

Orisha Worship and “Jesus Time”: Rethinking African Religious Conversion in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean

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On a February afternoon in 1994, in the village of Caratal in south-central Trinidad, a seventy-eight year old woman—the great granddaughter of nineteenth-century free African immigrants—used the phrase “Jesus’ time” to explain her own devotion to Christian Pentecostalism rather than the African-derived orisha worship brought to the Caribbean by her forebears, and continued by many of her neighbors to the present day. Irene Joseph seemed to argue that, at least for her, the time of African religious beliefs had passed. In earlier years, she had in fact pursued Trinidad’s African-derived religion, sometimes called “Shango,” but in more recent times also widely referred to as “orisha worship.”¹ Joseph would later explain that, as an older woman, she had met a Pentecostal minister and some of his followers during a stay in hospital. Having had a poor prognosis from her medical doctors, she became convinced that the prayers of this minister had restored her health. Thus she had converted to his particular religious group.² She still remembered well the various “Shango” or “orisha” beliefs and practices and did not speak of them with any regret or criticism. Despite what official Pentecostal doctrine might teach, Joseph gave no hint that she viewed her former African-derived religion as either heathen or in any way bad. At most, she seem to imply on occasion that the orisha worship might have less power than her new-found faith—at least in the late twentieth century! But on the whole, Joseph seemed to interpret her conversion to Pentecostalism as a kind of linear move from one form of religious or supernatural practice to another, neither condemning that which she claimed to have left behind nor over valorizing that which she newly embraced.

Nonetheless, ideas of African cultural nationalism or folkloric preservation would still seem to suggest that Irene Joseph’s conversion represents some kind of loss. In both academic and popular discourse African-derived religions have long served as favored examples of African cultural resistance in the face of European hegemony in the New World. The Shango or orisha worship of Trinidad has often received particular attention, being the only example of such a ritually structured African-based religion in the English-speaking Caribbean. Historians usually cite two factors as explaining this anomaly. First, at the end of the eighteenth century, Trinidad received significant numbers of French planters and slaves through the dispersion prompted by the Haitian revolution. These slaves from Saint Domingue no doubt brought with them many of the vodun religious practices well documented in that colony from

the earliest days of slave plantation society. Second, during the mid nineteenth century, Trinidad also received some eight thousand free African immigrants. Under slave trade suppression, the British Royal Navy rescued approximately one hundred thousand such people from illegally operating slave ships. Various British policies settled thirty to forty thousand of those rescued in diverse West Indian possessions largely as indentured laborers. These liberated Africans, despite facing economic and social constraints as an indentured working class, did not face the restrictions of slavery. Thus, historians have argued, they had a unique opportunity to pursue the religious beliefs brought with them from Africa.³

With this history in mind, Irene Joseph's adoption of Pentecostalism—possibly the smallest of all Christian groups in Trinidad—becomes yet another interesting turn in a unique African-American religious journey begun by her African immigrant ancestors. More than this, however, Joseph's experience provides a paradigm for re-examining the very different religious paths of Africans and their descendants in the New World. Many Africans, including thousands of the nineteenth-century free immigrants, arrived at "Jesus' time" long before the late twentieth century. The introduction of Christianity to slave communities has seen much scrutiny by historians. So too have the various slave continuations of African religious practices and beliefs. The case of the liberated Africans, however, poses a somewhat different challenge. Following the logic implied by the Trinidad experience of orisha worship, one might surmise that a majority of liberated Africans throughout the British Caribbean would likewise pursue organized African-oriented religion. Virtually all of them certainly had sufficient (albeit not complete) freedom of movement and assembly to do so. Yet in so many cases they did not. While Irene Joseph's forbears venerated Yoruba spirits in the hills of south-central Trinidad, liberated Africans in the Bahamas became active Baptists and Methodists with reputedly great fervor. Most likely, no single factor will explain this stark contrast in the religious experience of the liberated Africans—Africans who arrived in the Caribbean not only under similar circumstances but also with a similar distribution of African ethnic backgrounds. But a comparison of such parallel but very different religious communities holds the potential for distilling those factors of greater and lesser weight in the shaping of religious experience, not only for these free Africans but also for the wider consideration of the African diaspora as a whole.

Such a study first requires some understanding of the overall nature of the African-European religious encounter in the Caribbean. During the years of intensive slavery and colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries few people would have characterized the region as a particularly religious environment. Quite the contrary, white residents received repeated and well-deserved criticism for their neglect of their own spiritual lives and the spiritual

lives of their slaves. That criticism applied almost equally well to Spanish, French, and British possessions. As societies focused almost exclusively on the generation of wealth through slave-based agriculture, the islands saw few early attempts to construct church communities, even where tradition, propriety, or other motivations did lead to the construction of some church buildings. Furthermore, for the most part, white populations in the Caribbean did not experience major periods of Christian revivalism comparable to those which took place in North America. Given these circumstances, it seems at some level remarkable that early African-Caribbean populations developed the intensive religious communities which they did. While obvious factors precluded the reproduction of African religious systems, the supposedly dominant European religion held a marginal status at best. Why then did slaves or nineteenth-century liberated African immigrants pay attention to Christianity at all?

In answering this question, it is important to note that even the African-derived religions such as Trinidad's orisha worship entailed the incorporation of Christian elements. Two key factors contributed to the influence of Christianity among African-Caribbean populations. Ironically, one aspect of Christianity's appeal lay precisely in the marginality of the religion among the dominant white slaveholders. Many ministers, priests, and missionaries appeared to slaves and free blacks as unusual white allies in a society otherwise governed by unremitting European exploitation of people of African descent. While conversion to Christianity rarely led to any immediate material benefit—and for slaves could sometimes lead to punishment—it is logical that slaves or liberated Africans would have at least listened to the religious beliefs presented by the only Europeans who appeared to have the interests of non-white people at heart. Second, but perhaps more importantly, the Africans who entered the Caribbean came from societies in which religious systems and supernatural beliefs had a prominent and pervasive presence. In the precolonial cultures of West and Central Africa there did not exist a formal conceptual distinction between religious and secular matters. People understood all spheres of human activity as having some spiritual or supernatural dimension. Success or failure in agriculture, in war, or in anyother aspect of life, was considered related to the influence of supernatural forces with whom people interacted through their religious systems. Therefore, for Africans who found themselves in the Caribbean, the religion of their very powerful captors and enslavers would have clearly seemed worthy of investigation and even adoption. Furthermore, even beyond such a pragmatic or mercenary perspective, Africans transported to the Caribbean from such profoundly and profusely religious societies inevitably sought to build new religious lives relevant to their new environment. Thus began the diverse religious journeys which form the subject of this essay.

