CHAPTER 1

What Is a Caribbean Enlightenment?

This book asserts that there was a distinctive Caribbean Enlightenment and that recovering this Enlightenment matters for two reasons: it contributes significantly to our understanding of eighteenth-century French and British Caribbean societies and to our understanding of the Enlightenment as a cosmopolitan intellectual and cultural movement.

Yet recovering a "Caribbean Enlightenment" only became possible when scholars of eighteenth-century life and the Enlightenment began to offer different answers to Kant's eternally vexing question, "What is Enlightenment?" It was unthinkable when the Enlightenment was still conceived as the work of prominent *philosophes* ensconced in cosmopolitan European capitals with Paris preeminent. The Caribbean lacked anyone who possessed the intellectual stature of a Benjamin Franklin or a Thomas Jefferson, much less a Jean-Jacques Rousseau or a David Hume.[1] But a Caribbean Enlightenment became discernible as scholarly approaches of the last few decades brought the social aspects of intellectual life to the fore and as scholars' interests "switched from the Enlightenment as an idea to the Enlightenment as a practice."[2] This entailed, according to Bettina Dietz, "turn[ing] away from a pure history of ideas in favor of a cultural history of publishing and reading, a social history of intellectual sociability, and the situating of ideas within historical-political constellations." As Carla Hesse points out, this "sociocultural history of the Enlightenment" necessarily poses very different questions: "How did the Enlightenment emerge? How

[1] Two figures meriting systematic analysis as Enlightenment intellectuals: on the British side, Edward Long, author of *The History of Jamaica* (1774), often cited for his racist views; on the French side, Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, see *Moreau de Saint-Méry ou les ambiguïtés d'un créole des Lumières*, ed. Dominique Taffin (Martinique: Société des Amis des Archives et de la Recherche sur le Patrimoine Culturel des Antilles, 2006).

[2] L. W. B. Brockliss, *Calvet's Web: Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

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did it spread? And how was the Enlightenment transformed from a new way of thinking into a new way of life?"[3]

Nearly forty years ago, the essays in *The Enlightenment in National Context* reacted to an Enlightenment composed of "systems of socially disembodied ideas" whose geographic centers were either assumed or considered irrelevant.[4] The pioneering work of Robert Darnton and other scholars compelled us to consider how print, the chief disseminator of Enlightenment ideas, actually worked (or did not work) as well as what people actually read and what they made of it. The role of the press in Enlightenment studies now embraces enterprising publishers and printers, from a bookseller in Berlin to a mestizo priest in Mexico City.[5] Tracking the mobility of texts through translation, John Robertson and Sophus Reinert have illuminated how Scots, Neapolitans, and Germans all looked to the same political economy to develop solutions to the distinctive problems of their states.[6] Historians of science, long attentive to the social contexts and meanings of the production of knowledge, have applied a transnational approach to create intellectually rich studies such as James Delbourgo's *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America* (2006). The work of these scholars and others has given us a more richly detailed and nuanced picture of the Enlightenment as a simultaneously cosmopolitan and local phenomenon.

I have distilled the lessons of these new approaches into a trio of commonalities that undergirded Enlightenment intellectual culture wherever it appeared: attitude, approach, and activity (Figure 1.1). *Attitude* comprised both intellectual rights and responsibilities. The right to think

[3] Bettina Dietz, "Making Natural History: Doing the Enlightenment," *Central European History* 45, no. 1 (2010): 25; Carla Hesse, "Towards a New Topography of Enlightenment," *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 13, no. 3 (2006): 500.

[4] *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), vii.

[5] Pamela E. Selwyn, *Everyday Life in the German Book Trade: Friedrich Nicolai as Bookseller and Publisher in the Age of Enlightenment, 1750–1810* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Fiona Clark, "'Read All About It': Science, Translation, Adaptation, and Confrontation in the *Gazeta de Literatura de México*," in *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500–1800*, ed. Daniela Bleichmar, Paul De Vos, Kristin Huffine, and Keven Sheehan (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 147–77; Fiona Clark, "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained: Lightning and Enlightenment in the *Gazeta de Literatura de México* (1788–1795)," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series 99, no. 5 (2009): 71–93.

[6] John Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Antonella Alimento, "Translation, Reception and Enlightened Reform: The Case of Forbonnais in Eighteenth-Century Political Economy," a special issue of the *History of European Ideas* 40, no. 8 (2014).

