean has come to be known as the Western Design.

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Another area rarely explored in English language studies of this event and its precursors is the Spanish defense of their New World colonies. K. R. Andrews and Karen Ordahl Kupperman have, among others, gone a long way to correcting this omission, but much remains to be done. The Spanish defense of the Caribbean can be examined in its own right, and that examination can cover the fleet system, fortification projects, and the effectiveness of the militia system. An area especially needing exploration is the multiracial character of the Spanish defenses the English faced. The maroons of Jamaica who waged the effective guerrilla war with Venables’ survivors have been written about extensively, but the black militiamen and emergency ad hoc units of plantation slaves require the historian’s attention. Their scouting and fighting roles on Hispaniola figured in the Spanish victory in April 1655, as was the role of black militia regiments throughout the Spanish empire.

The Western Design, as such a pivotal event, is often mentioned in studies of Commonwealth England, the English Caribbean, and life and career of Oliver Cromwell. Only one book-length study has been devoted to the campaign, S. A. G. Taylor’s *The Western Design*, published in 1965. Taylor focuses on the English colonization of Jamaica, and he provides an engaging narrative of their military experience there and on Hispaniola. The account of events prior to Jamaica are dealt with rather quickly, without much attention paid to Spanish sources from the defense of Santo Domingo, and the book is somewhat short on footnotes, reducing its usefulness as an aid for researchers. Still, Taylor very effectively captured a sense of the frustrations and sufferings of the English soldiers in the Caribbean.¹ John F. Battick published a short article on the topic in 1972, “A New Interpretation of Cromwell’s Western Design.” He

argued that the Western Design represented well-thought out state policy, representing a true shift in English imperial growth. In general, though, the Western Design has been more mentioned in passing, than studied on its own.\(^2\)

\* \* \*

Historians of Stuart England and of Oliver Cromwell’s regime have long included discussions of the role of planned Caribbean expansion and the Western Design in general English history. For example, the importance of the Providence Island Company in solidifying members of Parliamentary opposition against Charles I appeared in J. H. Hexter’s 1941 classic *The Reign of King Pym*. Interpretations of the Western Design have served to illustrate the two main contesting views of Cromwell: was he “Machiavellian” using a hypocritical religious front to seek power, or was he sincerely religious and motivated to seek God’s blessings for England?\(^3\)

Two of the more recent biographies of Oliver Cromwell that dealt with the Western Design’s outcome and its results for his protectorate take the latter position. Barry Coward’s book, published in 1991, viewed the Western Design as the outgrowth of Cromwell’s connection to Lord Saye and Sele and other Puritan leaders who had promoted colonizing ventures in the Caribbean in the 1630s and 40s. Coward saw the failure of the Western Design as prompting Cromwell to self-pity and fear of God’s personal judgment. This resulted in a thorough effort at religious reformation of England, and the institution of the rule of Major Generals over that nation to enforce that reformation.\(^4\)

J. C. Davis, in his 2001 biography, saw Cromwell’s reaction to the debacle on Hispaniola as proof that his professed religious beliefs were genuine, in his attempt to discover and atone for the reason that Providence deserted him.\(^5\)

Blair Worden wrote a 1985 essay, “Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan,” that explored the question of Cromwell’s result-driven providential theology in depth, and looked at the results of the Western Design at great length. Worden described Cromwell’s providential theology as

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5 Davis, *Oliver Cromwell*, 129-130.
genuine, in which he saw England as a type of Israel in the Old Testament, where God’s blessings and curses were shown in the successes and failures of Cromwell’s New Model Army.\(^6\) As long as England faithfully followed God’s law, Cromwell believed almighty God would grant his men success. As Worden succinctly expressed it, “Through the fear of God he conquered the fear of men.”\(^7\) As Lord Protector, Cromwell already had to endure charges made by radical dissenters that he was disobeying God. The debacle on Hispaniola represented, as Worden argued, an unprecedented defeat for the Lord Protector, which plagued him possibly for the rest of his life.\(^8\)

Worden argued that Cromwell viewed the defeat of the Western Design as God’s judgment in two distinct areas: first, on the ungodly soldiers who took part, and second, on him personally. Historians have continued the first thread on a secular level, in laying the primary blame of the debacle on the English forces. Cromwell reacted by punishing the military and naval leaders of the expedition. To seek out the cause in England of God’s judgment, Cromwell instituted a day of fasting and humiliation, a common Puritan response to troubles. Worden argues that Cromwell equated the expedition’s defeat on Hispaniola with the defeat of the Israelites by an inferior force at the city of Ai in the Book of Joshua. The defeat was the result of the sin of one man, Achan, and Cromwell believed that a parallel sin had been committed in England to draw God’s displeasure. One opponent of Cromwell equated the Protector’s rise to power with this sin. Cromwell himself felt some guilt for the defeat, but also blamed the sinfulness of the English people.\(^9\)

Beginning in the 1950s, and through the 1970s, the Western Design became an important issue in the debate over Oliver Cromwell’s foreign policy. The debate surfaced again in the 1990s. Cromwell’s wisdom in risking open warfare with Spain and befriending France, which would become a dangerous and powerful enemy in later decades, has been questioned since the


\(^{8}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{9}\) Ibid., 136-39, 141-45.
original debate held in the Commonwealth’s Council of State on 20 April 1654. The debate rests, like the general debate on Oliver Cromwell himself, on two theses. The first is that Cromwell followed an anachronistic, “Elizabethan” policy of seeking alliances with Protestant powers and opposing Spain. The other thesis argues that Cromwell’s policy was realistic, not based only on religion, in which he kept the potentially hostile powers of France and Spain separate and prevented a united European drive to put Charles Stuart on the English throne. The point has been made since that a religiously motivated policy and one based on national interests would not necessarily have been mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{10} Two important works on English foreign policy of the middle 1600s were published in 1995 and 1996. Steven C. A. Pincus, influential for his work on Anglo-Dutch relations in this period, continued that work with \textit{Protestantism and Patriotism}, but also dealt with the origins of Anglo-Spanish War of the late 1650s. Timothy Venning’s important work \textit{Cromwellian Foreign Policy} was the result of his PhD dissertation. Other historians have also contributed to the modern debate. Cromwell’s biographer, Barry Coward, saw the Western Design as part of Cromwell’s broader campaign to increase the size of the world’s territory confessing a Protestant faith.\textsuperscript{11}

Pincus’ goal was to restore a discussion of foreign policy to seventeenth-century English historiography. He saw England’s policy as motivated by millenarian Protestantism, especially in light of the three wars fought against the Protestant Dutch, and worked on the popular base of foreign policy. To Pincus, both wars against the Dutch and the Anglo-Spanish conflict sparked by the Western Design were seen as defensive, guarding England against conquest by a Jesuit-motivated conspiracy to establish a Catholic world monarchy. He demonstrated the appearance of such a conspiracy theory involving the 1653 publication of an earlier treatise in translation advising a past King of Spain to divide the Dutch and English defenders of Protestantism and render them easier to conquer. Popular newspapers of the day widely disseminated such


theories. Pincus saw Cromwell’s response as Elizabethan in nature, meaning the strategy of investing the Spanish West Indies and robbing the Spanish of the gold necessary for their military. Thus, Cromwell’s Western Design was something of a preemptive strike, to use a contemporary term, based on anachronistic ideas held over from the Tudor monarchy.¹²

Timothy Venning certainly did not discount the role of religious faith in Cromwell’s policy, of which he has a positive view overall, reservedly crediting the Protector with a generally successful policy, considering the difficult circumstances of his rule. Venning saw Cromwell as motivated by both practical and religious considerations, with the more radical New Model Army taking an active role in the implementation of ambitious Protestant projects such as the Western Design. Rather than treating the Western Design briefly, Venning assigned it an entire chapter of narrative and analysis in his work. He regarded the Design as a key to Cromwell’s foreign policy, and attacked negative views of the expedition, stating the Cromwell’s strategic move was actually quite rational. He pointed out that Cromwell and his advisors felt that the expedition would be cheap, would reap profits from the Spanish treasure fleets, and would provide employment for restive and unpaid English soldiers and sailors. They also felt that there was little risk of continental war with Spain. Venning also argued against the notion that an attack on Spain was necessarily Elizabethan. Others had proposed such an assault on the West Indies since the 1620s, and the use of a regular military and naval force in making the attack on friendly territory was an entirely new approach. In the end, the Design failed because of faulty intelligence and lack of preparation, not an anachronistic policy.¹³

* * *

Important groundwork was laid in the 1970s for a view of English growth in forming an Atlantic empire during the early modern period, including Ireland, North America, and the Caribbean. The English were among the second wave of Northern Europeans to venture into the Caribbean, once Spanish had established colonies there. The English privateering ventures preying on Spanish treasure proved a poor substitute for trade and permanent colonies. The Caribbean was known for quick profits through sugar planting, just as Virginia would become

¹² Pincus, Protestantism and Patriotism, 1-3, 6-7, 184-85, 189.

¹³ Venning, Cromwellian Foreign Policy, xii-xiii, 11-12, 71-90.
known for tobacco.\textsuperscript{14} England’s expansion across the Atlantic had until recently been considered a late development. However, the imperial project has been dated earlier as the English conquest of Ireland has been considered. Over the course of the sixteenth century, Ireland became largely a colony of the Tudors. Karl Bottigheimer, in his essay “Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Westward Enterprise,” and Irish historian D. B. Quinn have argued that the English may have even drawn lessons from Spanish colonial administration for methods of ruling in Ireland. Bottigheimer argued that Ireland did not represent simply another English colony, but that it did see massive migration of English and Scots at the same time of early English expansion into the Americas. Colonization of Ireland ended, Bottigheimer pointed out, in the Cromwellian era for internal reasons, but interestingly at the same time there was renewed interest in settling the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{15}

Meanwhile, the first English incursions in the Caribbean have been dealt with by the noted historian of Elizabethan privateering, K. R. Andrews. Andrews sought to revise the earlier celebratory emphasis on the damage done by the raids of the earlier privateers to the Spanish empire. Instead, he used both his 1978 essay “The English in the Caribbean, 1560-1620,” and his 1984 book \textit{Trade, Plunder and Settlement}, to argue that the initial English attempts at raiding in the Caribbean up to 1620 were inadequate to do more than cause a slow decline in Spanish trade. The real assault on the Spanish Caribbean, for Andrews, began with permanent settlement by the English in the 1620s.\textsuperscript{16} The earlier involvement in the Caribbean under Drake in the late sixteenth century had been directed to striking rich, vulnerable Spanish cities for booty, and setting up bases for more raiding. As defense of the Caribbean became costly, the Spanish had


to be selective in what areas of the Caribbean they devoted their resources to protecting, and which they abandoned to the enemy. This allowed for an influx of small groups of raiders to become very active in the early seventeenth century. At the same time, English merchants began operating in illegal and legal, licensed trade in the Caribbean. After a break in Caribbean ventures during the peace negotiated with Spain by James I, and Raleigh’s unfortunate expedition to Guiana, colonization was renewed in earnest in the late 1620s in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War. Andrews saw the presence of Dutch naval forces in the Caribbean as the key to allowing English colonization in the region.\(^{17}\)

English imperial expansion into an Atlantic world has prompted a body of scholarly work that no longer views the British colonies in isolation from the metropolis. In a 1995 review article, “The American Colonies: Another British Kingdom,” Karen Kupperman pointed out that the result of the earlier historiographical isolation of colonies from metropolis, and colonies from each other, “results inevitably in exaggerating difference and seeing distinctiveness as the important story.”\(^{18}\) Earlier, historian Jack P. Greene wrote an introduction to the 1984 work he edited, Colonial British America, which provided a statement of this problem and its solution. He cited a Whiggish tendency in twentieth-century historiography to focus only on the American colonies that became the United States, and emphasize the precursors of the American Revolution. Instead, the English / British empire in the Americas should be viewed as an imperial entity, including not only the thirteen American colonies, but the Caribbean as well.\(^{19}\) One important work published in 1987 with the project of seeking the Atlantic connection in mind was David Cressy’s Coming Over, a trans-Atlantic view of the seventeenth-century


colonization of New England. Karen Kupperman has more recently applied this approach to the seventeenth-century Puritan mission to colonize the Caribbean.

The Western Design has often and effectively been interpreted as a Puritan-motivated push to colonize the Spanish Caribbean with godly English Protestants and divert the wealth that was enriching and empowering Catholic Spain. Puritan colonization and early modern New England are all but synonymous and have been discussed by historians almost to the point of exhaustion and cliché. Kupperman has played a key role in bringing the Puritan designs on the Caribbean into the historiographical prominence more appropriate to the importance the godly themselves placed on settling the West Indies. Kupperman has published extensively on the early history of the Atlantic world, but the two key works dealing with this historical development are a 1988 article in *William and Mary Quarterly*, “Errand to the Indies: Puritan Colonization from Providence Island through the Western Design,” and a book-length treatment of the failed attempt to colonize Providence Island, published in 1993, *Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony.*

Kupperman’s thesis was that the West Indies, not New England, was the major target of Puritan colonization in the 1630s and 1640s. The Caribbean islands, and not the inhospitable colonies to the North, would provide an opportunity to strike at Catholic Spain, divert its wealth, and offer suitable land to grow cash crops. The first focus of this colonization move, undertaken by the leading Puritans of England’s nobility and gentry, was the colonization of Providence Island off the Nicaragua coast (known to the Spanish as Santa Catalina.) In the meantime, James I and Charles I of England maintained peace with Spain, except for an outbreak of warfare in the second half of the 1620s. The English planted the Providence Island colony in 1630, and it was

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23 Kupperman, “Errand,” 72-76.
a model of what Kupperman says might have happened if the Puritans had settled Virginia: a plantation economy developed, using slave labor, as well as a base for privateering. After political instability and three Spanish assaults, the final one successful, the colony failed as the Spanish captured the last colonists in 1641. By the end of the English Civil War, a government existed in England under Cromwell eager to carry on the colonization work in the Caribbean. Thus, English projects in the Indies were not seen as anachronistic, but a completion of recent ventures in that region. In the end, the results of the Western Design were the conquest of Jamaica but the failure to plant a godly colony, and interests in trade and piracy would eventually take over concerns of the propagation of the gospel. As Venning has more recently argued, Kupperman attributed this to Cromwell’s lack of planning, an example of the overly optimistic hopes of Puritans who thought the conquest of the Indies would be an easy one.

David Armitage, writing on early modern England’s empire building in his 1992 article, “The Cromwellian Protectorate and the Languages of Empire,” treated the Western Design and Caribbean expansion as vital to imperial development. Providing a useful periodization, Armitage classified the period of 1654-56 as “the imperial moment of the English republic.” This period covers the end of the Anglo-Dutch War, the Western Design and the beginning of the Anglo-Spanish War. Cromwell’s empire building proved troubling to his supporters and detractors in England who felt such activity inconsistent with the building of a republic. Armitage showed, in fact, how the fall of the monarchy and rise of a new republic provided new opportunities for imperial growth, as the republic’s leaders forsook the more peaceful approach of the Stuart monarchs. Cromwell saw an assault on Spanish America as a limited naval war, unlikely to result in war in Europe, which would add to England’s wealth in trade as well. Armitage also pointed out eschatological motivations for conquest of Spain’s American empire. A certain current of belief among Puritans in England and New England held that the downfall of Spain would hasten the millennium. Continental war did break out with Spain, and while

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24 Kupperman, *Providence Island*, *passim*, esp. chap. 11. Kupperman also provides an extremely useful bibliographic essay.


Cromwell’s army conquered Dunkirk, the republican empire building campaign was a failure. The example, however, would be taken up in the eighteenth century to inspire a new round of assaults on Spain in the West Indies.27

The study of the early modern English and British empire from a transatlantic point of view has been a recent development in the past thirty years of the historiography of this colonial era. However, it also has a weakness. Historiographical lines are indeed blurred between colony and metropolis, and North American and Caribbean colony, but lines between the historiographies of Britain and North America, and Spain and Latin America remain solid. For a true dialogue among historians, any discussion of British intrusion into the Americas needs to also include study of the Spanish who had already arrived, colonized, and built a civilization.

* * *

Any study of the Western Design focusing only on the British tells half of the story, and does great disservice to the historical actors involved. Seventeenth-century British settlement of the Caribbean can usefully show, as Kupperman and Armitage have done, the workings of Puritan expansion into the Americas and the formation of a British Atlantic empire. The existing scholarly work can be built upon and enhanced by focused analysis on the Western Design itself. However, the expedition’s significance can only be fully understood when we take into account the Spanish side of the affair. The Western Design serves not only to test the effectiveness of English foreign policy and expansion. It also tests, perhaps even more effectively, the strength of Spain’s hold on its Caribbean empire. Issues that can be explored on this theme include the system of defense built by Spain for its empire and key cities, the effective use of a multiracial military force in a slave society, and the Caribbean-wide effects of the Western Design.

The Spanish empire in the Americas suffered from repeated assault from the sixteenth century onwards, by French corsairs, Dutch privateers, English seadogs and naval flotillas, not to mention an international array of buccaneers. A common and older view of the Spanish empire through the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was an empire under attack and in slow decline. Much has been made of the vulnerability of Spanish ships and possessions, from the raiding of Drake to the capture of the Plate Fleet by Piet Heyn in 1628, and the later depredations

27 Armitage, “Cromwellian Languages of Empire,” 532-37, 553-54, passim.
of Henry Morgan and his ilk. More recent work, while acknowledging the long-term economic depression in Spain, has provided a more balanced view, from the vantage point of the empire’s defenders.

Paul E. Hoffman’s 1980 book *The Spanish Crown and the Defense of the Caribbean, 1535-1585: Precedent, Patrimonialism, and Royal Parsimony* is a seminal work in the historiography of Spain’s defense of the Caribbean. Bringing quantitative methods into a study of military and naval policy, Hoffman painted a picture of a stronger empire than previously supposed. Hoffman viewed the bold acts of corsairs and privateers like Drake as adaptations to the effectiveness of the Spanish colonial system, requiring more and more daring moves to penetrate its defenses. Hoffman concluded that the Spanish fended off small-scale corsair incursions and smuggling operations, for which their system was intended. This was precisely what the Spanish crown and local colonists could afford. Any larger attacks on the Spanish Caribbean required adequate prior intelligence and timely reinforcement. Although Hoffman examined the sixteenth century, a study of the Western Design shows that this assessment held true through the middle of the seventeenth century as well.28

One aspect of the defense Spain made of its empire was the use of armed flotillas to protect treasure, and sometimes territory. Carla Rahn Phillips in her 1986 maritime history of the seventeenth-century fleet system, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century*, saw these flotillas as the key to preserving the Spanish Empire. The wealth of the Americas, argued Phillips, was the only resource keeping Spain strong against the enemies that began attacking the empire in earnest during the Thirty Years’ War. Over the seventeenth century, Spain’s wealth was, for the most part, preserved because of the system that developed using biannual armed fleets sailing across the Atlantic, with the support of naval vessels and privateers. Phillips argued that, while overextended, the Spanish government effectively used naval forces to defend an empire.29 The study of the fleet system’s role in Spanish colonial defense also crosses historiographical lines. Karen Kupperman also dealt in her

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book *Providence Island* with the offensive role of the fleet in attacking English interlopers in the West Indies. Seeing the English as squatters and pirates, the Spanish navy probably would have seen themselves as a defensive force. Kupperman pointed out the end of the Providence Island venture as the English surrendered to Francisco Díaz Pimienta of the Spanish Plate Fleet after his successful attack in May 1641. This followed unsuccessful sea-borne assaults in 1635 and 1640. Thus, even in the history of the Spanish empire prior to the repulse of the English from Hispaniola, the Spanish should not be considered helpless victims to bold Protestant sea rovers and Puritan colonists.³⁰

Spanish militia played a decisive role in the defeat of the English expedition on Hispaniola. The focus of previous work on Spain’s defense of the American empire has been in two areas: first, on the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and the Spanish fleet system, and second, the period of the so-called Bourbon reforms, after the 1762 fall of Havana to the British. The earlier threats of sea-borne assault by English and French privateers were answered with coastal fortification projects and concentrations of troops in key seaports. Historian Christon Archer argued in his essay on the military in the 1986 book *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America* that the Spanish militia of the seventeenth century was unable to repel buccaneering raids. While Morgan’s campaigns bear out this interpretation, Hispaniola was at least a notable exception that needs to be accounted for. Archer wrote that the period of the Bourbon reforms saw the implementation of a systematic defensive force of both a small base of regular army units and a larger body of colonial militia.³¹

The force that pushed the English off Hispaniola was a multiracial one, and plantation slaves and Maroons served as scouts and in Spanish ambushes in the forest fighting on the island. One of the most interesting currents of research in colonial Latin American military history focuses on the role of blacks in the Spanish militia force throughout the empire. As in the general colonial military history of this area, the scholarly focus has largely been on the role of black militia after the Bourbon reforms. For free persons of color in vulnerable coastal areas,


forming militia regiments provided an opportunity to gain social prestige. The crown garnered the benefit of having a local group that could serve as loyal militia troops in heavily contested areas. In Cuba, black and mulatto militia units dated back to the late sixteenth century.32

Historians have written not only on the militiamen’s military role, but also their social history. The historiographical focus to study the Bourbon reform militia is particularly notable in Spanish borderlands regions historiography of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as Spain’s empire grew more vulnerable. The military figured prominently in Kimberly Hanger’s 1997 study of free black society in New Orleans during this period, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*, when Louisiana was part of the Spanish empire. Hanger saw Louisiana as a militarily important colony, in which free black militia units were important to its defense. Service in the militia also provided free blacks with an opportunity to form a corporate group identity, and to receive rights and privileges they might normally be denied through the *fuero militar*, customary privileges granted by the Spanish government to soldiers. Some free blacks even became officers, further elevating their status. On a less positive note, these militia units not only served in defensive roles, but also to hunt runaway slaves. Hanger saw the growth in size and status of the free black militias as stemming directly from the Bourbon reforms and growth of both the free and enslaved populations of color.33

Not all historians of the black militias see the Bourbon reforms as the most important era for the development of these vital military units. One historian of the black militia in New Spain, Ben Vinson III, argued that the period before these reforms was actually more important. The focus of an article he published in 2000, “Race and Badge: Free-Colored Soldiers in the Colonial Mexican Militia,” was on racial identity as shown by studying the free militia in Mexico. His special study in the article was on the protection offered free blacks through the *fuero militar*. He argued that, in guarding the visible public buildings and places of the colonial government, the free black militia became vital in protecting the workings of that state itself. Through the seventeenth century, Spanish colonial officials were wary of arming blacks in a

32 Archer, “Military,” 201-203.

slave society, but reluctantly endorsed the policy, influenced by growing dangers of assault. Vinson regarded the period for the most important growth of free colored militias in New Spain as occurring before the 1760s, beginning in 1670, rather than during the Bourbon reforms. During this period, colonial officials relied on free blacks for soldiers, as neither whites nor Indians readily volunteered to serve. Free black militia units grew and demanded privileges that increasingly became harder to attain during the Bourbon era of the eighteenth century. In the 2001 book that developed from his research in this area, Bearing Arms for His Majesty, Vinson stated his argument even more strongly, that the Bourbon period marked a time of decline for the black militia in Mexico. The black militia played an important role before this in defense of sparsely populated coastline, bordering both the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific, areas vulnerable to piracy and buccaneering raids. Throughout the empire, men of color provided a key defensive element in protecting the Spanish empire against attacks such as the Western Design. The defense of Hispaniola did not see the use of formal bodies of black militia. However, the events of the Western Design figure into this historiography as the Spanish offered freedom to Maroons in the vicinity of Santo Domingo in return for fighting the English, and gained valuable intelligence concerning English troop movements from plantation slaves serving as scouts.

In studying the Western Design, most of the primary source documentation for my thesis derives from eyewitness accounts, both English and Spanish, and state records where the participants’ voices were lacking. There are some weaknesses in the sources, as some of these accounts were written after the fact, but most of the journals and letters were composed either at the time of the events recorded or soon after them. There is also the problem that officers wrote all of the available records on both sides, and the common fighting man’s experience must be inferred from these. However, especially on the English side, the sources bear the strength that the writers did not mince their words or guard their language, and made no attempt to cover up

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35 Vinson, Bearing Arms, 1-2, chap. 1 passim, 221-23.
the weaknesses of their forces or enormity of the defeat on Hispaniola. Instead, the historian must be careful in the use of accounts where these officers made great haste to blame each other.

The English sources represent both the military and naval arms of the Western Design. The commanding general, Robert Venables, wrote a lengthy memoir of the expedition to defend himself against his detractors. The diary of his second wife, Elizabeth Venables, who accompanied him, provides additional information about the general and the process of preparing for departure to the West Indies. Lieutenant Colonel Francis Barrington and Major Thomas White, regimental officers who served in the Western Design, also represent the army’s voice. Two sea journals reflect the naval point of view, one by Thomas Whistler, Admiral Penn’s sailing master, and the other by the skilled sailor and sea officer Richard Rooth. On the Spanish side, the notary and treasurer of Santo Domingo both wrote reports soon after the English left. Four years later, Manuel Gonzalez Pallano Tinoco, who served as a captain in the fight against the English, wrote an extended account of the campaign in a bid for royal rewards which had escaped him earlier. For a Spanish view of the English landing on Jamaica, the cleric Julian de Castilla put on paper the record of events up to 1656. Events in England and in official circles were collected in the papers of John Thurloe, Oliver Cromwell’s secretary of state. In addition, an interesting anonymous journal was published soon after the main body of the fleet arrived in England, attacking the conduct of the expedition, by a certain “I. S.” or “J. S.,” who will be referred here as “I. S.” Together, these accounts paint a vivid picture of events on the ground on Barbados, Hispaniola, and Jamaica, and also in Whitehall, that comprise this watershed moment in English colonial history.36

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Here, the Western Design is traced from its inception in the spring of 1654, to the return of the English commanding generals and the attempts to build a new colony in Jamaica in the fall and winter of 1656. The first chapter focuses on the inception of the Western Design, from the close of the Anglo-Dutch War in April 1654 and the growth of anti-Spanish sentiment and interest in Caribbean colonization in Cromwell’s court, through the formal planning of the expedition in the summer and fall of the year. The roles of the Black Legend and the former Catholic priest Thomas Gage are examined, and Oliver Cromwell’s policy decision of the spring and summer. The new colonial policy is approached as a serious act of state, rather than an Elizabethan anachronism. The second chapter covers the recruiting and provision of the army and fleet in England, and the restive stay of the expedition on Barbados in February and March of 1655. This chapter the lack of training and proper provisions weakened the force, which might have allowed greater chances of success against the Spanish. In addition, it will be shown how the lengthy stay on Barbados proved both damaging to colonial relations, and gave the Spanish an opportunity to reinforce Hispaniola and await the coming English.

The third chapter introduces the actual clash between the forces of England’s army and navy, and the defenders scraped together at the last minute by the Spanish at and around Santo Domingo. The chapter will show how not only the English blunders and command failures, but flexible and brave leadership on the part of the Spanish, forced Penn and Venables from the island by the end of April 1655. The fourth chapter covers the English landing on Jamaica the next month, and shows how, because of a failure of communication between Spanish colonies, the English were able to gain a foothold on the island. Finally, the fifth chapter examines the Western Design’s consequences in England in the fall and winter of 1655, both in the initial assessment of who or what was to blame for the defeat at Santo Domingo, and in the early attempts to make good the colonization of Jamaica. In all, the Western Design will be shown to have some limited success in an innovative approach to empire building, limited not just by English blunders, but largely by Spanish valor.

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An examination of even as brief an event as Cromwell’s Western Design can open questions in several areas of British, Atlantic, and Latin American history. Cromwell’s foreign policy has been a much-debated topic, as historians have tried to learn whether he was truly
religiously motivated or was seeking political power, or was he driven by a combination of religious and temporal goals. From there, the historian can move on to investigate the nature of the early English empire, how and why it formed. The development of Atlantic history allows for study of trans-Atlantic events, examining them on a broader scale than simply focusing on the colony or the metropolis. Colonial American history has begun to look at the British Caribbean as part of a unified empire, rather than examining the North American colonies in isolation. Latin American historians also have a historiographical contribution to make to an event usually viewed as part of British history. Work remains to be done on the effectiveness of Spain’s colonial defense networks. Needing special attention are the black militias of the frontier areas prior to the period of Bourbon reforms, when they have been shown by such events as the Western Design to have been more important than previously thought. Finally, the effects that local colonial crises had on the wider Spanish circum-Caribbean require further examination, as has already been shown to some extent by Spanish borderlands historians working on Florida. Such a project as outlined above is large enough to appear daunting, but such a broader field of research and analysis must be conducted to understand the true implications of the events of 1655.

Researching and writing on events in early modern history that concern both British and continental European historical actors can prove rewarding and exciting, but carries a potentially confusing factor. Just as modern Englishmen, (and Anglo-Americans), have declared their independence of the European continent by sticking to inches and feet instead of centimeters and meters, in the early modern period the English insisted on using the obsolete Julian calendar, or Old Style, as opposed to the Gregorian, or New Style calendars used on the continent. Thus, through the seventeenth century, the date in England was perpetually ten days behind that of the continent. Because the bulk of primary sources for this thesis that made extensive use of chronology are English, I use the Old Style dates, but the years are taken to begin on 1 January. Dates given in New Style are followed by the abbreviation (NS).

I have also tried to maintain continuity with the sources with regard to military and naval terms and ranks. However, I modernized the titles of naval officers for the sake of clarity. At the time of the English Civil War and in the following decade, there existed a greater degree of fluidity between military and naval command. William Penn, who commanded the English fleet in the Western Design, actually bore the title of general, or general at sea. I have changed that
here to admiral, to avoid the confusion that exists in the primary sources when writers applied the rank of general to both land and sea officers. In this case, participants had to repeatedly specify the general to whom they referred. Otherwise, the original spelling and grammar has been maintained from the sources, even when the author was barely literate, to preserve the voices of the historical actors.

