

Slave revolt in the West Indies, 1733

Introduction

The prevalence of slavery in pre-Revolutionary America made actual and threatened slave uprisings of intense interest throughout the British colonies in North America. The West Indies, or Caribbean islands, where slavery predominated, were vitally important to commerce and trade in the colonies, and slave revolts there were particularly newsworthy. In this issue of the *New-York Weekly Journal*, dated March 11, 1733[4],* editor John Peter Zenger printed a sloop captain's report on a slave takeover of the Danish island of St. John in November 1733.

A group of slaves, the captain reported, "kill'd all the Men and aged Women, that they could lay their Hands on, and debauched the young Women, and that they kept Possession of the Island and Fort for 8 Days." He also claimed that the revolt had been put down after "a number of Whites and Negroes from St. Thomas's . . . attack'd the Fort, which they took after a stout Resistance." However, fighting continued on St. John until 1734, when English and French forces ended the uprising.

* Zenger mistakenly continued to print 1733 on his masthead after the year changed. He began printing the newspaper in November 1733.

Excerpt

BOSTON, January 12.

Friday Night last a Sloop from St. *Anguilla*, came to Anchor in *Nantasket Road*, the Master of which informs us, that on the 10th Day of *December* last, there was the most violent storm at *Statia*, St. *Martins* and *Anguilla*, that has been known in Memory of Man. . . . The said Master further informs us, that while he lay at *Anguilla* a Bermudas Sloop arrived there from St. *John's*, the Master of which informed him, that the Number of Whites destroyed by the Negroes of that Island did not exceed 60, some having found Means to escape their Fury. That they kill'd all the Men and aged Women, that they could lay their Hands on, and debauched the young Women, and that they kept Possession of the Island and Fort for 8 Days, when a Number of Whites and Negroes came from St. *Thomas's* and attack'd the Fort, which they took after a stout Resistance; and among the rest, had the good Luck to take the Ringleader or Captain of the Black Gentry, whom they flea'd alive, and tortured several others of them to Death. Upon this Defeat, most of the Negroes that were scattered about upon the Island, took all the Canoes and other

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small Craft they could find, and quitted the Place, and 'tis thought they are gone to Cape *Fransway*, &c. This Rising of the Negroes at St. John's, has so alarmed our Islands, that they keep 30 or 40 Men every Night upon the Watch upon each Island, to prevent a Surprize. 'Tis further said, that all the Islands in the West Indies are under Apprehensions of a War. . . .

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, view the image of the original story from the *New-York Weekly Journal*, and read the excerpt. Then apply your knowledge of American history as well as evidence from the article to answer the questions that follow.

1. Why did the editor of the *New-York Weekly Journal* consider this story of significant interest to his readers?
2. How did news of this event reach New York? Do you believe this report is reliable? Why or why not?
3. As a result of the events described in the newspaper article:
 - What happened to the leaders of the rebellion?
 - What steps were taken to prevent a recurrence of this rebellion?

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Image

now it is reported that some Thousand of Spaniards are landed at *Villa Franca*.

BOSTON, January 12.
 Friday Night last a Sloop from *St. Anguilla*, came to Anchor in *Nantasket Road*, the Master of which informs us, that on the 10th Day of *December* last, there was the most violent storm at *Statia*, *St. Martins* and *Anguilla*, that has been known in Memory of Man, in which 2 French Sloops were lost at *Statia*, one of which had on board 180 Casks of Molasses, and that 4 Men belonging to the Sloops Perished at the same Time. That a Scooner bound from *St. Kitt's* to *Anguilla* was overset, and all Men lost but the Master and a Negro Boy, who lay upon the Hatches afloat on the Sea till the next Day, when a Vessel hapened to come that way and took them up. That the Sloop now at *Nantasket* left her Bolt-sprit, her Jibb, and was forced from her Anchors at *Anguilla* out to Sea, but returned again after the Storm, and had the good Fortune to take up her Anchors. The said Master further informs us, that while he lay at *Anguilla* a Bermudas Sloop arrived there from *St. John's*, the Master of which informed him, that the Number of Whites destroyed by the Negroes of that Island did not exceed 60, some having found Means to escape their Fury. That they kill'd all the Men and aged Women, that they could lay their Hands on, and debauched the young Women, and that they kept Possession of the Island and Fort for 8 Days, when a Number of Whites and Negroes came from *St. Thomas's* and attack'd the Fort, which they took after a stout Resistance; and among the rest, had the good Luck to take the Ringleader or Captain of the Black Gentry, whom they flead alive, and tortured several others of them to Death. Upon this Defeat, most of the Negroes that were scattered about upon the Island, took all the Canoes and other small Craft they could find, and quitted the Place, and 'tis thought they are gone to *Cape Fransway*, &c. This Rising of the Negroes at *St. John's*, has so alarmed our Islands, that they keep 30 or 40 Men every Night upon the Watch upon each Island, to prevent a Surprize. 'Tis further said, that all the Islands in the West Indies are under Apprehensions of a War.

October 14. We have Advice from *Cassel*, the Court of the Regency of that Landgraviate, that a Treaty is said to be negotiating with this Court for a Marriage between Prince *Frederick* of *Hesse Cassel*, presumptive Heir of the King of Sweden's Dominions in Germany (that Monarch being near threescore years old and having no Issue) and her Royal Highness the Princess *Caroline*, his Highness being one of the most hopeful Princes in Germany, and an exceeding fine Gentleman.

We hear from *Barbadoes* by a Vessel arrived at *Marblehead* from thence in 17 Days Passage, that a Day or two before he left that Island, a Ship arrived from *London* in 26 Days or thereabout, with an Account of a Meditation between France and the Emperor.

New-York, March 11.
 Last Week arrived here *Capt. Stephen Burris*, from *Bermudas*, who gives an Account that a large new Sloop arrived there from the French Islands, loaded with Sugars, &c. In Order to pay for her, as they supposed, for she was built there, the Master is an Englishman. A French Gentleman who was Commander formerly of one of the French King's Ships, came as a Passenger with the said Sloop. They carried her into a Harbour in the Country, where they rebuilt her, in order for a Privateer, as was suspected by the People. It was observed that the said French Gentleman from Time to Time took a Survey of the Island, Harbours, &c. And likewise, that he offer'd to buy several Bermudas Negroes, who were counted the best Pilots in the Island then.

The Governour being informed of this, called a Council & presently after, the Collector went and seiz'd the said Sloop, and ordered her into the Harbour: An Eminent Merchant their offer'd to be Security for the Sloop, to have her forth coming, Provided, they would let her be finish'd, which was refused, and she was brought into the Road, and stript of her Sails and Rigging, the said French Gentleman is now kept upon the Island.

Mr. Zenger, please to put this in your Journal, so soon you can.

We been read your Journal, and Mr. *Ersford's Gazette*; we find nothing, but the quarrel with them. That's true, I believe the quarrel will be good for the Country. But we tink no Time for quarrel now. You no hear how the Frans make Preparations? You tink no Time for we to make Preparations? The People all one Sleep in this Town. You hear one say no War yet; another say the Frans King will want his Ships for better employ, than to lend them here. The third say, we have great deal Man in this Country, no fear for the Frans. Pegg, that is one fine Story. Suppose the Frans come on a surprize? Then

John P. Zenger, *New-York Weekly Journal* [Vol. 932, no. 19], March 11, 1733[4], page 3. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08724)