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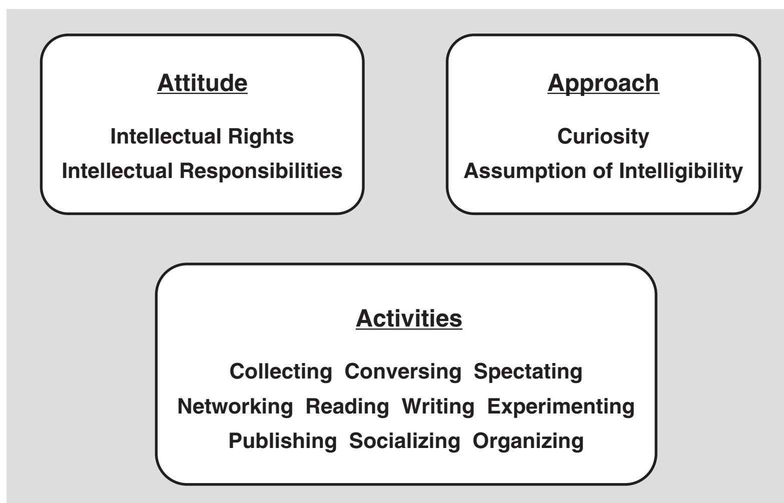

Figure 1.1 Commonalities of Enlightenment intellectual culture

for one's self was the most democratic and potentially transformative. In the apt phrase of a disapproving Englishman, it was the liberty of "every man in this Enlightened age . . . of making a philosophy (and . . . a religion) for himself."[7] Indeed, Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar claimed that liberty without apology: "The God whom I adore, is not a God of darkness; he hath not given me an understanding to forbid me the use of it. To bid me give up my reason, is to insult the author of it. The minister of truth doth not tyrannize over my understanding, he enlightens it."[8] Certainly not everyone enjoyed and exercised Shaftesbury's "Intire Philosophicall Liberty."[9] In reality, rights were abridged by factors such as censorship and religious belief; they were denied partly or wholly because of status, gender, and race.

Chief among intellectual responsibilities was the imperative for improvement, personal and social, moral and physical. This logically followed from the belief that knowledge must be useful, not idle. An emphasis on improvement retains an urgent sense of human agency at the heart of the Enlightenment while bypassing the misleading popular characterization of it as optimistic. Eighteenth-century people were not

[7] Alexander Catcott quoted by Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton and Company, 2000), 79.
[8] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilius* (Edinburgh, 1768), 2:169.
[9] Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World*, 3.

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fools. D'Alembert warned in the *Preliminary Discourse* to the *Encyclopédie* that "everything has regular revolutions," and he even worried that "barbarism" was humanity's "natural element."[10] With respect to *approach*, people were supposed to be curious about the diverse phenomena of the human and natural worlds, which were assumed to be intelligible.[11] "Intelligible" is preferable to "rational" – and expansive enough to include what recent scholarship on sensibility has abundantly proved: eighteenth-century people believed they understood the world, especially the other people in it, not just through their rational capacities, but through sentiment. Indeed, the capacity to imagine internal emotional states like one's own was key to developing compassion and opened a pathway to virtue.[12]

My list of *activities* suggests just some of the ways people could participate in Enlightenment intellectual culture. Clearly everyone did not have access to all of them, much less engaged in them. But anyone who was literate and possessed some disposable income and time would have had access to some, and there were social imperatives beyond the intellectual to pursue them.

Conceptualized as approach-attitude-activities, the Enlightenment is not just a "most reified bundle of axioms."[13] Instead, it seamlessly joins the high and the low, the learned and the popular, the intellectual and the social. As such, it offered eighteenth-century participants neither consensus nor a "coherent doctrine," but ways for people to ask questions about things that mattered to them and to argue about the answers.[14] Paris and other European cities remain central,[15] yet their intellectuals could not control how people appropriated and applied what they made available in the intellectual marketplace. As Sebastian Conrad writes, "The

[10] Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, "Discours préliminaire," ARTFL.

[11] On the rehabilitation of curiosity after denigration in the Christian tradition, Neil Kenny, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe: Word Histories* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1998); Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), chap. 8.

[12] Chief theme of Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760–1807* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

[13] Simon Schama, "The Enlightenment in the Netherlands," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, 54.