A number of the primary sources used for this thesis are only available locally in collections of printed translations. When using translations of documents originally written in Spanish and Swedish, I have been careful to use reliable editions. I have used Irene Aloha Wright’s early twentieth century translations of AGI documents in the Royal Historical Society collections, as well as Professor Michael Roberts’ translations of Swedish diplomatic correspondence. Wright did pioneering labor in Spanish archives in the early part of the twentieth century, collecting and translating documents that have proved helpful to beginning researchers in colonial Latin American history, especially in studies of Florida and the Spanish Caribbean.
CHAPTER 1

“160 Ships Swimminge”: The Origins of the Western Design
April-December 1654

Members of the Council of State witnessed a fascinating debate on 20 July 1654. Since April, the Council had before them a proposal for an assault on the Spanish in the Americas. Intelligence came from varied sources, including a former royalist and a renegade priest. Oliver Cromwell, as lord protector, supported the idea, which would come to be known as the Western Design. He had one powerful detractor, John Lambert, who felt that the scheme was grandiose and unfeasible, and would cost too much money. Cromwell insisted that the plan was God’s will, and would succeed in bringing profit and glory to England.¹

Thus Cromwell launched the Western Design, a source of problems for his later rule. The Western Design proved an expensive failure, with only the consolation of the conquest of Jamaica after Spanish defenders ambushed an English expeditionary force and drove them from Hispaniola before the hopeful besiegers could reach Santo Domingo. Cromwell has reaped a great amount of criticism for this policy, from scholars and contemporaries. Scholars have often wondered what went wrong when the victor of the civil war and an Irish campaign let an unprepared force be so savagely beaten. Two schools of thought exist concerning the design: one argues that it represents an anachronistic act of nostalgia for the glories of Elizabeth’s reign and an inexcusable error of judgment on Cromwell’s part. The other claims that the plan was a carefully planned and crafted one, but that Cromwell gave up control of the expedition itself and allowed it to fail.

Cromwell’s hopes of a great work in the West Indies can be traced back to his association with the political Independent faction of the 1640s, most notably promoters of the Providence Island venture such as Viscount Saye and Sele.\textsuperscript{2} Cromwell took advantage of an ideal opportunity England had for such an expedition. In the Western Design, England saw the culmination of plans for colonizing the Americas made coherent by Richard Hakluyt in Elizabethan times. It was not a nostalgic anachronism, but a carefully discussed plan involving what research could be done for a combined-arms operation requiring military and political skill. However, the motivation and intelligence provided for the design were driven by prejudice against Spain that allowed the English to underestimate their opponents. This underestimation, and poor quality troops and supplies, led to the design’s downfall and Lambert’s vindication. However, the arguments of the above historians omit a vital element. To explain the failure of the Western Design, the historian must give credit to the expedition’s Spanish opponents for their victory against superior numbers on the island of Hispaniola. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the situation in which Cromwell and the Council of State found England in the spring and summer of 1654, and what factors led them to plan and launch the Western Design later that year.

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Spain had been a target of English hostility since Mary Tudor’s unpopular marriage to Philip II in the 1550s, when her government diverted English funds into a Spanish war. Hostility increased with the progress of the English Reformation, as some Protestants viewed Spain and the Society of Jesus together as a growing force attempting to conquer England for Rome.\textsuperscript{3} Warfare had broken out officially twice, interspersed with unofficial sporadic violence “beyond the line” that did not lead to warfare, near the Spanish domains in the Americas. The most recent


\textsuperscript{3} Pincus, \textit{Protestantism and Patriotism}, 187.
treaty with Spain had been negotiated in 1630 in Madrid. It was a treaty ignored by those who wished to colonize the Caribbean and prey on Spanish shipping, and their defense pointed to Spanish retaliation and termed it an act of hostility. Colonial impulses going back to Richard Hakluyt, combined with hatred of Spain, were instrumental in bringing England to the point when, under Cromwell, plans were finally made to launch a full-scale joint army and navy expedition against Spanish America.

The writings of popular authors such as Thomas Gage, and translations of the writings of Bartolomé de las Casas and Thomas Campanella reinforced this current of anti-Spanish feeling in seventeenth-century England. English Protestant hostility against Spain in the early modern period has come to be known as the “Black Legend.” The term is a broad one, but generally refers to the perception of the Spanish as a cruel and treacherous nation bent on world domination and elimination of Protestantism. Thomas Gage, discussed below, popularized the Black Legend in England through his writings, using its two most common motifs when applied to westward colonial expansion. The first was based on the writings of the Dominican friar Las Casas concerning the first conquest of the Caribbean, in which he described shocking atrocities perpetrated by the conquistadors on the Indians, in an effort to secure royal Spanish intervention on their behalf. The second denounced the Spanish conquest of the Americas as illegitimate, based on the donation of the pope, whom the Protestant English and Dutch refused to recognize. Gage scoffs as well at the notion of right to new land by discovery, arguing that an English ship could not claim ownership of Spain by virtue of sailing within sight of it. A large part of the Black Legend was driven by fear of Spain. Especially potent was the thought that the Habsburg monarchy was attempting to build a universal monarchy, a Catholic empire mirroring the days of the first Rome.

Gage invoked accounts of Spanish cruelty, described so graphically in Las Casas, and reissues of writings of Thomas Scot circulated in the 1620s that came into vogue again. One example is Scot’s short account of Spain’s supposed atrocities in the Netherlands, reprinted in 1642, with the inflammatory title, *The Wicked Plots, and Perfidious Practices of the Spaniards, against the 17 Provinces of the Netherlands.* In it, the Dutch rebels of the late sixteenth century

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are portrayed as defenders of the Reformed faith against the treacherous and tyrannical Spanish crown, the persecutor of true religion that used Catholicism as an excuse to cover greed for Dutch tribute. In this account, the duke of Alva is seen tearing down Reformed churches and using the scraps to build gallows to hang Reformed Christians. Even towns receiving the Spaniards peacefully are sacked and burned; meanwhile, the pope is seen approving such activities. As a final bitter insult, the author writes of the Spanish, “If Judas himself were alive, he might goe to them to School.”

Also printed in 1654, probably in the fall, was an English translation of Thomas Campanella’s *Discourse Touching the Spanish Monarchy*. The translator’s note draws attention to Spain’s earlier desires for the universal monarchy and present failure in achieving it.

Campanella himself appeals to the idea of universal monarchy, hearkening back to the days of the Roman Empire. He sees the potential in a Spain buttressed by faith and military prowess of true world domination. He believes that the Spanish monarchy should take advantage of divisions between its enemies and exercise its great power. This statement undoubtedly sparked nervousness in an England recently at war with their coreligionists in the Netherlands. Campanella counts England as an enemy standing in the way of world dominion. To him, the easiest way to deal with the English threat is to foment internal unrest. This spoke to the fears of Jesuit infiltration aiding a Spanish assault. Whether all this ever represented a serious or feasible consideration among the Spanish was beside the point: Englishmen reading this in 1654 felt convinced that Spain was the avowed enemy of Protestant nations, and this hostility justified any design against Spain. Indeed, in Council meetings concerning the Western Design, Spain is referred to as “an old enemie to this nation when it prospered best,” and the Council stated that,

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7 Campanella, *Discourse*, 4-5, 31, 155-57.
the Spaniard beinge the greatest enemy to the Protestants in the world, and a nation of
greate councell, and harder to be dispossessed of any accesse of greatnesse: the French
not soe bitter against the Protestants.\textsuperscript{8}

These statements in the commonwealth’s Council show the effects of the Black Legend, as an
attack on Spain came to be justified by the threat posed to the Protestant English.

Actively contributing to this Black Legend was Gage, probably the most fascinating
figure connected to the Western Design. Born into a family of recusant gentry, he was sent to
the continent for his schooling. He disappointed his father when, instead of becoming a Jesuit,
he chose the Dominican order. One night, while living in Jerez, Gage and a friend decided in a
fit of missionary zeal encouraged by drinking quantities of Spanish sack to go to the Philippines.
As a foreigner and thus not allowed into New Spain, Gage had to be smuggled out of Spain to
begin his journey. Arriving in Mexico, Gage lost his zeal for the Pacific voyage and elected to
remain in New Spain, traveling to Chiapas and Guatemala. He received a higher degree in
divinity in Guatemala, fulfilled an assignment to learn Indian languages, and served as a priest
until 1637. Having been threatened by Indians angry at the loss of their traditional religion, and
having doubts about Catholicism, he stole away, hoping to return to England. Gage did so,
through Spain, encountering English prisoners from Providence Island along the way. He
returned to England, disguised as most recusant priests were, and relearned his native language.
After a journey through Germany and into Italy, he made a final break with Catholicism, and
returned again to England, drawn, he claimed, by hopes of further reformation of English
religion to be brought about by the Long Parliament. Gage preached a conversion sermon in
London, and married to prove his sincerity. He also identified with the parliamentary side in the
civil war, receiving a clerical living in Kent.\textsuperscript{9}

Gage enthusiastically set about establishing his bona fides as an Englishman and a
Protestant as he set about encouraging an English expedition of conquest in the Americas.
However, he also prized his reputation as “the English American,” hoping to introduce his fellow
Englishmen to the wonders of the Americas. Seeking the conquest of New Spain, Gage
emphasized, exaggerated, and lied about Spain’s weak hold on the American empire. He

\textsuperscript{8} Firth, Clarke Papers, 3: 203-4.

\textsuperscript{9} Gage, \textit{English-American}, \textit{passim}.
described the route and schedule of the silver fleet in great detail to prompt an assault on the flotilla system. In addition, he opened up a new world to his readers, devoting an entire chapter to the exotic beverage chocolate, for instance. The entire work is interspersed with disparaging comments and accusations directed at the Catholic faith and Spanish rule. All friars and missionary priests are debauched and decadent, and Catholic religion is reduced to superstition and ceremonies. Gage’s treatment of Catholicism ranges from accusing Archbishop William Laud of Catholic associations to deriding the priests at a mass who stopped the service to chase a mouse which had run off with a communion wafer. In his portrayal of the Spaniards, Gage provides the right combination of buffoonery and cruelty to fuel the Black Legend. Meanwhile, the reader is introduced to the brave and noble Englishmen captured from Providence Island, as they made the attempt on West Indian planting that Gage urges other Englishmen to complete.10

Gage immediately set about using his writings to catch the attention of the leadership of the New Model Army, and convince them to initiate an expedition against Spanish America. When he first published his treatise on the wonders of the New World and the conquest of Spanish domains, he dedicated it to Lord General Thomas Fairfax. Combined with a laudatory poem by Thomas Chaloner, his dedication to Fairfax read as a call to action. He addresses Fairfax in his military capacity as captain general of the parliamentary army in England and Wales. Gage believed that his entrance into the Americas as well as his conversion was no accident, but an opportunity to provide useful service to a now more completely reformed England to spread the Gospel across the Atlantic. He urges Fairfax to consider using his troops in some design to conquer American lands, invoking Henry VII’s famous lost opportunity in not sponsoring Columbus. With their colonies in the Caribbean, Englishmen had become acclimated to the West Indian climate. Additionally, Fairfax need not worry about the legitimacy of the design, as Spain had no right to the Americas. As we know now, 1648 was no time to be suggesting the launching of a transatlantic design.11 In 1651, Gage sent a copy of The English American to Colonel Edward Popham. He hoped with his case for English designs on the West Indies to inspire Popham, the man whose “flag began to awe our neighboring foes and to strike dread into the inhabitants of all the Lusitanian shore.” Gage hoped that soon Popham’s ships

10 Ibid., especially chapters 21-22.

11 Ibid., preface, sig. A3r-v.
would be ranging American waters, striving against the “popish” Spaniards for what he calls a “second Canaan.”

Five years after Gage called on Sir Thomas Fairfax to lead the way into the Americas, his dream of an English design on Spanish America backed by the full force of the state came to fruition. In 1654, Cromwell, ruling as lord protector, felt that England was finally in a position to expand its reach across the Atlantic and demonstrate its power to the Catholic kingdoms of Europe. His government proclaimed peace between England and the Netherlands on 26 April 1654. Hostilities in European waters were to cease in twelve days, and beyond the line in eight months. In early May, Cromwell declared a day of public thanksgiving for the peace as well as for much-needed rain. It may seem an odd combination, but both had great import for Cromwell, as evinced by the language of the proclamation for the day of thanksgiving. The combined occurrence of peace with a Protestant nation and the end of drought in an agricultural society meant only one thing to the lord protector and likeminded individuals. England was clearly God’s “first-born,” in the language of the proclamation, the Lord’s anointed nation to advance his will on the earth. For Cromwell, the time had come for England to use its new and advantageous position for some grand work in the New World.

In addition, Cromwell needed to keep the army and navy occupied. The presence of a large military or naval force restive about lack of pay and without some enterprise to keep it occupied is often an equation for unrest or even rebellion. There was enough fear that an addition to the Articles of War in October 1653 sentenced mutineers to death. The Dutch war

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15 *An Additional Article to the Laws of War and Ordinances of the Sea* (London: John Field, 1653).
had already seen two major instances of mutiny in 1652 and 1653. The army provided cause for nervousness as well. The body of men who had marched on London in 1647 had proved that they could grasp political power. Some employment had to be found for troops who might prove restless. In September 1654, Cromwell issued an ordinance to ease the process of former soldiers entering civilian trades, allowing soldiers of four years’ service with good conduct to go directly into trades without having to complete prior apprenticeships. Funds also had to be found to provide for these men and those remaining in service.

Maintaining this restless military and naval force was expensive. The state had to raise taxes to pay for the costs of government, a large military and naval establishment, and widows and disabled soldiers left from the previous decade’s fighting. The lord protector and Council imposed a five percent excise on imports in May 1654. Meanwhile, the state called for tax assessments to find funds for the army and navy. The tax burden created by the increased expense of the military did not go without complaint. William Prynne wrote a protest against new taxes, especially the excise on hops. He used Scripture to accuse Cromwell of unjustly spoiling the commonwealth, without the legal authority of Parliament, going so far as to accuse Cromwell’s government of levying the impositions for which Charles I had called. He also accused Jesuits in England of inspiring the levying of these taxes. Prynne’s tirade seems to have been set off by a request that he pay tax on his hops, a tax authorized in September 1654 and to remain in effect until 1656, encompassing the period of heightened military activity in the West Indies. Cromwell and his Council, therefore, had to take up the difficult task of keeping the soldiers and sailors of the Commonwealth occupied in godly causes without increasing the financial burden of the nation.

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17 *A Collection of All the Proclamations, Declarations, Articles, and Ordinances, Passed by His Highness the Lord Protector and His Council*, December 1653-September 1654 (London: Henry Hills, 1654), 661-65.

18 Ibid.

The solution called for setting the army and navy to some employment that would not only cost little, but would even turn a profit. From the age of Hakluyt, high hopes of financial reward fueled English designs on the West Indies. These might come in the long term with successful planting, or be made immediately by seizing Spanish treasure. In answer to Lambert’s objections to the Design’s expense, Cromwell reminded him of the extraordinary rewards to be reaped from wealthy Spanish ships. He called for “six frigotts nimble” to search for Spanish prizes from the newly acquired base in the Caribbean.\(^\text{20}\) The English had proof that the plate fleet was vulnerable to seizure and defeat. In 1628, the Dutch privateer Piet Heyn had managed to drive the entire fleet into Matanzas Bay on the North coast of Cuba and seize the treasure from the bottled-up ships, an action that left the Spanish shaken.\(^\text{21}\)

If the English planned to seize the annual fleet, they had to find it, which with good intelligence would not be too difficult as it followed the same route every year. Young Council of State member Edward Montague took extensive notes on the debates held about the Western Design on 20 April and 20 July. According to his notes, the route taken by the Spanish fleet was outlined in detail. Silver was mined in Peru, and the ore was taken by ship up the Pacific coast to Panama. From there, the treasure passed overland to Portobello. Meanwhile, the fleet had arrived from Spain using the trade winds to sail to Havana and south of Hispaniola to Portobello to load the silver. Then the fleet touched at Havana again, and set a course by Florida, using the Gulf Stream to bring Spain its yearly treasure.\(^\text{22}\)

Spain had been long entrenched in the Americas, and the fleet system had worked well since the sixteenth century. Thus, in England by the time of the Design there was ample intelligence to make an attempt on it possible. One of the most practical applications of Gage’s treatise was his detailed account of a year’s voyage with the fleet. He not only described its exact route, but also wrote to expose its vulnerability and importance to the Spanish crown. He felt the Habsburg Catholic world empire would collapse without it.\(^\text{23}\) Campanella saw treasure

\(^{20}\) Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 208.


\(^{22}\) Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 204.

as the key in promoting a Spanish world monarchy. In fact, American silver did not even represent a quarter of the Spanish monarchy’s income at its height.

Gage’s journey along the fleet’s route began in an attempt to reach Panama and thence sail to Portobello to board the fleet’s ships for Europe. He wrote that they arrived in June or July. In his first journey home, a Dutch privateer captained by a mulatto who had sailed under Piet Heyn seized his ship. This mulatto robbed Gage of the fortune he had later reported he had reaped from his Indian parishioners. Gage eventually reached Portobello, where he witnessed the loading of the Spanish galleons with silver brought by mule from Panama. From there they sailed to Cartagena, and then to Havana and past St. Augustine into the Atlantic. Meanwhile, Gage indicated the nervousness in the fleet of falling prey to privateers from Providence Island. Throughout his description, Gage provides Englishmen with the knowledge to confidently and effortlessly secure Spanish treasure.

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The intelligence-gathering and extensive discussion of the Council of State point to the careful planning that Cromwell had invested in the Western Design. As the concept was first suggested, the Council was set to make a hard decision. In the spring of 1654, peace having been made with the Dutch, Cromwell had hopes of impressing the kingdoms of Europe with military might and diplomatic skill. In an expansive mood, he set his Council to decide whether England should go to war with France or Spain, and make peace with the other. He was not going to make the mistake of declaring war on both powers at the same time. At the beginning of Cromwell’s protectorate, both the Spanish and French ambassadors made overtures to him, hoping for an alliance against the other. The Spanish ambassador, Alonso Cárdenas, encouraged Cromwell to join Spain in enforcing peace on the European continent by contributing 4,000 soldiers and twelve ships to Spanish designs against Bordeaux. This was further urged by the

24 Campanella, Discourse, 81.


representative of the Prince of Condé. The French, on the other hand, represented in England by their ambassadors Antoine de Bordeaux and Paul de Castelmore, Baron de Baas, hoped for a defensive and offensive alliance against Spain, promising to reimburse England for making war on the Spanish. Cromwell bought time with general and evasive answers to all the ambassadors.²⁷

Cárdenas became nervous when his entreaties did not receive a positive response. He made it clear to Cromwell that he did not want to coerce England into war with the French if that meant ill relations between England and Spain. His first priority was to renew the Treaty of Madrid, and he discussed the 1630 agreement in conference. England’s main complaint was that Spain acted in the Americas as if they were at war with the English, attacking English colonists and violently driving them off Providence Island and Tortuga. The English also demanded that the Inquisition stop harassing English merchants in Spain for practicing their religion, and that these merchants be allowed to own English Bibles. Cárdenas’ response was that these petitions were asking “his master’s two eyes,” and that nothing could be done about them. Indeed, one could hardly expect the Spanish to apologize for suppressing what they saw as piracy; according to their law any non-Spanish interloper in the West Indies was trespassing on the pope’s donation. Therefore, the conference came to nothing, and Cromwell’s leanings tilted strongly against Spain.²⁸

The Council sat down for its final discussion about a foreign alliance. Thurloe reported later to Hyde that Cromwell had favored an attack on Spain in the West Indies aimed at restitution of former damages. He also stated that the majority of the Council of State supported this, as well as a French alliance. The first and most important reason was that a France on good terms with Cromwell’s government presumably would not entertain an alliance or good relations with Charles Stuart or his brother James. Good relations with France were also thought to be beneficial for the Huguenots, and also a way of preventing the French from aiding Scottish resistance in a renewal of the Auld Alliance. Thus, they decided on peace with France in Europe.²⁹ One might ask, what of the obvious third option: why not attack no one and have


²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 761, and Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 205-6.
peace with France and Spain? Colonel Edward Sexby wrote a lengthy document offering advice to the Council, asserting his hope to avert a war that might prove hazardous to England. However, he also cautioned against allowing a general peace in Europe. Peace with both kingdoms invited the danger of an alliance between France and Spain against England in support of Charles II.\textsuperscript{30}

On 20 April 1654, six days before Cromwell issued a proclamation of peace between the English and the Dutch, the Council of State discussed the feasibility of launching an expedition against the Spanish in the Americas. Cromwell defined the issue at first as one of finding employment for the 160 ships “swimminge at sea” and a large army about to be reduced in size anyway. Before the Council were two basic choices: whether to launch an attack on France or Spain with the other’s support, and Cromwell resolved that Spain was the more harmful nation to the Protestant cause and therefore the most likely target. In the spirit of the Black Legend, Spain was described as Protestantism’s most bitter enemy. There was the added benefit that war with Spain was seen as profitable, especially with American treasure as a reward for victory.

The Council went on to discuss the various targets in the West Indies. Hispaniola topped the list of islands, and the city of Santo Domingo judged to be the best target. The English believed from their intelligence that it lacked fortification by land and guarded by only three hundred men, a serious misjudgment that would eventually cost a thousand English lives. Other possible targets included Havana, Portobello, and Panama, all of them important sites for the transport of precious metals. The general opinion of the Council, having reviewed the intelligence, was that the Spanish had barely enough men to man their garrisons and keep their slaves in order. The decision had to be made as to whether the expedition should be launched during the present year and partially completed during the 1654-5 campaign season, or be postponed until the next year. The advice from two experienced West Indies traders, Captains Henry Hatsell and William Lymberry, who had lived in Hispaniola, was to move immediately and secure the island and Havana before the year was out.

The Council did perceive certain problems. As much popular enmity as existed in England for Spain, a profitable trade existed between the two countries in cloth and fish. Some

\textsuperscript{30} Firth, \textit{Clarke Papers}, 197-98, 206. The issue is addressed in Edward Montague’s notes of the Council debates as well.
feared that this trade might all go to the Dutch if war broke out. However, as part of the notion of having peace in Europe and war beyond the line, Cromwell believed that this trade was important enough to Spain to necessitate its survival even in the face of war in the Indies. Moreover, he thought that since Spain was entangled in war with the French, retaliation would be impossible.  

The Council discussed the matter of an expedition to the Americas once more on 20 July. Cromwell had reached his decision concerning France and Spain, concluding that peace with Spain was impossible. His reason was one of religious conscience: he argued that Spain did not allow English traders to exercise their religion. This bald statement did not convince his entire Council. To John Lambert, no proponent of the Black Legend, this alone could not justify an expensive blow against a peaceful nation. He believed that Cromwell’s charge against Spain would not stand. At any rate, to Lambert the design was “improbable” and America too far away to conquer and settle with any advantage to England. Lambert correctly predicted that the Spanish would put up a rigorous defense of Hispaniola, and unless territories conquered by the English were secure, colonists from other English domains would refuse to migrate. The Western Design would not “advance the Protestant cause,” and would distract men and attention from more immediate concerns in Ireland. In the end, Lambert considered the Western Design too costly an enterprise, not likely to result in any good for the Commonwealth.

Cromwell rebutted these objections in short order. Ironically, his first response to Lambert mirrored that of Philip II facing the objections of his generals to the Spanish Armada: the expedition is God’s will, and it will succeed by divine providence. This was not an opinion, however, guided by blind fanaticism. Cromwell saw a realistic opportunity created by recent peace with the Dutch, the availability of a trained and experienced army and navy, and the voluntary services of an intelligence agent who had lived in New Spain as part of the religious establishment. Cromwell, a believer in providence, was convinced that the door had been opened by God to carry the Reformation across the Atlantic into the empire of the most powerful and dangerous Catholic monarchy. Therefore, in his first argument to Lambert, he stated,

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31 Ibid., 203-6.

32 Ibid., 207-8.
We consider this attempt, because wee thinke God has not brought us hither where wee are but to consider the worke wee may doe in the world as well as at home, and to stay from attemptinge untill you have superfluitye is to putt it off for ever, our expenses beinge such as will in probabilitye never admit that. Now Providence seemed to lead us hither, haweinge 160 ships swimminge…. Thence wee came to consider the two great crownes, and the particular arguments weighed, we found our opportuntie point this way.  

God’s will could not wait for England’s finances to be in order, for the opportunity might be lost.

Cromwell went on to address the issue of expense. Finance had limited England’s involvement in continental affairs, notably during the Thirty Years’ War. A campaign across the Atlantic, which might result in European hostilities closer to home, could become a very expensive affair. The Council’s problem involved finding employment for the Commonwealth’s forces without costing the government any money. Cromwell argued to Lambert that his design would do just that. He claimed that the expedition would cost no more than outfitting the ships, and this would become a fleet of thirty-eight, including two second-rate vessels, and provided a great opportunity for profit. Cromwell may well have been thinking of Drake’s profitable voyages and Piet Heyn’s seizure of the Spanish fleet.His final word to Lambert was a claim that “the designe will quitt cost.” Cromwell believed that six fast-sailing ships, “six frigotts nimble,” raiding the Bay of Mexico would be enough to find booty to pay for the expedition and infuse new funds into the Commonwealth.

How did Cromwell justify a blatant attack by a regular military and naval force, led by commissioned officers, against the territory of a foreign power in time of peace? Spain and England enjoyed trade and diplomatic relations. Elizabeth’s investment in Drake and Hawkins’ privateering voyages on the sly and having English “volunteers” in the Netherlands was one thing. An open and recognized state policy of violent conquest was a different matter. The problem of legitimacy for the Design can be explained by the concept of “no peace beyond the line.” The concept implied that: European and British governments, realizing the danger of corsairs raiding each other’s colonies without government sanction, decided on a policy that violence in the Indies would not affect peace in Europe. Considering the lawless nature of the

33 Ibid., 207.

34 Ibid., 207-208.
Caribbean at the time, and the vague and fluid line between legitimate merchants and pirates, it was a necessary policy for preserving peace in Europe until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, when a colonial administration and naval power existed to suppress maritime bandits. However, did the policy apply to the Western Design?

Cromwell misguidedly argued that it did. Montague’s notes of 20 April spell out the basis for this opinion. Additionally, there was a feeling that a strike against Spain was justified as retaliation. Cromwell gave an explanation of this position when recruiting Robert Venables for the army command. After long service in Ireland, Venables was attending a General Council of the Officers, and at one point Cromwell pulled him aside to acquaint him with the Western Design and offer him the command. The lord protector explained to Venables,

that either there was Peace with the Spaniards in the West Indies, or not. If Peace, they had Violated it, and to seek reparation was Just. If we had no Peace, then was there nothing acted against Articles with Spain.  

In fact, the Treaty of Madrid of 1630 made no provision for suspicious activity beyond the line. After grace period of nine months after publishing the treaty would be the date for all acts of war or piracy to cease in the Indies. Afterwards, subjects of either nation could not make designs on the territory of the other, or issuing letters of marque or reprisal. No matter what Cromwell might have thought regarding what was permissible beyond the line, his plans had no legal basis.

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Thomas Gage’s involvement in the Western Design continued even after the publication of The English-American. In 1654 he provided the Council of State with a brief paper on Spanish America, giving advice on the proposed design. His first move, in light of his former career as a Catholic priest, required defending himself against any charge of ulterior motives

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36 Articles of Peace, Entercourse, and Commerce, Concluded in the Names of the Most High and Mighty Kings, Charles by the Grace of God King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, and Philip the Fourth King of Spaine (London: Robert Barker, 1630), sigs. B2v-C3r.
because of his proposal to draw away forces from England. He claimed his accusers stated that he was inspired by a “Jesuiticall spirit” to do this, an ironic charge to be directed toward a sworn enemy of Jesuits. Gage had earlier given a public recantation in St. Paul’s and taken a wife to prove his sincerity. Arguing pure motives, Gage stated his intention to bring the true gospel to the “poore Indians,” who had been led astray by their avaricious priests. There are other indications that Gage was motivated by missionary impulses. For example, he concluded his monumental work *The English American* with a grammar of the Poconchi language that he had learned in Guatemala.

Gage coupled his missionary zeal with a call for a military strike that would expedite Rome’s downfall. Gage asserted, as many had before him, that the foundation of Spain’s strength was in its silver mines, and if those were taken away both the “house of Austria” and Rome’s “triple crown” would topple. In fact, Gage argued that the Spanish in America had their own prophecies concerning their downfall. He felt that the Spaniards’ fall in the Americas was inevitable, considering their pride and sin, and that these “sinnes will betray them and fight against them.” He encouraged the Council by telling them that the design would not be difficult, that the Spanish were thinly distributed on the mainland of America, and the land weakly defended. He also appealed to English vengeance, mentioning Spain’s expulsion of the English from Providence and Tortuga. Gage engaged English prejudice and hatred for the Spaniard, and predicted an easy victory in the Americas:

> The Spaniards cannot oppose much, being a lazy, sinfull people, feeding like beasts upon their lusts, and upon the fat of the land, and never trained up to warres; over whom there can be no fitt commanders suddainely (there being few or none in the land experienced in martial discipline) nor armes or ammunition (in some parts) in two hundred leagues to arme or strengthen six hundred fighting men.

Considering Gage’s long years in Spanish America, it is amazing that his prejudice rendered him oblivious to Spain’s militia system or the efficiency of its fleet. His confidence would cost England dearly.

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Gage went on to address the practicalities of launching a force in the Americas. He observed the hostility between the Spanish ruling class and Creoles native to America, as well as the potential of inciting a slave revolt in Spanish domains. He advised that when arriving in the West Indies, the English force should declare Mulattos, African slaves, and Indians free to gain their support. What Gage did not address was why these factions would ally with an invading Protestant army not likely to practice any more benevolent a system of colonization than their previous rulers. Gage advised the Council on the most likely targets in the Caribbean basin. The English had two choices: they could invade a Caribbean island or the mainland. Gage’s experience and best intelligence came from his years on the mainland, his time in the Caribbean being limited to his voyage home with the Spanish fleet.

Gage dealt with the islands first. He suggested that of all islands under Spanish control, Cuba and Hispaniola were the most likely to prove profitable once captured. This would be a break from the earlier pattern of English colonization, for previous to this time northern European and English latecomers to Caribbean planting had contented themselves with the Lesser Antilles, territory neglected by the Spanish. Of the two, Gage preferred the choice of Hispaniola for colonization. First, it would be a great psychological blow to the Spanish empire since it was Spain’s first colony in the New World, founded by Columbus. Large tracts of the island, according to Gage, had remained uninhabited, and the island would be easy to conquer. He reported that the island had potential for profit, producing ginger, cowhide, and sugar, and there were rumors of silver mines. He would be proven patently wrong in believing the conquest of the island would be easy; however he made the astute observation that if the invasion were not quickly supported with action on the American mainland, the Spanish would regroup and become stronger than before.

Gage recommended Cuba and the mainland as targets for the proposed design. He suggested besieging Havana from land and sea, and reminded the English of Heyn’s conquest of the silver fleet at the Matanzas inlet. He argued that on the mainland, Honduras and Guatemala were the most likely places to land, being thinly defended but rich. The city of Guatemala he described as lying open and without fortification. He bore in mind the practicalities of the

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.
expedition, reporting where enough cattle could be found to supply the English fleet, and suggesting that it be immediately supplied from sources in Virginia, New England, and Barbados. Landing here would provide the English with a door to the Pacific, or “South Sea,” as well. He believed that there was enough timber to construct a second fleet to take to the Pacific and awe Panama and Peru. If a beachhead in the Americas were established, England’s opportunities, asserted Gage, were limitless, and he had even further designs on Mexico.

