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FREEDOM, FAITH, AND FORTUNE: NOCTURNALITY'S OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EARLY MODERN CARIBBEAN

Introduction

The earliest recorded sighting of the Americas by a European occurred during the late hours of the night, when Rodrigo de Triano – a sailor in the crew of Christopher Columbus – espied a glow emanating from one of the islands in the Bahamas[1]. That nocturnal moment marked the start of centuries of expansion that transformed both the Old and the New World. While recognizing the violence inherent in the colonial project, two 'positive' facets of the night can be gleaned from a historical analysis of the Caribbean, specifically in the territories governed by Britain, the Dutch Republic, and France during the long eighteenth century. The first positive component considers the lived experience of those in the region by demonstrating that the night provided space for physical and metaphorical freedom for people who existed outside the bounds of colonial norms. Enslaved Africans and African-descended people claimed freedom by nocturnal self-emancipation as they escaped from the oppression of slavery by fleeing from plantations or by starting revolts, and devotees of unsanctioned religions embraced the night as a time to practice and celebrate their faith. The second

1. Christopher Columbus, *Personal Narrative of the First Voyage of Columbus to America. From a Manuscript Recently Discovered in Spain. Translated from the Spanish*, Boston, Thomas B. Wait and Son, 1827, 32-33. Columbus retroactively claimed that he saw the island first, around 10 p.m., but de Triano's sighting at 2 a.m. was the one recognized by the rest of the crew.

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positive component is a historiographical one, as it centers the Caribbean in discussions of modern industrialization by considering the place of overnight sugar-cane refining. Round-the-clock labor on an industrial scale began with enslaved laborers on sugar plantations working throughout the night to process raw materials into salable goods, a key development of the modern capitalist economy. The facets examined here were not intrinsically connected to the night – the daytime also saw enslaved people claim their freedom, individuals practice their religion, and workers process sugarcane. I argue, however, that the night not only provided space for these activities that was unavailable during the day, but it also helped generate new expressions and identities in the colonial world.

Night studies in pre-modern European history cover a wide variety of themes, ranging from art, to labor, to policing, to religion, and to urbanity[2]. Conversely, far less attention has been paid to nocturnality in the Caribbean, despite the region's importance to the development of European power in the colonial era[3]. The system of racialized chattel slavery that undergirded the economic and social order of the early modern Caribbean transformed nightlife throughout the Atlantic World. Its clearest influence on European nocturnal sociability is apparent in the products – especially coffee and tobacco – that flourished primarily because of the labor of enslaved men, women, and children. Recognition of this relationship complicates the adulatory views of European nocturnalization that focus on opportunities granted by the expansion of the night, such as greater sociability or the creation of a public sphere, by foregrounding the ethical costs of the commodities that helped spur

2. For example, see Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 2005; Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Darrin McMahon, «Illuminating the Enlightenment: Public Lighting Practices in the Siècle Des Lumières», *Past & Present*, 240 (2018), 119-59; Avner Wishnitzer, *As Night Falls: Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Cities after Dark*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

3. A notable exception is Laura Hollsten, «Night Time and Entangled Spaces on Early Modern Caribbean Sugar Plantations», *Journal of Global Slavery*, 1 (2016), 248-73.

its growth. Indeed, this realization demonstrates the interconnected nature of the early modern world by compelling scholars to consider the centrality of the colonial Caribbean in their cultural and social-historical analyses.

Freedom and Faith: Opportunities in the Night

In 1790, an advertisement written in English and French appeared for three consecutive weeks in a newspaper on the island of Grenada, the southernmost Leeward Island in the eastern Caribbean. The notice promised a reward for an enslaved man and woman who had recently fled from captivity 'dans la nuit', a detail mentioned only in the French text. Described as a couple, the «Mulatto Man, named La Pierre» and the «Negro Wench named Magdelaine» reportedly stole a large canoe in an attempt to lure other slaves to join them and set out into the Caribbean Sea[4]. Contemporary readers would know that potential freedom lay 120 kilometers to the north, where they could join the Black Caribs on Saint Vincent, or 160 kilometers to the south, where the Spanish at Trinidad and Tobago would provide asylum[5]. As their journey began in darkness, the two would have used the stars to navigate, hoping that they might reach safety before they were recaptured or they perished from lack of sustenance or exposure to the elements. Examination of early modern Caribbean newspapers and other sources reveal that such cases of nocturnal self-emancipation were common throughout the region.

La Pierre and Magdelaine's nighttime quest for freedom undermined the system of slavery, robbed the plantation of valu-

4. *St. George's Chronicle, and New Grenada Gazette* (St. George's, Grenada), September 24, October 1, October 8, 1790. *Readex: Caribbean Newspapers*, www.readex.com/products/caribbean-newspapers-series-1-1718-1876-american-antiquarian-society.

5. Julie Chun Kim, «The Caribs of St. Vincent and Indigenous Resistance during the Age of Revolutions», *Early American Studies*, 11/1, *Special Issue: Forming Nations, Reforming Empires: Atlantic Polities in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2013), 117-32; Kit Candlin, «The Connections Between Grenada and Trinidad in the Age of Fedon, 1783-1797», *Journal of Caribbean History*, 56/1 (2022), 1-23.

able labor and property, and upset the social order – all these would have been viewed as negative aspects and thus as the 'dark side of night' by authorities and slaveholders. However, this transgression against the law provided liberty for these enslaved individuals and for them served as a 'bright side of night.' This type of resistance by African-descended people against slavery, collectively referred to by scholars as 'marronage,' provides one of the greatest positive aspects of nocturnality in the early modern Caribbean. The most common way enslaved people engaged in marronage, or self-emancipation, was by running away from captivity (known as *petite marronage*). Sometimes these individuals joined Maroon communities (via *grand marronage*), which were made up of former slaves, those born in freedom, and local Indigenous peoples, and these enclaves existed wherever racialized chattel slavery predominated[6]. Owing to the fact that the demands of labor generally lessened at night (albeit with the exception of processing sugarcane), enslaved people usually had more 'free time' during these hours to pursue their own desires. Most of this time would be spent doing activities such as eating, socializing, tending to gardens, and resting. But some individuals used this modicum of nocturnal autonomy to plan and execute strategies for escape. And because darkness gave them cover from the watchful eyes of drivers and slaveholders, nocturnality afforded them a greater chance to claim freedom.