[14] Paraphrase of Antoine Lilti, *L'héritage des Lumières: Ambivalences de la modernité* (Paris: Gallimard & Seuil, 2019), 19.

[15] Reconfirming French centrality, Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

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Enlightenment was not a thing; rather, we should ask what historical actors did with it."[16]

In fact, many colonists were doing many things with the Enlightenment in the Caribbean. Yet the notion that they were "enlightened" would have struck many contemporaries in Europe as oxymoronic. Caribbean philistinism had already become cliché by the middle of the eighteenth century. Historian François Regourd nicely sums up French metropolitan disdain, which applies equally well to the British: colonists were perceived as "materialist and debauched, indifferent to the life of the mind, unfit for the slightest intellectual activity that did not promise immediate profit."[17] No surprise, then, that Charles Leslie declared of Jamaica in 1740 that "learning is here at the lowest Ebb."[18] Derogatory views of Caribbean philistinism became even more powerful in combination with arguments that Europeans and their offspring inevitably degenerated morally, physically, and intellectually in the tropics.[19]

As Natalie Zacek observes, historians have generally echoed rather than interrogated the harsh judgments of eighteenth-century critics. Richard Dunn asserts that "ever since the eighteenth century the sugar planters have *deservedly* received bad press" – and not, of course, just for boorishness. Others assert that, at the time of the American Revolution, the Leeward Islands were noteworthy only for their "grotesque character of life" and that Nevis at mid-century was nothing but a "tropical hellhole of dissipated whites."[20] Regourd notes similar characterizations by historians of the French Caribbean: these scholars relate that colonists favored "useful preoccupations, dancing, crude jokes, gossip, and sexual gluttony" over "disinterested learning, reflection and conversation" and "notoriety conferred by wealth" rather than time-consuming literature.[21]

Yet Zacek notes that this view is changing, that historians have begun to "explore English West Indian society in a more nuanced way."[22] Indeed, Trevor Burnard was the first historian to engage seriously with the intellectual life of Thomas Thistlewood, a notorious slaveholder important in

[16] Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 1015.
[17] François Regourd, "Lumières coloniales. Les Antilles françaises dans la République des Lettres," *Dix-huitième siècle* 33 (2001): 182.
[18] Charles Leslie, *A New and Exact Account of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, 1740), 36.
[19] More on this topic, Chapter 2.
[20] Natalie A. Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670–1776* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4–6.
[21] Quoting Pierre Pluchon and Jack Corzani, Regourd, "Lumières coloniales," 183.
[22] Zacek, *Settler Society*, 6.

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this account, too.[23] Regourd was urging colleagues working on the French Caribbean to do the same, and studies by Jennifer Palmer and Paul Cheney have acknowledged a place for Enlightenment in their studies of Saint-Domingue, chiefly in connection with rationalizing plantation management.[24] Yet only two historians have placed eighteenth-century Caribbean intellectual activity at the center of book-length treatments: James E. McClellan III in his pioneering study of Saint-Domingue's scientific society, published nearly three decades ago, and B. W. Higman in an astute portrayal of the intellectual life of a Jamaican clergyman, John Lindsay.[25]

In this book, the colonists doing Enlightenment in the French and British Caribbean take center stage. They include planters, of course, but many others as well: physicians, merchants, overseers, military men, publishing entrepreneurs, colonial officials, and the rare minister or priest. They were just as inspired as their metropolitan counterparts by ideologies of utility and improvement, and they engaged in intellectual practices common in the metropole. They collected specimens of fauna and flora, sharing them with a local naturalist or posting them to a metropolitan intellectual society; they contributed a poem or a report on an agricultural innovation to their local periodicals; they checked out a book from a circulating library or read the news to each other in a café; they recorded observations from their barometers and thermometers and peered through telescopes and microscopes; they challenged metropolitan economic and political constraints by arguing in meetings and in letters to the editor. In the process, they made the Caribbean an object of knowledge, generating new knowledge about it. They brought ideas to life through diverse practices, from a White slaveholding parent of a mixed-race child transcribing passages of John Locke's treatise on education to an experienced

[23] Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-American World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chap. 4.

[24] Jennifer L. Palmer, *Intimate Bonds: Family and Slavery in the French Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 34; Paul Cheney, *Cul de Sac: Patrimony, Capitalism, and Slavery in French Saint-Domingue* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), chap. 3, at 78, 91–92. Discussed further in Part IV.