Gage believed that England was ready to make this further move into the Americas. He argued that climate would be no hindrance, for the English had already proven their ability to live in the West Indies. Gage asserted that in New Spain he and the Spaniards had lived in a healthy environment, “and many places there are as cold as it is here in England.” He did suggest, however, that operations in America be limited to a campaign season lasting from October to May, the other months being too wet to move an army. This was not entirely helpful, October falling within hurricane season. Gage argued that God would prosper the design of a godly English army and use it for the fall of the Roman Catholic Church and the conversion of the Indians. In conclusion, he compared himself with Joseph seeing Egypt, and admonished Cromwell not to turn down the opportunity that Henry VII did in refusing to patronize Columbus’s voyage. He urged the lord protector to exercise his faith overseas as well as in England, and to Gage this design was the best way to do so.42

Exactly what place Gage held in inspiring the launching of an expedition against the Spanish in late 1654 cannot be known for certain from Cromwell’s documents. Bulstrode Whitelock reported that Cromwell had acted “by the advice of one Gage, a minister, who had been long in the West Indies.”43 He was certainly considered important enough to the success of the Western Design to be assigned to the expedition in an official capacity. In November 1654, Cromwell gave him the commission of chaplain of the general’s regiment in the military force under Venables.44 Anne Laurence found in her research on parliamentary army chaplains in the

42 Ibid., 59-61.


44 Firth, Narrative of General Venables, 125.
civil war that these men performed important duties for their commanding officers besides ministering to the soldiers.\textsuperscript{45} It is probable that Gage was an advisor to the officers of the expedition in West Indian and Spanish matters.

Cromwell would have been guilty of a great blunder to rely solely on one source of intelligence for the Western Design. However, Gage was certainly not the Council’s only source of West Indian intelligence. Thomas Modyford also made a contribution to designs on the West Indies. A former royalist living in Barbados, Modyford had experience living in the Caribbean and offered advice very different from Gage’s. Modyford’s contribution to the Council’s planning is especially interesting in comparison to Gage’s, as it is utterly lacking in the preacher’s religious language and motivation. Modyford’s plan was simple. He suggested that the fleet use Barbados as a staging area, with a force of 2,000, and raise the remainder of their men among the English colonists. He argued that they should land in November to take full advantage of the campaign season. Modyford suggested an invasion of the Orinoco River region, as Raleigh had attempted at the beginning of the century. He did not consider it advisable to make attempts on Spanish islands in the Caribbean, provoking a Spanish response without weakening them. Settling the mainland, on the other hand, would place the English in control of not only gold and silver mines, but also the pearl trade, and would put them in good position to intercept silver from Peru. If the expedition settled an island, Modyford recommended they attack Cuba and take Havana, but he preferred the Orinoco.\textsuperscript{46}

Modyford had practical advice for fighting and settling in the West Indies as well. Like Gage, he saw the Indians as useful allies against the Spaniards and later in peacefully settling the American mainland. He suggested that the English fleet and army be well provisioned, with “the beef well salted, and the beer well boil’d,” since he saw sickness as the worst danger in West Indian warfare. The naval force should be strong enough to take on the Spanish fleet, and Modyford was not one to underestimate his opponent as Gage had. He also proposed that the troops be uniformed for the tropics, and fight in shirts and drawers and sleep in


hammocks. Modyford concluded with hopes that his plan would make the Western Design easy to fulfill, bringing great profit for England.47

The next step required finding men to lead the expedition. General William Penn, an experienced naval officer, received the order to command the expeditionary fleet in October.48 His instructions were threefold: to attack and seize any Spanish shipping he might encounter, to land the army regiments in Spanish domains for their assault, and to ensure the return to the state of whatever treasure might be taken from Spanish shipping. Robert Venables was a long-time veteran of the New Model Army. He had raised a company out of his own pocket, at least according to him, for service in England, and had seen action in Lancashire and Cheshire, including the siege of Nantwich. After the civil war ended, he crossed to Ireland and participated in the siege of Drogheda and fought in Ulster. Cromwell offered him military command in the upcoming expedition.49 His commission bore the date 9 December 1654, not long before the expedition would sail. It named him general commander-in-chief of the army contingent of the expedition, and bound him to make war on the Spanish in the Americas wherever he might find them.50

The instructions to both generals contained the bitter rhetoric of the Black Legend, as well as outlining the general plan for the expedition. The first line of both commissions cited Spain’s “cruelties and inhuman practices” in the Americas against both the Indians and English colonists. Both also made reference to Spain’s justification for the empire, the pope’s donation of 1494 by the Treaty of Tordesillas, regarded as illegitimate in England. As Modyford had suggested, Penn was to be careful of sickness in the fleet and sail for Barbados first. Venables’ instructions informed him that the design in general was to conquer land in the West Indies from Spain, and that he would not be limited by more specific orders. He was, however, given three suggested plans. The first was to invade Hispaniola by taking Santo Domingo, said to be easy to

47 Ibid.
49 Firth, Narrative of General Venables, 2-4.
50 Abbott, Writings and Speeches, 3:532-34.
capture, followed by San Juan on Puerto Rico. After these fell, Venables would be well placed to besiege Havana, where the Spanish silver fleet could be intercepted. The second plan was Modyford’s: to invade the Orinoco River or take Cartagena, intercept the treasure from Peru, and levy funds for the army from the surrounding countryside. The third plan was to take Santo Domingo or Puerto Rico, and immediately sail for Cartagena.\(^{51}\) Whichever plan the expedition would follow, Gage’s influence is evident. It was he who argued from the beginning that Spain and Rome’s Catholic empire would fall once English ships confiscated Spanish treasure. Thus Cromwell could advance England and God’s cause across the Atlantic and ensure the survival and victory of the Protestant Reformation.

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The inception of Cromwell’s Western Design was not an anachronistic throwback to the days of Elizabeth. Instead, Cromwell planned it according to the situation in 1654. The war with the Dutch had ended, and England was left with a fleet and a large army that needed employment and funds. Meanwhile, Cromwell saw an opportunity arise for England to improve its reputation and strike at its old enemy, Spain. He and the Council of State gathered intelligence and explored their options, finally deciding to attack Spain in the West Indies, hoping for peace at home and the increase of England’s western colonies. However, their intelligence, mostly relying on renegade priest Thomas Gage, was based on prejudice, the Black Legend, and a belief that God’s intention for England was clear. This led to an underestimation of Spanish power in the Caribbean. This miscalculation notwithstanding, the evidence of this intelligence gathering, and extensive planning and discussion, refute the notion of historians such as Pincus that the Western Design was an act of nostalgia and an Elizabethan anachronism. This argument points to a deeper problem in the English historiography of this expedition: that every possible explanation is given for the design’s failure except the most obvious, that the Spanish defenders had the available numbers and military skill to repel Penn and Venable’s assault. The events leading up to the expedition’s embarkation indicate the care and planning that Cromwell put into this effort to export England’s Reformation across the Atlantic.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 530-32, 534-37.
CHAPTER 2
“A mixture of little wine with much water”: Preparing for War in the West Indies
August 1654-March 1655

Robert Venables’ pursuits in the spring and summer of 1654 were not all military. Cromwell had taken him aside during a meeting in the spring, and offered him the command of a campaign against the Spanish. Venables was a natural choice. He served as military governor of Ulster, and had seen action in the Civil War in England, and in Ireland at Dublin and Drogheda where he gained valuable experience in siege warfare, fighting insurgents, and colonial administration. He was also a widower, with children, and in search of a wife.

Elizabeth Lee became a widow on Easter Week in 1642, left with memories of a happy marriage and seven children. Robert Venables paid court to Elizabeth seven years later, and at the time she refused his offer of marriage. He left for the fighting in Ireland soon after. He returned to England in April 1654; in the meantime Elizabeth had lost two children, including a beloved eldest son. On his way to the meeting with Cromwell, he renewed his proposal to Elizabeth. This time, Elizabeth accepted, and the engagement became official on May Day. The couple made plans for the future. Venables suggested a double marriage for their children: his son Thomas with her daughter Elizabeth and his daughter Frances with her son Thomas. More interesting to this study, the couple began preparations to settle in Ireland after their wedding.¹

When asked to take command of the military force of the Western Design, Robert Venables proceeded to arrange for compensation for pay due for past services, and provision for

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¹ Lee Porcher Townshend, ed., Some Account of General Robert Venables, of Antrobus and Wincham, Cheshire; together with the autobiographical memoir, or diary, of his widow, Elizabeth Venables (Manchester: Printed for the Chetham Society, 1871), 17, 23, 25-27.
his daughters in his absence on the coming expedition. Venables later explained that to leave without ensuring his family’s well-being would render him guilty of the charge in I Timothy 5:8 that the man who failed to support his family had “denied the faith, and is worse than an Infidel.” The Council of State referred the matter to a committee on 29 August 1654, the same day they authorized for his regiments. In early September the Council approved Venables’ request for his arrears, and paid him 3,076l., 6s. 10d. The explanation given for the payment stated that Cromwell has assigned Venables to “a special service in a present expedition.”

Venables hoped for assurance in other areas before accepting command. He requested for a certain quality of soldier to serve under him, supplies to feed and arm them, and chaplains to attend to the propagation of the gospel. He wished to know the reasons and justification for the Western Design before he took command, probably desiring the same assurance that he fought for a godly and just cause that he had during the Civil Wars and Irish campaign. He also made a special request in light of the distance of the intended battlefield. He asked that his orders not be so binding as to restrict him from responding flexibly to changing situations. With his questions and requests answered, Venables accepted command. Instead of Ireland, Elizabeth would now accompany him to the West Indies, trading one colony for another. Taking a broader view, the entire expedition had to be similarly prepared for the West Indies. This required a long, expensive, laborious process that had to be hurried in order for a fleet to set sail soon after the end of hurricane season, and before news reached Spain through the ubiquitous channels of European gossip.

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2 To avoid confusion, the segment of men serving in the army’s contingent under Robert Venables will be modified by the term “military,” while the force of ships and sailors under William Penn will be described as “naval.”


4 Calendar of State Papers Domestic, 1654, 338. This title will hereafter be abbreviated to “CSPD.”

5 CSPD, 1654, 357.

6 Firth, Venables, 3-4.
The Council of State meetings of 10 April and 20 July set the Western Design in motion. Now, the “160 ships swimminge” Cromwell knew of in the English navy had to become a reasonably sized fleet actually able to cross the Atlantic and deliver a striking force at the gates of Spain’s colonial establishment. Admiral Penn’s ships had to be supplied and manned, and this had to be overseen by the government, as this was a naval and not a privateering expedition. The army also had to be recruited, and quartered on board ship for the crossing. Commissioners able to manage colonial government had to be selected. Meanwhile, Spanish knowledge of Cromwell’s plans had to be blocked, and the spy network of the Council’s secretary, John Thurloe, tapped to learn how much continental Europeans knew.

This process became a largely unsuccessful one. That the army serving under Venables was mostly a rabble would not have mattered except for the fact that the Council and Venables failed to train these soldiers for the fighting to come. The supply structure favored the navy, which resulted in the untrained army recruited for the expedition being severely undersupplied. The Council sacrificed training and provisioning for a speedy departure from England, in hopes that the fleet could cross the Caribbean without the Spanish learning of it. In the end the Spanish did have the prior warning they needed to prepare Hispaniola for invasion. Furthermore, the English expeditionary force squandered the advantage of its fast departure by wasting two months on Barbados, recruiting more unready soldiers and angering local planters with heavy-handed behavior and strict enforcement of the unpopular Navigation Acts. In these months of preparation, the English sowed the seeds of failure, while almost, but not quite, stealing a march on Philip IV of Spain.

An expedition of the scope of Cromwell intended needed a vast store of supplies and provisions. Eventually, thirty-eight ships were to leave England in Penn’s fleet. Feeding and equipping the crews of these ships required planning and organization. Andrew Riccard and others were responsible for provisioning the fleet. They reported the needs of the expedition to Cromwell in August. The fleet would be sent with eight months’ worth of food in the form of ship’s biscuit and pease. Riccard prepared beef and pork for six months, and only two months accounted for the fresh beef supply, with the rest of the meat supplied from existing stores. Other food for the expedition included five months’ worth of cheese, sixteen weeks’ worth of
fish, and some oatmeal, rice, flour, and raisins. For the men to drink, Riccard planned for three months of beer, and brandy, wine, vinegar, and cider for when the beer ran out.\textsuperscript{7}

Much more had to be done to fit out the ships for warfare across the Atlantic. Warships needed sails and cordage, naval stores, and clothes for the crew. Riccard provided for spare sails and anchors, tackles, buckets, shovels, pitch, and oakum. Each man was to receive two shirts, one pair linen and one pair woolen stockings, one cotton waistcoat, one pair cotton drawers, two canvas jackets, two pairs canvas drawers, three pairs of shoes, and a Monmouth cap.

The fleet had to be prepared for combat, as well. Each cannon required eighty rounds of ammunition powder and cannon ball. Sailors needed arms and armor for defensive purposes and for use in landing parties, which would indeed be needed on Hispaniola. “General stores” included two hundred and fifty lances and two hundred pistols. Each flagship was to carry twelve suits of proven armor, and the fleet was to carry sixty large steel shields. The fleet carried twelve drakes (small cannon) for use in the ships’ boats.\textsuperscript{8} Allowance was also made for casualties of sickness and battle. The surgeon’s (“chirurgeon” was the contemporary term) were to fill their chests for eight months’ service, with the specific amounts of medicine prepared for every hundred men, including “Unguents, Oyles, Pills, …Syrupps, Powders,” and received money for the purchase of “some sugar and other necessaries for sick and wounded men.”\textsuperscript{9}

The arming of the fleet continued, with weapons more specific to the work at hand in the Caribbean. The Council of State expected the expeditionary force to find itself conducting siege work against the Spanish in the West Indies, and planned accordingly. On 29 August 1654, the Council prepared for the contingency and directed the commissioners of the Admiralty to issue siege artillery to William Penn, consisting of three large mortars and shells, and six “great battering guns with carriages.”\textsuperscript{10} Thus armed, the fleet needed officers to command, and men to sail the ships and fight the guns.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[9] Ibid., 573.
\item[10] CSPD, 339.
\end{footnotes}
Appointments to command ships under Penn often went to experienced officers, prior service with the admiral receiving special reward. Penn himself had held the post of admiral of the second squadron of Richard Deane and George Monke’s fleet fighting the Dutch in May of 1653. Between six and twelve officers who commanded ships, or even divisions and squadrons in this fleet went on to captain or admiral’s rank in the Western Design. William Goodson, Vice Admiral in the Western Design, had been Rear Admiral, George Dakins, had served as captain of a 50-gun frigate in the first squadron.\textsuperscript{11}

Political influence and family connections also played a decisive role in officer selection. At the end of November and beginning of December 1654, Cromwell sent William Penn two letters concerning ambitious relatives, Cromwell’s nephew Whitstone and a kinsman named George Smythsby, who the Lord Protector described as well suited to sea service.\textsuperscript{12} Penn did not select Whitstone as a lieutenant on his own ship, however, as Cromwell wished. Instead, to the Lord Protector’s eventual annoyance, he filled that position with a kinsman of his own.\textsuperscript{13}

With officers selected, the fleet had to be manned. Since too few experienced seamen volunteered for the fleet, recruiters had to resort to impressments. An anonymous journalist refers to the “Fresh-water Sailors” being forced into service, presumably watermen or other laborers experienced with boats, and possibly in addition some men with little or no sailing experience.\textsuperscript{14} Two weeks before the end of the Anglo-Dutch War in April, Cromwell had given further legal reinforcement for the practice. The Protector and Council of State issued an ordinance on 22 March extending the powers of the Parliamentary act concerning impressments of sailors until 1 November.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} The Commonwealths Great Ship Commonly called the Soveraigne of the Seas (London, 1653), 29.


\textsuperscript{13} Abbott, Cromwell, vol. iii, 575.

\textsuperscript{14} I. S., A Brief and Perfect Journal of the late Proceedings and Success of the English Army in the West Indies (London, 1655), 8.

\textsuperscript{15} A Catalog and Collection of all those Ordinances, Proclamations, Declarations, & c. Which have been Printed and Published since the Government was established in His Highness the Lord Protector (London: William Du-Gard and Henry Hills, 1654), 56.
the naval force suggested enlisting landsmen into the sea service. They proposed attracting men with proclamations in English market towns, asking for volunteers aged seventeen to twenty-four to report at Trinity House, or at Deptford, Woolwich, Chatham, Dover, or Plymouth. Thus many of Penn’s sailors had to learn their craft by experience, in the course of the expedition.\textsuperscript{16}

Meanwhile, an army also had to be recruited. The men that assembled to take on the might of the Spanish empire failed to impress even their fellow Englishmen. Venables’ force indicates a departure from the previous record of the New Model Army, a force with considerable experience in action, victorious in England, Ireland, and Scotland. These were not the soldiers recruited for this service overseas.

Venables had believed that the problem of manning the assault force had an obvious solution. He hoped that he could lead the men he had commanded in Ireland. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the men hardened by the siege of Drogheda and pacification of Ulster would be well suited to the siege and campaign work of conquering Spanish America. This request, was denied, probably because the men were still needed in Ireland.\textsuperscript{17}

Military officials concerned with the design set about the task of recruiting an army. Recruiting parties literally drummed up prospective soldiers in England, taking those volunteers willing to go overseas in the service of Cromwell’s red-coated army. These were not men necessarily willing or suited to hard campaigning. I.S. wrote that the recruiters gave encouragement to severall who go by the name of Hectors, and Knights of the blade, with common Cheats, Theeves, Cutpurses and such like leud persons, who had long time lived by the sleight of hand and dexterity of wit, and were now making a fair progresse unto \textit{Newgate}, from whence they were to proceed towards \textit{Tiborn}; but considering the dangerousnesse of that passage, very politickly directed their course another, and became Souldiers for the State.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Birch, \textit{Thurloe}, vol. ii, 574.

\textsuperscript{17} Firth, \textit{Venables}, 6.

\textsuperscript{18} I. S., \textit{Journal}, 8.
He was not alone in this judgment. Elizabeth Venables, Robert Venables’ new wife, who accompanied the expedition, described the force as a “wicked army” and “the Devil’s instruments.”\(^{19}\)

A basic problem of the expedition, as in several enterprises embarked on under Stuart auspices in the 1620s, was the poor quality of the rank and file soldiers. The matter was not that Cromwell lacked such soldiers, indeed, with his dictum that he preferred earnest men who loved their cause to military gentlemen, the New Model Army had won victory after victory in England, Ireland, and Scotland. Venables and many of his officers were veterans of service in England and Ireland. The question remains, what went wrong in the raising of the army that was to build a colony in the heart of Spain’s empire?

The secrecy of the expedition proved to hinder recruitment of committed soldiers. Men who wished to fight confidently for what they understood was a godly cause were understandably reluctant to volunteer for a campaign whose destination and objective remained unknown.\(^{20}\) In the end, so few experienced soldiers strengthened the army, that I. S. compared their presence in Venables’ army to “a mixture of little wine with much water.”\(^{21}\) Indeed, as one dauntless regimental commander would find out on Hispaniola, where he was killed, being the only brave and committed soldier on the battlefield could prove to be a man’s undoing.

Venables also believed that he led a very mixed force. His hopes to lead his victorious and experienced regiment of the Ulster garrison had been defeated, and instead he would have to make do with men drawn piece-meal from standing regiments. Venables insisted, in a final bid to ensure a committed and eager military force, that he would only accept volunteers from the New Model Army. Instead, regimental officers hit men who stepped forward to volunteer and forced them back into their ranks. Regimental commanders seized on the chance to perform housecleaning in their units, by sending Venables all of their undesirables. In a Protestant expedition being sent to destroy the might of the expected Habsburg Catholic world empire,


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 9.
these castoffs included Irish Catholics and even a recusant priest. Venables expelled the recusants from the army in Barbados.  

The officers that would lead the army were a mixed lot, but this body included some committed and experienced men. Francis Barrington wrote Sir John Barrington on 2 September 1654 concerning plans for the Western Design, and his eager expectations of a lieutenant colonel’s commission. Barrington hoped for a place in Colonel Buller’s regiment.  

Francis Barrington came from a prominent Essex family, related to Cromwell, with connections to Parliament and a history of staunch Puritanism. Barrington himself had been a dragoon officer in Ireland. Barrington, Major-General Heane, Colonel Anthony Buller, Major Michael Bland, and others would prove their leadership abilities in the campaign to follow.

The inadequacy of the army caused less consternation in England than might be expected. This was due to the planned rendezvous at Barbados before the final attack on Spanish territory. The general idea was to recruit a large part of the army there and at other English colonies in the Lesser Antilles. This followed the precedent of Parliamentary privateering commander William Jackson, who raided South America and the Caribbean in 1642-44, and managed to temporarily capture Jamaica during this venture. Jackson’s first port of call in the West Indies was Barbados, where he raised a force of over 500 men for land and sea service, in addition to 250 colonists recruited on St. Christopher’s by a subordinate. Venables and Penn probably hoped for similar results on their expedition.

It would be easy to conclude that the outcome of the Western Design was a foregone conclusion, and an example of yet another seventeenth century expedition from England doomed from the start by the recruitment of riff-raff, poorly fed, untrained, and all but unarmed. However, through the English Civil War pressed men filled the ranks of the New Model Army,

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22 Firth, Venables, 6.

23 Historical Manuscript Commission, 7th Report, 571. Hereafter to be referred to as HMC.


and desertion had been a constant problem, but one that could be overcome. What might have been made of the force sent to the West Indies can never be known, but Venables was never given the chance to learn. The Council of State member John Desborough believed that the secrecy of the expedition rested in its hurried departure, and he refused to hear any suggestion that might delay the design.

This haste prevented Venables from having any chance of making something of his army before it boarded ship. He requested quite earnestly that he be given the opportunity to drill the recruits before they left London. Instead, Venables received orders to march to Portsmouth, where the army would board ship, and not to take time for training his men, or learning the measure of their military skill. Venables later wrote that he and his officers were threatened with prison if they did leave London quickly. He hoped in Portsmouth to drill the officers and men together to test the abilities of his army as a whole. Promised this opportunity for a general muster, authorities denied Venables this as well once there, and he put to sea without knowing the quality of his men.26

* * *

Hoping to draw on the expertise of men who had proven leadership abilities in the Americas, Cromwell broadened the command structure of the Western Design. If the cliché of too many cooks can be forgiven, one wonders if too many leaders spoil a military expedition. Including Venables and Penn, the state’s commission to head and manage the design went to five men. The other three were Edward Winslow, Daniel Searle, and Gregory Butler. Winslow and Searle were natural choices, but Butler would not take long to prove his incompetence for any sort of command. Winslow had been one of the original Pilgrim Fathers, and thus had long been active in puritan colonization ventures. Searle was the governor of Barbados, where the force would recruit men and prepare for the campaign. Together, the five were responsible for carrying out Cromwell’s orders in executing the plans of the expedition, the aim, they understood, was to liberate the Indies from Spanish-governed “Miserable Thraldome and Bondage, both Spirituall and Civill,” and prepare the Americas for the spread of a Protestant

26 Firth, Venables, 6.
gospel. The commission of 9 December put no one officer in ultimate authority, but instead gave civilians an equal voice in military and naval decisions.27

In addition to administrative decisions, Cromwell’s government collected intelligence concerning Spanish activities as well as leaks of information about the Western Design. This was under the charge of John Thurloe, Secretary of State. Thurloe headed an intelligence network that investigated possible Royalist conspiracies.28 He also, as seen below, collected intelligence from correspondents posted in various European cities, who informed Thurloe of their observations. Periodic intelligence reports concerning the Spanish Plate Fleet had confirmed Cromwell’s hopes of the potential for great gains from the Western Design. An agent in Brussels wrote John Thurloe on 16 May 1654 about the coming of the New Spain and Tierra Firma fleets. Word had just arrived that both convoys were on their way, rumored to be carrying thirteen million ducats.29 Ships carried the treasure into Dunkirk by September to aid the Spanish war effort in the Low Countries. It amounted to the equivalent of £220,000 in silver bars and pieces of eight.30

However, with the news of summer and fall 1654, came indications that the preparation and object of the Western Design was known on the European continent. Venables believed that the Western Design had been “Vulgarly discovered” even before its departure.31 John Thurloe’s correspondent in Brussels indicated that the Spanish knew of Penn’s fleet by the middle of September, and had made a good guess as to its destination. The agent wrote, “the Spaniard is jealous of it against his West-Indies.”32 In November, the Dutch ambassadors to England wrote to their government about the mutiny of Penn’s fleet at Portsmouth. In their letter, they claimed


30 Ibid., 296.

31 Firth, *Venables*, 5.

one of the causes of the mutiny was the sailors’ belief that the “enemy” knew of the expedition and was already preparing a defense.\(^{33}\)

News soon spread about the expedition’s departure once it was at sea. The Dutch ambassador to England, Willem Nieupoort, wrote the Dutch States General on 22 January 1655 (NS), reporting that a letter had arrived from Penn, dated 8 January (NS). According to this, Penn was at that point 35 Dutch miles south of the Lizard.\(^{34}\) Preparations of a large fleet, and the volume of rumor surrounding it in England and on the continent, could not go long unnoticed by the intended target. The Spanish ambassador, don Alonso de Cárdenas, finally asked Cromwell about the intentions of the expedition. Cárdenas later related the results of these inquiries to a Swedish ambassador in London. The Spaniard felt justified in posing the question on the basis of precedent. Earlier, when a Spanish naval fleet was fitting out in Dunkirk, Parliament sought assurance from Cárdenas that it was not about to attack England. Cárdenas had answered in writing that, although he did not know the purpose of the fleet, England was in no danger. The Spanish ambassador felt that, in turn, he deserved such a courtesy while Penn’s war fleet was so obviously arming for combat overseas.

According to Cárdenas, he did not have such a straightforward answer from the Lord Protector. Cromwell instead took offense at the question, and replied that the “arcana” of his policy were none of Cárdenas’ business. Cárdenas argued that he was not trying to discover Cromwell’s “arcana imperij,” or secrets of the realm. He simply wanted to know if the English were planning to maintain the peace between the two nations or not. Once again, according to Cárdenas, Cromwell reiterated that he did not need to tell a foreign ambassador about secret state policies, but that his actions as Lord Protector would be “straightforward, justifiable, and honourable.”\(^{35}\) Cárdenas claimed that he was not entirely taken in by this statement, as he stated

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 709.


to the Swedish ambassador later that he already had some notion of the real intentions of the expedition.36

As would be made obvious on Hispaniola, the Spanish did know that Penn and Venables were attacking their empire, and they predicted correctly where the blow would fall. Moreover, they knew early enough that the reinforcements from Spain arrived at Santo Domingo on 8 April 1655 (NS), sixteen days before Venables landed. Sometime after Penn departed from Portsmouth, the Spanish sent their reinforcements, who managed to cross the Atlantic in the time that Penn and Venables were waiting on Barbados, to win the race to Hispaniola by a margin of two weeks. Agents of John Thurloe intercepted a letter of 16 February. In it was a report that soldiers were mustering and a fleet was fitting out in Cadiz, possibly under a royal command to follow William Penn across the Atlantic. The Spanish knew enough, probably from intelligence leaks and reasonable assumptions, to react in time.37

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The fleet urgently needed to be underway. Cromwell and the Council acted on this, in light of the dangers of intelligence leaks. Cromwell had delegated the job of overseeing the preparation of the fleet, boarding of the army, and departure of the expedition to his brother-in-law, John Desborough. Desborough, besides the family connection, was a general in the army and a member of the Council of State.38 To fulfill his responsibilities, Desborough was in Portsmouth inspecting the growing fleet in late November 1654. He wrote Cromwell on 27 November that if the weather held twelve to fourteen ships would be ready to set sail, and to transport up to 1,200 men of Venable’s army. By late November, John Desborough was already anxious to speed the preparations of the design. He emphasized to Oliver Cromwell his desire that the troops board ship as quickly as possible.39

36 Roberts, Swedish Diplomats, 177.

37 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 156.


In the meantime, trouble broke out between Venables and Desborough over the army’s provisions. Colonel Anthony Buller, commanding one of the regiments, approached Venables privately to tell him that the food for the expedition was unfit. Venables hoped to make a quiet complaint to Desborough through Buller, and received in return a bitter public reprimand. Desborough accused him of making false accusations and halting the expedition’s progress. Venables perceived a rift with the naval contingent resulting from this, as the navy’s victuallers supplied the provisions. He later accused Desborough of downplaying ill reports of the navy victuallers because he profited from their business. Desborough was in such a constant state of hurry to have the expedition underway, however, that any delay over food may have driven him to an angry response, profiteering or no profiteering. Meanwhile, the stores of the army were kept in London, away from the fleet in Portsmouth, and the store ships in London delayed their departure. Venables later complained that these stores could have been brought with the fleet had naval officers not taken up room on the ships with trade goods for personal business in Barbados.

At the cost of supply and training, the expedition would depart by the end of December. Desborough finalized plans to have the fleet on the move as quickly as possible. On 3 December, he reported to Cromwell that Rear Admiral George Dakins had his ship, Torrington, ready to sail. Since this was one of the first large fighting vessels to be ready, Desborough recommended that Dakins’ squadron be the first to leave, ahead of Penn with the main body. He also wrote that Dakins would be taking Heane’s and Fortescue’s regiments with him. Francis Barrington, with his lieutenant colonel’s commission, stood by with Buller’s regiment in Chichester, near Portsmouth. After a conversation with General Desborough about administrative matters on 11 December, Barrington felt that he would soon be ordered to board ship with his regiment. Preparing for a long absence, Barrington arranged for an agent in

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40 Firth, Venables, 5.

41 Ibid., 7.

42 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 4.

43 HMC, 7th Report, 571.
England to receive his pay of £63 a year.\textsuperscript{44} He made his final preparations to leave, and awaited orders to march with his troops from Chichester to their ships in Portsmouth.