In the study of African-American cultural history no single subject has received greater attention than the question of religious development. Scholars have explored at length both the African-derived religions such as Brazil's candomblé, Cuba's santería and Haiti's vodun, as well as the influence of African antecedents on the numerous varieties of African-American Christianity. In many cases these two religious patterns have received separate treatment. That is, the African-derived religions have occupied one sphere of inquiry, while African-American Christianity has occupied another. The roots of this division, to a large extent, lie in the geographic distribution of the different religious practices. Well-organized (or ritually structured) African-derived religions have occurred, and continue to occur, for the most part in regions settled by the Roman Catholic countries of France, Spain and Portugal. Meanwhile, uniquely African-influenced forms of Christianity have seen greatest prominence in the English-speaking and largely Protestant territories of the United States and the formerly British Caribbean. Thus, Alfred Métraux's classic, *Voodoo in Haiti* (1959) and Leslie Desmangle's more recent work *The Faces of the Gods* (1992) have explored the unique interaction of Fon and Yoruba cosmologies with Roman Catholicism to form Haitian vodun. Likewise, scholars such as Roger Bastide—*African Religions in Brazil*—and Joseph Murphy—*Santería* (1988)—have pursued similar explorations for Brazil and Cuba respectively. On the other hand, the Protestant conversion of slaves in the British West Indies and in North America has perhaps received somewhat lesser attention as the focus of exclusive studies. But these matters have of course formed a central place in all broader studies of slave society and culture in these areas. Works such as John Blassingame's *The Slave Community* (1972) for the United States and Elsa Goveia's *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands* (1965) have demonstrated how the Christianity promulgated by Protestant missionaries came to provide slaves with an important sphere in which to develop community values in many ways apart from the society which enslaved them. These and other studies have also pointed out the ways in which African traditions of religious singing and dancing, and perhaps most notably spirit possession, became integral parts of the newly forming African-American Christianity. Other historians such as Mary Turner—*Slaves and Missionaries* (1982)—and most recently Emilia daCosta—*Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood* (1993)—have explored the spiritual and organizational role which missionary Christianity came to play in slave resistance in Jamaica, British Guiana, and elsewhere. Also worthy of note, Mechal Sobel's *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (1988) broke critical ground in arguing that the Baptist faith, in particular, provided a unique terrain for the incorporation by slaves of West and Central African understandings of the supernatural world.

For the most part, however, these branches of scholarship have existed as two halves of the same coin with relatively little comparison between the two. Most studies acknowledge the differences in religious developments across the African diaspora, but do not engage those differences as a central concern. All the same, several propositions have emerged as key explanations for the religious variety. In *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (1978), Albert Raboteau directly addresses the contrast between the so-called obvious African influences in Haiti, Cuba and Brazil, and the apparent dominance of Christianity in the southern United States. Raboteau places his emphasis on two factors, one ecclesiastical (or even theological) and the other demographic. Like many other historians and anthropologists, Raboteau points out the congruence between the Roman Catholic concept of saints and various West African concepts of multiple spirit beings beneath a high god. (This particular phenomenon has received great attention as the epitome of syncretism with candomble, vodun and santería all venerating spirits which devotees simultaneously identify both as saints with Christian names such as Michael or Mary and as orisha with African names such as Ogun or Yemanjá.) Protestant Christianity, particularly the experiential—as opposed to ritual—variety preached by dissenting missionaries offered no such cognitive or practical niche for the continued veneration by slaves of African spirits.⁴

Raboteau focuses secondly on the unique demography of the United States slave population. Unlike other New World slave societies which relied upon new shipments from Africa for their continued labor supply, the U.S. slave population became a self-reproducing one, replenishing itself by the birth of slave children more so than by new African arrivals. By the late eighteenth century, African-born slaves constituted a minority, and after the abolition of the legal slave trade in 1808, such people gradually became a rarity, despite illegal imports. Thus, scholars argue, U.S. slave society did not provide the opportunity for the maintenance (or invigoration) of African religious knowledge by continually arriving immigrants.

While Raboteau presents these concerns as a part of a work otherwise focused on the United States, anthropologist Roger Bastide, in a study now thirty years old, has offered one of the few systematic attempts to explore such religious comparisons across the Americas and the Caribbean: *African Civilizations in the New World* (1967). One might challenge Bastide's work as pursuing excessive rigidity in its attempt to divide societies according to greater or lesser degrees of obvious African influence. But even if one discards the specific categorizations, this text successfully delineates the wide range of factors which have affected both religious and other differences between African diaspora communities. Like most historians of comparative slavery, Bastide cites the possible differences created by different European colonizers. More specifically, he proposes a distinction between Northern Europeans, meaning

the British and Dutch, and Southern Europeans, meaning the French, Spanish and Portuguese. This distinction of course parallels the Roman Catholic versus Protestant distinction already discussed above. And indeed, Bastide pre-dates Raboteau in addressing this division.