[25] James E. McClellan III, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); B. W. Higman, *Proslavery Priest: The Atlantic World of John Lindsay, 1729–1788* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2011); also see James Robertson, "Eighteenth-Century Jamaica's Ambivalent Cosmopolitanism," *History* 99, no. 337 (2014): 607–31; Dennis Benn, *The Caribbean: An Intellectual History, 1774–2003* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2004). Special case discussed in Part IV, Justin Roberts's *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

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French sugar refiner perusing chemical works to understand the process bubbling in his boiler house.

These examples underscore the fact that my primary focus will be a Caribbean Enlightenment as experienced and made by White, male British and French colonists. This is not to dismiss the aspirations of the enslaved or free people of color or to occlude their participation in and contributions to knowledge production.[26] Rather, it reflects an essential feature and function of Enlightenment as these men practiced it. Exclusion, based in race and gender, was very much the point. They enacted what David Hume so brutally asserted in his essay "On National Characters": "I am apt to suspect the Negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation."[27] Thus, a White author masqueraded as an enslaved "Toussaint" in a Saint-Domingue newspaper, deriding the possibility of a colonial learned academy by savagely satirizing his persona's intellectual pretensions. Similarly, Edward Long in 1774 viciously dismissed the intellectual capacities of Francis Williams, a free Black man who had acquired a reputation for learning both in Jamaica and in Britain.[28] White women were also largely

[26] Laurent Dubois, "An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic," *Social History* 31, no. 1 (2006): 2–14, and in *The Atlantic World*, ed. D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard, and William O'Reilly (New York: Routledge, 2015), 227–41; Karol K. Weaver, *Medical Revolutionaries: The Enslaved Healers of Eighteenth-Century Saint Domingue* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Londa Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

[27] Hume added this footnote to the essay five years after its original publication in 1753: David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London, 1758), 125. Even more unequivocal was a final revision of 1777: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites." Richard H. Popkin, "The Philosophical Basis of Eighteenth-Century Racism," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture: Racism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro (Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 24–62; Richard H. Popkin, "Hume's Racism," in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), 251–66; John Immerwahr, "Hume's Revised Racism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 3 (1992): 481–86; Robert Palter, "Hume and Prejudice," *Hume Studies* 21, no. 1 (1995): 3–23; Emmanuel C. Eze, "Hume, Race, and Human Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 4 (2000): 691–98; Aaron Garrett, "Hume's Revised Racism Revisited," *Hume Studies* 26, no. 1 (2002): 171–77; Aaron Garrett, "Human Nature," *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1:160–233, esp. 195–97; Silvia Sebastiani, "National Characters and Race: A Scottish Enlightenment Debate," in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 187–206.

[28] See Parts II and III, respectively.

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excluded. Certainly they could discuss a book over tea and experiment with the medicinal qualities of a local plant. But in Jamaica we will see them excluded from intellectual friendships forged by men and how in Saint-Domingue they were assigned a complementary role to an emphatically male ideal of enlightened citizenship.

Certainly not every White male in Cap Français or Kingston engaged deeply in Enlightenment intellectual culture – but neither did all the men in Bordeaux, Bristol, or Boston. The Enlightenment's impact does not depend on inevitably elusive numbers, but in how individuals used its tools to make sense of their worlds, determine the meanings of their lives, and act. This is a book, then, about how a small but not insignificant set of people practiced and experienced the Enlightenment – its wonders and challenges, discipline and diversions, camaraderie and competition. It thus recovers an important facet of what Burnard has termed the "rich, vibrant, and distinctive" cultures of the eighteenth-century Caribbean[29] and a significant aspect of the "beyond" that the Caribbean historian Douglas Hall implicitly challenged us to find when he wrote many years ago: "Life in our slave society of the eighteenth century went beyond master-driver-slave-and-whip, and sugar-rum-and-molasses."[30] This is not directly a book about slavery, either. Yet slavery inevitably conditioned many appropriations of Enlightenment intellectual culture as all of the actors in this book benefited from the brutal system of racial bondage that inextricably linked astounding wealth and enormous human suffering. Indeed, becoming "enlightened" made a new, distinctive colonial identity available to them, one that rejected metropolitan notions of Caribbean degeneracy, redrew the line between free and unfree smudged by proximity and intimacy, and validated on a cultural basis the power to enslave.