Finally instructed to move, Francis Barrington and his soldiers began their march on Saturday, 15 December, halted for the night, and observed the Sabbath rest the next day. The men reached Portsmouth on 17 December, and went on board ship. Once the private soldiers were on board, the army officers now had to see to the loading of their supplies and belongings. Here, Desborough’s emphasis on haste led to confusion, since his orders demanded that the embarkation take no more than eighteen hours. In the process, officers’ had to leave their baggage behind in England. Circumstances separated from their servants, and forced to sail on ships other than those transporting their own men. Some officers were even left behind entirely. Officers and their commands were often not reunited until they reached Barbados.\textsuperscript{45}

In the course of this embarkation, there was danger of another mutiny breaking out, this time among the soldiers. Certain regiments were so hesitant to board ship that Desborough called out cavalry troops to force the reluctant men aboard. Further discontent grew among the private soldiers, when their officers failed to join them on board ship. Untrained, unpaid, without officers, and about to put to sea, the soldiers drew what seemed to them an obvious conclusion. The government and army wished to be rid of them as undesirables, and they had been sold to serve in a foreign army. Barrington’s own company and two others in Buller’s regiment changed their minds only with his arrival; he learned that had he not shown up, they planned to commandeer the vessel and make for the Isle of Wight.\textsuperscript{46} Once on board ship, regimental officers learned some of the plans for the expedition. Barrington wrote a final letter before departure on 18 December. He sailed aboard the Katharine. Here he learned, if he did not already know, that the army was grossly under strength in the minds of the commanders, and that they would stop at Barbados for recruits.

The ship carrying Barrington’s men set out from Portsmouth on 18 December. They did not get far that day, only coming to the Isle of Wight and dropping anchor for the night, and

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. His absence turned out to be not only long, but permanent- he was accidentally shot and killed on Jamaica in 1660.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
awaited the arrival of the rest of their squadron, commanded by Rear Admiral George Dakins, on his flagship, the *Torrington*. Edward Hopkins, a Navy Commissioner, had a report written on 18 December that the full complement of soldiers had boarded the *Torrington* and her accompanying squadron, which would sail the following day. On 19 December, they made for open sea ahead of the rest of the fleet. These ships carried Major General Heane’s, Colonel Buller’s, and Colonel Carter’s regiments.

Before the remainder of the fleet departed, one vital passenger had yet to come to Portsmouth to find passage, a passenger who was returning to the Indies. Thomas Gage, now described as a minister of Deal, now preaching as a Protestant, served as chaplain for the English forces in Venables’ regiment. The order to take him to Portsmouth on the *Fagons* came from the Lord Protector himself on 19 December. The missionary, author, imperialist, and agitator for the Black Legend would be able to see the product of his work.

Oliver Cromwell wrote Penn five days before he set sail, with hopes that the Admiral’s departure would be soon. The Lord Protector was concerned, rightly, at word of friction between the Admiral and Venables, which could be disastrous since neither held authority over the other. Cromwell tried to reassure Penn that command at sea was his, and the fleet was entirely under his command, just as Venables held independent command and ultimate authority over the army. Cromwell promised also that he would be just in upholding Penn’s honor, and prayed for God’s blessing on the expedition, and admonished Penn that he and Venables must forget their differences and “carry on the public work without hesitation.”

On Monday, Christmas day, the expedition was ready to begin its departure for the Indies. Cromwell hoped at this point that the first squadron was nearing Land’s End and ready to head into the Atlantic. William Penn, as commander-in-chief of the fleet, directed the

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47 Ibid.

48 CSPD, 1654, 585.

49 HMC, 7th Report, 571.


51 Abbott, *Cromwell*, vol. iii, 551.

52 Ibid., 551.
debarkation from the Admiral’s ship, the Swiftsure, commanded by Captain Jonas Poole. At dawn, a cannon was fired on the Swiftsure, and the foretopsails unfurled, giving a sign to the other ships to prepare to leave the anchorage in Stokes Bay. Robert Venables boarded the Swiftsure by noon, and John Disbrowe, along with Navy Commissioner Francis Willoughby, paid a last visit to the fleet before it sailed. The winds, heading East-North-East, forced the ships to anchor again by four in the afternoon. The fleet weighed anchor again by eleven the next morning, and attempted to set sail once more. The winds at Portsmouth were still blowing the same direction, causing a minor crisis as the Swiftsure and perhaps one or two more English ships ran aground. The sailors were capable, however, and used their sails to back away and resume their course away from Portsmouth.

The departure for the Indies made an impression on Henry Whistler, a seaman believed to be Penn’s sailing-master on the Swiftsure. He took note of men attempting to desert, but was more struck by the scenes of parting of men and women. Married men and their wives, young men and their betrothed, and other couples said their goodbyes. The men eagerly took keepsakes and gifts to remember their love by, including “Capes [caps], and Handcerchifes, and shertes.”

It would be only natural to suppose that the departure of the expedition had some effect on those left behind, as well. England would be cut off from communication with the fleet and army for some time; letters could be expected from Barbados, which would take time, and it would take even longer to learn of the success of the venture. One can imagine Desborough heaving a sigh of relief, having been in such a hurry to see Penn and Venables on their way. Now, the government at home had the task of maintaining what shreds of secrecy they could. There is circumstantial evidence that Cromwell remained optimistic, however. On 15 January, Cromwell wrote to the Admiralty Commissioners concerning a medal he had ordered for

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54 Firth, Venables, 145.


56 Firth, Venables, 144.
William Penn, in reward for some service and perhaps for the expected success of the expedition.\textsuperscript{57}

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For the Rear-Admiral’s squadron, the Atlantic voyage was smooth and relatively uneventful. The weather and the winds were generally favorable. Barrington believed that his own ship, the \textit{Katharine}, was miraculously saved from what he saw as a strange whirlwind that approached from astern and passed the vessel by a cable’s length. He believed that the \textit{Katherine} alone had this sort of experience. The only damage sustained in the voyage was by another ship, which mishap partially dismasted. Barrington saw special reason to thank God, arguing that fewer men died at sea in the whole squadron, than often perished on one ship making the trip. Venables, sailing with Penn, concurred on the matter of a small number of dead; he reported home from Barbados that it fell short of twenty. Barrington also believed that his fellow soldiers and officers did not take this lesson sufficiently to heart in the days that followed.\textsuperscript{58}

Penn’s fleet continued after their slow departure to make their way from Portsmouth and southwest into the Atlantic. By 27 December, they had sailed past Portland, and by the 28\textsuperscript{th} and 29\textsuperscript{th} they had approached and passed the Lizard, the southern point of the tip of Cornwall. On the 28\textsuperscript{th}, the sailors on the \textit{Swiftsure} heard distant cannon, but saw no sign of what had happened. The next day, they came upon a friendly ship that had been chased by a warlike vessel thought to be a man-of-war out of Brest. After the enemy fled at the sight of the fleet, Penn sent mail home with the friendly vessel. The fleet scattered, and on 5 January, the men on the \textit{Swiftsure} learned that four ships were forty leagues behind them, and three about fourteen leagues behind. Another ship had begun leaking and had been forced to head for shore, and nothing had been seen of the \textit{Great Charity} for nine days. Such a departure and sailing would result in an equally scattered arrival on Barbados, but the stay on the island would be long enough for the fleet to come together again.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Abbott, \textit{Cromwell}, vol. iii, 575.

\textsuperscript{58} HMC, 7\textsuperscript{th} Report, 571; Firth, \textit{Venables}, 7.

\textsuperscript{59} Battick, “Rooth,” 4.
The main body of the fleet had departed by Christmas day; however, much of the provisions for the soldiers and sailors had yet to be sent. As late as 15 January, Cromwell sent orders to a Captain Thomas Bennett, of the *Morning Star*, to lead the *William*, *Edward*, and *Recovery* out of the Thames and sail for Barbados. He was either to catch up with Penn’s fleet, or meet the expedition at Barbados and report to Penn, or Daniel Searle in Penn’s absence. If he managed to sight the *Little Charity* or *Great Charity*, Bennett was to form a convoy with these ships, and follow the orders of the *Great Charity*’s captain.\(^{60}\) The *Little Charity* and *Great Charity* did not reach Barbados with Penn’s fleet on 30 January, and Barrington supposed them to have been kept from crossing the Atlantic by the foul weather that had delayed the other provisioning ships. The delay of the *Little Charity* robbed the army of some of its horses, in addition to the loss of the provisioning ships cargo.\(^{61}\)

The Rear Admiral’s squadron was the first to reach Barbados, making landfall at eight in the morning on 29 January. They dropped anchor in Carlisle Bay, on the southern end of the island. Barrington believed this to be the best anchorage on this side of the island.\(^{62}\) At the same time, Penn’s squadron was seven leagues away from the island; they arrived in Carlisle Bay six hours later. The coming of two naval squadrons in succession caused some panic among foreign merchants. That day, a Flemish ship attempted to escape from Barbados, in such haste that the captain found himself stranded ashore. The fleet officers considered the vessel important enough a prize that Vice-Admiral Dakins dispatched the *Laurel* and the *Arms of Holland* to seize her.\(^{63}\)

Ironically, the *Marston Moor*, which had been dispatched earlier to prepare Barbados for the arrival of the fleet, had not reached the island yet. Slower sailors spent the night of 29 January in “Austines” (Oistin) Bay, still on the south side of the island, but further east. The next two days saw a partially completed rendezvous of the bulk of the fleet. The *Marston Moor*, apparently missing and sailing past Barbados, came in with the *Selby* on 30 January, and the

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\(^{60}\) Abbott, *Cromwell*, vol. iii, 577.

\(^{61}\) HMC, 7\(^{th}\) Report, 572.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 571-2.

\(^{63}\) Battick, “Rooth,” 4.
Indian, Hound, Lion, Halfmoon, Sampson, Adam & Eve, and Bear arrived the following day. The expedition began landing on Barbados on 30 January. Generals Penn and Venables, and Elizabeth Venables went ashore, followed by Major-General Heane and Colonel Buller. Those responsible found quarters for the soldiers newly arrived from England, and Francis Barrington and his men went ashore the next day, and settled into what would become their homes for the next two months.

The officers of the army began immediately to fulfill the purpose of the stay in Barbados—recruitment. The commissioners intended each of the five regiments to be built up to a full strength of 1,000 men, and they considered the army woefully short of the manpower needed to overthrow Spanish Hispaniola. Because of the nature of colonial society, however, recruitment required more than simply beating the drum and taking volunteers. Much of the economy, depended on the labor of indentured servants, who, as the poorer class with few economic prospects, also represented potential recruits for an army of what had essentially become cannon-fodder.

The colonists on Barbados requested that the army not strip them of indentured servants. As a solution, they suggested that the army officers leave the actual raising of men to the leading gentlemen of the island, letting them know how many soldiers they needed. The expedition’s commissioners instead kept the recruiting in the army’s hands, with some safeguards. On pain of losing their rank in the expedition, army officers were only to accept freemen and servants with nine months or less to serve in their indentures. This practice, provided recruiters adhered to it, as Francis Barrington believed, created its own problems. Even the loss of nine months’ labor and the services of the freemen, including artisans, was an economic blow to the island. In addition, the loss of manpower hit planters unevenly. Some lost most or all of their servants, while others lost few or none, and the charge was made that the colonists who lost the most

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64 HMC 7th Report, 572; Battick, “Rooth,” 4-5.


66 HMC 7th Report, 572.
servants were those who could afford it least. In any case, this made the army quite unpopular among the leading colonists, who, as Barrington pointed out, were still fellow Englishmen.\textsuperscript{67}

The recruitment of fighting men did not alone build an army, as these men needed effective weapons. The army pressed the carpenters and blacksmiths of Barbados into the service of making pikes for infantry soldiers. Recruiting officers promised them pay; Barrington believed that the army did indeed fulfill their end of the deal. In an age of a growing use of gunpowder, however, pikes proved inefficient on a battlefield. For muskets, the army pursued a policy disastrous for their relations with the colonists. The army confiscated all of the firearms they could find from Barbadian colonists, without offering payment. This angered the planters, as they were now left defenseless against the danger of slave and indentured servant revolt, without weapons to protect themselves. Barrington believed after the Hispaniola campaign that this demonstrated yet another area in which Venables ignored godly precepts, and showed an unchristian confidence in weapons and troops alone that foreshadowed his downfall.\textsuperscript{68}

The men recruited on Barbados at such political cost proved a mixed blessing for Venables’ army. Already worried about the outcome of using such unsuitable soldiers from England, I. S. expressed his thorough disgust by what he saw of the troops raised on Barbados and St. Christopher. In a comparison that paid no compliment to English soldier or colonist, he wrote,

\begin{quote}
What manner of Souldiers these Planters proved, may soon be imagined, for if we look with an impartiall eye, upon the major part of those that came out of \textit{England} to be (as indeed they were) raw Souldiers, Vagabonds, Robbers and runagate servants, certainly these Islanders must be the very scum of scums, and meer dregs of corruption…\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Whether the journalist was looking with an “impartiall” eye is debatable, if not improbable, yet his statement indicates a scorn felt by officers from England toward their colonial counterparts. Indeed, such men later followed Christopher Myngs to take Santiago de Cuba and Campeche and Henry Morgan to sack Panama.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 572.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 572.

\textsuperscript{69} I.S., \textit{Journal}, 11.

\textsuperscript{70} Taylor, \textit{Western Design}, 212-222.
I. S. was not alone in his disparagement of the colonists on Barbados. Henry Whistler considered the island “the Dunghill wharone England doth cast forth its rubidg.” He went on to write that an English rogue barely qualified as a Barbadian cheat, the colonists considered a bawdy woman a demure lady, and that a good looking prostitute could marry a wealthy planter. However, one custom appealed to Whistler’s seaman-like sense of hospitality: “The peepell haue a very Generus fashion that if one comes to a hous to inquier the way to any plase they will macke him drinke, and if the trafeller dose denie to stay to drinke they tacke it very vnkindly of him.”

One matter in particular caused concern for men from England committed to the continuing religious reformation— that of religious license in the faraway colony. Cromwell and the likeminded Independent faction in England believed in religious freedom for Protestants, and Cromwell invited the Jews back into England, believing that such liberty would allow Englishmen room to grow spiritually and come to God. This viewpoint had been opposed in the English Revolution by the political Presbyterians, who stressed rigid conformity. It was Cromwell, popularly associated with religious oppression, who attempted to moderate the persecution of Quakers and invited the Jews to return to England. However, events of the late 1640s and 1650s were giving English puritans pause in considering the merits of freedom of conscience, as Ranters, Levellers, Muggletonians, and Quakers seemed poised to send the commonwealth into religious and social anarchy.

Henry Whistler believed that he had found such religious anarchy on Barbados. Whistler wrote that the colonist on Barbados enjoyed the freedom of conscience that had been the object of fighting in England. He believed, however, that it was a privilege that the Barbadians abused. Whistler looked with horror on the cosmopolitan nature of a Caribbean colony. He remarked that the island’s residents included, in addition to Englishmen, Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Irishmen and Scots, and Spanish Jews.

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72 Firth, *Venables*, 146-7.

73 Ibid., 146.
In addition to tension in the relations between leading colonists and members of the expedition, there was also the problem of provisions. With the fleet still expecting the arrival of supply ships, rations were becoming short. I. S. related an interesting episode not corroborated by other veterans who recorded their experiences, but, if true, it is indicative of problems soon to develop in feeding the large English force. Apparently, the naval officers decided that the fleet could no longer support anyone not absolutely vital to the sailing of the their ships, and cut off the food supply and wages of ship’s boys. The officers also did not provide for passage home or establishment in Barbados for these boys. Without authorized rations, ship’s boys relied on the sailors on their vessel to divide their own provisions even further to give them food.

I. S. believed that providence intervened in an unusual (and brutal) way to partially relieve the situation. One day, two of these boys were swimming near their ship. A shark attacked them and, according to the journalist, “devoured” both of them “at one time.” The journalist believed that the orders were well intentioned, to preserve food supplies. However, this was a consideration that he believed should have been made in England before Penn’s departure, a matter better treated by the officers’ judgment without aid from man-eating “Sharke fish.”

Along with shortages of food, problems of command also arose on Barbados. According to the charges of Robert Venables, a cause of contention arose among the commissioners of the expedition: Gregory Butler’s drinking. Butler appalled his brother officers, even in the hard-drinking world of seventeenth-century England. This problem manifested itself on Barbados, where Pilgrim Father Edward Winslow reported Penn and Venables “how he [Butler] was got drunk…, and ran shouting thro’ the Town…” Embarrassed by this exuberant display of drunken glee, Penn, Venables, and Winslow dispatched Butler to St. Christopher to help raise troops, and keep him from giving the army a worse reputation in Barbados than it already had. Butler was not finished wreaking havoc, however. In negotiating with the French on St. Christopher, Butler further humiliated himself and his brother officers. Venables later wrote,


76 Firth, *Venables*, 60.
…when the Treaty was betwixt the French Governour and us, he was so drunk that he fell from his Horse and vomited, of which I have sufficient Witness, and my Lord Protector was much derided by them for employing such a man as he was in so honourable employment.\textsuperscript{77}

When Venables heard about this he became outraged, and called Butler a “drunken sot.”\textsuperscript{78}

One area where the expedition was successful on Barbados was that of capturing foreign ships engaged in contraband trade. The goods could then be confiscated, and ships put to use for the expedition. Penn’s fleet interrupted an apparently busy Dutch trade at Barbados during the expedition’s stay there. The navy captured Dutch ships here and at St. Christopher’s. Barrington for one had doubts about the wisdom of the policy, wondering how the Dutch would react, considering that the war between the two republics had ended only recently. However, as far as Barrington understood, the confiscation of these vessels was perfectly justifiable, as the Dutch were trading with England’s American colonies illegally. The ships themselves were useful to the fleet, and the commodities they carried were quite valuable. The prizes had been carrying brandy and sugar, as well as horses, which were appropriated by army officers.\textsuperscript{79}

Indeed, the 1654 treaty with the Dutch did leave room for the seizure of ships from that country. Articles XVII, XVIII, and XIX ensured the liberty of English and Dutch citizens to travel in each others’ countries and dominions for purposes of trade, allowed merchant ships of the respective nations to seek sanctuary in each other’s ports, and protected ships and goods from being seized illegally. However, these protections only applied to legal trade, and in the event of a Dutch ship taking refuge in an English haven, and vice-versa, the cargo was not to be made available for sale. Instead, the law of the host country bound the ships and merchants of the treaty powers.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} HMC, 7\textsuperscript{th} Report, 572.

\textsuperscript{80} Articles of Peace, Union and Confederation, Concluded and Agreed between his Highness Oliver Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland & Ireland, and the Dominions thereto belonging, and the Lords the States General of the United Provinces of the Netherlands (London: William Du-Gard and Henry Hills, 1654), 301-03.
The law of the land in England’s dominions was the Navigation Act, which Parliament passed in 1651. The metropolitan state restricted colonists when sending goods to England, Ireland, and English colonies to sending them in English ships. The ships had to be English-owned and manned by a majority of Englishmen. Foreign products coming into England and the colonies had to be imported in either English ships, or ships owned by the country of the trade goods’ origin. Any ship found in violation of the Navigation Act was liable to seizure, with all of its rigging and armament, and the goods it contained. The prize of the ship and its contents were then to be divided between the state and whoever had captured the vessel. Along with the Navigation Act, the Embargo Act of 1650 restricted foreign vessels from trading with the English colonies without a license from the Council of State. Both acts limited the free trade of the colonists of Barbados, and tried to direct the aim of their commerce to benefit England.

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By the end of March, the leaders of the expedition knew that waiting longer for the last of the supply ships from England would be fruitless. The army and navy had completed the work that could be done on Barbados, and the army, with the Barbadian reinforcements, boarded ship on 29 March. By this time, soldiers found quarters on board their assigned ships, the men loaded food and drink, and buried the dead of the lengthy stay on Barbados. On the next day, Barrington’s ship put to sea. Finally, by 31 March, the entire fleet was ready to sail. Robert and Elizabeth Venables were among the last to board the Swiftsure that afternoon, and the fleet was ready to depart for Hispaniola. Richard Rooth, with hope about the upcoming campaign and its outcome, penned this short prayer in his journal,

The Lord accompany us with His presence and bless all that we shall undertake, which I hope and desire shall tend to His glory, and the propagation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

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81 An Act for Increase of Shipping, and Encouragement of the Navigation of this Nation (London: John Field, 1651), 1449-51.


83 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.
After this, Rooth wrote only, “Little wind all night. We steered away NNW.”

The fleet now had a twelve-day passage to Hispaniola ahead of it. The winds and current are normally favorable for sailing westward in April, and the peak season for hurricanes begins in May. The English sailed along the west side of the Leeward Islands. They then turned westward after passing St. Croix, on the final leg of their journey. The English kept to the south of Puerto Rico, on the opposite side of well-fortified San Juan, and came to the south coast of Hispaniola from the east.

Once again, the fleet became stretched thin as slower sailors lagged behind. On the morning of 1 April, Penn began the attempt to bring the ships into a tighter formation by shortening sail and allowing the stragglers to catch up. As a contingency, Penn planned for the fleet to rendezvous at St. Christopher’s, where additional volunteers would be picked up, before turning toward Hispaniola. Meanwhile, one prize, now being used by the English, lost its masts except for the mizzen, and the Dover had to tow the vessel. Two other prize vessels fell foul of each other and collided, one tearing the sails from the yards of the other ship, which fired three guns to signal its distress. The expedition was not setting off with the best of auspices.

The journey through the Leeward Islands proved an instructive one, as the expedition encountered other English colonies, colonies of other nations, and places still inhabited by Indians. On 1 April, the fleet passed St. Vincent, which John Daniel, Auditor General, described in a letter as being “onely inhabited by infidel and caniballs.” On the next day, the fleet anchored on the west side of St. Lucia, a mile from the coast. Some men landed, and found no one living on the island except “wild and venomous creatures,” according to Daniel. Henry Whistler wrote that it had been settled by Englishmen at one point, who the Indians and French had cleared from the island. Penn, Venables, Whistler, and others were among the landing party,

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84 Battick, “Rooth,” 8; and HMC, 7th Report, 572; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.


86 Battick, “Rooth,” 8; Firth, Venables, 147.

87 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.

88 Ibid., 505.
who carried fouling pieces for hunting. Whistler noted the game of the island, including pelicans, feral cattle, and parrots. He, like Daniel, was struck by the presence of ominous fauna, as he wrote of the great snakes present there. The island is home to boa constrictors and pit vipers, not fauna Englishmen would regard with a casual eye. The sailors also caught fish there, “of very straing faisone [fashion].” Impressions of the island varied, as Daniel thought it a wilderness, Whistler considered it a place with a good harbor for raiding and seeking shelter, and Rooth described it as woody and mountainous.  

Penn decided to hold a council of war while at St. Lucia. He allowed the damaged prizes until noon the next day for repairs. He also saw the likelihood that the fleet would become scattered again, so he issued sealed orders to all ship captains. If the fleet arrived together at St. Christopher’s, the orders were to be returned to Penn unopened, and if the ships not meet at the rendezvous, the captains were to break the seals and follow the enclosed instructions. On the next day, the fleet passed Martinique. Whistler noted that Frenchmen and Indians inhabited the island, and he had heard they often intermarried. One of the company commanders of Venables’ regiment, Captain Disney, died on board the Bear that day. Otherwise, the passage went without incident until the fleet approached Dominica.

The fleet passed Dominica on 4 April, and experienced hostilities unrelated to an imperial contest with Spain. Dominica, not yet an English possession, was known to be inhabited by Carib Indians, with their reputation for being warlike and aggressive. Daniell had heard that an English Captain Leigh had been killed there, and his wife held captive for three years. The English had traded with them before, however, when passing the island. This voyage was no different. About 14 Caribs in a canoe approached Henry Fenn’s Gillyflower and came near the ship or aboard to trade, feigning friendly intentions. Something happened to spark a short, sharp skirmish, and when the Caribs approached a second time, Fenn prevented their returning on

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89 Firth, Venables, 147.

90 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505; Firth, Venables, 147; Battick, “Rooth,” 8.

91 Firth, Venables, 116, 148; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.

board the ship. The Caribs, whether in self defense or offensively, let fly with bow and arrow, and wounded three to five sailors, according to various English accounts. Fenn described the brief skirmish to Richard Rooth the next day. By Fenn’s account, reported second-hand in Rooth’s journal, the Caribs had actually come aboard first, and wounded only three seamen.93

As news of the attack spread on 5 April, the fleet passed Guadeloupe and continued making their scattered way to St. Christopher’s. Rooth was once again struck by the forests and mountainous nature of the Leeward Islands. Whistler noted that the French fired two signal guns at the passing of the English fleet, whether as a salute or a warning is unclear. Whistler noted the mountains, as Rooth had, and also the island’s crops of sugar, tobacco, cotton, and indigo. The fleet continued on its way past Montserrat, settled by English and Irishmen, and Nevis, an English colony. The fleet made a scattered arrival at St. Christopher’s, inhabited by both English and Frenchmen. Colonel Fortescue had arrived early, on 5 April, in the Grantham, ready to meet Lieutenant Colonel Holdipp and Gregory Butler, and the colonists they had raised to reinforce Venables’ army.94

On 6 April, Barrington reported that the expedition reached St. Christopher’s. Rooth in his ship arrived in the morning, the vessel carrying John Daniel came in the early afternoon, and Whistler noted his arrival at seven the next morning. French and English vessels and the forts offered a thirty-gun salute for the fleet, which Penn answered.95 There, the ships reduced sail to await the regiment of colonists that had been recruited there during the main body’s stay on Barbados. Dutch prizes had also been seized at St. Christopher’s, as at Barbados.96 The fleet met the Marston Moor and the Selby, with between seven and fifteen prizes, and 1,000 to 1,500 recruits. Some of those who arrived on 6 April had some time to go ashore, and John Daniel spent two hours, amazed by the cultivation of the island.97

93 Battick, “Rooth,” 9; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505; Firth, Venables, 148.
94 Battick, “Rooth,” 9; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.
95 Battick, “Rooth,” 9; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.
96 HMC, 7th Report, 572.
97 Battick, “Rooth,” 9; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.
Penn had some business to conduct for the final leg of the journey to Hispaniola. On 7 April Gregory Butler reported to Penn that a Spanish fleet of fifteen ships had passed the island three weeks earlier. This was probably the flotilla from Spain carrying Hispaniola’s new governor, the Conde de Peñalva, with reinforcements and news of the Western Design, but Penn did not know this. He did have the sense to realize this demanded haste, and he drove the fleet to set sail again. Meanwhile, Penn called the ships’ captains on board the flagship, and instructed them that Monday 9 April, should be set aside as a day of prayer, asking the Lord’s blessing on the progress of the campaign soon to follow.  

The final leg of the journey brought the fleet past St. Martin, St. Croix, and the southern coast of Puerto Rico. The sailors observed the Sabbath as usual on 8 April, and on the next day, Rooth and his ship honored the day with prayer. Also on Monday, the army officers assembled on board the Swiftsure for a preliminary council. Here, any officers who had not already learned that their destination was Hispaniola, and that the commanders planned for the landing to take place at the mouth of the Jaina River, which could only mean an assault on Santo Domingo. The fleet sailed along the south coast of Puerto Rico on 10 and 11 April. As the vanguard passed Mona Island, between Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, on 11 April, Penn attempted a ruse to secure a Spanish guide for the expedition. Penn sent the frigate Grantham to San Juan, with orders to fly a Spanish ensign and signal for harbor pilot. Once the pilot came to the frigate, he could be captured and then used for information. The attempt failed, and the Grantham returned that day.  

On 10 April, the Rooth reported passing south of Puerto Rico, eight leagues from the west end of the island. In the early afternoon, Penn sailed to the leeward side of the fleet and signaled from his flagship with a pennant for all captains to report on board. Rooth reported on board the Swiftsure to Jonas Poole, who told him to issue fourteen rounds of musket ammunition to the soldiers of the army and the sailors going ashore with the Sea Regiment, to which Rooth had orders to contribute sixteen men. Poole also gave him his final sailing and fighting orders, as well as instructions concerning prizes, in preparation for the now imminent campaign.

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99 Battick, “Rooth,” 9; Firth, Venables, 150-151; Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 505.
Like Richard Rooth, the colonels of the regiments and their staffs prepared their men for the landing on Hispaniola. Perhaps judging that the soldiers from England and colonial recruits required further reinforcement, the expedition’s commanders formed a regiment from the sailors on Penn’s ships. At the time, the anonymous journalist thought little of their morals or military ability, writing that the mariner’s “manners argued them better fed then either instructed in the principles of Christian Religion, or rudiments of marshall discipline.” However, in this case the “rugged Sailors” of the Sea Regiment would go on to prove the journalist wrong, at least on the second charge, in saving Venables’ force by covering their retreat and counterattacking in a desperate moment on Hispaniola.

A final council of war convened on 10 April. It was resolved that the regiments would land at the Jaina River in an order decided by lot. The army would only land at Point Nisao if the Spanish opposed the Jaina landing, or high seas prevented it. The officers then cast lots, choosing Buller’s regiment to land east of Santo Domingo. Finally, the council decided on measures to tell friend from foe. The password would be “religion,” and the men would wear a piece of white cloth or paper on their left arms. After everything was decided, instructions were given to the regimental commanders.

Meanwhile, Penn sent out a scout to reconnoiter ahead of the fleet. The scout was a man named Cox, who had been a gunner serving in the fortifications at Santo Domingo. He would serve as a guide for Venables once the army landed. Through the days of 11 and 12 April, the fleet remained just over the horizon from Santo Domingo, as the army prepared to land. The army, as will be seen from its careless advance, apparently did not know what level of resistance to expect on the island. However, at least Admiral Penn did know that a Spanish flotilla was present in the Caribbean.

Nine months had passed since Cromwell’s bold statement in the Council of State in rebuttal to John Lambert’s misgivings about the Western Design. These nine months saw the build-up of a fleet and recruitment of an army for carrying out Cromwell’s plans for a stronger English presence in the Caribbean. It was a period marked by the impressing and recruiting of unwilling or undesirable fighting men, and infighting among the leadership. The stay on

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100 I.S., Journal, 12.

101 Firth, Venables, 19-20.
Barbados was similarly marked by political missteps on the part of the expedition’s command. This would turn out to be ill preparation for an attempt to conquer Spain’s oldest American colony. Even worse, Penn and Venables’ haste in crossing the Atlantic would prove useless; the Spanish would win the race to Hispaniola, and the English army would remain without proper training or arms. The expedition was daring and unprecedented in English history, but the Council, military, and naval command in England essentially wasted these nine months, and increased Spain’s chances of retaining Hispaniola.
CHAPTER 3

“Jack Spanyard would not stand”: The Campaign on Hispaniola
13 April-3 May 1655

After fitting out on Barbados and recruiting soldiers there and on St. Christopher and
Nevis, the English set sail for Hispaniola on 31 March 1655. General Robert Venables expected
an easy victory against “Jack Spanyard,” considered an outnumbered, lazy, and superstitious
enemy. The campaign on Hispaniola proved only the first supposition correct, as a combined
force of a few professional soldiers, city militia from Santo Domingo and inland towns, and
multiracial “cow killers” from the Hispaniola cattle ranges used hit and run tactics and surprise
attacks to soundly defeat eight regiments of Cromwell’s prized New Model Army and navy. The
Spanish under Conde de Peñalva were able to rally non-professionals and black slaves and
maroons seeking freedom to deal with a potentially overwhelming threat.