As a source base, newspapers provide a useful, if incomplete, idea of the importance of nocturnal marronage in the Caribbean. The fact that many advertisements appeared for months on end demonstrates that freedom was a real and lasting possibility, although rewards posted years after self-emancipation indicate that this remained tenuous. Yet in the 17,000 advertisements for runaway slaves in *Les Affiches Américaines* from Saint-Domingue between 1765 and 1795, only 2% (about 300) specifically refer to their escape at night[7]. However, the vast majority of these neg-

6. For an overview on marronage in the Americas see Manolo Florentino and Márcia Amantino, «Runaways and *Quilombolas* in the Americas», in David Eltis and Stanley Engerman (eds.), *AD 1420-AD 1804*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011 (Cambridge World History of Slavery, 3), 708-40.

7. «Le Marronage Dans Le Monde Atlantique: Sources Et Trajectoires de Vie», www.marronage.info/fr/corpus.php.

lected to mention any time whatsoever, and the information included was often sparing, at best. Here it takes deep reading and contextualization to examine the importance of including a mention of 'the night' as part of a runaway ad. Authorities, slaveholders, and elites feared slave revolts, and to prevent them every colony instituted night patrols to quash potential uprisings. Law codes provided justification for greater nocturnal violence, as colonists were legally allowed to kill runaways or assailants at night[8]. Boat owners were required to lock up their vessels and oars at night to help prevent escape to another island[9]. People of color – both enslaved and free – were required to carry lanterns and papers that justified their presence outside after dark[10]. By design, the structure of chattel slavery attempted to prevent self-emancipation by instituting systems of control and using dehu-

8. For example of differentiation, consider this text from Barbados: «But if any poor small Free-holder or other Person kill a Negro or other Slave by Night, out of the Road or Common Path, and stealing, or attempting to steal his Provision, Swine, or other Goods, he shall not be accountable for it». *The Laws of Barbados, Collected in One Volume, by William Rawlin, of the Middle-Temple, London, Esquire. And Now Clerk of the Assembly of the Said Island*, London, William Rawlin, 1699, 164.

9. The fear of enslaved people using boats can be seen in this letter from Matthias Beck to the Dutch West India Company board of directors from 1657: «Every evening we have to secure our boat and other small vessels with a chain, no matter how poor their condition, in order to prevent Negroes or whites from being able to make off with them». *Curaçao Papers, 1640-1665*, trans. and ed. by Charles Gehring, New York, New Netherland Research Center and the New Netherland Institute, 2011, 103. Also consider the following regulation from British Montserrat: «All Owners of Boats, or other small Vessels, shall chain them up every Night to a Tree or Post, or bring them under Guard, and take away their Oars, Sails, and Rudders, and secure them, on Penalty of 2000 *lb*. of Sugar. Whoever shall be convicted of Stealing any Boat, or other Vessel, or be aiding to the same, shall be guilty of Felony». *Acts of Assembly: Passed in the Island of Montserrat; from 1668, to 1740, inclusive*, London, John Baskett, 1740, 126.

10. A law from the island of Tortola (in the modern British Virgin Islands) exemplifies this trend: «No Owner or Possessor of Negroes or other Slaves shall permit them or either of them to go out of their respective Plantations or Homes (except such as they appoint to attend their Persons, without a Ticket signed by the Owner, Possessor, Manager, or Overseer, or some other White Person dwelling on the Estate, specifying the Time of Absence allowed the Slave or Slaves», *Copies of Several Acts for the Regulation of Slaves, Passed in the West India Islands*, S.I: s.n., 1789, 69.

manizing tactics. Despite the existence of such legislation and its enforcement by authorities, enslaved people continued to engage in marronage, and nighttime repeatedly provided them with opportune moments for escape.

Several newspaper accounts indicate that enslaved people emancipated themselves at night in small groups, sometimes with children, which demonstrates that this was both an individual and a communal activity. A 1773 advertisement from Saint-Domingue warned of seven Africans – four men and three women – who escaped the plantation of a «Mrs. Bensse» in February of 1773. Identified as Joseph, Belair, l'Africain, Théodore, Catherine, Collette, and Léonore, all were physically branded with the name of their mistress and originated from the African «nation Arada»[11]. The text reported that the group all carried billhooks and axes, cutting tools which would be used by field hands to harvest sugarcane. These implements could easily serve as weapons, which made such a group appear dangerous to anyone they encountered. On a night in May of the same year, a still larger group of Africans – ten unnamed men and one woman, all described as «new» – escaped from another plantation on Saint-Domingue. Reportedly from the Congo, they all bore country marks (a type of ritual scarification) on their «body and face», along with the brands of the slaveholder couple, Mr. and Mrs. Gestas. The advertisement stated that it was «suspected that they were hidden by other Maroons»[12]. These two examples of nocturnal marronage demonstrate that self-emancipation could be communal rather than singular, and that while not necessarily violent, such groups were perceived as a threat to travelers and

11. *Supplement Aux Affiches Américaines* (Au Cap, Saint-Domingue), March 6, 1773, 108, *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, https://dloc.com/AA00000449/00009. Philip Curtin describes the term «Arada» as «terminological imprecision», and further states that «by the late eighteenth century, the term had already extended to mean almost anyone shipped from the Bight of Benin ports». His census shows that in the 1770s there were only 17 enslaved people on Saint-Domingue described as being from Arada. Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969, 186, 193.

12. *Supplement Aux Affiches Américaines* (Au Cap, Saint-Domingue), May 19, 1773, 236, *Digital Library of the Caribbean*, «soupçonne qu'ils sont retirés par d'autres Negres marons».

the social order. Moreover, it serves to represent the practice of Maroon communities that exploited the nighttime to conceal the enslaved people who claimed their freedom – the fact that the writer of the advertisement mentioned the suspicions shows that this possibility was viewed as a real threat. Given that newspapers could contain several pages of descriptions of escaped slaves, it seems clear that enslaved people frequently and successfully engaged in marronage.