The Europeans who went to the islands were not culturally autochthonous. They brought with them a common intellectual heritage, one continuously refreshed by the circulation of metropolitan publications and the development of domestic cultural institutions, such as theatre and coffeehouses. As in the metropole, being "enlightened" in the colonies signaled more than the pursuit and possession of useful knowledge; it bolstered claims to gentility or *civilité*, serving as a means to acquire social and cultural capital. If anything, these larger stakes were felt by Caribbean

[29] Burnard, *Mastery, Desire, and Desire*, 245.
[30] Douglas Hall, "Planters, Farmers and Gardeners in Eighteenth Century Jamaica," Elsa Goveia Memorial Lecture (Department of History, The University of the West Indies, 1987), 17.

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colonists more keenly because of the in-between state they occupied. Edward Brathwaite captured this in-betweeness when he defined "creole society" as the "result of a complex situation where a colonial polity reacts, as a whole to external metropolitan pressures, and at the same time to internal adjustments made necessary by the juxtaposition of master and slave, elite and labourer, in a culturally heterogeneous relationship."[31] This uncomfortable, sometimes perilous situation transformed the Enlightenment in the Caribbean into a distinctive "politics of culture."[32]

Philip Wickstead's portrait of the planter Benjamin Pusey and his wife Elizabeth illustrates how colonists could appropriate metropolitan ideas and forms to serve a colonial agenda and their stakes in doing so (Figure 1.2). Nothing in the painting, not even the Black servant, would necessarily suggest that the scene is set in Jamaica rather than England.[33] Yet Wickstead probably painted it on the Cherry Hill and Cherry Garden Estate that Pusey owned in St. Dorothy's parish. Hardly the grandest planter, he was prosperous enough,[34] and he served multiple terms in the Assembly of Jamaica.[35] He had a taste for improvement, as his name appeared on a list of Assembly members selected to oversee the creation and management of a free school for the poor in Spanish Town, the colonial capital.[36] He appreciated poetry, too, which he sought to promote locally by subscribing for six copies of the domestically printed *Persian Love Elegies* by John Wolcot (who later enjoyed much success as the satiric poet Peter Pindar back in Britain).

As a member of the White planter elite, it is not surprising that the portly and neatly attired Pusey occupies the center of the painting.

[31] Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), xvi.

[32] Phrase from David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 152.

[33] On Black enslaved servants as status symbols, Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), chap. 1; Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 124–27; David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 21–28. I have learned much about Wickstead from Kate Crawford's dissertation, "Transient Painters, Traveling Canvases: Portraiture and Mobility in the British Atlantic, 1750–1780" (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2017), which she very generously shared with me.

[34] Benjamin Pusey, UCL; additional property acquired by his death, "Gymballs and Cherry Garden Estates," Caribbeana, volume 2, JFSGR.

[35] Benjamin Pusey, Feurtado, "Official and Other Personages of Jamaica from 1655–1790," JFSGR.

[36] School funded with a legacy from a member of the island's most important planter dynasty, the Beckfords, *The Laws of Jamaica, 1681–1759*, 1:306–08.

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Figure 1.2 Philip Wickstead (active 1763–86), Portrait of Benjamin and Mary Pusey (c. 1775). Oil on canvas. 99 × 124.6 cm. Collection: The National Gallery of Jamaica. Photo credit: Franz Marzouca

Gesturing toward a painting on a chair by the piazza's entry, he commands everyone's attention: the enslaved Black man who props up the painting; his wife in her pink satin dress, edged generously with lace; even the whippet at lower right. A landscape on the wall, an oriental carpet bunched up against a globe, books scattered on the floor as if they had just been consulted – all attest to the Puseys' affluence, refinement, and intellectual interests. It is a rather charming depiction, but it communicates power as well. However affectionate, even bemused, his wife's gaze acknowledges his authority. Fully illumined, husband and wife assert "enlightened" command over the human being and the humble beast consigned to the shadows and the margins.