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Spanish officials had enough warning to know their Greater Antilles colonies were in
danger. As Paul Hoffman argued as true for sixteenth century colonial defense, good
intelligence would prove the salvation of Santo Domingo.\(^1\) To meet the emergency, Don
Bernardino de Meneses Bracamonte y Zapata, Conde de Peñalva, was made president and

captain-general of Hispaniola, and the crown dispatched him to the island with 200 soldiers to reinforce the garrison. The danger was imminent, and Peñalva was impatient to arrive before the English did.

Peñalva and his son, Don Gutierre, reached Hispaniola on 8 April (NS), or 29 March by the English calendar, on board the ship La Concepción, after nearly two months of preparations and Atlantic crossing. The count took command two days later. Without panicking, he made a careful inspection of the garrison force in Santo Domingo, finding that only 170 of the 300 men were able to fight. Peñalva took stock of the supply of weapons and the strength of the fortifications, which were in his eyes inadequate to fend off a modern enemy. He was especially worried about Santo Domingo’s vulnerability from the landward approach.²

On 13 April, a Friday, men took up posts at Point Caucedo, east of Santo Domingo, to watch the seas for the expected English fleet. At about eleven in the morning, they caught sight of William Penn’s ships. Counting 56 well-armed ships, the watch reported the sighting to the count. The lookouts correctly assumed that the fleet was certainly not a Spanish one, and guessed it to be the expedition sent from England. Peñalva knew of its coming, but Captain Manuel González Pallano Tinoco, a professional soldier, later wrote that he had found himself surprised at the breach of the peace between Spain and England.³

The Spanish set about making careful and earnest preparations to meet the English assault. Drummers gave the signal for Santo Domingo’s garrison and militia to prepare to defend the city. Conde de Peñalva formed another makeshift company of his fellow noble passengers on La Concepción. Peñalva had these troops rendezvous at the city’s fortifications, and adequate weapons were found in good working order to arm the defenders of Santo Domingo. The arms consisted mostly of lances, which would serve the Spanish well in the brutal and irregular fighting to follow.⁴


³ Wright, Spanish Narratives, 2, 48.

⁴ Ibid., 48, 63.
The Spanish then decided where best to place their limited number of soldiers. They saw the presumed English fleet splitting off in two squadrons, one sailing windward and east of Santo Domingo, and the other setting course leeward and west. West of the city seemed the more likely landing place, and militia infantry and artillerymen under Captain Damian del Castillo Vaca marched in that direction to reinforce San Geronimo and Jaina. The Spanish had dug trenches on the landward side of Santo Domingo and had deployed their infantry and placed cannon there. In the unlikely event of a windward landing, 50 soldiers guarded the rocky Caucedo shore. Finally, Peñalva called for aid from militia companies inland, and sent a vessel to Puerto Rico asking for outside help. In a measure to find more men to fill the defenders’ ranks, he drafted all men and boys fourteen years of age and above into the militia, and issued word to the maroons in the Mamel hills that if they fought the English, they would be granted their freedom. This act shows how, in the face of a full-scale English assault, Peñalva resorted to every possible measure not to allow Santo Domingo to fall to the enemy.\(^5\)

Peñalva also held the advantage of lessons learned from prior harsh experience. Santo Domingo had been attacked before by an English fleet, that of Sir Francis Drake in 1586. At that time, the city’s defenses were patently inadequate to hold out against overwhelming force, consisting of a simple wooden wall.\(^6\) Drake bypassed the fixed artillery and a naval galley at Santo Domingo, landing a thousand soldiers at Boca de Jaina. They advanced toward Santo Domingo, receiving only token opposition in the jungle, and overran the hundred and fifty inexperienced militiamen to take the city.\(^7\) The Spanish reaction was a case of better late than never. Drawing on new theories of fortification characterized by the trace italienne, or low-walled fort with outworks to allow use of battery and counter-battery fire, the Spanish crown sent expert military engineers to recommend new physical defenses for the Caribbean. Giovanni Bautista Antonelli and Juan de Texeda drew up plans for strengthened, with varying results

\(^5\) Ibid., 51-2, 60.


throughout the region. However, by the time of the Western Design, Santo Domingo had walls and Fort San Geronimo to guard against an enemy’s landward assault.⁸

With these precautions in place, the city prepared for a siege, one of the more common occurrences of early modern warfare.⁹ Planters, under orders, brought their slaves to the city, presumably for service in a labor or defense capacity. The city council guarded the food supply in the city’s fortress. The Spanish feared English brutality against women, especially those in holy orders, and arranged patrols to ensure that all women remained inside their homes, and nuns inside their convents. Finally, the Spanish rounded up and jailed foreigners present in the city to prevent their treason. With all possible preparations attended to, the Spanish awaited an enemy landing and assault.¹⁰

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The English fleet had actually been just over the horizon for an entire day. Henry Whistler, one of Penn’s officers, caught sight of the city at 5 in the morning on 12 April. The fleet remained out of sight of the coast for the day, and sailed in that night to appear offshore the next morning. Whistler saw the beacons of the Spanish lookouts, and movement of citizens from the country to within the walls of Santo Domingo.¹¹ Francis Barrington, a lieutenant colonel in Anthony Buller’s regiment, reported seeing the city of Santo Domingo on the next day, where the fleet split: one flotilla sailed west to land General Venables’ force, and the rest kept watch on the city and prepared to support a siege. Barrington described their action flippantly as “plying up and down before the city to amuse the enemy.”¹²

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¹⁰ Ibid., 52.


The English planned to approach Santo Domingo from two sides, and take the city in a pincer movement. Venables would land with the main force west of the city, while Anthony Buller would land to the east with his own regiment and 500 men recruited at St. Christopher’s under Richard Holdip’s command. Venables’ men, five army regiments and the Sea Regiment raised from Penn’s sailors in March landed at Nisao on 14 April, with no opposition. Surf conditions and the presence of Spanish troops prevented the Navy from landing Buller’s contingent east of Santo Domingo, so instead the two regiments disembarked 3 leagues west of the city on 16 April.

Once Venables’ men landed, the unpaid and underfed soldiers heard a proclamation that prompted anger and disappointment. The day before, Venables had called a council of war to decide the issue of plunder. The West Indian recruits especially expected booty to take the place of regular pay. It was decided this time, however, that the men would not be allowed to loot for individual plunder. Instead, the soldiers would be promised an extra six weeks pay once Hispaniola fell. Sailors in the sea regiment protested, “Shall we venter our liues for nothing?” The officers, however, managed to somehow rally the men’s hopes, and when the men marched the next day, it was with “chearfullnis,” at least at first.

The march toward Santo Domingo began on Sunday, 15 April, after a pause in the morning for prayers. As they moved eastward, the English soldiers came across the physical images of the Catholic religion they hated. The “Ballpated friors” had evacuated, but the English found images on which to take out their anger. A statue supposed to be of the Virgin Mary received special attention. First, it was pelted with oranges, before it was defaced. The soldiers

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13 HMC, Seventh Report, 572.

14 Granville Penn, Memorials of the Professional Life and Times of Sir William Penn vol. ii (London: James Duncan, 1834), 74, 82; Firth, Venables Narrative, 151-52; HMC, Seventh Report, 572.


16 Firth, Venables Narrative, 152.
also disobeyed orders against looting, and coming across sugar mills stole the valuable commodity in large quantities.\textsuperscript{17}

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As the English began to move toward the Jaina River, the Spanish desperately sought out information about the upcoming attack, the size of the English force was attacking them, and their ultimate goal. Peñalva suggested to Damian del Castillo that he capture an enemy scout as he engaged the attacking force under General Venables approaching Boca de Jaina. As Castillo and his men reached within two leagues of Nisao, they spotted three men in advance of the enemy on horseback. Pallano reported that Castillo himself killed one of them, an officer named Captain Allen, and that his men had wounded another Englishman who escaped, and took the other scout prisoner. The Spanish soldiers brought the prisoner back as they retreated to their fortifications.\textsuperscript{18}

Interrogation of the prisoner confirmed what Peñalva had feared. The prisoner’s gave as complete and helpful information as an English soldier in the expedition could give. He informed the Spanish that the fleet carried a force of between 8,000 and 10,000 under the command of Penn and Venables, sent by Oliver Cromwell with the intention to conquer and settle Spanish territory. He also told them of the stay in Barbados, and further intentions to attack other Spanish cities once Hispaniola fell. Finally, and most usefully, the scout gave the Spanish the helpful information that the fleet would not sail into the port at Santo Domingo until the army captured the city due to the harbor fortifications. The Spanish gained crucial insights to the English plan of attack, and concentrated their efforts on preparing the defense against the army approaching from the west.\textsuperscript{19}

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\textsuperscript{17} C. H. Firth, \textit{The Clarke Papers}, vol. iii, Royal Historical Society Publications (1899; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965), 54; Firth, \textit{Venables Narrative}, 152.

\textsuperscript{18} Wright, \textit{Spanish Narratives}, 5, 53; Firth, \textit{Venables Narrative}, 128.

\textsuperscript{19} Wright, \textit{Spanish Narratives}, 53.
Venables and his men suffered through a two-day march plagued by thirst, hunger, and sporadic surprise attacks by small groups of Spaniards. The Englishmen waded the Jaina River and joined with Buller’s men on 17 April, Buller’s men also desperately looking for water. Thirst proved a constant problem throughout the expedition. Not only had a water supply not been found, but the substitute was characteristic in an age when men considered spirits not merely healthy but indeed essential for hard service in the tropics. Francis Barrington later wrote on Jamaica, “the fleet affordeth strong liquor good store, which would do our men great good, but no care is taken for giving us any, so that our men daily perish.”

He also referred to “brandy wine (a strong liquor much useful in these hot climates).”

On 17 April, the English advanced on San Geronimo with Venables at the head of the forlorn carrying a musket to gain a personal view of the terrain. Whether the men simply marched into an ambush or were led into it by the Irish guide Venables had pressed into service is disputable. In either case, the English were careless in their approach, and it was possibly at this time that Venables remarked, as Barrington remembered, “that Jack Spanyard would not stand.” Meanwhile, “Jack Spanyard” was gathering his forces, personally inspected by Peñalva, half a league from Santo Domingo at Pozo del Rey, and had scouts watching the Boca de Jaina and Esperilla roads.

The Spanish heard reports claiming not to have found any enemy within two leagues of the city. Skeptical, a sergeant, Diego Rodríguez Tirado, went out himself and found Venables’ force advancing on the Boca and Esperilla roads within musket range of Pozo del Rey. Captain don Alvaro Garabito, commander of the Geronimo garrison, volunteered to prepare and lead an ambush, and, according to Pallano, grandly offered to be beheaded if the English were not

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20 HMC, Seventh Report, 571.

21 Ibid., 572.

22 Firth, Clarke Papers, 55; Penn, Penn Memorials, 85; Firth, Venables Narrative, 153-4. In early modern warfare, a “forlorn hope” was a body of picked men or volunteers, usually numbering 100, who led the storming of a fortified position. It was the most dangerous position, but carried great honor, and often involved the right to plunder.

23 HMC, Seventh Report, 573.

24 Wright, Spanish Narratives, 6-7.
beaten. With roughly 150 men from the Bayaguana and Santo Domingo militia, Garabito set up his ambush along the Esperilla road, with Captain Pallano scouting for the enemy. Soon, the English came up, marching twenty abreast down the wide road. The Spanish opened with a volley of musket fire, coaxing the English to discharge their pieces, allowing the lancers to charge with safety.\(^25\)

What happened next did the English army little credit, but allowed the Sea Regiment to save the army. General Venables, cut off in the forlorn from his men, hid from the charging lancers. Whistler sarcastically remarked that Venables “very nobelly rune behinde a tree.” The sailors of the Sea Regiment checked the English retreat, stood their ground and sent the Spanish lancers falling back to their fortifications. Pallano and the Santo Domingo notary did not mention this episode in their accounts, Pallano remarking that the Spanish fell back because of exhaustion. Still, the Spanish took encouragement, seeing that their knowledge of the terrain and road conditions, allied with careless tactics (or lack of tactics entirely) among the English, proved an equalizing force in a campaign of hundreds against thousands.\(^26\)

Venables was left shaken by the episode. Whistler reported that he had been too terrified to speak coherently. Venables called a council of war, stating his decision to retreat to Boca de Jaina to regroup. His officers disagreed, including Major General Heane, who wished to keep up the pressure on the Spanish, and feared the defenders would have the opportunity to reinforce their defenses. Venables overruled these objections, and the English fell back. This aroused the anger of many, Barrington and Captain Thomas White both considering the army willing to move forward now that the Spanish had been repulsed, and thinking that water would be easier to obtain beyond the Spanish positions, not on the way back to Boca de Jaina.\(^27\) The retreat was brutal, with the army demoralized by defeat and out of water. Whistler reported that the march

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 8-12.

\(^{26}\) Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 55; Firth, *Venables Narrative*, 154, Wright, *Spanish Narratives*, 11.

killed more men than had died in action. Men dying of thirst resorted to the expedient of drinking each other’s urine.28

The English retreat encouraged the Spanish defenders, who now saw that the vaunted New Model Army was not always invincible. On 18 April, the Spanish tracked the English retreat to see how far the enemy had withdrawn. They saw that the English had fallen back from the Esperilla road, stopped at the Mieses sugar mill, and retreated all the way to Boca de Jaina. Some Englishmen, seven or eight according to Pallano, had remained in the path of the retreat, exhausted. Spanish lancers quickly killed them.

The litter of the English army told the Spanish scouts much about their enemy. On the track of the retreat, the Spanish saw the fruits, literally, of the privation of the English soldiers. Scattered in the Englishmen’s wake were orange peels and remnants of oranges squeezed for their juice. The Spanish, although finding some water bottles, saw how thirsty their enemies were in their hard marching. They also found sugar looted from Hispaniola sugar mills. In addition, the Spanish saw how hasty and panicked the English retreat was: weapons, books, and rations whose loss would be felt later were all found where the English had hastened away from their first battle.

At the Mieses plantation, the Catholic Spanish came upon a sight even more telling of their enemy’s motivations and beliefs, and also deeply offensive to themselves. Pallano identified the religious statue destroyed by the English as St. Anne, grandmother of Christ, and patron saint of the plantation. Pallano reported that the “sacriligious dogs” completely defaced and mutilated the statue, he believed out of resentment for the Spanish victory. The Spanish were now not only defending their colony, but their religion and culture as well.29

The religious character of the soldiers in the expedition is not known, but through the lens of the officers observing them, it can be inferred that they probably did not share with Cromwell and Gage the strong motivation of following God’s will in the design. However, even in cases where sectarian differences were a minor or secondary issue, religious iconoclasm and violence was a common factor in imperial conflict in the Americas. When Jacques de Sores, a Huguenot Norman corsair, captured Havana, “He desecrated the church and destroyed it, giving the

28 Firth, Venables Narrative, 155.

29 Wright, Spanish Narratives, 13-14.
vestments to his soldiers for cloaks.”

Catholics could share such hostility to representatives and objects of a rival Christian faith. Religious violence went both ways. A well known instance of Catholic-on-Protestant violence in the Americas was Pedro Menéndez de Avilés’ massacre of his Huguenot prisoners at Matanzas in Florida in 1565. Calvinists, opposed to the use of graven images in worship, did not have icons to receive the wrath of Catholics, but they did have books. Eugene Lyon describes the discomfort felt by the Spanish captors of Fort Caroline by the presence of Protestant books in close proximity.

The rejoicing and feasting of the victors was somewhat tempered by the discovery in the fort of some of the books and symbols of the Huguenot religion. These gave the Spaniards deep disquiet, as did the presence of the heretic women and children.

Sir Francis Drake’s career provides an excellent example of English violence and iconoclasm carried out against Spanish Catholicism. Strong religious commitment was not a prerequisite for such violence. Harry Kelsey believes that Drake’s religion was more of an outward show than a devout inner life. Drake’s ships saw a Protestant form of worship, in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England. However, not all sailors were committed to the Reformed religion, and some had to be beaten into attending the services.

Kelsey argues that Drake considered that “A raid was not complete unless the church was desecrated.” Shortly after his raid on Cádiz, Drake allowed his men to sack a monastery near the village of Sagres. Religious violence went beyond simple thievery on the Pacific Coast of New Spain in 1579. At Gualtuco, Drake’s men stole or ruined the church’s plate, vestments, and altar cloths. Crucifixes and icons were broken, and the Spanish prisoners were forced to eat, it being

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32 Kelsey, *Drake*, 20-22, 33, 393.
Holy Week. Meanwhile, Drake showed one of the Spaniards Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, explaining the book to him. Drake began to present himself as an instrument of God.33

Drake’s men had also burned churches and convents. There were also rumors that Drake had executed two friars, in revenge for the murder of a young black man serving Drake by a Spaniard. A later Spanish account gives the story of Drake’s men torturing and murdering two Dominicans. Harry Kelsey, Drake’s most recent biographer, believes the latter story may in fact be true. At any rate, Drake’s men, like Venables’ later, did engage in a rash of iconoclasm: “Drake’s men did wreck every convent, monastery, and church they found, destroying images, altars, screens, and choirs, and attempting to burn what they could not otherwise ruin.”

Meanwhile, Drake used the cathedral of Santo Domingo as a jail for his unruly men.34 The Spanish probably feared that such destruction would return to the city if Venables’ army was not stopped.

* * *

The Englishmen’s circumstances on the beaches of Boca de Jaina were desperate. The Spanish set up ambushes to intercept and kill details of Englishmen sent to kill feral cattle, effectively cutting off a potential food source. Rations and drink other than water were lacking, and while abstinence from alcohol may have been an improving influence on the Englishmen’s health, they certainly did not think so. What fresh meat and fruit the English were able to eat, in addition to their previous hardships, and exposed conditions, led to further troubles. Henry Whistler described the results graphically,

But the lieing heare did doue the armie more hurt then thayer marching, ffor the fresh meat, and the abundant of frut they did eate, and lieing in the raine did case most of them to haue the Bluddie-flux, and now thayer harts wore got out of thayer Dublates into thayer Breches, and wos nothing but Shiting…35

At this time, the men languishing on the beach grew resentful of Venables’ comfort aboard ship. This ill will only multiplied with the realization that Elizabeth Venables was with her husband, a consolation the soldiers and sailors did not enjoy. Henry Whistler was a sailor

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35 Firth, *Venables Narrative*, 155-6.
who valued the shipboard life, and demonstrated earlier in his journal a longing for the women left behind in England, adding to his sense of the injustice Venables did his men. He expressed his low opinion of the general, who “haueing a good ship vnder him and his wife to lie by his side, did not fele the hardship of the Souldgers.” Venables, veteran though he was, failed to demonstrate to his men that he could lead competently, show physical courage, or share hardships.36

In the meantime, the English prepared for a second assault. On 18 April, Venables ordered that three artillery pieces be landed, a mortar and two small drakes. Carpenters were also put to the task of making scaling ladders.37 Heane and some other officers suggested that the army be split in two groups for the upcoming attack. This would allow for an advance on the east as well as the west side of Santo Domingo. Venables overruled this suggestion, and insisted that the English approach San Geronimo in one massed body.38

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The Spanish were watching for a renewed assault. Pedro de Medina, described by Pallano as a “courageous coloured man,” had twelve men under his command, and watched the Boca road for signs of an English advance. On 24 April, Medina accounted for killing three Englishmen himself. An attack was expected, and on the next day, Pallano joined Medina to observe the English forces, and found they were on the move toward San Geronimo Castle.39

The Spanish prepared quickly to meet the oncoming assault. Damian del Castillo had orders to prepare an ambush on the Esperilla road.40 Using a clearing made in the woods by the road, the Spanish deployed their troops in three layers: a mixed group of musketeers and lancers, with troops of lancers on either side. As scouts reported the English approach, Pallano had the

36 Ibid., 156-157.
37 Ibid., 155.
38 HMC, Seventh Report, 572-3.
39 Wright, Spanish Narratives, 20.
40 Ibid., 56-7.
men lie down and remain out of sight. In a further embarrassment to the English, the defenders laid their ambush in the same place the previous one had been.

The English forlorn came into view, supposedly under the charge of Adjutant-General Jackson, marching past the ambush without noticing the enemy. The Spanish opened fire after allowing the English forlorn to march past the ambush. A few English reacted coolly and fought back, and several Spanish officers and men were killed and wounded by return fire from the English. The Spanish lancers then charged, and effectively wiped out or sent into retreat the attacking Englishmen. As the defenders killed or put to flight the men of the Barbados cavalry troop, Spanish lancers mounted about 40 of their horses and used them to pursue the English down the narrow road to Boca de Jaina.41

The ambush cost the English dearly. Not all of the Englishmen ran away, and those who remained suffered for their comrades' cowardice. Especially bitter to the army was the loss of Major General Heane. Heane was ahead of the cavalry, directly behind the English forlorn. Armed with only a light rapier, he attempted to stop the retreat, demanding that enough men stand by him to stop the Spanish counterattack. Accounts vary as to whether only three or six men heeded his word, and the Spanish overran and killed them - Heane “with his sword sheathed in his enemies bowels.”42 His loss was keenly felt, and prisoners told the Spanish after the battle that Heane “was the best soldier in England.” The Spanish also found among the English dead two men, a mulatto and a black from Hispaniola who were serving as guides for the enemy.43

The slaughter continued until the Sea Regiment finally made a stand, allowing the fleeing soldiers to run through their ranks, and then closing up to stop the Spanish.44 The Spanish lance had done fearsome work. The broad-bladed lance used to kill cattle and wild hogs proved a better weapon in close quarters than the English musket and pike. Finally, the Spanish fell back on San Geronimo, as the Spanish lancers were literally too exhausted to kill any more

41 Wright, *Spanish Narratives*, 21-24; Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 57.


44 Firth, *Venables Narrative*, 158.
Englishmen. Pallano wrote, “Over three long laps of a horse’s running our lancers killed them [the English], and when wearied with killing, withdrew…”

This respite and retreat back to the fort allowed the English to recover. The English were not utterly beaten, however, even after receiving this treatment. Major Michael Bland of Buller’s regiment led a hundred picked men from each regiment in a counterattack to recover the ground so recently abandoned to the Spanish lancers. Thomas White commanded a detachment of these soldiers. The men advanced to within musket range of the fort, and held the ground in readiness to assault the fortification and move on Santo Domingo. They suffered from Spanish artillery throughout the night of 25 April and into the next morning.

The Englishmen had made preparations to take the fort by storm. The mortar and two drakes which had proved useless so far were put in position, and the army’s pioneers cut down trees to use for building barricades. The English soldiers felt enraged by the slaughter of their comrades, and their former helplessness in the ambush was made sharper as they had to endure the artillery bombardment that night. Finally having the means and stomach for a fight, orders came to these Englismen burn the gun carriages, bury the artillery ammunition, and fall back.

There was considerable disappointment and confusion among Bland’s men, as they learned of the order to retreat. White had believed that an attempt was still to be made on Santo Domingo until he saw the army marching back to the bay. The English needed to cover their retreat to prevent a massacre like the day before. At about seven in the morning, 150 soldiers of Fortescue’s regiment formed a rearguard to protect Bland’s men as they fell back to Jaina Bay.

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46 Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 57-58.
48 Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 58.
49 Ibid., 58.
The final retreat to Jaina Bay utterly demoralized the English soldiers. The surprising orders to fall back from the prepared positions near the fort convinced the men that they had lost the campaign, and the collapse of the army was complete. The men now panicked at any rumor of an enemy, or appearance of a stranger. Barrington wrote that 500 soldiers had dropped their weapons and fled when a soldier caught sight of a black man and shouted, “The enemy, the enemy.” The chagrined patrol sent to deal with the threat found themselves with nobody to fight but many arms to retrieve. Likewise, at night, the sight of fireflies would cause panic as soldiers thought they were seeing the burning matches of Spanish musketeers coming to kill them in their sleep. The English army had reached the point that it no longer had the courage to defend itself, or, even more importantly, forage for food.\(^{50}\)

Now began a time of severe privation for the English, as the soldiers were cut off from the supplies on board ship. Men going inland in search of cattle were driven back by “cow killers,” and from the anonymous journalist’s report the English ran even from the sounds of leaves rustling in the wind or crabs scuttling on the ground.\(^{51}\) Barrington reported that with the lack of bread, the men resorted to eating horse and dog meat “without salt.”\(^{52}\) The men were found “exercising their valour” on slaughtering and eating every part of whatever horses and donkeys they could find- this was the end of the mounts for the troop of horse from Barbados. Whistler reported that a trooper could scarcely tie up his horse to relieve himself, without the animal being stolen, slaughtered, and cooked.\(^{53}\)

The Englishmen also began assigning blame for the amazing defeat of 9,000 by what was thought to be only 300. It was soon discovered that Adjutant General Jackson had not taken simple precautions to discover enemy ambushes, had not put enough pikemen in the vanguard of the forlorn to protect the musketeers, and had stayed behind his men and out of danger during the fighting. Venables found Jackson lurking with the wounded. Jackson’s sword was ceremonially broken over his head, and he was stripped of his rank and made to swab the hospital ship. While

\(^{50}\) HMC, *Seventh Report*, 573; Firth, *Venables Narrative*, 161.


\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) I. S., *Brief and perfect Journal*, 18; Firth, *Venables Narrative*, 160.
this seemed fitting treatment for Jackson, it hardly answered for the conduct of the rest of the army. As the journalist put it, “my opinion is, that if all of like nature had been so dealt with, there would not have been many whole Swords left in the Army.”

Most commonly, English officers saw the defeat as the judgment of God, either against the greed of the common soldier and, indeed, officers thinking only of plunder, or pride in expecting an easy victory. Barrington concluded, “Indeed the Lord hath made us all along to be scourges to whip our own backs.” Veteran English officers in the expedition also blamed Venables for acting against their advice, and using his authority in an arbitrary manner. Belief in Providence coexisted happily with reason in the minds of English Protestants. The shameful behavior of the expedition’s soldiers, and the unreflective character of Venables’ leadership provided a combined irritant to competent officers in the English army. Barrington argued that the military leadership of the invasion had acted “against common reason.” Throughout his letter, he brought up episodes in which the sensible action was clear, yet Venables disregarded it.

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The English had nothing else to do but leave the island in disgrace. Francis Barrington reported that most of the army had boarded ship by 2 May, a process completed by the next day. The English set sail on 3 and 4 May, after a final tragic and wasteful episode characteristic of the whole expedition. Not able to load the remaining cavalry mounts, the army slaughtered one hundred horses on the beach. Barrington, a veteran dragoon officer of the Irish campaign, was horrified. He considered there to have been enough valuable horseflesh to sweep any of the Spanish Antilles clean, and was revolted by the brutal massacre. The episode inspired him to close his letter home with a frank condemnation of his general and the conduct of the expedition.

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54 Ibid., 18-19 [Numbered 16-17].
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
The embarkation went unmolested by the Spanish. This was amazing to the anonymous journalist, who wrote that it would have taken only two or three hundred Spaniards to further severely cripple Venables’ army before Penn sailed it out of range.\textsuperscript{58} The Spanish were taking no chances, however, since the English had makeshift fortifications around their embarkation point. They were also occupied in guarding neighboring sugar mills, out of concern that the English might burn them out of spite for their defeat. Once the English left, the Spanish soldiers around Boca de Jaina moved in and seized an Irishman who had been abandoned, and who informed them of the English fleet’s intention to assault Jamaica.\textsuperscript{59}

Conde de Peñalva immediately set about trying to send warning to the Spanish on Jamaica of the coming danger. He offered a reward of 400 pesos to the messenger who might successfully carry the warning of the English fleet, but it was found that Penn had wisely assigned a squadron to patrol offshore to prevent such communication. In one last effort to warn Jamaica, Peñalva sent men to go by canoe rather than ship, but their canoe leaked and the voyage was impossible. Hispaniola had remained Spanish because of prior warning and time to prepare; Spanish Jamaica would have no such advantage. Instead, Peñalva set about the other necessary task of ritually celebrating the victory.\textsuperscript{60}

If the English were ready to attribute the defeat to the wrath of the Almighty, the Spanish also knew whom to thank for the deliverance of Santo Domingo. There was much to be thankful for. The Irishman, a fellow Catholic, had informed the Spaniards who found him that the English army intended to wipe out “the Christian religion.” For the preservation of their faith, and the light casualties, only 25 Spaniards dead, and the victory over the English fleet, Peñalva formed his men up and marched them to be formally welcomed into Santo Domingo. The cannon on the city walls fired a salute as the army neared the city, dragging captured English regimental flags in the dirt behind them. The archbishop of Santo Domingo welcomed the defenders into the city, and had \textit{Te Deum Laudamus} sung in the cathedral.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{58} I. S., \textit{Brief and perfect Journal}, 19 [numbered as 17].

\textsuperscript{59} Wright, \textit{Spanish Narratives}, 35, 60.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 35, 60.
Such was the end of Cromwell’s bold plans of the previous April. Certainly, the inept leadership of Venables and poor and untried quality of the troops played their part in the English defeat. However, enough skilled veteran officers and soldiers and sea-soldiers did not run from the Spanish, that victory was still within the English grasp. The credit for their defeat most properly goes to the Spanish defenders of Santo Domingo. Conde de Peñalva and his forewarning of the English expedition’s coming allowed time to arrange an adequate defense of the city. Spanish militia, runaway slaves, “cow killers,” old men and boys were effective soldiers under able and courageous leadership, and used the wild country on the southern coast of Hispaniola to their advantage. The English failed to make any progress past San Geronimo castle, let alone reach the city walls. With all of their previous intelligence of Spanish America, the English failed to account for the Spaniard’s ability to draw together all available resources and men in defense of the empire.
CHAPTER IV

“For fresh meat and pieces of eight”: Establishing a Foothold on Jamaica
May-July 1655

Early on the morning of Monday, 7 May, Admiral William Penn fired a gun and flew a jack from the ensign staff of the Swiftsure. George Dakins and William Goodson repeated the signal. This marked the beginning of a day of humiliation and fasting, to seek God’s blessing on the coming attempt on Jamaica, and his forgiveness for the sin that led to the previous defeat before Santo Domingo. Richard Rooth wrote a personal prayer in his journal, beseeching the Lord’s guidance and protection. This day also saw the death of Edward Winslow, who passed away from a fever, according to a letter from Robert Venables and Gregory Butler. Winslow’s death seemed sudden to some, and Butler believed that he died of grief for the loss at Santo Domingo. The fleet buried the Pilgrim Father at sea with full honors on the way from Hispaniola to Jamaica, far from either England or the Plymouth colony. A day later, the fleet passed Cape Tiburon, a feature of land Rooth called Cape Tybourne, the western-most end of Hispaniola.¹

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The Spanish had decisively routed the English army on Hispaniola. Deciding to attempt Jamaica and salvage a victory from the failing expedition, Penn and Venables would carry out a more successful landing on Jamaica. The acquisition of this island would not assuage the

disappointment in England when news finally arrived of the ill success of the Western Design. However, among the army officers in Jamaica, the island was most definitely not seen as a consolation, but as ideal for planting and harrying the Spanish in the Caribbean. The eventual stiff Spanish resistance, as well as the fruits of mismanagement and poor planning, tempered this optimism among the English. All the same, the English gained an early foothold on the island, unlike their experience on Hispaniola. Here, the ad hoc Spanish defense did not prevent the loss of a colony. This was not because the island’s military leadership or defenses were weak; in fact, Spanish leadership on Jamaica proved to be quite strong in the irregular conflict leading up to the completion of the English conquest in 1660. Also, the Spanish enjoyed the use of fortifications and artillery directly opposing the English landing, in a harbor difficult for Penn’s fleet to navigate. The defenders of Hispaniola held only the advantages of advance warning and a clear understanding of English intentions. The Spanish colonists of Jamaica had no word of the English fleet’s arrival, no reinforcements, and no idea that Penn and Venables’ men had come to stay.