Bastide also cites the uniqueness of the United States with its high percentage of American-born slaves. He further points to additional demographic factors such as the number of slaves held on individual plantations and the ratios between Europeans and Africans in the population as a whole. One presumes, for example, that hundreds of slaves housed on the same plantation had greater community-building opportunities than slaves held in units of ten, twenty or even fewer. Bastide also notes the potential impact of particular concentrations of specific African ethnicities. That is, a significant number of people of the same ethnic origin would likely have an easier time of maintaining their own religious ideas, and even spreading them to people of other ethnicities represented in smaller numbers. This subject has received considerable attention with respect to the influence of Akan-Asante peoples who numerically dominated the trade to the English-speaking Caribbean during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.⁵ In addition to this question of ethnic concentrations, there also exists the possibility that certain African ethnic groups possessed religious systems which, through structure or doctrine, proved more amenable to a reorganized existence in the New World. Thus, for example, in a given New World community, even if Yoruba did not predominate numerically, their religious notions might. Scholars have long noted that specifically Yoruba and Fon beliefs provided the foundation for all of the major African-derived religions in diaspora. All the same, ethnicity alone never proved sufficient to dictate particular religious developments. The present essay attempts to discern which *combination* of factors did prove sufficient to shape such determinations.

In addition, the experience of the liberated Africans also provides an opportunity to challenge the divergence which exists between the understanding of African-derived religions on the one hand, and African-American (or African-influenced) Christianity on the other. At its most extreme, this divergence implies a framework of conceptual opposites: African cultural resistance exemplified, for example, by vodun or candomble, versus European cultural dominance, exemplified by widespread Protestant conversion. Few historians or anthropologists subscribe to such an absolute interpretation. This view perhaps remains the province of the most radical among African diaspora cultural nationalists.⁶ Nonetheless, much academic analysis still falls prey to a more nuanced version of this dichotomy. African-derived religions have come to represent the occurrence of greater African assertion, while African-influenced Christianity represents the occurrence of lesser. In other words, scholars imply, in varying degrees, that African-influenced Christianity marked a greater European victory in the admittedly two-way acculturation process.

Not surprisingly, the language of Protestant missionary discourse tends to reinforce this perspective. That is, the logic of so-called conversion presupposes knowledge and power on the part of the converter with ignorance and subordination on the part of the converted. Describing a bedside meeting with a free African immigrant, Methodist missionary John Brownell lamented: "Found him near death & as ignorant of God . . . He knew not that he had a soul much less any proper idea of a future state . . . said I to myself on leaving his hut, 'hath no man cared, thy soul to save!'"⁷ Such a declaration leaves little opening for African agency or even input in the proposed conversion process. Quite the contrary, Brownell and most of his colleagues viewed their project as taking Christianity to the heathen. And even as historians have explored the ways in which Africans and their descendants reshaped that Christianity, the idea of an imposed religion has continued to raise the specter of a kind of authenticity deficit. Although both orisha worship and African-influenced Christianity contain a mix of European and African elements, the orisha practice has a more obviously African-weighted balance. From this fact arise two related assumptions: first, that given the opportunity, Africans in diaspora would choose the orisha worship over Christian practices; and second, that those who pursued Christianity did so mostly because of duress (or at least the lack of an opportunity to do otherwise). However, the comparative experience of parallel liberated African communities in the Bahamas and Trinidad directly calls into question both of these assumptions. While the Trinidad community followed elaborate orisha practices, the Bahamian community became African-Christian Protestants.

These two free African communities had several characteristics which make them ideal for such an exploration. Perhaps most importantly, in both colonies the liberated Africans did exercise much greater volition and control than their slave predecessors. Ordinances did remain prohibiting non-Christian religious activity, but as free people, usually living away from their places of employment, the free African immigrants had substantial opportunities to circumvent such prohibitions. Secondly, the Bahamian and Trinidad cases provide examples for directly comparing Roman Catholic versus Protestant effects on similar populations. The Spanish held Trinidad until 1797, and although they left only a small population legacy, they did establish Roman Catholicism as the primary European faith in the island, a fact which obtains to the present day. During their tenure they put in place a small number of missionaries and churches, some of which likewise have persisted to the late twentieth century. But perhaps the greatest stimulus to Roman Catholic influence in Trinidad came with the influx of planters and slaves from the French Caribbean, both in the wake of the Haitian Revolution already mentioned above, as well as significant numbers of Francophone migrants who arrived even earlier during the 1780s. (The Cedula of Population issued by the Span-

ish crown in 1783 encouraged foreign, and particularly French, immigration as a means of transforming the island into a more profitable colony.) Indeed, historian Bridget Brereton contends that “[a]s early as 1784 . . . Trinidad had become virtually a French colony.”⁸ Many of the Francophone slaves arrived already baptized as Roman Catholics. Following the pattern typical of the Roman Catholic Caribbean, missionary presence and teaching remained minimal but at least skeletal Roman Catholic observance occurred. Even after the switch to British control in 1797, Francophone planters and their slaves remained a dominant community in both their numbers and the persistence of their faith. By contrast, the Bahamas followed a Protestant pattern more typical of British West Indian territories. The official Anglican church launched only a minor missionary effort, while dissenting Baptists and Methodists did most of the evangelizing of Africans and their descendants.

The Bahamas and Trinidad also prove model cases for re-examining African religious acculturation, because both colonies received significant numbers of Yoruba Africans—the single ethnic group whose religious pantheon and world view seems to have exercised the most dominant influence on the African-derived religions of *candomble*, *santería*, *orisha* worship, and *vodun*. Partial demographic records indicate that in both cases people of reputed Yoruba ancestry constituted at least one third of all liberated African arrivals. Furthermore, the oral history of both the Bahamas and Trinidad identify the Yoruba as the most prominent specific African ethnicity to which their forbears referred. Yet as much as Yoruba influence clearly shaped the development of Trinidad’s *orisha* practices, their ethnic counterparts in the Bahamas left no such inheritance. On the contrary, the strongest religious legacy of the Yoruba in the Bahamas lies not in any African-derived religion, but rather in the well-known claim that a group of free Yoruba immigrants founded and dominated the largest and most prominent Methodist chapel serving the African-descended community in and around the city of Nassau.⁹ Such dramatically opposite paths provide obvious ground for a re-evaluation of the particular Yoruba affect on New World religious developments.