Wickstead was working in the popular metropolitan genre of the "conversation piece," deploying its conventions to depict a colonial parlor. Like metropolitan painters, he showed his subjects "in a comparatively relaxed guise, demonstrating a 'natural', easy gentility through everyday

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acts."[37] The mid-century trend of emphasizing "familial intimacy and domestic affection" is much evident here as well.[38] As in metropolitan conversation pieces, the Puseys' dress and possessions project status, while their books and globes constitute their "proudly displayed cultural capital."[39] Yet the portrait did more than satisfy Pusey's vanity; it performed a function similar to the conversation pieces produced for British patrons in India "eager to establish their credentials as a ruling elite."[40] As such, it expressed "planters' desires for a cultured, established, and naturally increasing white Jamaican society" as it projected a refined image of colonial society back to the motherland.[41] But the image is not entirely stable: while Pusey is the undeniable center of this group portrait, the servant and the painting he supports interrupt the wedge of light falling from the outside into the parlor – a reminder to us of the traffic in labor and cultural goods on which the Puseys' prosperity and cultural aspirations depended.[42]

Acknowledging the many motives my subjects had for engaging in Enlightenment intellectual culture (beyond a disinterested pursuit of knowledge) does not compel me to adopt a hermeneutics of suspicion, however. I approach Caribbean colonists in the spirit of Joyce Chaplin's *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation & Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (1993). In the preface, she recounts how her original thesis collided with an epiphany in the archives "when I was sitting over yet another planter's library inventory, which contained, yet again, all the latest (circa 1800) in improving literature. An argument that this was a static society seemed not to explain the actual society at hand."[43] The resulting study is impressive, first, for how seriously she takes her subjects. She does not assume that bad faith or hypocrisy necessarily motivated the southern slaveholders of North America when they sought to reconcile

[37] Hannah Grieg, "Eighteenth-Century English Interiors in Image and Text," in *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance*, ed. Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (London: V&A Publications, 2006), 107–08.

[38] Kate Retford, "From the Interior to Interiority: The Conversation Piece in Georgian England," *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 3 (2007): 300–01.

[39] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 7; Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (2002): 882–85.

[40] Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Colonizing Nature – The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760–1820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 93.

[41] Crawford, "Transient Painters," 97.

[42] Thanks to Richard Sha for this observation.

[43] Joyce E. Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation & Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), vii.

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their enlightened "modernity" with the brute facts of their slave societies, which contemporary Scottish stadial views of human history condemned as atavistic. Second, she illuminates their attempts by combining evidence from diverse primary sources – private correspondence, newspaper advertisements, agricultural treatises – with a deep understanding of the ideas with which her subjects engaged.

Nor is my goal to require yet another element in the characterization of particular eighteenth-century Caribbean "creole" societies. Even scholars deeply interested in creolization acknowledge the slipperiness of the concept as "creole" quickly breaks through the modest definitional bound of people of African and European descent born in America.[44] The constant churn of population caused by high levels of mortality and the comings-and-goings of merchants, military men, officials, planters and their children, among others adds to the problem of characterizing the White colonists of these societies overall. More seriously, it was a deeply polemical term. Visitors could deplore the "creole" while colonists could proudly claim the label. They could reject it, as North Americans did,[45] or they could transform themselves into "Americans," as periodicals in Saint-Domingue urged their readers in the 1760s.[46] As a rule, I use the word "creole" when it appears in my sources and when it reflects a perception of or an assertion by my subjects. Otherwise, I prefer the term "identity" as defined by Kathleen Wilson, who was supplementing a quotation from Stuart Hall: "a historical process, [it was] 'a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being"' ... tentative, multiple and contingent" – in short, a dynamic process rather than a static quality.[47] Diffuse and shifting, "identity" captures the creole impulse while leaving room for outraged British and French colonists to claim their rights as Englishmen and Frenchmen. These shifting (sometimes opportunistic) identities also validate the convenient shorthand of terms such as "Jamaican" to denote those who shared a space and a distinctive way of life that ended at the water's edge.

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[44] Charles Stewart, "Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

[45] Joyce E. Chaplin, "Creoles in British America: From Denial to Acceptance," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 58.

[46] See Part II.

[47] Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), xiii.