On the afternoon of 9 May 1655, two fishermen hunting turtles in the vicinity of Morante Point on the coast of Jamaica caught sight of the approach of a large fleet of warships. They took to their canoes, probably very quickly, and sailed all afternoon and night, bringing the warning to Santiago de la Vega. The fleet came in view of Caguaya, the port of Santiago, the next day at dawn. The Spaniards counted fifty-six ships and numerous smaller vessels. The governor of the island, Don Juan Ramirez de Orellana, raised the alarm and dispatched his maestre de campo, Don Francisco de Proenza, to Caguaya with any available men to identify the ships. Penn’s ships sailed in under their flags, informing the watchers at Caguaya who was coming. Proenza sent word to Santiago that the fleet was English.²

The Spaniards on Jamaica found themselves as unprepared for an invasion as their compatriots on Santo Domingo were ready for one. Many of the townsmen whose services may have proved useful were occupied on their ranches and plantations. Fortification consisted of a breastwork armed with five cannon, manned by one hundred and eighty soldiers. The chronicler Julian de Castilla did not specify the quality of these troops, but Jamaica certainly did not have

² Possibly as late as the summer of 1655, English officers continued to use the Spanish place-names for towns and geographical features on Jamaica, which I use in this chapter. The maestre de campo corresponds in rank to an English colonel.
fresh reinforcements of professional infantry such as those that reached Hispaniola in the nick of
time. The Spaniards had withstood Venables against long odds at Santo Domingo, but none of
the extenuating circumstances of prior warning and English naiveté existed for the defenders of
Jamaica.\(^3\)

While the fleet was startling the fishermen from their turtle hunt, Rooth went aboard the
*Swiftsure* with the other captains, receiving instructions for landing the army. The English had
sighted the eastern end of Jamaica at eight on the morning of the same day, and prepared
themselves to make a better attempt at securing Spanish territory. The admiral would anchor
offshore with the larger ships, while the twelve-gun galley *Martin* would guide all shallow-
draught vessels closer in to land. The captains, following orders, provided the soldiers once
again with fourteen rounds of musket ammunition per man, in addition to rations for three days,
one day’s supply of brandy, and six yards of match cord for their muskets.

On 10 May, Penn approached Caguaya at six in the morning. Three hours later, he
ordered a gun fired to signal the order to anchor and prepare the assault. Plans did not work out
as intended, as several ships lost their anchors on the foul bottom of the harbor. Rooth’s ship lost
theirs with a quarter of its cable. Finally, with the wind blowing up, the fleet sailed into the
harbor. When the *Martin* led the shallow draft vessels closer in, some of the ships ran aground.
Rooth, sailing in after them, tried to avoid this fate, but also ran aground when following Penn’s
orders to stand in closer to shore.\(^4\)

The lack of unity in the expedition’s command became an issue in the assault on Jamaica,
but did not hinder the landing. Gregory Butler wrote to Cromwell later with a comment on the
rivalry between the commanding generals attacking Jamaica. According to him, Penn had said
privately that he did not trust the army to carry out the landing successfully, so the admiral
planned to bring his ships as close to shore as possible in order to drive off any defenders with
his guns. This may have been true, as Penn certainly had little reason to rely on the army. In any
case, bringing shallow draft vessels close to shore to bombard the Spanish was a wise decision,

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\(^3\) Irene A. Wright, trans., “The English Conquest of Jamaica,” in *Camden Miscellany*, vol.

\(^4\) Battick, “Rooth,” 15.
and Penn did not show any scorn he may have had for the army as he cheered them on their way to land.⁵

Once the ships moored under such harsh conditions, Penn landed the army. The rear admiral went by boat from ship to ship, giving the captains orders to send the soldiers ashore. When the sailors on the loaded boats began pulling for shore, the Spanish opened fire with their cannon. The English fleet took advantage of their shallow draught vessels in the harbor to return fire and thereby effectively silenced any more salvos from shore, allowing the soldiers to come ashore in the ships’ boats.⁶

One incident illustrated that not all of the soldiers in the English army felt utterly beaten and demoralized, and also indicated that Venables had allowed defeat and sickness to render him unwilling to exercise active command. Henry Whistler observed Venables pacing the deck of the Martin, wrapped in his cloak and with his hat over his eyes. Whistler believed that Venables looked more like he “had abin astuding of fissick” than acting like a general. Demonstrating high spirits surprising in a demoralized army, as boatloads of soldiers headed for shore passed the Martin, they cheered their general with a “holow” and waved their caps and hats in the air, possibly at the long-awaited prospect of a victory. Venables did not answer, but looked away. Instead, it fell to Penn to encourage the soldiers of the army. The admiral called to them that the Spanish had run, and they cheerfully rowed to shore.⁷

As the army came in haling distance of shore, the Spanish called out asking the purpose of the fleet’s coming. An Englishman replied that they sought “fresh meat and pieces of eight,” which probably confirmed the first impression among the Spaniards that the expedition arrived bent only on pillage, rather than permanent settlement. One defender defiantly called out daring Venables’ army to land, in good enough English that Barrington thought the man was a renegade Englishman.⁸ John Daniel believed that five hundred Spanish defenders manned nine cannon on

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⁵ Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 755.


⁷ Firth, Venables, 163.

⁸ HMC, 7th Report, 573.
the shore, a high estimate. As the Spanish retreated, they abandoned not only their fortifications, but also their cannon, to the enemy soldiers. According to Barrington, the English suffered no losses in taking the port of Caguaya. He believed that God had indeed blessed the army, as in his military eye the defenders of Caguaya were in a much stronger tactical position than those of the Hispaniola shore, having coastal fortifications and artillery to meet soldiers riding exposed in boats.\(^9\)

Upon landing, Venables held another council of war, and once again rejected their advice. He also failed to inform his subordinates of his intentions. Annoyed by this behavior, Barrington remarked that Venables failed to inform his colonels about his plans even as much as captains generally had been in English or continental warfare. The lieutenant colonel argued that, in several instances, the council’s dissenting opinion would have saved the army certain losses or defeats on both Hispaniola and Jamaica. In this case, Barrington related that the army officers formed a council soon after landing. The officers decided that they should press the advantage of the easy landing and the apparent confusion among the Spaniards, and make a night march in pursuit. Venables did not follow this sensible advice.\(^10\) The army made camp for the night, planning to assault Santiago de la Vega the next day.

On the next day, the army began their march on the city, supposing it to be roughly five or six miles distant. The soldiers awoke early the next morning, and set out between eight and nine o’clock. Julian de Castilla described the road from Caguaya to Santiago as “a level road over two short leagues, but hilly, and suitable in this distance for the laying of many an ambushade.”\(^11\) He believed that at the fords of the Caguaya River, the English would be likely to stop for water, and could have been easily taken by surprise if “a few well disciplined men” were up to the task. The defenders apparently made some attempt to slow down the English advance. There was a battery on the way to Santiago of three cannons and a “murderer,” placed in a small fort. The Spanish fired one salvo from these, and quickly fell back. Otherwise, the Spanish put up little resistance, but instead abandoned Santiago to Venables’ army. The weak defense relieved Thomas White, as he and probably other officers no longer trusted the men’s conduct in

\(^9\) Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 507; *HMC*, 7th Report, 573.

\(^{10}\) *HMC*, 7th Report, 573-75.

\(^{11}\) Wright, “Conquest,” 2-3.
The Spanish resistance was half-hearted and insufficient enough that Barrington did not even notice it.\textsuperscript{13} The English army entered the town at two in the afternoon. A forlorn hope advanced into Santiago, and found it abandoned. The Spanish had taken advantage of the night’s delay to evacuate the town with their valuables, and retire into the surrounding countryside. Not only was there no one for the English to fight, there was also a disappointing lack of loot. Barrington believed that, had Venables not dawdled, the English would have captured the Spanish defenders and their goods intact, without having to fight the subsequent campaign. Venables established his headquarters in the town hall, while other army officers found lodging in the town.\textsuperscript{14}

As the English troops marched on Santiago, a Spaniard named Antonio de Salinas met them on horseback, bearing a flag of truce, possibly a handkerchief. Officers gave the order not to fire, and escorted Salinas to Venables under promise of safe conduct. In meeting with Venables, he communicated an offer of any supplies and provisions that the fleet might need, so that it could once again be underway. Through this, the English learned that the Spanish on Jamaica misunderstood their intentions. The Spanish believed that the English, as in previous raids, had come to plunder, refit, and go their way. The Spanish were apparently assuming this based on their experience with William Jackson. Also based on previous experience with English privateers, the Spanish assumed Venables to be a mercenary officer.\textsuperscript{15} Venables expressed a desire to speak with the maestre de campo or sargento mayor of the island, as the governor was not present. By one report, men carried Juan Ramirez de Orellana out of Santiago in a hammock on account of the pox. He had his quarters two leagues away on Francisco Cartagena de Agramonte’s sugar plantation. Salinas went to the plantation to report to the governor, and Orellana sent don Francisco de Carvajal, his sargento mayor, to discuss terms with the English.

\textsuperscript{12} Wright, “Conquest,” 3; Firth, Clarke Papers, vol. iii, 59; Firth, Venables, 163.

\textsuperscript{13} HMC, 7\textsuperscript{th} Report, 574.

\textsuperscript{14} HMC, 7\textsuperscript{th} Report, 573-74; Firth, Venables, 137, Wright, “Conquest,” 3.

\textsuperscript{15} Wright, “Conquest,” 3; Firth, Venables, 163, HMC, 7\textsuperscript{th} Report, 574.
Governor Orellana’s representatives and Venables took from 12 to 15 May to conclude a treaty. If the Spanish remained unclear about the English army’s intentions, they soon learned that Venables’ men were in Jamaica to stay, not simply plunder and depart. The terms of the treaty, had they been followed, would have given the English firm and quick control of Jamaica. The treaty specified that the Spanish had to leave all their slaves and property on Jamaica, only taking two suits of clothes apiece with them, and prepare for transportation to New Spain. The English heard reports of the Spanish colonists’ reluctance to come into the English camp, afraid that the English ships would land them among hostile Indians. In an attempt to enforce the treaty, the English took Spanish hostages as a guarantee of good faith. As the Spanish later refused to submit to the treaty, Venables threatened to hang the governor, which had little effect, nor did the general carry out this threat. As the treaty negotiations proceeded, some English officers found themselves frustrated by the close presence of the Spanish defenders in the surrounding woods. Despite Barrington’s estimation that only three miles separated them from the Spanish, Venables refused a colonel’s request to make a sortie from Santiago. This colonel had suggested the attack not only to round up Spanish resisters, but also to bring livestock to feed the army.16

As the English army still suffered from hunger, a prevalent theme on Jamaica, soldiers became restless and began striking out on their own in search of food. This proved fatal for some of them, as the Spanish in the surrounding countryside had begun organizing resistance, and were lying in wait. Barrington believed these losses preventable, had the organization of English capture of Santiago shown greater planning and foresight, Spanish goods and livestock might have been taken, and Spanish slaves captured to plant food for future provisions. The efforts of musketeers to shoot cows also frightened off the cattle herds, making it difficult for the army to round them up, that Barrington summed up, “this greatly damnified us.” Venables attempted to solve the problem by charging the few men with horses to establish regular patrols to bring in cattle. The army resorted to other expedients to bolster the meat supply, falling back on dogs, horses, and donkeys. Barrington himself expressed a definite preference for the latter, and wrote that he “did eat heartily of it.”17

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16 *HMC*, 7th Report, 574.

17 Ibid.
When this mostly peaceful period of the English invasion ended, scattered Spanish resistance broke out near the town. The Spanish retreated to the southwest of Santiago, into the Guatibacoa region, the location of many Spanish cattle ranches. Proenza made certain of the safety of the people of his household, and then took a position on a bridge two leagues from the town. A hundred and thirty musketeers and lancers, fifteen black bowmen, and a chaplain, Licentiate Alonso Telles, made up his forces. English stragglers roamed the countryside in search of food, and provided easy prey for Proenza’s scouts. Through the capture of one young man from Barbados, named either George or Nicholas Paine, the Spanish heard encouraging news.

The young man served the expedition as an interpreter. Because he had pleaded for his life in Spanish, the patrol took him to Proenza for questioning. He gave some false information, either coerced or his own mistaken impressions, including the statement that the expedition had been instigated by the “Jews of Flanders” who Cromwell had admitted into London. However, the Spanish learned accurate and useful information as well. They did not face an invincible fleet, but one that had recently been soundly beaten on Hispaniola. Somehow, Paine may have been returned to the English army or escaped, because White later reported that he was hanged for indicating the English army’s vulnerability to the Spanish.\(^{18}\) The punishment was legally justifiable under the Articles of War, albeit extreme for a frightened youth from Barbados, if one does not consider the precarious position he placed the English army in with his information.\(^{19}\)

John Daniel reported that, after a week’s negotiations, the Spanish emissaries agreed to surrender, leaving the ailing governor as a hostage. Venables and Butler emphasized that they had actually ordered a patrol to apprehend the Spanish governor. However, the remaining Spanish defenders turned down the offer of transport if they laid down their arms. The Spaniards refused, Daniel claiming the reason being that many were Creoles, without resources elsewhere. Because of their resolve to die in Jamaica, instead of becoming paupers in another colony or in Spain, Daniel concluded that the English would have a hard campaign clearing them out of the

\(^{18}\) Wright, “Conquest,” 11; Firth, Clarke Papers, vol. iii, 59.

\(^{19}\) C. H. Firth, Cromwell’s Army: A History of the English Soldier during the Civil Wars, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, 4th ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962), 400, 404.
island, comparable to the irregular war against tories in Ireland. Venables and Butler had hopes that the campaign to pacify Jamaica would be a quick one, believing the Spanish forces too weak to make a long stand on the island. They also hoped to prevent the Spaniards from escaping to Cuba.

After about two weeks on Jamaica, Anthony Buller finally made a sortie. He stayed out in the country for two weeks looking for Spaniards and for food. Another officer, Michael Bland, also went out on patrol, but returned having accomplished nothing. When Bland returned, the Spanish left their refuges and burned many houses around Santiago to deny the English the use of them. Colonel Buller returned with word that the country supported a large number of “beeves” that the army could slaughter for food. When Buller patrolled the countryside in May, he captured two Englishmen who had been living on Jamaica. He questioned them as to why so many Spaniards had not surrendered. They claimed that Spanish priests had told frightening tales that the English had denied God, and planned to put the population to the sword, after putting out the eyes of any who approached their lines. They also reported that some Spaniards still claimed that the English had only come to Jamaica for food, and would be gone in three or four months. If so, they certainly could not be expected to abandon the island.

The army found itself in a desperate situation due to starvation and sickness. The Spanish around Santiago denied the English army cattle and other provisions, and Venables and Butler wrote on 4 June that they could only secure meat “at the point of our swords.” Between the end of May and June, the army began using cassava as a substitute for bread. They had also

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20 Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 508. John Daniel shows some confusion over where the English were sending the Spaniards. He maintains that they were going to Spain, where the Jamaican Creoles did not wish to settle. Either he or the Spaniards may have misheard New Spain as Spain. Certainly an accountant who consistently referred to Jamaica as “Jamico” can be forgiven for having difficulty understanding Spanish.

21 Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 511.

22 *HMC*, 7th Report, 571, 74-75.

23 Ibid., 571.

begun to bring in cattle. At the end of May, when Buller made his patrol in search of pockets of Spanish resistance, he brought back the cheering news of many cattle herds in the interior, and if the army showed enough energy to fetch them in, they would not starve. Officers with private means were better able to relieve their hunger than the common soldier. Barrington remarked that he had finally purchased six months’ worth of biscuit for himself and his family, and regretted that the “poor soldier” did not have this recourse.²⁵ Venables believed that the Spanish broke their original promise to supply food for the expedition. This sharpened the suffering caused by an utter lack of decent bread supply. Once the tardy store ships finally reached Jamaica, the amount of bread they carried would only last the army twenty-two days at half rations. Moreover, the fleet off Jamaica had supplies for only three more months’ service. English officers decided to seek aid from the New England colonies, and a call was sent for help. Venables and Butler had little confidence, however, that the colonies on the North American mainland would send nearly enough food to fulfill Jamaica’s needs.²⁶

Lack of rations, unhealthy rations, and the hard service combined to strike the army down with dysentery, as they had suffered on Hispaniola. Venables and Butler wrote that the men and their officers resembled corpses more than an army. The dysentery, no respecter of persons, had heavily afflicted the officer corps, leaving the army with inadequate leadership. Venables and Butler reported that only two colonels, three majors, and seven field officers remained fit to command, the rest were ill.²⁷ Barrington wrote that men fell sick “daily,” and that many soldiers had died. His letter home indicates that lack of hygiene in camp caused part of the army’s problem. Soldiers left dead men unburied, or in such shallow graves that they did not remain long underground. Meanwhile, soldiers disposed of offal in camp when butchering meat. Barrington feared a plague outbreak, and that “the Lord will whip us with his third rod.”²⁸

The Great Charity finally arrived at Barbados in June, five months late. Thomas Modyford reported that it sailed on to Jamaica as quickly as possible, with two captured Dutch ships loaded

²⁵ HMC, 7th Report, 571, 575.

²⁶ Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 510.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ HMC, 7th Report, 571, 74.
with manatee, to relieve the army’s starvation. Even Modyford, not directly affected like the
soldiers, complained that the supplies only came in “lamely and scatteringly.” The first supply
ship sent from Barbados sailed on 26 April, not reaching Hispaniola in time to meet the army and
fleet before they departed for Jamaica.\(^{29}\) The *Little Charity* came in at Jamaica as well, with the
army’s horses, but without the vital bread supply. Even as supply ships came trickling into
Jamaica, Barrington did not think that the replenished stores would last. He believed that the
army needed to disperse into the country and begin planting food crops, instead of relying on the
uncertain arrival of ship’s biscuit for their sustenance.\(^{30}\)

The English commanders agreed on the need of quick action to keep the army and navy
from starving. The commissioners of the expedition, now reduced to Penn, Venables, and
Gregory Butler, knew that there no longer remained any question of further campaigns against
other Spanish colonies. Furthermore, the soldiers and sailors depleted the food supply daily, and
needed reinforcement and supplies. The large fleet was no longer necessary to the expedition,
and formed a liability in its use of provisions. The heavy warships would to sail home, while the
faster frigates would remain based at Jamaica to seek Spanish prizes and harass the enemy.
Venables sent a letter home with Penn’s fleet to Oliver Cromwell. In the letter, he spelled out
the army’s desperate need for bread and brandy, as well as carpenters tools and blacksmiths. He
also hoped for the dispatch of another naval squadron.\(^{31}\)

In May and June, Penn and the fleet made preparations to depart, leaving a smaller
squadron at Jamaica under William Goodson’s command. At the end of May, during these
preparations, a horrible accident befell one of the warships outlining the dangers facing sailors in
wooden ships, and symbolizing the wastefulness of the expedition. On 25 May, the *Discovery*,
three guns, commanded by Captain Thomas Wilts or Wilkes, took on cannon and provisions
from the *Swiftsure*. This task completed, the *Discovery* drew away from the flagship. At
roughly seven in the evening, a sailor named John Gall set to the task of bottling brandy from
casks, carelessly near an open flame. The fire took hold, and when the situation became

\(^{29}\) Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 565.

\(^{30}\) *HMC*, 7th Report, 571, 75.

\(^{31}\) Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 598-99.
hopeless, crews of the fleet’s boats bravely approached the burning ship, and towed it aground away from the other vessels. A moment of fear in the fleet probably ensued as a land breeze brought the burning *Discovery* back off the point of land. The fire reached the powder magazine, with its hundred and twenty barrels of gunpowder, before the ship reached the others, making what must have been a horrific explosion. Rooth wrote, after describing the event, “The Lord, of his mercy, sanctify this, His fatherly affliction, to us,” and describing the attempts at salvage the next day, “This morning the General sent several boats to see whether they could find the hull of her or any guns, but the coming they could do no good therein.”

It took some time due to contrary winds for Penn to put to sea. Orders went out on 20 June from the rear admiral that the fleet would sail early the next morning. However, the wind the next day blew toward land, and the ships could not get out. On that day, 21 June, Richard Rooth jotted in the margin of his journal the list of ships sailing for England: the flagship *Swiftsure*, Rooth’s own ship *Bear*, and fifteen other vessels. Three ships had orders to sail for New England. In a letter 25 June, Penn instructed Fortescue to communicate all of his reports to Gregory Butler, and include Butler in decisions concerning prizes of war. Regardless of Butler’s competence, he was the last remaining commissioner with the expedition, with Venables going and Penn departing, Winslow dead and Searle on Barbados. At daybreak on 25 June, Admiral Penn fired a signal gun, and the fleet sailing home weighed anchor and made their way out to sea with the land breeze, heading for home.

Penn’s fleet kept together until an accident occurred in July ten leagues off Havana, reminiscent of the strange demise of the *Discovery*. Fire broke out in the steward room of the *Paragon*, formerly Goodson’s vice-admiral command and one of the larger warships in the fleet. After two hours, the fire reached the powder magazine, resulting in an explosion killing roughly one hundred men. Meanwhile, three other ships became separated from the fleet. The fleet

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33 Ibid., 20. The other ships listed are *Paragon*, *Lion*, *Mathias*, *Indian*, *Convertine*, *Heartsease*, *Halfmoon*, *Rosebush*, *Gillyflower*, *Sampson*, *Westergate*, *Little Charity*, *Marigold*, *Cock*, *Tulip*.

34 Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 585.

became further scattered as Penn gave chase to a French vessel near Land’s End. Rear Admiral Dakins had been placed in command of the Paragon, but he survived the accident and made it to England with the fleet. Penn arrived in England in the Swiftsure, and notified Cromwell of his presence at Spithead on 31 August.36

William Goodson wasted no time in deploying his fleet to reconnoiter and harass the Spanish in the Caribbean. Goodson had twelve ships at his disposal for these purposes. He sent six of his ships out to patrol and make mischief. These constituted the six nimble frigates Cromwell had called for in the Gulf of Mexico in July of the last year. Two kept station off Santo Domingo to provide information on Spanish shipping. Goodson relieved the captain of one of these vessels, the Selby, of command that summer for losing a Spanish prize when he “made a hole and sunck her.” Three other ships divided their time between pursuing contraband French trade, and securing salted turtle meat for provisions. Goodson placed the other ship between Jamaica and Cuba to interdict communication between the Spanish colony and resisters on Jamaica. Once the Marston Moor sailed for England in late July, Goodson had further plans. He hoped, after leaving two vessels to guard Jamaica and one to watch the north coast, to take a squadron of eight ships to raid the waters near Cartagena and Portobello, probably to try for the Plate Fleet.37

Not long after Penn departed for England, Venables would abandon the design as well. Stricken sick by dysentery for some time, Venables’ illness impaired his ability to command. According to a letter dated 28 April to Daniel Searle, he had been suffering from the “fluxe” for twelve days.38 Eventually, his sickness rendered him so unfit for command, that he decided to return to England. On 7 June, the army officers on Jamaica convened a council of war at Santiago de la Vega, with Major General Richard Fortescue, Colonels Buller, Carter, Doylie, and Richard Holdipp, Quartermaster General John Rudyerd, Adjutant General Isaac Birkenhead, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Barry, and a Major Smith in attendance. They decided to give the

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36 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 752-53. The long list of “Ibid” below are citations of various documents used here from the collection in this volume of the Thurloe papers, rather than a repetitive citation of a single document.

37 Ibid., 682.

38 Ibid., 411.
sick General Venables the authority to return to England, inform Cromwell of the army’s condition on Jamaica, and see that supplies and reinforcement be dispatched from England. The officers also authorized Colonel Buller to accompany Venables. The council gave these two officers a warning: if they did not return in a year, they would forfeit their claim to a plantation on Jamaica, as those who remained would secure.

Because Venables planned to leave for England, the army needed a new commander in chief. Venables opened Cromwell’s instructions with regard to change of command, and summoned Gregory Butler. With Butler there, any decision would be backed by the authority of two of the three remaining commissioners of the expedition. Two days later, Butler having not shown up, Venables went ahead and appointed Fortescue the commanding general of the land forces on Jamaica. When Butler finally arrived at headquarters on the following day, Venables informed him of his decision, and asked Butler to add his approval. Butler did not do so, but simply asked for time to think about the matter, and then complained that he had not been consulted at all.  

A further problem arose in the command structure as Venables and Buller planned to leave in July. Butler decided that he too wished to go home. In a situation where the army and navy commanders had equal say, they needed at least one more commissioner to provide a tie-breaking vote. Fortescue remonstrated with Butler to stay on Jamaica, but Butler expressed his determination to return to England, claiming his job done. Fortescue showed his frustration with the commissioner, and claimed that he only wished for Butler to stay to add a third commissioner to the commanding party of the expedition of himself and the remaining naval commander, William Goodson. He requested that the next commissioners, should Cromwell send them, be “sober, discreet and serviceable men,” as opposed to the besotted gossip Butler. Fortescue claimed that Butler had done much to sow discord and dissension among the army and navy commands. Butler maintained to Fortescue that he could not endorse the selections of Fortescue and Goodson as commissioners, and so he completely washed his hands of responsibility for leading the expedition now floundering on Jamaica. 

39 Ibid., 523, 674.

40 Ibid., 674, 81.
The army officers held a meeting in July to consider their needs, which Venables and Buller were to bring to Cromwell’s attention. The officers remained confident that the guiding mission of the Western Design was not only to establish plantations, but also to create a godly community, and propagate the gospel. The army was in a desperate situation regarding chaplains, as two were dead and one dying. One of these was probably the well-known Thomas Gage, who died on Jamaica. They requested a “godly, sober, and learned minister,” not only to bring God’s word to the New World, but also in hopes that his preaching would calm dissension and complaints in the army. The army also needed an officer with the authority to keep track of the expedition’s accounts, to keep the officers from stealing funds, and the soldiers paid. John Daniel had been fulfilling this role as Auditor General, and Fortescue asked that this office be confirmed, as Daniel was “a very good accomptant.”

In June, Thomas Modyford on Barbados foresaw needs of the army that suggested the campaign to hold Jamaica would not be an easy one. He asked that Cromwell and the Council send more troops and supplies as quickly as possible. Modyford also suggested weapons more fitting a professional and effective army. The soldiers should have the regular long pikes and pikeman’s armor, as well as saddles and weapons to outfit cuirassiers, cavalry troops wearing heavy armor that fought with swords and extremely long pistols.

Fifteen army officers, including Fortescue and Barrington, drew up a formal document with their requests of the Lord Protector and Council. They desired clothing, better cutting tools, and provisions, including bread, oatmeal, brandy, firearms and ammunition, and medicine. To clear up the problems of rival generals on land and sea, they requested an overall commander of all forces, with the authority to establish admiralty courts and issue letters of marque and reprisal to privateers. To prevent the earlier problems of leading reluctant and broken soldiers into battle, they also requested reinforcements drawn from the proven veterans of the New Model Army in Ireland, and that these soldiers be better fed and equipped. Of note, the officers requested that any additional soldiers be issued leather water bottles, probably remembering the retreating army dying of thirst on Hispaniola. The officers’ other requests dealt with the matter of establishing a permanent and lucrative colony. They asked for a constitution and laws from the Council of

41 Ibid., 681.
42 Ibid., 565.
State, so that they could form a system of government, and they also requested legal confirmation of the land distribution among the regiments on Jamaica. To work the new plantations, the officers requested indentured servants, suggesting Scotland as a source of labor, and they asked that Cromwell work out the terms of service. They also suggested that colonists and merchants in England be encouraged to come and settle in Jamaica.  

The return of ships and men to England allowed the participants in the expedition to communicate with home through letters, which expressed their optimism about Jamaica’s usefulness as a colony. Considerable information about the events of the Western Design comes from letters written to England from Barbados and later from Jamaica, when participants had the opportunity to consider their experiences and write to concerned officials and family members in England. John Daniel wrote in a hurry, managing to jot down a letter on 3 June in time for a ship to carry the correspondence home. Daniel wanted copies made in England for his wife, to be delivered to her in London or Ipswich. He also wanted his mother in Cheshire to have a copy. Both women in his life would see the danger he had faced on Hispaniola, especially if he was near Major General Heane at his death, as he indicated in the letter. Finally, he requested copies for his cousin. He considered the letter a hasty job, asking the reader to “pardon errors, and picke out the sence, haveing not tyme to examen it.”

Barrington wrote to family as well. He refers to having family with him, but also sent greetings through Desborough to his “little cousins.” On 26 May and 6 June, he wrote Sir John Barrington about recent events and the state of the army. On 14 July, Barrington wrote out an extended letter, tracing the course of the expedition from its departure from England up to the current situation on Jamaica. Lieutenant-Colonel Barrington may have been the Francis Barrington who was brother of Sir John Barrington, of Barrington Hall, who sat on the Long Parliament. If so, Francis had a wife, Elizabeth, but no children. Barrington sent his letters of

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43 Ibid., 661.
44 Ibid., 508.
45 Ibid., 647.
May and June by the same ship. He took the opportunity in July of sending his extended letter with Colonel Buller, when the colonel returned to England with Robert Venables.  

