



Agostino Brunias (1728-1796), *Linen Market, Dominica*, ca. 1780, used on the title page of *The Creole Archipelago*.
Source: [Yale Center for British Art](#)

Book Review

Tessa Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021

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HISTORICAL STUDIES of the Caribbean often overlook the Windward Islands or focus on the individual history of a single island. Tessa Murphy's *The Creole Archipelago* studies the geographical interconnection of the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles, and how this interconnectedness affected the region's socio-economic development during the 18th century. Rather than beginning with the colonization of the islands, she

discusses the interconnection of the archipelago's indigenous communities, and, through analysis of 18th-century maps, census-, church-, and plantation records, correspondences, and acts of legislation, Dr. Murphy masterfully paints a picture of the ways in which life and socio-political dynamics in the Windward Islands were shaped on an individual level by the actions of French Catholics, free Blacks, and native Kalinagos, but also on an institutional level by the

adaptation of colonial regimes seeking to integrate the region into their larger imperial structures.

The book begins by describing the indigenous methods of inter-island boat travel that fostered the region's "lived geography" and the difficulty of its integration into wider colonial systems. This introductory section also presents the work's core analytical themes of "Indigenous dominion, racial belonging, economic development, and colonial subjecthood." (p. 5) The work is then divided into eight chapters, each exploring different developments associated with these themes across the 18th century.

Chapters 1 and 2 discuss how the presence of Indigenous Kalinagos in the Lesser Antilles and their challenging of the encroachment of newly-arrived European colonists onto their lands initially established the Creole Archipelago as an interconnected network of islands. The Kalinagos' successful resistance resulted in the recognition of Kalinago domains throughout the region. The geographical closeness of the islands and the existence of these Indigenous domains made it more difficult to integrate the region into larger colonial networks by allowing for uninhibited inter-island trade across empires. It also allowed for the establishment of racially integrated communities outside of the colonies by groups seeking economic opportunity and escape from restrictive racial laws.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the imperial experimentation which occurred in the region following the 7 Years' War, as Britain and France increasingly encroached on Kalinago lands and sought to increase their colonies' productivity by learning from previous colonial endeavors. The demand for enslaved labor rose dramatically during this period, and infrastructural development sought to discourage inter-island boat travel as the empires attempted to attract settlers and consolidate their holds on the region. This gave already present settlers power to shape the nature of subjecthood, as French Catholics already present on newly British-controlled islands pushed for political rights unavailable to Catholics elsewhere in the British Empire.

Chapter 5 focuses on the major demographic shift caused by the rapidly growing slave population. It also describes how British colonists increasingly racialized Kalinagos to justify further encroachment onto their lands, and threatened the freedom of the

islands' free-Black populations. The growing availability of slaves on the islands also led to increased brutality in the name of productivity and to even greater demand for land. This caused Maroon populations to swell and led to armed conflicts between settlers and both Maroons and Natives.

The final three chapters discuss how these marginalized groups then capitalized on the interconnectedness of the Creole Archipelago in order to coordinate resistance to British rule during the revolutionary period. Many colonists formed alliances with the French during the American Revolution and aided in their campaign to retake the islands. Groups oppressed by British colonial policy also moved to regain the rights, lands, and freedom of movement that had been gradually stripped away under English rule. The return of British rule in 1783 led to increased repression of Kalinagos, free Blacks, and French Catholics, before the French Revolution ignited further resistance to increasingly oppressive policies. This period saw each of these three groups launch insurgencies that necessitated costly military responses and badly damaged local infrastructure. The British response of mass deportation and public executions then allowed for the more complete establishment of sugar plantations and the completed consolidation of British control over the islands, ending the period of the Creole Archipelago.

The Creole Archipelago is compelling on a number of levels. Dr. Murphy's clarity of wording and ideas makes it accessible to a non-expert audience. Her contextualization of 18th-century historical developments, and the perspective she takes of the region as an interconnected system rather than a set of independent political entities make the work of great value to any student or academic who studies the socio-economic development of the region. And the way she keeps individual stories at the forefront of her study gives valuable insights into the lives of groups often overlooked by more general analyses and puts the region's development into perspective by showing the rapidity of developments across single lifetimes. Any student of the period should read and attempt to emulate this book, because it provides a valuable model of how to tell stories that are inclusive, deeply insightful, accessible, and which look beyond singular spaces to view history in a more complete regional context.