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The title of this book reflects the region's economic, demographic, and ecological coherence: a tropical environment in which enslaved laborers, vastly outnumbering their masters, powered an agro-industrial regime devoted to producing consumer commodities for export. Ideally, a book about a Caribbean Enlightenment – even one focused on just one slice of the population – would cover more than the French and the British national contexts. So confined, it would include French and British holdings beyond Saint-Domingue and Jamaica, my chief focus here. But such a book would become entirely too diffuse. The Enlightenment was a vast world of mobility, networks, and connections, but scholars must narrow their focus if they hope to contribute anything meaningful. And, as Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus have demonstrated, there are very good reasons to center a study on the most populated, economically dynamic colonies of two empires battling for primacy throughout the eighteenth century.[48]

This book is divided into four parts, each of which explores a distinct and well-established field of Enlightenment scholarship: natural history; the press and the public sphere; the histories of reading and the book; and Agricultural Enlightenment. All four topics have generated impressive bodies of scholarship, which constitute the essential ground of my work. In each case, I identify the assumptions and expectations that colonists shared with metropolitans *and* how they diverged. We will see how their appropriations of Enlightenment intellectual culture were creative, suited to colonial agendas, hardly passive, and often not deferential to the metropole. As an intellectual historian, I am naturally drawn to identifying, contextualizing, and interpreting the texts my subjects produced as well as the circumstances of their production. But I also employ other means to detect intellectual activity, such as mapping the movements of naturalists and collating information from newspaper advertisements.

Part I begins in the late 1740s, and Part IV reaches into the early years of the French and Haitian Revolutions. Taken together, they push back to the 1750s and 1760s a serious engagement with Enlightenment intellectual culture. It thus resists the dating of an "Atlantic Enlightenment" from 1776[49] and the gravitational pull of the Haitian Revolution. The importance of the latter especially is undeniable, yet it cannot tell us everything

[48] Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[49] Wiliam Max Nelson, "The Atlantic Enlightenment," in *The Atlantic World*, ed. D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard, and William O'Reilly (London: Routledge, 2014), 651.

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we need to know about the French colonial regime any more than the French Revolution can tell us everything we need to know about the Ancien Régime.

Part I, "Before Breadfruit: Natural History, Sociability, and Colonial Identity in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," explores the multiple meanings of science for Jamaican colonists by reconstructing the careers of Patrick Browne and Anthony Robinson, two naturalists active from the 1740s into the 1760s. Browne's and Robinson's work tells us much about how colonial naturalists worked in the field, the intellectual challenges they confronted, and the critical importance of networks of local informants to their research – even, in Browne's case, to publication. It reveals how enslaved and free Jamaicans acquired and deployed knowledge about their environment and how White male colonists cultivated affectively rich intellectual friendships and appropriated a disciplined and respectable scientific identity.

Part II, "Creating Enlightened Citizens: The Periodicals of Saint-Domingue in the 1760s," argues that the three periodicals established in the colony during this decade were facets of a coherent and deeply gendered Enlightenment project: the long-lived *Affiches Américaines* and the short-lived *Journal de Saint-Domingue* and *Iris Américaine*. Although well known to scholars and increasingly available through digital publication, the *Affiches* has been insufficiently exploited for what it tells us about colonial intellectual life; the other two, because of their rarity, have never been systematically analyzed. All three served as a conduit for metropolitan material. But by combining this material with domestically produced efforts, the *Affiches* and the *Journal* created forums for discussing issues of public concern, such as governance and commerce. They fostered the creation of an informed and articulate male citizenry devoted to the common good and committed to finding enlightened means towards it. The *Iris* promoted the flip side of this ambitious cultural program by encouraging the refined White woman to civilize her partner through the cultivation of *belles lettres*, ideally displacing his "colored" concubine.

Part III, "Tristram in the Tropics: Or, Reading in Jamaica," addresses a significant lacuna in the histories of the book and reading, vigorous fields in European and North American Enlightenment studies. It begins with an impressionistic survey of reading on the island that analyzes newspaper advertisements, library inventories, book orders, and the practice of borrowing and lending. It then delves into the meaning of reading for two Jamaicans, the ex-overseer Thomas Thistlewood and the planter Robert Long, by focusing on two themes: race and slavery, and religion. While their

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practices do not permit generalizations to all Jamaican readers, they demonstrate how colonial readers took possession of Enlightenment and suggest how they used publications to reflect on their situations in light of personal experience, social status, intellectual aspirations, and even spiritual anxieties.

Part IV, "Cultivating Knowledge: Agricultural Enlightenment in the French Caribbean," shows how Enlightenment and agriculture were as intertwined for colonists as for metropolitan improvers. It reveals the often considerable ingenuity of Caribbean agriculturalists as they appropriated scientific advances, staged trials, and developed new technology. From letters to the editor to freestanding treatises, their agricultural writing even sought to solve social problems by promoting crop diversification. Caribbean agricultural texts and images also reveal a disconnect between metropolitan and colonial intellectual agendas, challenging the efficacy of the existing intellectual infrastructure that was supposed to secure useful knowledge, promote improvement, and arbiter competing claims to intellectual authority. Finally, the rise of anti-slavery sentiment, which demanded that slavery be considered a moral, not a management problem, compelled Caribbean responses. These included the promotion of the "Enlightened planter," an agriculturalist whose estate flourished precisely because he harmonized humanity and interest.