Finally, as a special immigrant population—rescued by the British from illegal slave ships and settled in the Caribbean as a part of the ‘great free labor experiment’—liberated Africans often received peculiar attention from both missionaries and government authorities during the nineteenth century. In addition, because of their unique experience, these Africans have also held a conspicuous place in the collective memories of their respective communities. Both written and oral sources thus yield rich material on their religious journeys.

Two communities in particular provide logical sites for comparison: in the Bahamas, the settlement of Grants Town located on 400 acres less than one mile south of downtown Nassau; and in Trinidad, the collection of towns

and villages scattered in or near the south-central range known as the Montserrat Hills. Both areas served as concentrated locations of liberated African settlement.

In her study of the Yoruba in Trinidad, Warner-Lewis includes the Montserrat area villages of Caratal, Kanga Wood, Mayo, Poonah, and Tortuga as notable sites of African immigrant presence. She also includes the nearby town of Gasparillo, which several recent scholars have noted for its lasting evidences of a significant Yoruba (and other African) presence in the not-too-distant past—presumably the latter of half of the nineteenth century and first few decades of the twentieth.¹⁰ For example, in a 1969 essay J.D. Elder contends that during the 1960s, Gasparillo not only had a strong community of orisha practitioners, but also had several long resident families who identified themselves as Yoruba descendants and continued to organize their households according to Yoruba kinship patterns. In the neighboring village of Mayo, Elder also found people who self-identified as Congo descendants, as well as a Hausa group which still had limited knowledge of Arabic language, the Koran and several Arabic Muslim songs.¹¹ Based on the claims of Elders' informants as well as the ethnic patterns prevailing the nineteenth-century slave trade, it seems almost certain that the majority of these people descended from nineteenth-century liberated African immigrants rather than earlier generations of slaves.

A resident of Caratal interviewed in 1994 further confirms the impression that the Montserrat area has long served as major place of residence for free African immigrants and their descendants. Sylvia Ampson describes orisha observances during her childhood (1940s and 1950s) which would draw people from "all over the area." Twenty or thirty people formed the core participants, with as many as two or three hundred observers who ranged from fellow believers to the idle curious. When questioned about the ethnic ancestry of the central participants, Ampson responds that "all [their] parents came from Africa." (In this case, the term "parents" seems to refer to foreparents in a long term generational sense, rather than to immediate mothers or fathers.)¹² Of course, all diaspora Africans could accurately describe their ancestry in this manner. However, Ampson seems to use this theme in a more specific and immediate sense, in reference to people like herself who can trace their African origins to a specific immigrant generation of great- or great-great-grandparents. Ampson also echoes several of the patterns found thirty years ago by J.D. Elder. For example, like Elder's informants, she too suggests that Mayo has long served as a particular home for the descendants of Congo immigrants: "I think Mayo has, they still have a lot of Congo people there . . . they have some will remember . . . [They] must."¹³

In addition to this evidence which surmises backwards from the twentieth century, nineteenth-century descriptions of Montserrat also characterize

the area as having a likely concentration of liberated Africans. Liberated African settlement logically tended to cluster close to areas with significant numbers of sugar or other plantations. And the area around the Montserrat Hills certainly comprised such a region. Descriptions of this area include references to at least five major plantations (Cedar Hill, Caracas, Phillippine, Edinburgh, and Bonne Aventure) which likely represent only a fraction of the total number. Furthermore, during the late nineteenth century the Montserrat Ward in particular received repeated attention from Trinidad legislators as a haven for squatters, who included liberated Africans as well as other groups. During the late 1860s the government appointed Robert Mitchell as Montserrat Ward Commissioner. He was charged first to complete a land survey and then to attempt to devise a plan for regularizing the status of the various squatters. In March of 1868, an editorial in the *Trinidad Chronicle* reviewed and commended Mitchell's diverse efforts. Among the lengthy material covered, the editorial offered the following description of Caratal as well as other parts of the Montserrat Hills region:

The district known as Caratal and other districts are inhabited by negro-kind, from the Yaraba down to the Congo, who, though nominally Christians, live under the influence of Obeah superstition and who are, more or less, barbarous in their manners, and impatient of control.¹⁴

This description does not directly identify free African immigrants. However, during the latter half of the nineteenth century liberated Africans constituted the overwhelming majority of the African-born population. The Trinidad press of this era regularly—although not always—made distinctions between “negroes” born in Trinidad and those born in Africa. (Some writers used the term “creole” for the former while reserving “African” for the latter.) Furthermore, in most cases references to specific ethnic Africans pointed to the African-born. Thus, this portrait of Caratal and its environs strongly suggests a region dominated by liberated African immigrants.

Comparable evidence exists to similarly characterize the much smaller Bahamian neighborhood known as Grant's Town. Indeed, the government of the Bahamas had specifically developed this settlement for the location of African immigrants. Liberated Africans had begun arriving in the Bahamas as early as 1811. In the non-plantation economy, many worked in domestic or other occupations in and around the Nassau capital. Furthermore, on the very small island of New Providence, even those with agricultural employment often sought residence near the town. In two notable instances the government did establish official African settlements away from the town area—first, the village of Carmichael ten miles southwest of Nassau, and later, the

village of Adelaide much further away on the island's most southwesterly coast. The settlement of Carmichael was founded in 1824, while the less rural Grant's Town emerged a year later. According to various accounts, numbers of Africans from the Carmichael location sought to re-establish themselves closer to the capital. They thus "migrated . . . to a rocky tract of waste land located south of the town of Nassau, bordered by the Blue Hills."¹⁵ The outlying Carmichael Village did provide various public employments such as chopping trees and clearing roads, and the Africans also had access to land for subsistence cultivation. However, these pursuits apparently failed to occupy or satisfy some fraction of the residents. Perhaps they sought more lucrative employment in domestic work or trades in and around the capital. Many liberated Africans had worked at such pursuits for three to seven years after their arrival under terms of indenture. Perhaps some of these people had shipmates, friends, or other personal connections in the urban area.