The letters represented not only the desired reaffirmation of family and political bonds, but optimism about the island that was only the expedition’s second choice for capture. John Daniel was impressed by Jamaica’s potential. The Spanish had left sugar mills, maize, and rice. On the island, salt, fish, fowl, tobacco, “rare fruite”, and forests flourished. Daniel reported hearing that spices, cloves, mace, and cinnamon, grew on Jamaica, and also believed the rumors of gold and silver mines. Showing some business enterprise, Daniel thought that silk worms could be introduced. All of these resources brought him to the conclusion that the English were better off with Jamaica. Hispaniola would have been too large to hold, considering the small force under Venables, and the topography would allow too many Spaniards to simply retreat into the hills and forests and carry on the battle. Moreover, Hispaniola’s position windward from Cuba would prevent English ships from returning to the island after raiding. On the other hand, Jamaica was ideally situated for galling the Spaniard, and very fertile.

Thomas Modyford on Barbados wrote on 6 July that Jamaica was more suitable for colonization than Hispaniola. He had spoken more elaborately on this point in June. Modyford believed that Jamaica had an excellent harbor for the English fleet. He asserted that Jamaica enjoyed a particularly useful situation for an attempt on the Plate Fleet as it sailed between Cartagena and Havana. Provided that England continue supplying the army, and English frigates patrolled the Caribbean, Modyford thought that nothing could prevent Jamaica from becoming a viable colony in three or four years, and provide a base for further bold actions against Spain.

Army officers also expressed their opinions on this score. Major General Richard Fortescue believed that survival for Venables’ army would have been impossible on Hispaniola. He boasted that no Spanish ship could sail out of Cartagena or Cuba without being spied by the

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47 HMC, 7th Report, 571.

48 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 508.

49 Ibid., 507.

50 Ibid., 565, 622.
English on Jamaica. Venables and Butler agreed with the opinion that Jamaica had a more strategic location for attacking Spanish colonies. They also argued that Jamaica had more pleasant weather than Hispaniola. Venables listed six varieties of wood available on Jamaica, mostly suited for moveable items such as furniture, but he also noted some wood useful for dyes. He also listed ten types of fruit, spices, and other commodities, including pepper, avocado, cocoa for chocolate, citrus, tobacco, and indigo. He also mentioned that Jamaica had “the largest potatoes my eyes ever beheld,” likely describing yucca or cassava plants. Barrington believed that as long as the army held onto Jamaica for a year, its situation would improve. He was optimistic that if the men would learn to take advantage of the presence of cattle, and begin raising hogs, their army would eventually be well provisioned.

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It took time for people in England to learn of the momentous events going on in the West Indies. The long absence of soldiers and sailors across the Atlantic certainly caused anxiety among their families. Keith Thomas points to wives consulting astrologers when worried about husbands away on naval expeditions, or lost at sea. London astrologer William Lilly heard requests in 1655 to provide information on the welfare of men in Penn’s fleet, as well as sailors serving under Admiral Robert Blake in the Mediterranean.

One useful gauge of the arrival of rumor and news in England of the Western Design are the letters of two Swedish diplomats in London, written to King Charles X of Sweden. Peter Julius Coyet, envoy, and Christer Bonde, ambassador, lived in London in 1655-56, and made frequent report of news concerning Anglo-Swedish relations and international affairs to their monarch. First, they related the false and vague reports, and dearth of positive news, hitting

51 Ibid., 674.
52 Ibid., 510.
53 Ibid., 547.
54 HMC, 7th Report, 575.
55 Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 308. I wish to thank both Paul Morris and Joanna Neilson for this reference.
London before definite word came of the events on Hispaniola. Peter Julius Coyet wrote King Charles X on 23 April, and mentioned Penn’s fleet, concerning which he had heard nothing new. He reported that the most informed opinion held its destination to be Hispaniola, although there were rumors that Penn sailed for Brazil. Coyet again wrote of the lack of news on 30 April, claiming erroneously that the fleet had sailed seven months before, implying frustration with the lack of information. Coyet inferred on 7 May that the English prolonged their negotiations with the French, with expectations that if the Western Design should prove successful, the protectorate might have a stronger bargaining position.⁵⁶

By the middle of May, some positive news had reached England, and been disseminated within the diplomatic community. By this time, observant people in London knew about the expedition’s arrival and stay at Barbados. Coyet reported to Charles X on 14 May that Penn remained on Barbados as of 8 April, in possession of 18 or 19 Dutch prizes. Coyet related an interesting rumor in a letter of 21 May. Talk in London held that Penn had not yet carried out his mission because of the ruin of all of his powder, and that Penn would wait to carry out the design until new powder arrived. However, he also wrote in a different letter on the same day that there was no definite news from the expedition. In a letter of 28 May, Coyet still had no news, but he did relay intelligence that estimated the force of the design at 6,000 soldiers, 5,000 sailors, and two cavalry companies. Thurloe had an intelligence letter written on 22 May (NS) that reported Penn to be sailing for “St. Dominick,” but the writer also conjectured that Penn could be aiming for Cuba or Cartagena.⁵⁷ Cromwell told Coyet in a meeting on 15 June that he was postponing his decision on the recruitment of Scots into the Swedish army until he had heard from Penn and Venables. Coyet wrote and translated Cromwell’s verbal statement for Charles X, “what it sticks on, it is that I am expecting within a fortnight or three weeks at the latest, tidings from the fleet in America...”⁵⁸

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⁵⁷ Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 434.

Most of the news coming into England at this time provided more confusion than clarity. Some rumors finally arrived in time for Coyet to write of them on 29 June. He reported that letters had come from St. Kitts, written 9 May, and from Spain. These carried the news that Penn had sailed from Barbados to Hispaniola direct, and had succeeded in capturing Santo Domingo. Coyet said that there were “great rejoicings” in London. On 6 July, Coyet wrote that news of victory in the West Indies was still coming in.\(^59\) The Dutch ambassador Nieuport reported on 16 July (NS) that news of Penn’s capture of Santo Domingo had been “sufficiently confirmed.”\(^60\) On the other hand, the French ambassador Bordeaux passed on a rumor that correctly reported a Spanish victory, but at the wrong city. According to this story, 3,000 Englishmen died trying to capture Cartagena.\(^61\)

As the summer of 1655 came to a close, more definite news began to trickle in from across the Atlantic. At the end of July and beginning of August, more accurate accounts of the Hispaniola campaign arrived in England. Coyet wrote from Gravesend that word arrived about Penn and Venables landing with 9,000 men, but Santo Domingo had not fallen. Instead, Coyet had news of the second ambush on the island, and probable death of Major-General Heane. The only other thing that Coyet knew was that Cromwell and the Council of State had observed a day of prayer and fasting, possibly in response to bad news from the West Indies.\(^62\)

During the same time, ambassador-extraordinary Christer Bonde had arrived from Sweden. He believed and wrote that a war between England and Spain seemed likely, and wrote to that effect on 29 July. Bonde thought that such a war would prompt Cromwell to a stronger defensive alliance with Sweden, to buttress the “Evangelical Cause.” By the beginning of August, more definite news of the Western Design continued to elude the Swedish diplomats. However, on 24 August, Coyet finally wrote Charles X that Jamaica had fallen to the English. He knew that the English were broadening their foothold on the island, and that the onset of hurricane season endangered the fleet. The day before Coyet wrote, Cromwell and the court held

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\(^{59}\) Ibid., 89, 91.

\(^{60}\) Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 623.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 662.

day of prayer and listening to sermons, four altogether, possibly in reaction to the defeat on Hispaniola. By 14 September, the European diplomatic community in London knew that the Western Design had not turned out according to Cromwell’s expectations. Christer Bonde reported the return of Generals Penn and Venables, and the failure to take Hispaniola. In addition, he now knew that the English had a tenuous beachhead on Jamaica. Bonde wrote Charles X,

Though it is given out among the populace that Jamaica is of great value, the reverse appears to be true; and those that have returned from the expedition speak very ill of the protector, and of the great sufferings they were exposed to. So that this great expedition is considered to have been as good as a failure; and despite the fact that reinforcements have been sent out, there are said to be not more than 4000 men there, in a wretched condition, incapable of withstanding Spanish forces from Hispaniola, Cuba and Nova Hispania, or the flota which has been assembled in Spain and is dispatched against them.

Bonde argued that the expedition, coupled with Blake’s lack of success, caused the country “damage and disgrace,” and hinted that the Lord Protector was at the peak of his career. By the end of September, Coyet could refer to “great consternation” in England due to the defeat on Hispaniola. Oliver Cromwell’s reaction to this was quick; he fell ill, or at least claimed that he did. When Christer Bonde sought an audience with the Lord Protector on 13 and 14 September, Sir Oliver Fleming and John Thurloe informed him that Cromwell had been indisposed for two weeks, and could not stand or attend to official business for any prolonged period of time. Cromwell overcame his embarrassment and possible sickness to avoid dealing churlishly with the representative of the Swedish crown, and offered to see Bonde despite his illness, out of respect for the ambassador and Charles X. Bonde graciously refused to impose on Cromwell, and passed his messages on through intermediaries. In the meantime, Bonde reasoned that Cromwell’s illness was the result of his resounding military disappointments in the West Indies. Coyet believed that Cromwell had planned to assume legislative authority, but that now a Parliament would need to be called to provide revenue to pay for the completion of the conquest of Jamaica. Likewise, Bonde reported the opinion voiced in London that Cromwell

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63 Ibid., 113, 117, 145-46.

64 Ibid., 154.
planned to claim the throne and declare himself king, and that only the disappointing news from
the West Indies prevented him.\(^{65}\)

Likewise, in Spain, English correspondents monitored the news concerning the West
Indies until the quick and angry reaction coming with the arrival of word of the Western
Design’s assault on Spanish colonial territory. A small ship in Cadiz arrived in early May from
Santo Domingo. Because the crossing had taken sixty days, the vessel had left long before Penn
and Venables arrived to assault the city. The English consul in Cadiz, James Wilson, confirmed
that the ship had no news of the fleet. He also offered his opinion that, as long as Penn and
Venables left the Plate Fleet and Havana alone, their actions would not incite a war.\(^{66}\) Benjamin
Wright wrote from Madrid in June that a vessel had arrived from Havana, leaving in April, with
no news of Penn’s fleet. Admiral Blake’s fleet provided a greater source of anxiety at the time
for the Spanish, as it sailed much closer to Spain. Of course, any ship sailing along Spanish
navigation routes from Cuba would not have encountered Penn, sailing from the Leeward Islands
along the south coast of the Greater Antilles, but Englishmen in Spain did not know that.\(^{67}\) A
letter from Madrid indicated that, by July, the Spaniards knew the force and intent of the Western
Design. An Englishman reported that it the citizens of Madrid preferred not to discuss the
matter, and that most people did not want war with England.\(^{68}\)

By August, however, observers on the European continent knew about the assault on
Hispaniola. An item of news from Rome, dated 14 August, showed that the Spanish were irate,
if not yet well informed. Word from Rome claimed that the Spaniards there were angry over the
reported loss of Santo Domingo, and “other ports in the West Indies,” and were accusing
Cromwell of being “ungrateful.”\(^{69}\) On 21 September, Christer Bonde noted that news reached
London concerning Philip IV’s reprisals in Spain on English merchants and goods in the country.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 152-53, 55, 56, 166-67, 69.

\(^{66}\) Birch, *Thurloe*, vol. iii, 389-90.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 542.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 610.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 695.
He believed a general war was imminent between the two countries. Coyet referred a week later to a petition made by the English merchants to Cromwell, on account of Spanish seizure of their property. Cromwell replied simply that trade with Spain would soon be restored.

Ambassador Bonde, as well as Coyet, kept a sharp eye on the growing international crisis between England and Spain. Cromwell maintained to Christer Bonde that he had tried to reach terms with Spain, but that an agreement between the two nations could not be reached because the Spanish would not grant English merchants immunity from the Inquisition. Coyet reported on 12 October, that Alonso de Cárdenas had been recalled, and planned to leave as early as in a week’s time. Meanwhile, news had arrived from the Spanish Netherlands that English merchants there had been arrested, and their property seized. Christer Bonde arrived at the conclusion that general and open war between England and Spain was inevitable, after a long meeting with Alonso de Cárdenas on 17 October. Cárdenas had visited to make his farewells to the Swedish ambassador, and the conversation turned to the recent occurrences in the West Indies, and resulting rift with England. Cárdenas argued that the Spanish had been on the best of terms with the English commonwealth, and asserted that Spain had been early to recognize the republican government in England after the Civil War. He also maintained that Spain had treated English ships and people well and humanely. Because the English had attacked a colony of 180 years standing, with no claim, Cárdenas argued that, if fighting broke out, Spain would be waging a justified war. Cárdenas also scoffed at the idea that there was “no peace beyond the line,” and called it “vain and childish” for a government to use such a justification for overseas adventures. Cárdenas claimed instead that the notion of “no peace beyond the line” was something of a myth, far from being legitimate international law; it was simply “the talk of the common people.”

Cárdenas spoke further and in more exactness concerning the breach with England, and the justice of Spain’s complaints and reactions. The original treaty of 1630 stipulated that peace be maintained on the continent, and in the colonies of the two nations. If war did break out,

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71 Ibid., 166.

72 Ibid., 161, 73, 76-7.
merchants would be allowed time to plan accordingly and move their property to friendly territory; three months were allowed in Europe, and nine in the Americas. Here, Cárdenas had to defend the Spanish crown’s more immediate seizure of English merchandise in Spain. He argued that these were in reprisal for English depredations, to be held until the payment of indemnity. He also argued that the war was just, as Cromwell had prepared the fleet and made the assault while Cárdenas was acting in good faith as ambassador. Ultimately, Cárdenas believed open war with a known enemy was better than being attacked by a supposed friend pretending good faith and normal diplomatic relations.  

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The month of May 1655 saw a small, surprising shift in the fortunes of the Western Design. Whereas Venables’ soldiers had not been able to even reach the walls of Santo Domingo, they entered Santiago de la Vega with little trouble. The English foothold on Jamaica resulted from definite differences in strategy from those exhibited on Hispaniola. In the landing at Caguaya, the English fleet and army actually coordinated their attack, bringing the weapons of both forces to bear in a combined action. Thus it was a truly amphibious operation. This never happened in the chaotic debacle on Hispaniola. The Spanish position on Jamaica was not, as could be assumed from the ease experienced by the English in landing, weaker than that on Hispaniola. At Caguaya, the Spanish actually opposed the English at the beachhead. However, they did not have the warning and reinforcement that the forces on Hispaniola enjoyed. Defense of the Spanish empire relied on communication, and here, communication failed. Believing that the English came in search of temporary plunder, like all previous English raiders, the Spanish allowed them to march ashore. However, with Venables no longer fit to command, the English squandered their advantage in the months to come. The defeat at Santo Domingo and precarious position on Jamaica, sharpened by the failure to capture the island quickly or planting a permanent food supply, mitigated the seizure of a desirable colony. In the early fall of 1655, Englishmen could begin pondering the costs of attaining a new colony. The first accurate news of the island’s capture to cross the Atlantic put England and Spain on the brink of a war that neither government wished to prevent.

73 Ibid., 176-8.
CHAPTER V

“The old good way of seeking his face”: The Aftermath of the Western Design
April-December 1655

Some time after the return of Penn’s fleet, a London publisher printed a brief but explosive book for the reading public. I. S.’s journal and assessment of the Western Design was small and thin, only twenty-nine pages in length including the title page. A mistake in the pagination makes the book end on page twenty-seven; the volume may have been published in a hurry or carelessly. The author and publisher remained anonymous, as their subject was the Western Design. As the book promises the “satisfaction of all such who desire truly to be informed in these particulars,” one can imagine the cause of the anonymity.¹

I. S. provided his opinion of the Western Design early in his account, that “although the managing of so grand affairs (and matters of high concernment) were committed to some who had the repute of being well principled, valiant, and politick in War, yet there wanted not means to frustrate the design,” in short, it had failed, and failed miserably.² I. S. indicated what he felt about the abilities of those reputed “valiant and politick in War” when he wrote, “nor is it alwaies pregnancy of wit, valour and discretion (although these be famous in war) that gives the victory, but God that worketh all in all.”³

The journalist did not stop there, but went on to question the legality of the Western Design, the intentions and religious convictions of those who dispatched it, and the fitness of the


² I. S., Brief and perfect Journal, 2.

³ Ibid., 3.
army to carry it out. I. S. did judge the expedition lawful, but in such a way as to justify right of conquest by its precedent in English history of William of Normandy and legitimacy of the royal family, not an argument likely to win friends among the Commonwealth government that had overthrown Charles I. I. S. did acquiesce that England’s leadership, with Cromwell implied but not named, had godly intentions, but that the army and the people it was recruited from was so sinful that no good could be expected of it. “Grapes could not be expected from thornes, nor figs from thistles,” I. S. sermonized, and in the fall of 1655, Cromwell and the Council of State set to pruning.⁴

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News of the Western Design had far reaching results in England, as described in the previous chapter. Cromwell now needed to respond to three major issues. First, he would assuage political opposition to the Western Design by meting out discipline to the generals responsible for the ill success in the West Indies. Next, the threat of war with Spain had to be answered, and the conflict justified to the English people and European community. Finally, soldiers on Jamaica had to be reinforced, and the new colony capitalized. Cromwell now had to see to attracting Englishmen to depart from their homes to begin a new life in the Caribbean. Although Jamaica’s success as a colony would be delayed, the Western Design would be proven not wholly unsuccessful, as the result was a lasting settlement in the West Indies.

In England, different currents of opposition to war with Spain and the Western Design combined to create an unfriendly climate in Cromwell’s court for the returning generals. One source of opposition was from the merchant community. Before definite news arrived of the Western Design’s outcome, Peter Coyet reported that English merchants involved in trade with Spain had petitioned Cromwell that their commercial relations with Castile were more valuable to the country than commerce with France. Coyet claimed that this had been dismissed as propaganda inspired by the Spanish crown.⁵ Later, the English manifesto declaring war on Spain expressed concern about merchants and their “excessive desire of the small Profit to be made by

⁴ Ibid., 4-5.

trading to Spain,” which unless Englishmen put these thoughts behind them, would hinder the war effort against Philip IV’s forces.6

Once the enormity of the West Indian disaster was known, high officials began distancing themselves from the Western Design. Coyet believed that Cromwell had pushed the Western Design through the Council of State against the opposition of all of the members. According to the records of the council debates concerning the West Indies, albeit incomplete, only John Lambert voiced disapproval of the expedition. Coyet probably gained the impression of Cromwell’s sole responsibility from listening to council members disavow any approval of the design.7

Other opinion came in expressing support for Cromwell, but a belief that the instruments carrying out the Western Design had been sinful and thus bound for failure. Charles Fleetwood, Lord Deputy of Ireland, wrote to Thurloe on 1 August, once he had heard of the outcome of the Western Design. Fleetwood believed that the defeat was an act of providence, and that God spoke through the events to chastise the government and people of England. He wrote that he had believed from the beginning, knowing what manner of soldiers fought under Venables’ command, that God would not allow the design to succeed. Fleetwood also saw the folly of putting faith in the strength of man. He apologized for this frank statement, but urged Thurloe that England’s leadership should take a lesson from the defeat on Hispaniola, and “continue in the old good way of seeking his [God’s] face, and seeing his presence to goe before us in all our undertakings.”8

The Council of State had word of Penn’s arrival and his nineteen ships at Stokes’ Bay on 3 September. The great ships were to dock at Chatham, and the others at Woolwich and Deptford. The Council ordered Penn on the same day to come to London and stand before them


7 Roberts, Diplomats, 14, 167. Michael Roberts argues this point in his introduction.

8 Thomas Birch, A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Esq., vol. iii (London, 1742), 690.
to report on events in the West Indies at eight in the morning on 11 September. On 12 September, Penn had reported already, and the Council of State set up a “Committee for the business of Jamaica,” including Fiennes, John Lambert, and John Desborough. Soon, the other commanding officer of the expedition had his turn before Cromwell and the Council. Peter Julius Coyet reported to Charles X on 14 September about Penn’s appearance before Cromwell, the account he gave of English losses, Venables’ return, as well as his sickness, and the friction between the sailor and soldier. Coyet stated that 6,000 soldiers remained alive on Jamaica, under Fortescue’s command, and he knew that the remaining ships in the West Indies were under Goodson’s orders. He also had heard news of the explosion of the Paragon off the coast of Cuba, with the loss of 100 hands.

Captain Edward Blagge, of the Marston Moor, reported to the Admiralty on 9 September from Spithead. He announced the arrival as his passengers Robert and Elizabeth Venables, Colonel Buller, Gregory Butler, and other officers, as well as twenty-eight people of Venables’ “retinue.” Important for intelligence purposes, he also had Spanish documents and letters sent by Admiral Goodson. Venables requested permission to travel to London up the Thames. His superiors denied the request, and instead he had to travel by coach, with a companion to support him along the way.

On the morning of 20 September, Venables followed Thurloe’s instructions and reported to wait on Cromwell and the Council of State. He went to Whitehall to meet the stand before the Lord Protector, and Cromwell now had a human target on which to vent the frustration and pain from the failed design. First, Cromwell demanded that Venables explain who had sent for him. He explained that the army officers on Jamaica had voted to send him home to represent their tenuous position on the island to Cromwell. Cromwell got straight to the point, asking of Venables if he could name any other general who had deserted his command in the field.

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9 Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1655, 312. Hereafter, will be abbreviated CSPD.

10 CSPD, 1655, 328; Calendar of State Papers, Colonial, America and West Indies, 1574-1660, 428, hereafter will be abbreviated CSPC.

11 Roberts, Diplomats, 156.

12 CSPD, 1655, 326-27.
Venables could only answer, the Earl of Essex, and Cromwell replied that it was a “sad example,” and asked if Venables had any other defense for his actions.\textsuperscript{13}

Venables requested a respite to examine his papers and prepare a defense, which Cromwell was in no mood to listen to. Venables later considered this with bitterness; he maintained that Cromwell had denied him a privilege that even the apostle Paul had been allowed by pagan magistrates, a comparison requiring some vanity and lack of respect for the Lord Protector. Finally, Venables had his sentence. He still suffered from illness, and had not eaten that day. He took his allotted time to find some food, and collect whatever necessary items he needed for a stay in the Tower, where he was to report that evening. He was finally taken into the Tower through Traitor’s Gate, and delivered to Colonel Barkstead, the Lieutenant of the Tower. His warrant explained that the Council charged him with deserting his army in the field without license to do so.\textsuperscript{14}

The accusations against Venables were severe. Desertion by soldiers carried punishment by death. The Articles of War did not refer directly to the consequences of officers quitting their commands, although they forbade the failure to be resident in an assigned garrison on pain of default of pay on the first two offences, and relief of the command on the third. However, the Articles did bind commanding officers to professional and dedicated service, and after the humiliation of defeat, Cromwell quickly judged that Venables’ efforts fell short of the mark.\textsuperscript{15} The defeat on Hispaniola looked bad enough in its own right. Letters from Jamaica would have provided further evidence of Venables’ faults, if they reached the Council. Considering that two damning letters to Desborough were in the collected papers of John Thurloe, the conjecture here is that Cromwell or his Council or both did have these letters and considered them in judging Venables. Francis Barrington wrote to Desborough, relating his experiences under Venables’

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\textsuperscript{13} C. H. Firth, ed., \textit{The Narrative of General Venables} (1900; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965), 73.
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\textsuperscript{14} Firth, \textit{Venables}, 77.
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command. He frankly accused Venables of deserting the army against the regimental colonels’ wishes.  

Gregory Butler had also done his best to put Venables in the worst possible light concerning his part in the debacle. Butler’s charges had some justification. Nevertheless, Butler was also a partisan of William Penn; and he possibly sought to equalize Venables’ treatment of him for his drinking on Barbados. Butler wrote a letter to Desborough, that, if it arrived in time for the Council to judge Venables’ case, may be indicative of the opinion they and the Lord Protector held of the general during his interview. Butler argued that the English defeat on Hispaniola resulted from Venables’ poor generalship. Venables proved his aloofness from his army, remaining aboard ship with Elizabeth at night rather than bivouacking with his men. He had allowed the army to be defeated, and good officers to be “slayne by a handful of cowardly Molatoes and Negroes.” This was unfair, as the slaves and Maroons on Hispaniola proved a formidable foe, and a force of professional Spanish infantry fought in the campaign. Finally, the irregular fighting on Jamaica was Venables’ fault, as he allowed the Spanish in Santiago to slip away and regroup in the countryside. Also on Jamaica, Venables had chosen Fortescue as his successor without consulting Butler, although we have seen Fortescue’s statement that Venables did try to involve the third commissioner in the decision. Butler echoed Barrington’s complaint that Venables did not take the advice of his junior officers, or heed the majority opinion of councils of war. If these letters came to the Council’s attention in September, especially since the Barringtons were an influential family and related to Cromwell, there is small wonder Venables’ ended up locked in the Tower.  

Penn and Venables’ imprisonment was not lengthy. On the condition for assuming the blame for the defeat and deserting their posts, the Council of State eventually released the commanding officers of the expedition from the Tower. The Council heard William Penn’s petition on 25 October, confessing his error in leaving Jamaica without orders. Penn was set free on the same day. The Council also instructed to give up his commission as a general of the fleet. Likewise, the Council heard a petition on that day from Robert Venables. The Council


17 Ibid., 689. See footnote 1 in this chapter on authorship of letter.

18 CSPD, 1655, 396; *Publick Intelligencer*, No. 4, October 22-October 29, 1655, 64.
decided on 30 October to release Venables, once he had given up his general’s commission and his Irish command. Venables claimed not to have his commission with him, but promised to turn it over as soon as he could. News came from Whitehall on 1 November that the Protector and Council were ordering Venables released as well.19

The Council of State as well as naval officials spent the fall of 1655 resolving matters related to the Western Design. They needed to fulfill the tasks of paying off the fleet, looking after legal matters, and providing for widows. The Western Design, far from paying for itself, had indeed proven expensive. Penn’s fleet returned to England, as well as Robert Blake’s, and funds to pay off the ships consumed the entire naval budget, increasing the navy’s debt. The Admiralty advised that £40,000 be provided to pay off the sailors for a year’s wages, the Council ordered £30,000 put into the Navy Treasury for this purpose.20 In the meantime, the Council of State went over Colonel Buller’s report of the events in the West Indies, and advice from the army officers on Jamaica on 2 October.21 Penn and Venables were not the only veterans judged in England. The case of the commanders and officers of one of Penn’s ships, the Golden Falcon, was brought before the Admiralty Commissioners, concerning fraud.22 Not all officers connected with the Western Design were treated this way, at least in memory. Major General Heane’s faithful stand in front of San Géronimo reaped a reward. On 5 October, the Council of State awarded his widow Elizabeth Heane and her servants £400 as arrears of the major general’s pay, and lands bringing in £150 a year.23

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19 CSPD, 1655, 396, 402-3; Publick Intelligencer, No. 5, October 29-November 5, 1655, 78. The announcement of Venables’ release comes three pages after the good news of the arrest of an English minister who made the habit of marrying women and then running away with their money, and in one case his landlord’s horse as well.

20 CSPD, 1655, 312, 82.

21 Ibid., 364.

22 Ibid., 1655, 353.

23 Ibid., 1655, 344, 69.
The Western Design, emblematic to Cromwell and to modern historians alike of defeat and bitter disappointment, actually fulfilled its mission in a limited way. The expedition had secured territory in the Spanish empire useful for colonizing and for providing a check on Spanish power in the Americas and Europe. Once the fleet and army had captured territory, it needed to be reinforced, and then colonists had to be convinced to settle there.

Cromwell did plan, regardless of past failures to prepare for the worst, to strengthen any foothold the expedition would make in the West Indies. As early as February, reinforcements were planned for the Western Design. The Council of State decided to send eight warships, with a thousand soldiers. By the end of March, the admiralty was planning to also send merchant ships to carry provisions for this force. A hint of plans to reinforce the West Indian expedition took form in June. One of Peter Julius Coyet’s missions as Swedish envoy involved the recruitment of Scottish mercenaries to serve Charles X. In a letter of 18 June reporting progress in this endeavor, Coyet passed the word that the number of Scottish soldiers Cromwell would allow to join the Swedish army would be limited, because of the Lord Protector’s intention to dispatch Scotsmen to America. On 25 June, Coyet reported that Cromwell was sending 1500 soldiers and 19 ships as reinforcement to America. According to Coyet, the reinforcements under Major Robert Sedgwick and Colonel Humphries [Humphrey] left Dover for the West Indies on 29 June/9 July. Thirty more ships were designated to reinforce England’s ongoing naval ventures in September, half of these intended for Sedgwick’s command. Dutch ambassador Nieuport wrote concerning the small fleet a week after it had sailed, in a letter of 16 July, and said Sedgwick’s ships had been seen at the mouth of the English Channel. In fact,
Sedgwick had gone with 800 soldiers. Naval captains under Sedgwick reported that he left port on 11 July. 

Once news came confirming the army’s occupation of at least part of Jamaica, proclamations quickly went out advertising the benefits of transplanting to the West Indies. The Council of State first turned its attention to the Englishmen who had already carried out the decision to cross to the New World, the New England colonists. The Council of State instructed Daniel Gookin to go to New England, and convince the colonists there to immigrate to Jamaica. The Council ordered Gookin to inform the governors and colonists of the conquest of Jamaica, and to describe the island as one with great potentials for colonization. The desired result was that a “convenient” number of New Englanders would transplant their godly polity in the West Indies, and also to compensate their years in New England’s “desert and barren wilderness” with anticipated prosperity in the Caribbean. Gookin’s project carried some urgency, since there were intimations that the inhabitants of New Haven had plans to move to Delaware Bay, reducing the number of available discontented English families to attract to Jamaica. Gookin had sailed by December in the Fraternity, by which time the council reimbursed the owner of that ship. The transportation to Jamaica of all New England men would take place within two years’ time. A loan of six ships were authorized for the voyages, and the state promised twenty acres to every man over twelve years old, and ten to every woman and child. Even armed with these promises, Gookin had discouraging results in inducing the English colonists in New England to transplant to the West Indies. Over the course of 1656, Gookin visited the four united New England colonies, and presented Cromwell’s offer of land in Jamaica. He wrote from Cambridge at the end of this period, informing John Thurloe that the people respectfully declined the offer, and that he requested permission to return to England.

News from Jamaica had either preceded him, or arrived while he was in New England. Three factors led to a reluctance to colonize Jamaica, “the great mortalitie of the English upon the place, the prophaneness of the generalitie of the souldiery, the continuall hazard of mens

30 CSPC, 429; CSPD, 1655, 503.


32 CSPC, 430.
lives by the sculking Negroes and Spaniards.” The majority of New Englanders resolved to wait on the Lord’s leading, but otherwise remain where they were, and only three hundred planned to make the voyage once Gookin secured ships to transport them. Three men had gone ahead to see Jamaica in English hands, and decide on future colonization plans. In the meantime, Gookin had hopes concerning the three hundred; he believed that among them were industrious and responsible workers who would benefit Jamaica. Nevertheless, Gookin found the numbers of willing colonists discouraging; clearly he and Cromwell had intended for a considerably larger migration.