Slave revolts – the most feared type of self-emancipation – were intimately tied to the night in the minds of slaveholders, and it is true that African-descended people capitalized upon temporary hours of rest and independence to permanently claim their freedom[13]. Because of the numerical disparity between the white ruling class and the enslaved Black population, the system of chattel slavery used constant nocturnal patrols by soldiers and militia, as well as techniques of dehumanization such as racially-driven abuse and torture, to prevent uprisings. Two brief examples taken from British Barbados as well as Dutch Essequebo and Demerary (modern Guyana) demonstrate the way that nocturnality provided opportunity for self-emancipation and also informed colonial perspectives on revolts.

A letter from 1683 by an unnamed British official on Barbados (probably the governor, Richard Dutton), recounted a conspiracy that lasted a single night. He wrote that «about two a Clock in the morning [a messenger] made great knocking at my door and told me all the Leeward parts of the Island were in Armes upon an alarme which he thought was occasioned by some Negroes being nigh Rebellion». Seemingly unconcerned, the official stayed at home after sending officers to handle the issue[14]. After all, a nocturnal patrol had been put into effect to prevent «the disorderly meeting of Negroes» only six months earlier, so the

13. Other types of self-emancipation, such as the previously discussed physical escape, include purchasing one's own freedom and suicide. For more, see Graham Nessler, «'They Always Knew Her to Be Free': Emancipation and Re-Enslavement in French Santo-Domingo, 1804-1809», *Slavery and Abolition*, 33/1 (2012), 87-103; Terri Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015.

14. *Extract of a Letter from Barbados, Dated 18th December 1683, Barbados*, National Archives, CO 1/53, No. 265.

island should have been safe[15]. Indeed, the following day the revolt appeared to be an entirely unremarkable event, and life returned to normal for the majority of the residents. As punishment for fomenting an unsuccessful revolt, four or five enslaved people were publicly whipped, and «an old Negro man» was burned alive – not for rebellion, but for being «insolent» to a white woman. The letter quoted a note that the rebels purportedly circulated throughout the island, and its contents showcased nocturnality's potential for freedom:

> Brothers
> Our design is discovered but not be dishartned, lett us begin the nexts Sunday about Midnight, do not lett us mind the Patroll or Companies for I understand some Brothers are in hold and if wee do not begin wee shall all be brought in trouble, and withall lose Our lives, if not then sometime next week, for wee will have it, for wee have done for our Brothers here, methinks long the time, for wee have most of all Countries of Our side, therefore bee not afraid[16].

Clearly, a Sunday night was seen as an advantageous time for revolt by enslaved people and slavers, hence the presence of armed troops. Plantations were supposed to be dormant on a Sunday, so the enslaved people would be more rested. Darkness would hide the movement and gathering of a mass of rebels, and by beginning «about Midnight» their efforts could theoretically coordinate across the island's 430 square kilometers. Despite a lack of successful self-emancipation resulting from this conspiracy, nocturnal revolts became a well-established pattern in the Caribbean.

Located in modern Guyana along the South American coast of the Caribbean, the connected colonies of Essequebo and Demerary contained large sugar plantations and, as two Dutch

15. Richard Dutton, *Instructions from Sir Richard Dutton to John Witham*, May 1, 1683, National Archives, CO 1/51, No. 104.

16. *Extract of a Letter from Barbados*. The official denied that an African-descended person wrote this text because «negroes are not able to read». But Michael Craton, a noted historian of slave resistance, argued that this note demonstrated that enslaved people used spoken and written English as a lingua franca. Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982, 110-11.

writers put it, «the Colonies could not exist without Negroes or Slaves»[17]. One revolt in 1789 began on the rural Uitvlugt Plantation in Demerary, and the role of nocturnality can be seen in a description by Petrus Gerardus Duker, an *Advocaat Fiscaal* (a government tax lawyer or prosecutor) in Stabroek (modern Georgetown)[18]. Duker heard of the uprising and joined a group of 30 militiamen who traveled from the city to quell the revolt. At the plantation, they heard the story of a brutal assault on the main house that had happened the night before, when 30 to 40 rebels had attacked the white servants, overseer, and owner. With greater firepower, the latter two had managed to survive until the militia arrived, although the rest of the white servants perished. The militia proceeded to barricade themselves in the house, and they «feared the upcoming night». After two nights, when Duker and the other men «heard the howling of the runaways and imagined they would move on us, but they did not dare», the colonists gathered sufficient numbers to slowly put down the rebellion in the surrounding countryside by killing or capturing all the men and women involved[19].

Unlike the hardly noticeable conspiracy in Barbados, the Demerary revolt resulted in a significant threat to the colonial order, and Duker recorded a public and brutal response. Five women and one man were whipped or enchained. Twelve men were hanged, 20 were broken on the wheel, and all the executed men were beheaded, all in front of an audience of «thousands of negros on all sides»[20]. The authorities installed a regime that emphasized nocturnal control, one that compelled white colonists to continually monitor the actions of enslaved people.

17. All translations mine unless otherwise noted. *Brieven over het Bestuur der Colonien Esequebo en Demerary, Gewisseld Tusschen de Heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus*, I, Amsterdam, W. Holtrop, 1785, 5.

18. «Petrus Gerardus Duker: Profile & Legacies Summary, 1746-1837», *Legacies of British Slave-ownership*, University College London, www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/9432.

19. Petrus Duker, *Duplicaat-Missive van P.G. Duker te Stabroek aan de Kamer Amsterdam Betreffende een Opstand der Negerslaven in Demerary*, Inventaris van de Collectie Verspreide West-Indische Stukken, 1614-1875, Nationaal Archieef, 1.05.06.

20. *Ibid*.