Whatever the motivation, a significant group of the immigrants effectively initiated a kind of African suburb. That is, they formed a squatter community just outside the town. Apparently in response to this initiative, local authorities decided that it would be appropriate to establish a formal African settlement in such a location. Thus, in May of 1825, Charles Poitier, the Collector of Customs—officially responsible for liberated African welfare—purchased 400 acres of land at that site. Surveyor J.J. Burnside divided the parcel into quarter-acre lots, available for purchase by liberated African immigrants at a rate of ten shillings per lot, or two pounds per acre.¹⁶ So began the process of formal settlement which would continue, not only by Africans migrating from Carmichael, but also by later arrivals from newly captured slave ships through the early 1840s.

Not surprisingly, after emancipation, newly freed slaves also became a part of the Grant's Town settlement. However, both contemporary descriptions and modern oral history strongly suggest that liberated Africans—and later their descendants—remained the dominant component of the community's population. In fact, to accommodate demographic growth in the wake of emancipation, a second settlement was established immediately west of Grant's Town. This second suburb, known as Bain Town, emerged during the late 1830s.¹⁷ Evidence suggests that here too, liberated Africans played a prominent role, apparently just as they did in their foundation community next door. In an 1850 letter, a local Methodist missionary referred to these two townships as "comprehending" a single "District," a logical union when one considers the fact the towns together comprised probably less than a thousand acres. Yet even more notably, the missionary further described the area as "occupied by liberated Africans."¹⁸ This description, with no qualification, seems to portray the area as virtually the sole province of such African immigrants.

Bahamian local historian, Cleveland W. Eneas, reinforces such a portrayal in his oral history memoir entitled *Bain Town*. Eneas based this work largely on the recollections of himself, his family and his friends. He describes the original settlers of Bain Town as follows:

The majority of them were actual Yorubas from Western Nigeria, or the immediate descendants of Yorubas . . . the length of Meadows Street from Blue Hill Road to Nassau Street, was owned and inhabited by Yorubas who called themselves N'ongas.¹⁹

Eneas also recalls—through his parents and grandparents and great-grandparents—descriptions of people having reputed Congo ethnicity. These people allegedly settled an area directly south of Grant's Town and Bain Town referred to as "Contabutta."²⁰ Yet even more specifically, the Eneas family's oral genealogy explicitly traced their ancestors to a ship of liberated Africans which arrived in the Bahamas during the 1830s. The origin tale, passed down from one generation to the next, describes the arrival of a brother and sister from Africa who became the indentured servants of a British family named Eneas. And so began the story of a Yoruba-descended family with this particular English name. (In interviews conducted during 1993 and 1994, Eneas explained that, since the publication of his book, he has successfully located in the Bahamas Archives written evidence of an indentured African male bearing the uncommon name of "Briton Eneas" just as the oral history had always described.) Of even greater significance, Eneas points out that, in sharing this family history, his forebears did not present it as a narrative of their uniqueness. On the contrary, the story always included the explanation that many other families in the Grant's Town-Bain Town area shared comparable origins.²¹ Thus, a preponderance of evidence establishes Grant's Town and its environs as a locus of liberated African community in the Bahamas.

In this sense, the Trinidadian and Bahamian communities clearly share many demographic and social parallels. Yet the histories of religious experience in these two locales could hardly differ more starkly. For the Trinidad case, the prominence of African-derived religion has already appeared several times in the descriptions presented above. Beginning at least in the 1860s, contemporary descriptions presented such practices as a characteristic feature of the Montserrat area villages. Of course, most such nineteenth-century observations came from generally unsympathetic Europeans. Hence, one might rightfully question whether or not the portrayals of rampant African religious activity contained at least some exaggeration. However, the twentieth-century legacy observed by scholars and described by residents overwhelmingly supports a vision of an area long steeped in the religion now referred to as orisha worship.

During 1869 and 1870 a British Anglican priest stationed in Trinidad devoted extensive and specific attention to the religious or spiritual state of the inhabitants of the Montserrat Ward. At that time, the western coast of Trinidad, lying between Port-of-Spain in the north and San Fernando in the south, comprised four Anglican parishes. W. Bovell Laurie served as rector for the combined southerly parishes of Saint Philip and Saint Peter situated north-east of San Fernando around the smaller town of Pointe-a-Pierre, and directly east of the Montserrat Hills. In the course of his mission work, Laurie became aware of the liberated African population of this neighboring region. He found that many of them at some time past had received Christian baptism. However, they had long lived without the supervision and guidance of a regular Christian minister. According to Laurie, these nominal Christians lived "without the privileges, and without a sense of the responsibilities of their Christian vocation."²² These words seem mild in comparison to the *Trinidad Chronicle* description of "superstition" and "barbarous manners" already cited above. Written only a year apart, both accounts refer to the exact same region and apparently the same population. And, analyzed together, these two portraits point to a situation perhaps ideal for the development of a syncretic but mostly African-derived religion—a religion such as Trinidad's orisha worship.

Trinidad received most of its liberated African immigrants between the mid-1830s and late 1850s. Thus, in 1869 the Africans encountered by Laurie had most likely resided in the colony for at least ten years and possibly much longer. Given the presence of Francophone planters in Trinidad, the Africans may have received their Christian baptism through a Roman Catholic missionary while working as indentured laborers on local estates.²³ As Laurie speculates, such a missionary priest may have done little more than perform the baptism itself, either because the plantation involved discouraged anything further, or because a shortage of local clergy precluded extensive teaching in any single place. (Such a pattern of baptism followed by relative neglect would hold consistent with the experience which obtained in France's own Caribbean colonies.) Along with this meager offering of Christianity, the African immigrants of course still possessed whatever culture and beliefs they had brought with them across the Atlantic. An outsider such as Laurie could hardly document the presence of such beliefs, but other contemporary observers did at least note the persistence of African languages. For example, the *Chronicle* editorial referred to above also complained of "a dozen African tribes who all speak different dialects."²⁴ Language arguably serves as perhaps the strongest outward cultural marker of inward orientations. Thus, the community at Montserrat appears to have been poised to nurture a religion of the African-derived model.