As these summaries suggest, this is not *the* Enlightenment of bookshelves stuffed with canonical texts, though more than enough of those figure in my story. Nor is this *the* Enlightenment construed as the progress of humanity, the benign advance of liberal democracy, or the malignancy of European hegemony.[50] Learning what people "made" of Enlightenment through a dynamic encounter of mind and material, we avoid unhelpful dichotomies that cast it as progressive or repressive and escape what Michel Foucault called the "blackmail of the Enlightenment": the demand that we be for it as an agent of liberating change or against it as a source of new forms of oppression.[51] The diversity of Enlightenment views on any given topic – its "noisily argumentative world" – further frustrates judgment as it counsels us to investigate the tension between different viewpoints and the stakes people had in them.[52] In the confines of a single

[50] Annelien de Dijn, "The Politics of Enlightenment: From Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 785–805.

[51] Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50; James Schmidt, "Misunderstanding the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?': Venturi, Habermas, and Foucault," *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 1 (2011): 43–52.

[52] Foucault's "blackmail" much in evidence in the framing of Ritchie Robertson's encyclopedic synthesis, *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680–1790* (2021). In contrast and also

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article published in a popular British periodical, for example, a reader in Glasgow or Montego Bay encountered Hume's scathing dismissal of the intellectual and moral capacities of Africans *and* James Beattie's sharply worded rebuttal.

As the Enlightenment in the Caribbean tells us things we did not know about Caribbean societies, it also contributes to our understanding of the Enlightenment writ large. Here that chiefly means exploring the conditions, agents, and methods of its "acclimatization" for what it reveals about the powerful appeal of Enlightenment intellectual culture and the dynamism with which it spread. Metaphors are not arguments, of course, but they are economical – and one that suggests the opportunities and pitfalls of "acclimatization" would have been appreciated in the eighteenth century by everyone from a royal administrator to a Caribbean colonist coaxing fruit from his transplanted peach tree. The Enlightenment was like a ship stuffed with plants of diverse provenance, only some of which might flourish wherever the ship disembarked on its global voyage. The former required an amenable environment and cultivators who carefully selected, perceived benefits accruing from their efforts, and risked hybridization to produce distinctive, even wildly different varieties better suited to their needs. In short, they never let anything alone, and they made what came to them their own.

The quartet of themes I explore here obviously does not exhaust the subject. The indefinite article in my title is a reminder of the open-endedness of this study. This book will hopefully inspire other scholars to discover other Caribbean Enlightenments that augment, correct, or supersede mine. Nor does my title assert a unitary Enlightenment in the Caribbean – or anywhere else, for that matter. We should not expect the Enlightenment to look precisely the same in French Guiana, Barbados, or Martinique any more than it looked the same in Philadelphia or Charleston, in Amsterdam or Edinburgh. With justification, some scholars worry that the proliferation of "Enlightenments" – not just geographically based, but Jewish, Catholic, radical, military, Protestant, participatory, practical – drains the "Enlightenment" of meaning, making it hopelessly diffuse and worthless as an analytic tool. How scholars with different projects engage with this important question and emerge with different

alluding to Foucault's blackmail, Vartija urges that the Enlightenment's foundational and troubling role in the creation of modern ideas of equality *and* race is best handled by eschewing judgment and focusing on the links and tension between them in Enlightenment thought. Quoting Barbara Taylor, Devin J. Vartija, *The Color of Equality: Race and Common Humanity in Enlightenment Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 1.

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answers is always valuable, necessary, and (dare I say it?) enlightening. Where definition fails, another metaphor may satisfy. Richard Sher elegantly characterizes the Enlightenment "as a grand symphony with multiple variations," and my schema maps nicely onto his common core "of general values to which proponents of the Enlightenment adhered."[53] Ultimately, the struggles to contain Enlightenment show that we have grasped something truly essential about it: a protean quality that inevitably undercuts crisp definitions – without excusing us from the obligation to try.

[53] Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15–16.

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