For example, when Henry Bolingbroke traveled to Demerary in 1798, he told that «Negroes guilty of improper conduct in the streets, or of being out after eight o'clock of the night without a passport, are committed to the jail, where they remain until liberated by their owners, when they receive such a punishment as their fault deserves». Bolingbroke also recounted how the fear of rebellion compelled the Stabroek *militia* – which Petrus Duker had joined a decade earlier – to guard the city continuously, especially during the hours of darkness. Unfortunately for them, these soldiers succumbed to «the unhealthy night airs» (a common complaint by European writers traveling in the early modern Caribbean), and the majority of them fell ill and were unable to fulfill their duties. This forced the Dutch governor to recruit and force British residents to «patrole the streets during the night», and these men also fell ill from the effects of their «nocturnal 'burgher waght [watch]'»[21]. Such evidence indicates that the threat of nocturnal revolt directly or indirectly transformed the daily – and nightly – lives of every person in the colonies.

These examples of nocturnal self-emancipation by rebellion demonstrate that African-descended people challenged the social order and upset the rhythms of daily life in the colonial Caribbean. Although it may seem counterintuitive to connect the turmoil of early modern freedom with modern conceptions of 'positive', the evidence seen here indicates that law-breaking and violence functioned as necessary components of this «bright side of night». Nevertheless, with few exceptions (most notably the Haitian Revolution), revolts rarely led to permanent freedom for the majority of the participants[22]. Life under the regime of

21. Henry Bolingbroke, *A Voyage to the Demerary, Containing a Statistical Account of the Settlements There, and of those on the Essequebo, the Berbice, and other Contiguous Rivers of Guyana*, London, Richard Phillips, 1807, 58, 280-82. For discussion on 'unhealthy night airs' and the shift in the modern era to view them as healthy, see Peter Baldwin, «How Night Air Became Good Air, 1776-1930», *Environmental History*, 8/3 (2003), 412-29.

22. The so-called «Bois Caïman ceremony», a Vodou ritual performed on the night of 14 August 1791, was often portrayed as the beginning of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), but beginning in the 1990s historians have questioned the date, location, and authenticity of the eyewitness accounts of the event. For more see David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002, 81-92.

chattel slavery was certainly dark, but nocturnal self-emancipation provided an unusual bright spot for enslaved people.

Another component of freedom related to Caribbean nocturnality can be seen by considering religion, specifically in the lives of marginalized ethnic and religious groups. As with marronage, the night provided time and space for freer practice of an individual's faith and culture. Unlike in Europe or North America, historians of the Caribbean often relegate state-sponsored Christianity to the margins, particularly in the colonies held by the Protestant powers of Britain and the Dutch Republic. As Kristen Block states, «[t]he Caribbean during the age of European expansion has often been characterized as especially irreligious, a blanket assumption of scorn for Christian principles»[23]. This historiographical perspective is often overblown, and emphasis is primarily placed on economics, imperialism, or slavery, while the effects of religious practice are ignored. Yet the evidence demonstrates that African-descended people used the night to create new spiritualities that drew upon both their African heritage and their situation in the Americas. Similarly, although Catholic and Protestant contemporaries bemoaned a lack of piety among the colonial leadership and residents, some European colonists exploited this more nonchalant approach and traveled to the region to gain religious freedom or to make converts.

Scholars of the Caribbean debate how much religion and culture Africans held on to after their journey through the Middle Passage. For example, the sociologist Orlando Patterson argued that enslaved people experienced 'social death,' a process that alienated them from their birthplace and its society, and this can be interpreted to mean that they were forcibly cut off from any religious heritage[24]. Nevertheless, European colonists often

23. Kristen Block, *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean: Religion, Colonial Competition, and the Politics of Profit*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2012, 3.

24. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1982, esp. 5-6. The effect of social death on enslaved Muslims in the Caribbean is particularly noticeable, especially with restrictions on its practice such as forced consumption of unclean food and drink, requirements to work on holy days, inability to pray at regular times, lack of access to the Qur'an, and a complete absence

expressed fear of African spirituality, and it seemed especially frightening at night. Consider this brief account from Hendrik van Dam, an officer of the Dutch West India Company on the island of St. Eustatius that occurred around 1702. He related that one night he was awakened from sleep by strange noises outside his house. Armed with a pistol, he rushed out to shoot any intruder. Once there, he said that he saw a «Negro making the most dangerous gestures, to cause sickness and death; then, raising his voice again, he called forth the Devils of Hell. It was all terrible to hear». The officer fired, but his overloaded pistol misfired, and the Black man escaped[25]. This episode is one of several that illustrate how Europeans supposed that Africans communed with evil spirits at night, a belief which persisted well into the latter years of the Enlightenment and decades after the end of most witch trials in Europe. Much of this perspective lacked concrete evidence, given that most colonists could not speak African languages.

Despite the ways in which Africans were cut off from their homeland, their descendants developed new spiritual traditions in the Americas, and these were intimately connected with nocturnal rituals. Obeah appeared in British territory and Vodou (sometimes referred to as Vodun or Voodoo) in French-speaking lands. Although distinct from each other, both spiritualities contained practices that were similar to those found in non-Islamic regions of Africa. Generally, these new practices were not formalized religions or ideologies with established deities or written texts. Instead, they functioned as malleable expressions that allowed practitioners to take part in the rituals of other religions,

of mosques. Additionally, the high literacy rate among Muslims was perceived as a threat of rebellion. See Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, New York, University Press, 1998.

25. «makende aldaar door den Neger het vervaarlijkste gebaar, even of 'er Kranken in doods nood, en Geesten die opgestaan waren: dan weder zijn stem verhessende, of 'er Duyvels uyt de Hel voor zijn vengster stonden; alle't welke schrikkelijk om te hooren was». Hendrik van Dam, *Deductie, gedaan maken by ofte van wegen Hendrik van Dam, fiscaal van de eylanden St. Eustatius ende Zaba en habitanten van de voorsz eylanden aan de bewindhebberen van de West-Indische Compagnie* (1703), 8.

especially Christianity and Islam[26]. Their primary concerns were with protection from evil and loss of property, and as darkness hid various spiritual and physical terrors, many Africans performed their rituals during the night, just as in the instance described by the Dutchman van Dam.