After evaluating the Montserrat situation, Reverend Laurie appealed to both Trinidadian and British sources for funds with which to establish a per-

manent Anglican chapel with its own attached missionary. His efforts to secure a building seem to have succeeded, with the consecration several years later of the Anglican Church of Saint Alban's at Montserrat.²⁵ In addition, a survey of the region today reveals several Roman Catholic churches which date to the nineteenth century, among these Our Lady of Montserrat located in the village of Tortuga. All the same, no nineteenth-century account ever states or implies that the area ever acquired regular, permanent or full-time missionary service. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the region seems to have produced an abundance of orisha practitioners—at least according to twentieth-century evidence.

Anthropologists, most notably George Simpson, have thoroughly described the basic character of Trinidad orisha practice. The system accepts the existence of a supreme or creator god. However, the religion focuses not on interaction with such a high or distant figure, but rather on interaction with various spirits called "orishas." Each orisha has special association with particular objects or concepts such as war, love, or health. The orisha further have African names, based largely on Yoruba antecedents. Yet they also bear the names of Roman Catholic saints. That is, each orisha figure has at least two titles, one African and the other Roman Catholic. Like so many West African religions, the orisha practice also includes the experience of spirit possession or trance. Followers undergo possession trance when taken over in mind, body, and spirit by a particular orisha. While in this state, devotees sing, dance, act, and speak not as themselves but as the orisha by whom they are possessed. Therefore, a person under possession will often reveal guidance, warnings, or predictions for both individuals and the group.²⁶

While these practices have occurred and continue to occur all over Trinidad, certain locations have developed the reputation as centers of concentration. Virtually the entire Montserrat area has had this characterization. Folklorist J.D. Elder has documented this fact based on his research of the 1960s. In particular, Elder explored the religious practice of a group of Yoruba descended families in the town of Gasparillo. Even beyond the basic framework described above, Elder compiled a list of specific Gasparillo beliefs and practices which closely paralleled those of the Yoruba in Africa. Perhaps most notably, Elder's work probes the conceptual foundations of the African and Trinidadian religious systems. He examines the intertwined notions of ancestors, spirits, and collective ethnic identity. Elder concludes that, even these abstract, philosophical foundations persisted to a degree among Gasparillo followers of the so-called "Orisha Work."²⁷

Recent decades have seen a significant decline in the number of continuing practitioners, and it seems unlikely that present-day inquiries could yield results equal to Elder's depth.²⁸ Several informants do, however, paint a vivid picture of widespread orisha worship throughout the Montserrat region

until relatively recent times. Sylvia Ampson of the village of Caratal makes a telling observation when she explains:

You [didn't] have to invite [people], because they know [i.e. knew] . . . that . . . you having this [annual orisha observance], the first week in August . . . everybody used to take part.²⁸

Similar to Irene Joseph, Ampson herself no longer follows the orisha religious system. But she readily explains at length that, for much of her life, orisha devotions, both large and small, public and private remained a common part of the cultural, social and spiritual landscape of both Caratal and its neighbors.

The great-great-grandchildren of liberated Africans in the Bahamas tell no such orisha tales. In contrast to the Montserrat Hills, the religious narrative of the Grant's Town settlement paints a picture of regular, intense and productive Protestant evangelism for over 150 years. During this period African immigrants and their descendants became active members of Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist congregations. Like many missionaries, evangelicals in the Bahamas during the nineteenth century spent much of their correspondence bemoaning the insufficiency of both money and manpower. As an archipelago, the Bahamas did pose peculiar challenges, as missionaries had to travel to over fifteen inhabited islands. But on the island of New Providence, and around the capital of Nassau, there effectively developed a kind of missionary concentration and an often very direct competition for the population's attention. Indeed, since the 1840s, the Grant's Town-Bain Town area has either encompassed or bordered at least five major churches of the three Protestant denominations: Saint Agnes Anglican, Bethel Baptist, Saint John's Native Baptist, Zion Baptist, and Grant's Town Wesley Methodist. All of these congregations claim distinctive and distinguished histories, intertwined in various ways with the social and political struggles of people of African descent. Therefore, to single out any one church perhaps runs the risk of implying a false exceptionalism. But, in terms of the specific history of liberated Africans, Grant's Town Wesley does hold a special place.

Wesley first holds distinction as a chapel originally established for the specific and virtually exclusive use of free African immigrants. This mission began late in 1831, seven years after the establishment of Grant's Town, but still two years before slave emancipation. In other words, the mission began at a time before freed slaves had joined the settlement en masse. It seems most likely that British missionary Charles Penney entered the Grant's Town community in November or December of 1831. During this period the Methodists already had established three significant chapels on the island of New Providence: a Town congregation apparently dominated by white Methodist

converts; an Eastern Chapel, also dominated by whites but including some “Black and Coloured” inhabitants; and a Western Chapel, founded in the late eighteenth century by a freed Loyalist slave from the United States and attended thereafter by “Black and Coloured” people both slave and free. In reporting to his London supervisors in January of 1832, Penney noted two major developments. He first announced that he had begun a special Monday Evening meeting “for the Black and Coloured people.” At these Monday events Penney sought to provide this special group with extra teaching “in a plainer manner,” consistent with what he viewed as either their weaker comprehension or lesser education in comparison to the “large mixed congregations.” Penney thus clearly had specific pedagogical plans for his Black and Coloured converts. However he did not mention liberated African immigrants as a subset of this group. Rather, they received separate attention in his second major announcement. Penney explained: “I have been invited to extend my labors to a Company of Coloured people who are settled in place called ‘Grant’s Town.’”²⁹

Although making this announcement with some apparent pride, Penney at first used it as an opportunity to document his extreme overwork, making a typical thinly veiled plea for further assistance. He pointed out that, even without this new task, he had scheduled mission events six nights of the week. Saturday night remained free, but he of course required that to prepare his three Sabbath sermons! Such distress notwithstanding, Penney concluded his letter: “I must and will by God’s blessing, embrace this [Grant’s Town] opening, as it is too important to be neglected.”³⁰