Soon, general word went out in England asking for colonists. Cromwell issued a proclamation from Whitehall on 10 October encouraging Englishmen to settle in Jamaica on similar terms to those Gookin was to offer New Englanders. The state promised groups sailing to the island twenty acres, excluding lakes and rivers, for every male aged twelve and older, and ten acres for every woman and child among them. The proclamation advertised convenient locations near good harbors to these groups, as well as freedom from paying rent for seven years, and then a rent of a penny an acre. The state also offered potential colonists privileges in their use of the land. They would have the freedom for seven years to seize horses and cattle found on their land, as long as the animals did not belong to other planters. Likewise, they had the right to enjoy the use of fisheries within the boundaries of their land. Concerning mining and precious metals, colonists could profit from mines on their land for any ore other than gold and silver, including copper, iron, tin, and stone quarries. Colonists had the right to fish off the coast of Jamaica for pearls and precious gems, paying a fifth of their proceeds to the state.

Some of the “privileges” promised, however, hinted at the unsettled state of the island, and gave warning that the colonists were heading for a battlefield. Several of the rights given colonists basically gave them the freedom to defend themselves against the original colonists, and hunt down renegade Spanish defenders with Fortescue’s army. Colonists were given the authority to fortify their holdings, with “Walls, ... Bulwarks and Castles.” To fulfill these requirements, the new colonists could bear arms, and allow their servants to do so. Finally, they were allowed to lead their servants in action against any “Enemies, or Rebels,” on Jamaica, subject to the orders of the commander-in-chief of the army.

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Nevertheless, the state assured potential colonists of the safety of English-held territory on Jamaica. Cromwell’s proclamation asserted that six thousand soldiers garrisoned the island after the landings of May, and that eight hundred more had been sent in July in a fleet of eight warships, joining the twelve already there under Goodson. The proclamation offered a contrast between this vast state protection, and the precarious circumstances endured by the first planters on other Caribbean islands. Thus, prospective planters could be assured that they would not suffer the fate of their countrymen on Providence and Tortuga.

The proclamation indicated the English society in the heart of the Spanish Caribbean that Cromwell intended to establish. The state promised the new colonists that any of their children born in Jamaica would be considered freeborn Englishmen. A group would be allowed two years from 29 September 1656 to settle, as long as a third of their number had sailed to Jamaica by that date. The only requirement was that colonists be of the Protestant faith. The proclamation itself was targeting the people of the British commonwealth, and England’s colonies in the Americas. News of the Jamaican reality counteracted the effect the proclamation may have had. The stories of returning soldiers and sailors, and presumably letters from the West Indies such as Barrington’s, provided discouraging words for anyone who might wish to emulate them.

Cromwell and the Council specifically sought colonists in the other English islands in the Caribbean. The Jamaica committee discussed transplanting colonists on Nevis to Jamaica. As early as June, Thomas Modyford mentioned that a hundred families on Barbados were planning to immigrate to an English-controlled Hispaniola, that he hoped to convince them to transplant to Jamaica instead. Eager to populate the island with families, the committee on Jamaica discussed the best way to send wives of men on Jamaica to their husbands. Meanwhile,

34 By the Protector. A Proclamation Giving Encouragement to such as shall transplant themselves to Jamaica. (London: Henry Hills and John Field, 1655). See also Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 753.

35 Roberts, Diplomats, 167.

36 CSPC, 430.

37 Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 565.

38 CSPC, 434-35.
planners saw the need for labor on the new colony, for which the Council could supply indentured servants. In October, Cromwell issued orders to the Council of Scotland. The country sheriffs, parish commissioners, and landlords had instructions to round up any indigent and unemployed persons they could find, to be held by the state and eventually transported to the West Indies. The undesirables, termed “idle masterlesse vagabonds and robers, menn and weomen,” would provide a work force in Jamaica. On 23 October, a Captain Henry Hatsell in Plymouth recommended after a prison break to send the fifty remaining Irish and English prisoners to the West Indies as “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” Six Royalist rebels found themselves selected for transportation to Jamaica in November. The labor force would also consist of Irish youths, children really, as well. In September and October, the Jamaica committee discussed sending 1,000 young men and 1,000 young women, all under fifteen years of age.

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While plans proceeded for colonizing Jamaica, war loomed imminently between England and Spain. Ominous rumors reached London by the end of August that France and Spain were making peace. These rumors built on English worries that the pope planned to unite the crowns of Catholic Europe to deal a deathblow to Protestantism. In a personal audience with Christer Bonde, Cromwell argued that while the Protestant nations were fewer and weaker than the Catholic monarchies, providence had kept the Catholic kings fighting each other, preventing an alliance to reverse the Reformation by military conquest. In fact, these worries would soon be calmed. As war with Spain loomed, a treaty with France was finally pending. As early as June, some people believed that Cromwell would make an alliance with France, as the French

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40 *CSPD*, 1655, 393; *CSPC*, 430-31, 33.
41 Roberts, *Diplomats*, 144.
42 Ibid., 162.
ambassador to the Dutch Republic wrote to Bordeaux in London.\(^{43}\) The *Publick Intelligencer* reported the news from Whitehall on 24 October that the treaty had been signed by Cromwell and the French ambassador. Word soon arrived from Paris that, in the week preceding 2 November (NS), the French court had sent two couriers with orders to Monsieur de Bordeaux to conclude arrangements for the treaty with England.\(^{44}\)

Meanwhile, relations with Spain became hostile, as both parties continued severing diplomatic relations. The *Publick Intelligencer* published a relevant news report from Paris, dated 26 October (NS). Officials in Paris understood that open war would soon break out between England and Spain.\(^{45}\) The *Publick Intelligencer* reported in its news from Paris of 26 October (NS), Archduke Leopold in Brussels had orders from King Philip IV to recall his ambassador in England, and also to arrest all Englishmen, seize their property and ships, and declare war on England.\(^{46}\) The embargo stretched even further than Spain and the Spanish Netherlands. In the Canaries, it was entered into with some reluctance, due to the inconvenient timing. The inhabitants of the island begged leave of Philip IV to delay the embargo until after the year’s vintage of Canary wine was sold to English merchants.\(^{47}\) Finally, news of a declaration of war by Spain came in the *Public Intelligencer*. In the news from Paris, November 2 (NS), or 24 October in England, the Spanish crown had made public proclamation that a state of war existed with England in all Spanish dominions, and both land and sea.\(^{48}\)

In addition to seizure of property and preparation for war, the Spanish crown responded to the opening of hostilities by officially recognizing the victory at Santo Domingo. On 14 December 1655, Philip IV decreed that the anniversary of the departure of Penn’s fleet from Hispaniola was to be kept as an annual holiday, marked by the gift of 500 pesos to the poor of

\(^{43}\) Birch, Thurloe, vol. iii, 635-36.

\(^{44}\) *Publick Intelligencer*, No. 4, October 22-October 29, 1655, 64; *Publick Intelligencer*, No. 5, October 29- November 5, 67.

\(^{45}\) *Publick Intelligencer*, No 4, October 22- October 29, 1655, 52.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 52-53.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 64.

\(^{48}\) *Publick Intelligencer*, No. 5, October 29-November 5, 1655, 69.
Santo Domingo. On the same day, a yearly income of 300 ducats in *encomienda*, or rights to tribute from the labor of Indians, in Venezuela was awarded to Captain Damian del Castillo, who had intercepted Venables’ scouts himself to gather intelligence. Captain don Alvaro Garabito, who on 27 April had boldly offered to be beheaded if he did not stop the English, was given the same reward. Nine other officers also gained *encomiendas* for their gallantry. In addition to the thanks given others, the key role played by the lancers of Hispaniola received royal recognition, as 6,000 pesos was awarded to 300 of their number.\(^{49}\)

One officer who played a key role in the Spanish defense of Santo Domingo was not to receive recognition for his service, however. No mention was made of Captain Miguel González Pallano in the dispatches from Santo Domingo, and the crown passed him over in the awards that followed. This oversight was apparently unjustified: a year after the campaign, Damian del Castillo described Pallano as having been in the field “on all occasions,” demonstrating military expertise and bravery. In April of 1659, Pallano sought recompense either for himself or his son by sending his relation of his role in the battle, which he had composed in June of 1655, a month after the English defeat. According to Irene Wright, no results came of this for Pallano’s benefit, and his faithful service went without reward.\(^{50}\)

As the Spanish crown seized ships and property and declared war, Cromwell decided to expel the Spanish ambassador and prepare for the conflict. The Council of State declared on 23 October that Alonso de Cárdenas had five days to leave England, and ordered that the navy dispatch a frigate to take the ambassador to the Spanish Netherlands. On 29 October, Alonso de Cárdenas, took his leave from his post in London, and traveled to Gravesend by sea, in preparation to depart from England.\(^{51}\) On 5 November (NS), or 26 October, Nieuport reported that Cárdenas had been procrastinating in his departure, on the excuse that the English


\(^{50}\) Wright, “Narratives,” 1n, 68n.

\(^{51}\) CSPD, 1655, 392; *Publick Intelligencer*, No. 4, October 22- October 29, 1655, 64.
government had not written his passport in the correct form. Cromwell had a new passport sent, with repeated orders to leave England.  

Considerable importance rested on showing that the war with Spain was a just one. As has been said before in this study, in time of peace, Cromwell had sent a fleet from England’s standing navy and soldiers of the standing army, under commissioned officers, bearing their respective flags, and paid, or at least promised to be paid, by the state to attack the Spanish for the purpose of claiming territory. Quickly, a document prepared in Latin stated the justice of the English cause. This document has been attributed to the poet John Milton, who was Cromwell’s Latin secretary. On 25 October, the Council of State resolved to hear the manifesto stating the cause against Spain “first thing tomorrow.” On the next day, the Council had the draft of the manifesto read, and returned it to the committee responsible for revisions. In the afternoon, that committee cut several passages from the manifesto, and added another. Finally, Cromwell and the Council passed the declaration, and ordered it printed and published under the title, “A Declaration of his Highness, by advice of his Council, setting forth, on behalf of this Commonwealth, the justice of their cause against Spain.” The Publick Intelligencer announced the declaration of war in the issue of the week of 22-29 October. The newspaper simply reported, in the final lines of that week’s news, that Cromwell and the Council of State had produced a declaration of the justice of the conflict with Spain, and that said declaration would “shortly be made publick.”

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52 Thomas Birch, *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Esq.*, vol. iv (London, 1742), 91, 115. Cárdenas’ letter is on page 91. Indeed, Cárdenas did write a letter to Secretary Thurloe, in Spanish, protesting that the document did not convey the formality to which a departing ambassador was accustomed. He complained, “Haviendo entregado Egidio Mottet el pasaporte que V.S. me embió, y no siendo en la formalidad que se acostumbra dar a los embaxadores que parten de aqui ...”

53 CSPD, 1655, 397, 99-400.

54 *Publick Intelligencer*, No. 4, October 22- October 29, 1655, 64; Abbott, *Cromwell*, iii, 877n.
The declaration itself shows the intent of proving that the Spanish had provoked the Western Design, and that the conflict developing with Spain was a just war. First, the document hoped to prove that Spain held a false claim to the New World and that the Spanish exercised cruel colonizing policies. Second, the declaration of war argued that a series of Spanish attacks on Englishmen in times of official peace had resulted in a state of war, and thus the Western Design was retaliatory, and that England had not fired the first shot. The author expresses concern that some may see England as the aggressor, and that not all Englishmen believed Spain was evil. The writer had to prove that Spain had indeed played the aggressor’s role, and that the English had a stronger claim to the West Indies.55

The declaration first attacked the Spanish claim to the New World, and their behavior in colonizing the Americas. The writer argued that the Spanish claimed the Americas by the authority of the Pope’s donation in 1494, and by right of discovery, and that these claims were “ridiculous” and “absurd.” He argued that no intelligent man could accept Spain’s claims to such a vast empire, once those claims are laid out and explained.56 First, he denied that either the Pope or the Spanish crown had the right to either restrict other nations’ trade, or take away the Indians’ liberty. Specifically, he argued with the Spanish claim, that not only do they rule the Indies, but also that any foreigners present without permission were pirates. The pope, the author argued, as the Vicar of Christ, had no right to freely hand out unclaimed territories to what countries he chose, since Christ himself would not enter into property disputes. Moreover, why should the English, who as Protestants rejected the Pope’s spiritual authority, be expected to respect the Treaty of Tordesillas if the Catholic king of France did not?57 The author also rejected the claim by right of discovery, and refers to it as a “silly Pretence.”58 The Spanish had not “replenished” the earth where they settled, and did not settle unpopulated places, or at least with the consent of the Indians. The writer argued that, in fact, the English had settled islands in the Caribbean that the Spanish had left as barren wastes, and thus could claim American colonies

55 Manifesto, 3.
56 Ibid., 4, 26.
57 Ibid., 11, 23-24.
58 Ibid., 25.
by right of having planted or improved them.\textsuperscript{59} He referred as well to the “innocent Blood” of the Indians suffering under the Spaniards. He claimed that the Spanish empire was built with its foundations in “the Blood of the poor Natives.”\textsuperscript{60} The writer looked forward to the day of God’s judgment on Spain for its cruelty. Instead, he argued that the English had just as much, if not more right to have colonies in the Americas, having plantations on the North American mainland and in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{61}

Cromwell and the Council hoped that the declaration would show the world that the Western Design constituted an act of justified warfare.\textsuperscript{62} The writer stressed that, although these causes showed any reader why they should wish to fight the Spanish, these were not the reasons for the assault on Hispaniola. Previous Spanish cruelty to the Indians, and religious repression of English merchants in Spain were reasons not to renew a treaty. To explain the war, he argued that the Spanish had acted against “the Common Law of Nations” against the English, specifically in the West Indies. He accused the Spanish of heinous and unprovoked violations of international law.

... they are continually murdering, and sometimes even in cold Blood butchering any of our Countrymen in America they think fit; while in the meantime they seize upon their Goods and Fortunes, demolish their Houses and Plantations, take any of their Ships they happen to meet with in those Seas, and treat the Sailors as Enemies, nay, even as Pirates.\textsuperscript{63}

The author makes a similar accusation later in the document, specifically outlining the reason for the war.

\textsuperscript{59} For discussion of English justification by right of planting for possessing land in the Americas, see Patricia Seed, Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{60} Manifesto, 24.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 6, 13.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 4.
... they [the Spanish] have been continually invading our Colonies in a hostile way, killing our Men, taking our Ships, robbing us of our Goods, laying waste our Houses and Fields, imprisoning and enslaving our People...

According to the declaration, the courts of James I and Charles I had not dealt with previous Spanish atrocities because of the influence of a faction of Englishmen friendly to Spain, and these monarchs were only able to dispatch privateers in search of reprisal, rather than wage an honorable and public war. Indeed, the author of the manifesto accused the Stuart kings of establishing their respective treaties with Spain against their subjects’ will. Thus, it was a just and good use of England’s large fleet to finally avenge both Englishmen attacked by the Spanish, and the Indians who had suffered under a century and a half of Spanish rule.

The author concluded that Spain brought the attack on itself. The Spanish refusal to allow free trade in the Americas, and their culture of religious repression, kept Englishmen in Spain from professing their Protestant faith. He believed that the trading ban was contrary to the treaties of 1542, 1604, and 1630. To outline Spain’s actual crimes, the author gave a list of charges. These are twenty-one separate instances of Spanish attacks on English ships and colonies, mostly in the New World, specifically in the time of peace from 1604 to 1625, and from 1630 to 1655. The manifesto uses these to show that an actual state of war already existed with Spain, and that the Spanish had made an unfounded accusation that England had violated the peace. In the end, the author saw England setting out to war for two causes. The first was necessity, that Spain had drawn the English into open conflict. The second was the cause of honor and justice, that the country could not keep its honor if it pretended peace while Spain attacked Englishmen with impunity. The Council approved the manifesto and proceeded with more practical matters. On 26 October, the Council had ordered that all Spanish ships and goods be seized. Soon after, the state granted of letters of reprisal to Englishmen, allowing private ship owners to raid Spanish shipping to make up for previous losses incurred by the Spanish.

64 Ibid., 13.
65 Ibid., 5-7.
66 Ibid., 8-10, 14-21, 27-28.
67 CSPD, 1655, 400.
68 Publick Intelligencer, No. 5, 79.
Thus began a war with Spain waged in the Americas and on the continent. The war was certainly expensive for England. On land, combined forces of the English and French armies captured Dunkirk in the Spanish Netherlands in the summer of 1658. Hostilities were more limited after Oliver Cromwell died in September of that year. Peace came with the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in England in 1660. Charles II sold Dunkirk to the French, but kept Jamaica.

As five years of warfare on the continent and Indian revolt in Florida distracted the Spanish, irregular forces on Jamaica managed to force the English to fight for Jamaica for five years. Don Cristóbal Ysassi Arnaldo eventually succeeded the captured Spanish governor, don Juan Ramirez de Orellano, and the older maestre de campo, don Francisco de Proenza. Ysassi led a combined force of white and black defenders of Spanish Jamaica, receiving intermittent reinforcements from other Spanish colonies in the course of the conflict on the island. Ysassi’s position finally weakened when friction developed between him and Maroons fighting with him. Eventually, he withdrew to Cuba, and with the end of the Anglo-Spanish War, Jamaica was firmly in place in the English colonial orbit.

Jamaica would grow to mean more to England than a symbol of humiliation and failure where no decent person wished to settle. The army officers correctly predicted that Jamaica’s location would prove ideal for raids on the resources of the Spanish Caribbean. This would help add to Jamaica’s future reputation as a headquarters for dissolute buccaneers. The island would eventually provide Englishmen with livelihoods as large-scale sugar planters relying on African slave labor. Jamaica and other West Indian colonies developed a close economic relationship

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with the New England colonies that had scorned to send settlers to Jamaica. Finally, as an answer to those viewing Jamaica as a “consolation” prize not worthy of the force sent to take Hispaniola, it was this and all the other West Indian colonies that remained loyal to the British crown, when in the next century their mainland cousins revolted against their colonial status.\textsuperscript{72}

These developments were a while in coming. English hopes for Jamaica, and the Caribbean reality, can be summed up in the last few years of Francis Barrington’s life. Barrington commented on the ongoing campaign to complete the conquest. He remarked in a letter in March of 1657 that the English army still did not know the refuges of the Spanish and Maroons still fighting them, and that the enemy would melt into the wilds whenever his soldiers confronted them. He made the suggestion of importing blood hounds to track down the enemy, who he considered “black rogues.”\textsuperscript{73}

From the landing on Jamaica, up to his death, Francis Barrington did his best to become a successful planter in the New World. Considering his portion of land in the summer of 1655, Barrington believed it would one day give him £1,000 a year. In the fall of the following year, he was still short on funds. By the summer of 1657, he had improved his plantation to a “handsome condition,” and was ready for the indentured servants he had heard Cromwell was sending. He had cattle, sheep, and horses, and plans for a sugar mill. He was particularly proud of his acumen in purchasing the horses, worth £1,000 on Barbados, that he bought for £30. He believed the place to be “pleasant,” and was optimistic that it would eventually be lucrative.\textsuperscript{74} He would not enjoy the new life of a West Indies planter for long, however. Francis Barrington would not return to England and his native Essex, or be reunited with his brother. A letter


\textsuperscript{73} HMC, 7\textsuperscript{th} Report, 575.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 575.
written on 23 January 1660, indicated that Barrington was shot by a cavalryman on his way to his quarters, and died after lingering for 3-4 hours.\textsuperscript{75}

Barrington’s life and death illustrate the larger struggle that won Jamaica for England. The country gained a new and potentially wealthy colony, but at great cost of men and resources. When news of the Western Design’s ill success reached England, the initial reaction of many, including Cromwell, was to assign blame and seek justification. Robert Venables and William Penn became scapegoats for poor intelligence and planning on the part of the English state. Once they were punished, Cromwell found himself in a costly war that still had to be waged after the publication of John Milton’s justification. However, the Western Design had fulfilled its purpose in some small part. The English had indeed secured territory in the heart of Spain’s Caribbean empire, which would eventually prove extremely profitable to an emerging British empire.

CONCLUSION
“‘The skillful Chirurgeon’

The Western Design had a broad impact, producing change in England and also in Spain’s colonies. The social and political effects in England were immediate. Many believed that the defeat on Hispaniola constituted God’s judgment on English sin. Thus, the English bore the burden of responding with true religious reform. I. S. expressed his opinion bluntly about the effects of unrepentant national sin, “Can a Christian Common-wealth flourish either in godliness, plenty, or peace, when it abounds with such profane vile caterpillers, and corrupters of all good manners?”¹ England’s leadership needed to convince the people to change their ways, or transport them to the colonies:

A Common-wealth of people, is as mans body, some member may be corrupted, and yet the vitals preserved, and the head not impaired; in such cases the skillful Chirurgeon, that takes care to keep and preserve the Microcosm, dismembreth that part from the rest of the body, that might otherwise destroy the whole fabrick.²

Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector, fulfilled the role of the skilled surgeon. As stated in the introduction, Cromwell drew a parallel from the defeat on Hispaniola to that of Joshua and the Israelites at Ai, a battle lost on account of the secret sin of Achan. For England’s arms to enjoy victory again, the sin had to be cast out.³ In August 1655, Cromwell assigned eleven major-generals in England as domestic administrators. He carefully chose officers of godly

² I. S., Brief and perfect Journal, 5.
reputation. After news of Hispaniola arrived, Cromwell specified that the major-generals would prioritize the enforcement of moral behavior. Englishmen who enjoyed heavy drinking, using foul language, and gambling would soon find their pastimes illegal. 

Spanish colonists in the circum-Caribbean also soon felt the effects of the Western Design. The focus of Atlantic historians on the Spanish borderlands has uncovered information on the impact of the expedition in Florida. John E. Worth’s *Timucuan Chiefdoms of Spanish Florida* dealt with the domestic and overseas causes of the Timucuan Rebellion of 1656, including the events on the imperial scene that led to it. While Worth blamed the crisis mostly on the corruption and incompetence of the Spanish imperial governor Don Diego de Rebolledo, he saw the Western Design as the key trigger of the event. The fall of Jamaica created a crisis in the Spanish circum-Caribbean, as officials worried about their ability to defend key islands and seaports. Rebolledo’s panic in trying to rebuild St. Augustine’s defense, stock food supplies, and draft Indians into the colonial militia led to tactless and damaging dealings with the Timucuan leadership that eventually drove them to revolt. The suppression of the spring revolt was delayed until autumn, as Rebolledo had to maintain a defensive garrison in St. Augustine to face a possible English assault. At the same time, war with England closer to home distracted the Spanish from attending to colonial concerns. Colonial governments would restore Spanish power in Florida, but failed to recover Jamaica.

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The memory of the Western Design persisted in English minds. Soon after the Restoration of Charles II, one of Cromwell’s critics seized upon the debacle in the West Indies and resulting war with Spain as fodder for his polemic. Slingsby Bethel published his critique of the Lord Protector’s reign, *The World’s Mistake in Oliver Cromwell*, in 1668. Bethel hoped to convince his readers that Cromwell, far from enhancing England’s position on the world stage, had squandered opportunities for peace and commerce in prosecuting an ill-advised and unlawful war against Spain. Arguing that Cromwell “was not guilty of too much knowledge in [foreign

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affairs].” Bethel blamed the Lord Protector for upsetting the continental balance of power. This accusation unfairly demanded that Cromwell exercise a gift of prophecy to foretell that France, and not Spain, would become England’s chief rival. Bethel continued by arguing that the Western Design and Anglo-Spanish War caused England to lose the Spanish trade to the Dutch, as well as 1,500 ships in his estimate to the Spanish, to suffer a major and public embarrassment at Hispaniola, and to bear the burden of massive national debt.6

By the eighteenth century, enterprising Britons were ready to learn from the experience gained in the Western Design. After several small scale assaults on the West Indies in the final decade of the seventeenth century, the next large scale assaults on the Caribbean took place in 1740 and 1762.7 British strategists turned to studying the 1655 campaign on Hispaniola early in the century, during the War of the Spanish Succession. In 1710, at the suggestion that an expedition attack Havana, one planner offered advice based on Venables’ experience. He recommended that the soldiers land near their objective, avoiding the mistake during the Western Design of conducting an unnecessary forced march over rugged terrain. The writer correctly remarked that Venables’ men were beaten before they even reached the Spanish defenses. He also argued against any delay of operations by the expedition stopping at British colonies on the way to the objective, which would distract the soldiers and sailors from their goal and allow for Spain to learn of an attack. Indeed, it was Penn and Venable’s sojourn on Barbados that allowed the Spanish time to reinforce Hispaniola. Finally, the strategist suggested that the state provide misinformation as to the destination of an expedition to the Spanish Caribbean, rather than allowing the enemy to discover what stronghold they should prepare for an attack. These plans did not come to fruition, but opportunity would arise again to put the lessons of the Western Design to use.8

6 [Slingsby Bethel], The World’s Mistake in Oliver Cromwell; or, A short Political Discourse, shewing That Cromwell’s Mal-administration (during his Four Years, and Nine Moneths pretended Protectorship,) layed teh Foundation of Our present Condition, in the Decay of Trade, (London, 1668), 2-4, 9, 11.


8 Historical Manuscripts Commission, Reports, Series 29, Portland, Volume X, 334-5, 37.
Tensions arose again with Spain in the late 1730s, leading up to warfare lasting from 1739 to ’43. In the 1730s, the British looked back on the Western Design with approval, believing that it showed the proper path for national policy. An English translation of the 1655 manifesto justifying war with Spain saw publication in 1738, at the price of six pence a copy. The edition included a 1727 poem by a Mr. Thomson, titled “Britannia.” The poem, not exhibiting any outstanding literary quality, was two hundred and ninety-nine lines long, and portrayed the woman Britannia on a shore beset by storm, crying out against the depredations of the Spanish, and for the fleet to “ardent rise!” in defense of British liberty. The title page included an excerpt,

Whence is it that the proud Iberian, thus,
In their own well-asserted Element,
Dares rouze to Wrath the MASTERS OF THE MAIN?  

When war finally came, the British launched an expedition to the West Indies under the command of Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon, which met defeat at Cartagena in 1741. In the planning that led up to the expedition, strategists once again made a study of Penn and Venables’ campaign. They especially drew the conclusion that the commanders of any expedition should be given the flexibility to make decisions once they arrive in the Caribbean, as Cromwell had done with Venables. Historian Richard Harding sees the Western Design as a major source for the operational orders for this expedition, and the successful British assault on Havana in 1762. Thus, Penn and Venables’ setbacks were not suffered in vain, providing a valuable learning experience for future British ventures into the West Indies.

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9 Harding, Amphibious Warfare, 193.


11 Milton, Manifesto, frontispiece.

12 Harding, Amphibious Warfare, 38, 164.
When Oliver Cromwell urged the Council of State in April and July 1654 to join him in dispatching an expedition to the Americas, he was embarking on a new and ambitious foreign policy. Conflict and violence were certainly not unusual in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Caribbean. As rival French, Dutch, and Englishmen made incursions into the Spanish-dominated West Indies, some fighting was inevitable. The strategic goals of the combatants were temporary, as most Northern European captains planned only on raiding and smuggling before sailing home. When the English settled in the Caribbean, they colonized either uninhabited or abandoned islands. This pattern changed in the seventeenth century, and the Western Design was one campaign that signaled a new era of warfare in the Americas. In 1634, the Dutch seized by force and colonized three islands in the Southeast Caribbean: Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire. This move, argues Anne Pérotin-Dumon, was unprecedented for the region, as other Europeans had not yet taken territory from Spanish colonists for the purposes of permanent settlement.13

The Western Design was England’s first such expedition to the Caribbean. It was inspired by anti-Spanish prejudice and fear of the rise of a Catholic Habsburg world monarchy, as well as a desire to maintain the balance of power in Europe by allying with France and attacking Spain. Cromwell took advantage of England’s sea power, the legacy of the first Anglo-Dutch War, to ready the fleet and army to sail in the latter part of 1654. Trusting in providence, Cromwell and the Council also conducted research on Spain’s Caribbean defense, relying heavily on the misguided information of the renegade Dominican Thomas Gage. The expedition’s chances of success fell dramatically when the commanders, Admiral William Penn and General Robert Venables, found themselves leading pressed and sub-standard sailors and soldiers, and had no sufficient opportunity to train their men. The expedition departed England unprepared for war, for reasons of maintaining secrecy. The haste was pointless, as the Spanish learned of the campaign anyway.

The strength of the Spanish empire, at the time of the Western Design as well as in the sixteenth century, relied upon naval supremacy and rapid communication throughout the empire.

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and across the Atlantic. The Western Design saw the first hints of the transfer of this supremacy to England. The English delay on Barbados allowed the Spanish to dispatch reinforcements to Hispaniola. Effective leadership at Santo Domingo, and the bravery of irregular troops and Maroons who used the island’s terrain to their advantage, saved the colony for Spain. It was only when the English limped west to Jamaica that they used the fleet to block Spanish lines of communication, and coordinate the army and navy in a successful assault. The Spanish eventually lost Jamaica, but their colonists continued the fight for another five years. At the same time, Cromwell found himself in a costly war that was difficult to justify. The Western Design left Spain with the record of a notable victory against great odds, but cost the kingdom a colony and exposed a weakness in the American imperial system. The campaign also dealt English arms an embarrassing defeat, but gave the country a colony, and set a foundation for future ambitious imperial growth. The Western Design, a military expedition dispatched to seize a New World colony, had no precedent in English history. Considering this, and the many weaknesses of Penn and Venables’ force, the design can be considered a qualified and costly success.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew Harrington was born on 11 February 1978 in Chapel Hill, NC, and is the son of Dr. Thomas C. Harrington, Lt. Col. USAF, (Ret.), and Carol J. Harrington. He grew up in Fort Myers, Florida, where he graduated from Canterbury School, which imparted an early interest in history with its excellent high school curriculum. Growing up in Florida, Harrington became suddenly interested in maritime subjects when caught by the “No-Name Storm” on a ninth-grade canoe trip off the coast of the Ten Thousand Islands. Harrington undertook his undergraduate coursework at Auburn University, where he studied Medieval European history and Latin, and where he also spent a proud nine months as a cadet in the War Eagle Battalion, Auburn University Army ROTC, before being disqualified for near-sightedness. After a summer studying in England, Harrington graduated, and studied for his MA in history at Florida State University, under the direction of Dr. Matt D. Childs. At Florida State, Harrington also met his wife, Lindsey, who was a student of Dr. Childs’ as well.