Colonists viewed Obeah and Vodou as harmful superstitions that merited suppression for religious and humanitarian reasons. A report from Jamaica in 1789 described Obeah men as «pretended wizards» who deceived African-descended people of «a distempered Imagination and Credulity». The account further emphasized the hidden and nocturnal nature of Obeah, saying, «A Veil of Mystery is studiously thrown over their Incantations, to which the Midnight Hours are allotted, and every Precaution is taken to conceal them from the Knowledge and Discovery of the White People»[27]. Similarly, in his eighteenth-century history of Saint-Domingue, Moreau de Saint-Méry described Vodou as something covert, for it «never takes place except secretly, when the night casts a shadow, in a closed place and sheltered from all profane eyes». He further told of another Vodou menace of the night – the zombie – which could be used to manipulate the emotions and passions of impressionable young women[28]. European descriptions of Obeah and Vodou often sensationalized or

26. An example of this can be seen in the Spiritual Baptists, whose adherents are sometimes called «Shouters», a religious expression that originated in the late eighteenth century and despite its name combines Methodism and African religion, with many of its pastors serving as Obeah men. See Nathaniel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010, 225, 238; «Spiritual Baptists», in *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions*, 975-993.

27. «Jamaica», in *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council Appointed for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations; Submitting to His Majesty's Consideration the Evidence and Information They Have Collected in Consequence of His Majesty's order in Council, Dated the 11th of February 1788, Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa, and Particularly the Trade in Slaves*, London, 1789.

28. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique et Historique de la Partie Française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue, Avec des Observations générales sur sa Population, sur le Caractère & les Moeurs de ses divers Habitans; sur son Climat, sa Culture, ses Productions, son Administration, &c. &c.*, Philadelphia, Chez l'Auteur, 1797, 46-47, 52.

sexualized their subjects, and they correlated the darkness of night with the race of the religious practitioners[29].

It is true that Black Jamaican oral traditions contained specific elements of nocturnality, such as warning that nighttime hoots of an owl or a howl of a dog were omens of death. A special source of fear was the «duppy», or evil spirit, which often appeared as a maimed animal. One example included the «three-footed horse», which wandered under the light of a moon and «if it meet[s] any person it blows upon him and kills him». Travelers were further warned to avoid lunar rays and remain in darkness to avoid calamity[30]. It is possible that this perspective stemmed from the fact that the light of a full moon was viewed as an obstacle to marronage and rebellion, and there are several examples of enslaved people coordinating their rebellions around the darkness of a new moon[31]. Because British authorities connected Obeah beliefs and practices to the poisoning of slaveholders, laws spread throughout the region that made its practice punishable by death[32]. Despite the dangers, Obeah and its nocturnal rituals held real benefits for African-descended people, and thus serve as an example of the 'bright side of night'. Obeah men successfully reunited people with their stolen belongings, even if its power lay in social pressure rather than transformation of the metaphysical. Perhaps more importantly, Obeah provided its practitioners with community, one that they were willing to die to maintain.

Notwithstanding crackdowns by authorities in the Caribbean that continued into the twenty-first century, Obeah and Vodou persisted and continue to be followed in the modern era. Briefly,

29. For more on the Enlightenment's racialization of the zombie (such as in Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*), see Sarah Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2015, 36.

30. «Folklore of the Negroes of Jamaica», *Folklore*, 15/1 (1904), 89-91.

31. For an example of enslaved people planning a rebellion around the phases of the moon, see Brett Rushforth, «The Gauolet Uprising of 1710: Maroons, Rebels, and the Informal Exchange Economy of a Caribbean Sugar Island», *William and Mary Quarterly*, 76/1 (2019), 83-84, 88, 100-3.

32. See Diana Paton, «Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery», *William and Mary Quarterly*, 69/2 (2012), 235-38.

there are three ways that these largely nocturnal practices by African-descended people reveal the 'bright side of night'. First, they were a means of generating and maintaining community in an environment meant to dehumanize people of color, and practitioners capitalized on the freedom and secrecy of the night to facilitate their place in the region. Common faith and identity have often served to unite people, and, when unable to openly embrace their religion, these marginalized groups in the Caribbean turned to the night. Second, they were a means of resistance, both ideologically and practically. African-descended people maintained a sense of uniqueness that was not defined by their slave status and gave them a sense of purpose. This resistance was especially effective as the proliferation of Obeah and Vodou defied colonial authority and enslaved people managed to kill some slaveholders through the imagined and real threat of poison. Finally, they created new cultural and religious symbols, ones that remain into the present and continue to spur conversation about the importance and relevance of this history. This demonstrates that, despite the terrors of the system of chattel slavery, a generative and creative culture developed; one that did not merely attempt to maintain the traditions of the past but succeeded in establishing new expressions for the future.

Further room offered by the night for religious expression can be seen in the small Protestant sects that flourished in the Caribbean, especially from the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. Unlike the state-sponsored Dutch Calvinism or Anglicanism, many of these groups were open to the involvement of lower-class whites and people of color – including the enslaved. Yet discrimination against other faiths remained, as when the Quaker preacher Joan Vokins (c. 1630-1690) arrived on Nevis one rainy night in 1680 and found to her dismay that most of the lodging houses were owned by «Irish Papists»[33]. Baptists, Methodists, Moravians, and Quakers relied upon nocturnal proselytization, as these were the hours

33. Joan Vokins, *God's Mighty Power Magnified: As Manifested and Revealed in His Faithful Handmaid JOAN VOKINS, who Departed this Life the 22d of the 5th Month, 1690, Having finished her Course, and kept the Faith*, London, Thomas Northcott, 1691, 39-41.

when missionaries could interact with enslaved people on plantations owing to the reduced demands of labor. Indeed, when a Moravian missionary couple on Tobago tried to hold a Sunday-morning service, one of their letters told that the enslaved people «did not come, but went to work because they work for themselves on Sundays». This forced the missionaries to shift their services to nighttime hours, and on one such occasion they reportedly had more than 200 people in attendance[34].

Both white and Black itinerant preachers would speak to large nighttime gatherings, often against the wishes of slaveholders. For example, George Liele (c. 1750-1820) moved to Jamaica after gaining freedom from slavery in Georgia and served as the only Baptist minister on the island. His sermons were given to a majority-Black congregation of several hundred people, twice on Sunday and twice on a weekday evening after the day's work[35]. A key benefit gained from this proselytization by African-descended people was literacy. Missionaries intended this training in reading and writing to help enslaved people learn the Bible, but the students took advantage of education to explore ways of self-advocacy, navigation of society, and even the organization of rebellion. It also gave enslaved people a chance to interact with each other socially away from the watchful eyes of masters and drivers.