Future records indicate that Penney did indeed find time to begin a regular evangelizing mission to the liberated Africans. Penney’s successor John Corlett reported that the Grant’s Town work had commenced through a single evening service held on alternate weeks. This would hardly seem to constitute an intensive missionary presence. All the same, the community had shown sufficient receptivity to construct a makeshift meeting place at their own effort and expense.³¹ Furthermore, under Corlett’s guidance, more intense activity would lead to the demographic growth of what would become the most populous, the most powerful community of African-descended Methodists in the Bahamas; a compelling symbol of creative, and self-determining African-American Christianity. In the words a Methodist youth minister penned in the 1993:

Wesley is the Jewel in the Methodist Church crown. It is the church with the largest congregation and the most potential for growth. Out of Wesley have come three [new] congregations . . . Yes Wesley is still the jewel in the crown[.]³²

Over a century before this grand declaration, the missionary John Corlett focused his Grant's Town efforts on the liberated African core of that community. By 1839, newly emancipated slaves had also joined the settlement, but according to Corlett's descriptions, immigrant Africans continued to dominate. In fact, during 1838, more liberated Africans entered the Bahamas than in any other single year. Corlett quotes a figure stating that 1000 settled on New Providence alone. (This figure may underestimate the numbers which ended up on other Bahamian islands. But even an influx of 700 would have made a significant increase in the African immigrant group.) Corlett divided his work between instructing this population and seeking financial support for the building of a proper chapel and school. The latter goal reached fruition in 1847 with the acquisition of property and the beginning of construction. Meanwhile, by multiple accounts, the congregation grew enormously, led largely (albeit not exclusively) by the devotion and energy of liberated African converts. In the commemorative booklet which Wesley produced for its centenary in 1947, Reverend William Makepeace cites several notations from both missionary letters and synod reports affirming the critical participation of this unique population: "Rescued from the foul entrenchments of the slave-ship . . . by British power and philanthropy, they have also in many instances been rescued by the influences of the Gospel from the moral slavery which enchained their souls[.]"³³ Of course, one might reasonably question such a melodramatic claim of missionary success. After all, might not a minister have exaggerated such claims, either to improve his own stature or for another ulterior motive? Such exaggeration certainly seems a theoretical possibility. However, in a review of several hundred Methodist missionary letters, as many as one third report difficulty or failure rather than the success. (For example, John Corlett himself noted that the Grant's Town mission had largely collapsed for almost a year after a hurricane in 1837 destroyed its makeshift meeting place.) It therefore seems reasonable to presume accuracy in the later portrayals of increasing success.

In addition, Grant's Town popular history further reinforces the image of Wesley Chapel as the special province of liberated African people and their descendants. The commemorative centenary booklet of 1947 included a special segment entitled "Leaders and Church Officers." This essay presents a brief description of the reputed earliest leaders of the Wesley Church community. The text describes at least half of such people as "Africans," and identifies several of specifically "Nango" (Yoruba) ethnicity.³⁴ Similar to the work of local historian Cleveland Eneas, this essay combines several inherited family histories to establish a liberated African genealogy for the Wesley Church community as a whole. While much of this genealogy has arisen from the orally transmitted recollections of members of the community, documentary sources from throughout the nineteenth century provide poignant supportive evidence

for this portrayal of church history. For example, the early Wesley activists described by the commemorative booklet included a carpenter and musician by the name of Domingo Weir. According to the brochure, Weir established the first Wesley choir and served as its choir-master for forty years. In a 1994 interview, Gaspare Weir—great-grandson of Domingo—reiterated these details concerning the choir and in addition, explicitly asserting that his African Methodist ancestor had arrived in the Bahamas as a rescued slave taken from a captured foreign vessel.³⁵ For many, perhaps most, reputed liberated African descendants such a claim would prove difficult to verify. But in this case, the name of “Mingo Weir” does in fact appear on an 1843 list recording land grants for the village of Adelaide in southwestern New Providence.³⁶ Governor James Carmichael-Smyth laid out this village in 1831 expressly for the settlement of a group of liberated Africans rescued from the Portuguese slave ship *Rosa* in June of that year. Notably, in his own account of Domingo’s background, Gaspare Weir also refers specifically to a “Portuguese” vessel. Thus a confluence of relevant details seems to confirm the historical assertions of the 1947 commemorative brochure.

Another life history which illustrates the liberated African role in the development of Wesley Church involves a man called Alliday Adderley. Like Weir, Adderley received mention in the 1947 document as one of the “early leaders” of the Grant’s Town chapel. The booklet describes him as “an African gentleman of the Nango [Yoruba] tribe . . . a Christian in word and deed.”³⁷ Such an individual would seem to exemplify African immigrant espousal of Protestant Christianity. Ironically, the clearest verification of Adderley’s identity as a converted liberated African immigrant arises from his obituary which appeared in the *Nassau Guardian* in September, 1885. The brief but detailed announcement describes the funeral participation of the “Bahama Friendly and Yoruba Societies” along with other friends and mourners: “. . . large numbers forming the procession which marched, from the residence . . . first to Wesley Chapel, Grant’s Town, and from there to Potter’s Field Cemetery.”³⁸ At a minimum, this funeral procession to Wesley would seem to confirm Adderley’s membership in that congregation. Meanwhile, the presence of the “Yoruba Society” implies at least some affiliation with a specific African ethnic group. These deductions prove secondary, however, as the newspaper notice in fact directly identifies the deceased as “a native of Africa [who] came [to the Bahamas] in a captured slaver.”³⁹ It thus seems clear that liberated Africans and their descendants not only dominated the founding of Wesley Chapel in the late 1830s but persisted in its leadership through the nineteenth century.