One final example of religious freedom offered by nocturnality can be seen in the experience of Sephardic Jews in the Caribbean. The night plays an important role in Jewish tradition, and some of their most prominent religious holidays revolve around nocturnal rites, such as Hanukkah and Passover. Officially banned in French colonies by the *Code Noir* of 1685, Jews were some of the first European colonists in British and Dutch territory[36]. Writing about synagogues in the Anglophone world, the

34. «Account of a Visit of Br. & Sr. Montgomery on the Island of Tobago in the West Indies in Febr. March & April 1787», West Indies Papers no. 178.5, Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

35. John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register for 1790, 1791, and Part of 1793. Including Sketches of the State of Religion Among Different Denominations of Good Men at Home and Abroad*, London, Messrs. Dilly, Button, and Thomas, 1793, 333-37.

36. The first article states, «[W]e charge all our officers to evict from our Islands all the Jews who have established their residence there, to whom, as

seventeenth-century poet Daniel Levi de Barrios spoke of «six sacred lights of Israel» – four of which were in the Caribbean[37]. Other figurative and literal illumination of the night can be seen in the city of Jodensavanne in Dutch Suriname. Celebrating Purim, the town's nightlife has been described by the scholar Aviva Ben-Ur as a «carnival-like» atmosphere that involved the entire community, including Gentiles and enslaved people, and the festival was illuminated by candles, lamps, and tapers[38]. Similarly, during the town's centennial celebration in October 1785, the synagogue sponsored a feast with hundreds of different dishes served on tables lit by more than 1,000 lanterns. More than 1,600 people came, including Dutch leaders, and they partied with dancing that began at midnight and continued into the morning[39]. Given the logistics and costs of such an event, this gathering appears similar to the nocturnal parties and lighting displays typically associated with early modern nobility and royalty, and it also demonstrates that Jews were able to be a vibrant part of Caribbean society by their sponsorship of this nightlife[40]. Further

to the declared enemies of the Christian name, we order to have left within three months from the day of the publication of these present [edicts], or face confiscation of body and property». *Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu'a present*, Paris, Prault, 1767, transl. by John Garrigus, https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/1205/2016/02/code-noir.pdf.

37. Translation by Barry Stiefel, «Experimenting with Acceptance, Caribbean-Style: Jews as Aliens in the Anglophone World», in L. H. Roper (ed.), *The Torrid Zone: Caribbean Colonization and Cultural Interaction in the Long Seventeenth Century*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2018, 172. The other locations mentioned were London, England, and Madras Patân on the Indian subcontinent.

38. Aviva Ben-Ur, *Purim in the Public Eye: Leisure, Violence, and Cultural Convergence in the Dutch Atlantic*, «Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society», 20/1 (2013), 38.

39. Fred Oudschans Dentz, «Wat Er Overbleef van Het Kerkhof En de Synagoge van de Joden-Savanne in Suriname», *De West-Indische Gids*, 29 (1948), 214. Rachel Frankel adds the detail about the ball and its time, something not included in the article by Dentz. Rachel Frankel, «Antecedents and Remnants of Joensavanne: The Synagogues and Cemeteries of the First Permanent Plantation Settlement of New World Jews», in Paolo Bernardini and Norman Fiering (eds.), *The Jews and the Expansion of the West, 1450 to 1800*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2001, 394.

40. For more on the role of nocturnal celebrations in early modern European court life see «Princes of Darkness: the Night at Court, 1600-1750» in Koslofsky, *Evening's empire*, 91-127.

to the north in Suriname, the Jewish population in the city of Paramaribo stood out for their patronage of a flourishing social scene that valued the arts. This is evidenced by their enjoyment of concerts, by the growth of acting groups in the community, and by their building the second theater in the entirety of the Dutch Caribbean[41]. Although these activities were often segregated from their Christian neighbors, the fact that they could openly enjoy such nightlife marked the uniqueness of this space in the region. And when we consider the relative freedom of religion that was available to Jews in conjunction with examples of Obeah, Vodou, and Protestant sects, the positive aspects of nocturnality for minority populations in the Caribbean are clear.

Sugar Production: Transforming Labor's Darkness

The final component of the 'bright side of night' in the Caribbean takes a bit of a dark turn by considering the production of sugar. The plantation economy of the Caribbean grew goods for European consumers including coffee, indigo, and tobacco, but sugar drove the entire system and created the greatest profits[42]. Enslaved people planted, cultivated, harvested, and began the process of refining sugarcane in the colonies, one that was completed in European factories that were located in cities such as Amsterdam, Bristol, and Liverpool. Sugar plantations were viewed as being so valuable that the Dutch Republic believed it won the 'trade' with England during the Third Anglo-

41. There are several advertisements in the city's newspaper for concerts at the Jewish theater in the late 1780s. See, *De Surinaamsche nieuwsvertelder* (Paramaribo, Surinam), June 19, 26; September 25; October 23, November 13, 20, 1788; February 19, March 5, 1789, *Caribbean Newspapers*. The theater was probably built in the late 1770s or early 1780s, fairly soon after the *Hollandsche schouwburg,* an establishment which banned Jews and people of color from attending. See Julien Wolbers, *Geschiedenis van Suriname*, H. de Hoogh, 1861, 316–17.

42. For more on sugar's importance in the early modern economy as well as its relation to slavery, see Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Penguin, New York, 1985; David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000, especially chap. 8, 193–223.

Dutch War, which saw them gain Suriname at the expense of New Amsterdam[43]. Saint-Domingue became known as France's «Pearl of the Antilles», and the wealth generated by its sugar helped keep the French war machine afloat despite its being stretched across multiple fronts[44]. In the colonies sugar sometimes functioned as currency, with transactions and government fines based upon various weights of sugar[45]. Because of the centrality of sugar to the Caribbean story, it is necessary to discuss its place in the night.

Thanks in part to the regular climate, harvesting sugarcane could occur throughout the year – although it was usually limited to about six months at a time – and planters figured out how to maintain a fairly constant crop rotation to ensure that profits and production were regular and not confined to a short growing season. For a study of the night, it is significant that time pressure shaped the harvest process: once the sugarcane was cut, the sweet juice inside would turn rancid in a few hours, especially in the hot and humid conditions that were necessary for its growth. To stop this process there were several steps. First, the juice needed to be isolated from the woody stalks. This was done via the use of roller mills powered by animals, people, or water that crushed the cane for maximal extraction. Second, the raw product needed to be placed in large boiling cauldrons, a process which ended the rotting process and allowed the resultant syrup to be cooled and then placed in large barrels to be shipped to Europe for further refining[46].

Because of the time pressure created by the deterioration process, workers were forced to labor throughout the night to

43. L. H. Roper, «The Fall of New Netherland and Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Imperial Formation, 1654-1676», *The New England Quarterly*, 87/4 (2014), 672.

44. An overview of the French sugar industry centered in Saint-Domingue can be seen in Robert Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

45. For example, in Montserrat the unwarranted firing of a gun «after Eight of the Clock at Night» was legally punishable by a fine of 20, 30, or even 300 pounds of sugar, depending upon one's authority. *Montserrat Code of Laws: From 1668, to 1788*, London, Printed by Robert Hindmarsh for J. Anderson, 1790, 25-26, 95.

46. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 47-50.

keep the entire crop from being lost, and sources regularly describe how the boiler fires were maintained day and night[47]. This was dangerous, hot, and grueling work. Additionally, the enslaved people who performed this work usually did so after a full day of labor, which further fatigued them and made them susceptible to job-related injuries. William Dickson, an English abolitionist of the late eighteenth century, wrote of enslaved laborers during harvesttime that «they have but four hours sleep out of the twenty-four. They work in the field all day, then boil sugar at night»[48]. Building upon this, the French priest Jean-Baptiste Labat described how enslaved women in the early eighteenth century worked the roller mills in Martinique, saying that «[e]xhausted with the day's work and sleepiness, they fall asleep while pushing the canes, and leaning over the workbench while still holding the canes, they involuntarily follow them and are crushed before they can be rescued»[49]. According to contempo-

47. The eighteenth-century writer Thomas Tryon described the process of sugar refining as well as the length of the harvest season, saying, «the Labour [is] so constant, that Servants night and day stand in great Boyling Houses, where there are Six or Seven large Coppers or Furnaces kept perpetually Boyling; and from which with heavy Ladles and Scummers, they Skim off the excrementitious parts of the Canes, till it comes to its perfection and cleanness while others, as Stoakers, Broil as it were alive, in manageing the Fires; and one part is constantly at the Mill, to supply it with Canes, night and day, during the whole Season of making Sugar, which is about Six Months in the year». Thomas Tryon, *Tryon's Letters, Domestick and Foreign, to Several Persons of Quality, Occasionally Distributed in Subjects, Viz. Philosophical, Theological, and Moral*, London, Printed for George Conyers and Elizabeth Harris, 1700, 201-2.

48. William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery, by William Dickson, Formerly Private Secretary to the Late Hon. Edward Hay, Governor of Barbadoes. To Which are Added, Addresses to the Whites, and to the Free Negroes of Barbadoes; and Accounts of Some Negroes Eminent for their Virtues and Abilities*, London, J. Phillips, 1789.

49. «quand accablées du travail de la journée & du sommeil, ells s'endorment en poussant les Cannes, & se penchant sur l'établi elle suivent involontairement les Cannes qu'elles tiennent en leurs mains, ells se trouvent prises & écrasées avant qu'on puisse les secourir». Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amérique, contenant l'histoire naturelle de ces pays, l'origine, les moeurs, la religion & le gouvernement des habitans anciens & modernes. Les guerres & les événemens singuliers qui y sont arrivez pendant le long séjour que l'auteur y a fait*, III, Paris, Chez Pierre-François Giffart, 1722, 205-6.

raries, the only way to save such victims from being crushed to death was by amputating the affected limb, and sometimes would-be rescuers would be also dragged to their demise[50]. Defenders of slavery such as Hector Macneill argued that such work was no more difficult than that seen in Europe, and tried to argue that «every person takes his *spell* or watch in the boiling house or mill one night in three», and confusingly continued that «no Negro is compelled to labour after it is dark», despite going on to describe the music that accompanied such nocturnal work[51]. Little evidence of such amelioration exists, and it is clear that plantation owners took few safety precautions for the welfare of these workers. The fact that harvesttime lasted for months at a time indicates that perpetual exhaustion from diurnal and nocturnal labor, as well as the injuries that resulted from this work, would have been normal for the men and women who processed the sugarcane.

Providing light for the refining process by means of artificial illumination, that is, literally making sugar production 'bright', lagged behind the needs of the workers. Many boiling houses, especially in early iterations where the boiler fires were inside the building, were filled with the «smoaky sugars boil» that made it difficult to see[52]. Some of this was due to the fuel used to power the lamps, such as from the «Oil-Nut Tree» (referred to today as castor oil), which was derived from a pounding, boiling, and skimming process[53]. The infamous Jamaican chronicler

50. Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001, 50-51.

51. Hector Macneill, *Observations on the Treatment of the Negroes, in the Island of Jamaica, Including Some Account of their Temper and Character, with Remarks on the Importation of Slaves from the Coast of Africa*, London, Printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1788, 5-6. Regarding the music he says, «During the whole night, labour is accompanied by song. The young girls, in particular, sing in parts, and as a good ear and an African are inseparable; to the lover of music and humanity, their music is a double feast. Often have I enjoyed it at the expence of rest; and often has it smooth my pillow, and lulled me into slumbers».

52. *Jamaica, a Poem in Three Parts. Written in that Island, in the Year MDCCLXXVI. To Which is Annexed, A Poetical Epistle from the Author in that Island to a Friend in England*, London, Printed for William Nicholl, 1776, 32.

53. Patrick Browne, *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica. In Three Parts*, London, Printed by T. Osborne and J. Shipton, 1756, 350.

Edward Long referred to at least three different plants on the island that were processed by locals as lamp fuel, in addition to lamp oil imported from North America and Europe[54]. In comparison with older technology, the invention of the Argand lamp in the 1780s and its rapid proliferation in the Americas helped to provide more illumination inside mills and boiler houses. Nevertheless, based upon an early-nineteenth-century text from Thomas Roughley, a Jamaican planter, the lamps that were hung inside production facilities before 1800 were dim, with many of them only providing a single flame to illuminate the entire space, and he proposed using newer and brighter lights hung high in the center of the boiling house[55]. Jeremy Zallen demonstrates that these lamps were fueled largely by spermaceti or whale oil imported from the North Atlantic, for the Caribbean served as New England's largest customer base. He argues that «the boiling-house lamps of the West Indies were ruling-class instruments of power and death», and the evidence seen above of their use in sugar production bears this out, for the lamps helped facilitate the continuous production of wealth for sugar plantation owners and also served to weakly light the mills where enslaved people died as they worked[56]. Despite technological improvements there still existed a significant lack of light in mills and boiling houses, and they remained dangerous places for laborers.

This grim example of nocturnal sugar production makes it difficult to see the 'bright side of night' until we place it within a broader historiographical perspective, one that puts the Caribbean in a place of central importance, just as it was in the

54. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island: With Reflections On Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, vol. 1-3, London, T. Lownudes, 1774. He refers to Gum-Tree *Sapium* (168, 728), Nhandiroba (also called *acaricobo, ambuyaembo*, and *caapeba*) (419), Lamp Oil (541, 551), and *Fevillea* (718).

55. Thomas Roughley, *The Jamaica Planter's Guide; or, A System for Planting and Managing a Sugar Estate, or Other Plantations in that island, and throughout the British West Indies in General. Illustrated with Interesting Anecdotes*, London, Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823, 199-200.

56. Jeremy Zallen, *American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light, 1750-1865*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2019, 18, 28.

early modern economy. Eric Williams, the twentieth-century Trinidadian historian, postulated that the plantation system of the early modern Caribbean financed the Industrial Revolution that took over western Europe in the nineteenth century, and that it may also have served as a model for its successor[57]. If we focus just on the use of nocturnal labor, this influence seems plausible. Factory owners in Europe realized that their main capital investments – the buildings and the machinery – could work both day and night. Thus, hiring (rather than owning) a nocturnal work force that kept production going continuously would optimize their profits. Indeed, Karl Marx argued that «[t]o appropriate labour during all the 24 hours of the day is, therefore, the inherent tendency of capitalist production», and he decried what he called the «vampire thirst for the living blood of labor»[58]. If we consider the consistent application of nocturnal labor as necessary for industry and capitalism, then the example of the Caribbean sugar industry should be at the forefront of our conversations on the development of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. This helps move us from a historiographical conversation that is primarily Eurocentric and modern and pushes us to consider the history of capitalism in a global and pre-modern context[59]. Additionally, this shift offers considerable opportunities for historians to explore the intersections between colonialism and the night.

57. See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1994, especially ix, 169-77, 190-91. Williams further argues that one of the primary motivations for the abolition of slavery was the realization that it was more profitable to hire cheap labor – which did not need to be clothed, fed, or housed – than to own slaves.

58. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique Analysis of Capitalist Production*, I, trans. Samuel Moore, Edward Aveling and Swan Sonnenschein, London, Lowrey, & Co., 1887, 241.

59. For more conversation on this topic, see Jean Batou, «From Plantation to Plant: Slavery, the Slave Trade, and the Industrial Revolution», in Peter Reill and Balázs Szelényi (eds.), *Cores, Peripheries, and Globalization: Essays in Honor of Ivan T. Berend*, New York, Central European Press, 2011, 43-62; and Hilary Beckles, «Capitalism and Slavery: The Debate over Eric Williams», *Social and Economic Studies*, 33/4 (1984), 171-89.

Conclusion

These two sections on nocturnal freedom and sugar production have provided a brief glimpse into the rich subject matter available when studying the role of the night in the early modern Caribbean. And as the existence of the conference that prompted this chapter indicates, there is a growth of exciting scholarship on this subject that is not constrained by an era or a place. There is much more that could be discussed regarding the positives of nightlife in the Caribbean, ranging from nocturnal smuggling between islands and the coastlines of the Americas, to the benefits of nighttime travel in and out of ports in the Lesser Antilles, to the opportunities for social equality offered by attending the theater in Martinique and Saint-Domingue. However, given the role of colonialism and race-based chattel slavery in the region, it is impossible to avoid conversations about freedom and order, and the reality of the way they were often in conflict. Yet, as we look for the positives, we can see that the night provided people on the margins with unique opportunities often not afforded during the day: time to develop relationships with small and large communities, occasions for learning and self-emancipation, and space to foster the creation of new cultures and expressions. Put into dialogue with each other and with the historiography, they allow us to see the 'bright side of night'.

ABSTRACT

Adrian van der Velde, *Freedom, Faith, and Fortune: Nocturnality's Opportunities in the Early Modern Caribbean*

Via a focus on nocturnality, this article considers the opportunities afforded to marginalized populations of the long-eighteenth century in the Caribbean territories of Britain, the Dutch Republic, and France. While acknowledging the violence inherent to colonialism, this analysis uncovers two positive aspects of the night in the Caribbean. First, it reveals how the night became a realm of physical and metaphorical freedom, especially for enslaved people and ethnic and religious minorities. It shows how enslaved Africans and their descendants liberated themselves via nocturnal self-emancipation. It also considers the possibilities of nighttime religious expression for Jews, Christian sects, and enslaved people. Second, it centers the colonial Caribbean in historiographical conversations about the Industrial Revolution and capitalism by examining nocturnal sugar production. Sugar processing necessitated 24-hour labor, and this not only led to great wealth for the metropole, but it also provided a model for around-the-clock work that could be exploited by factory owners. Using print sources such as newspapers and popular books, as well as archival sources, this article demonstrates the interconnected nature of the early modern world.

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