Yet perhaps even more significantly, contemporary descriptions indicate that the nineteenth-century Wesley congregations practiced a style of Christian worship with such pronounced African influences that the Grant’s Town chapel stood out even amongst other local missionary churches with predomi-

nantly black and colored memberships. A North American author, William Drysdale, visited the Bahamas and Cuba in the early 1880s and published a narrative of his journey entitled *In Sunny Lands: Out-Door Life in Nassau and Cuba*. Among his many observations of the Bahamian black population, Drysdale includes a description of a visit made by himself and other tourists to a Grant's Town "church known as 'The Shouters.'"⁴⁰ While Drysdale does not identify this church as Wesley Methodist Chapel, no other church stood in the midst of Grant's Town at that time. As indicated above, several churches existed in the immediate vicinity of the liberated African village, but only Wesley lay properly within it. According to Drysdale, this church enjoyed such a reputation for a uniquely ecstatic worship style that North American travellers regularly visited the congregation for observation and entertainment. In fact, Drysdale reports that the interest of tourists had grown so significant that some Wesley members allegedly took payments in exchange for promising visitors a good "shouting" performance during the services which they attended. He explains: "For the shouters do not always shout, but only when the spirit moves, or when Americans want to invest a few dollars in seeing the fun."⁴¹ Drysdale himself concedes that he could not personally verify the occurrence of such payments, but even a fabricated legend about such transactions would serve as evidence of Wesley's particular reputation in this regard.

The term "shouting" has usually referred to a combination of African-influenced ecstatic singing, dancing, clapping, and stamping of feet, often but not always in ring formation. From the eighteenth through twentieth centuries observers have described this phenomenon in various Protestant churches throughout the African diaspora, although most commonly in the United States.⁴² Drysdale describes in some detail the behavior which he observed at Wesley chapel during his own visit. He characterizes the hymns which he heard as "curious" but reports that he found the sermon "quite sensible enough" until its closing passages. At that point the minister "warmed up . . . till he had some of his women hearers excitedly rocking their bodies to and fro, crying amen, and giving the other signs of religious excitement often seen in 'revival' meetings."⁴³ Nevertheless, Drysdale complains that, on the whole, during his visit "[t]here was no more commotion than . . . in any lively Methodist meeting, and the shouting part was a miserable failure."⁴⁴ Drysdale's own disappointment notwithstanding, his narrative offers powerful testimony to the distinctive reputation of Grant's Town Wesley for the performance of this particular African-influenced practice. After all, there were other churches with African-descended congregations within easy travelling distance of downtown Nassau which might have satisfied the curiosity of foreign tourists or the voyeurism of white local residents. Among such churches the Baptist chapels would almost certainly have had some kind of charismatic and African-influenced elements in their services. But according to Drysdale's account, outsiders such

as himself expressly selected Wesley. Popular opinion apparently portrayed the chapel founded and dominated by liberated Africans as the place which manifested the most potent and most dramatic examples of African-influenced charismatic Christianity. Wesley had become a kind of local exemplar of African influence in Bahamian religious culture. Observers such as William Drysdale did not necessarily highlight the role of liberated Africans in molding the nature of religious practice at the Grant's Town chapel. However, the influence of these latest arriving African immigrants clearly lay at the roots of Wesley's unique cultural prominence.

Never once does the author of Wesley's 1947 commemorative essay consider the irony of mixing an embrace of African origins with a celebration of Christian conversion. Yet, in such irony lies a clue to re-evaluating the comparative interpretation of African religious experience in diaspora. At a pragmatic level, the comparison of Grant's Town with the Montserrat Hills suggests that two factors, above all others, shaped the different religious developments. First, the Montserrat experience clearly reinforces the long-established proposition that Roman Catholicism, with its pantheon of saints, proved uniquely conducive to syncretism with West African religious systems. Second, and more importantly, however, the preceding comparison suggests that the single greatest influence lay in the volume and nature of interaction between missionaries and Africans.⁴⁵ Infrequent evangelism or so-called neglect left African immigrants largely to govern their own spiritual lives. Hence, they crafted a system, most heavily based on the systems of their former societies. On the other hand, intense missionary teaching presented African immigrants with a new set of propositions and practices for the governance of spiritual life; perhaps from their perspective a new spiritual order for the radically changed existence of life in diaspora. Thus, liberated African Methodists in the Bahamas were no less free, no less Yoruba, and no more European-dominated than their orisha-practicing counterparts in Trinidad. Most likely, like Irene Joseph, they viewed their transition to "Jesus' time" as a transition having equal cultural integrity or authenticity as any other African New World experience.

Notes

1. The name "Shango" refers to only one of many spirits or "orishas" involved in this religion and others similar to it, both in West Africa and in the New World. Some have argued that British observers mistakenly applied the name "Shango" to the religion as a whole. They therefore prefer the term "orisha worship" as being both more accurate as well as a rejection of colonial misunderstandings of African-derived culture. Since the official recognition (in the early 1980s) of orisha worship as one of Trinidad's religions, most of the individuals who have served as representatives or spokespeople for orisha believers seem to have preferred the labels "orisha worship" or even "orisha movement." However, in everyday discourse, among both practitioners and non-practitioners, the term "Shango" remains current. According to folklorist J. D. Elder the term "Orisha Work" has also had currency during the twentieth century. See: J. D. Elder, "The Yoruba Ancestor Cult in Gasparillo (Its Structure, Organization and Social Function in Community Cohesion)." Paper presented at the University of the West Indies, Saint Augustine, Trinidad, 20 January 1969. The term "orisha worship" will have preference here, except where written sources or oral history informants use the term "Shango."
2. Irene E. Joseph. Tape recorded interview conducted 26 February 1994, Caratal, Trinidad, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
3. The most extensive treatment of this subject appears in Maureen Warner-Lewis's *Guinea's Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidad Culture* (Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1991). Warner-Lewis explores the various particular influences of Yoruba culture in Trinidad, basing her work on interviews conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the descendants of Yoruba people who arrived as liberated Africans in the 19th century. Other commentaries on this particular religious influence appear in Bridget Brereton's *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and Donald Wood's *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968). Both of these place the influence of the liberated Africans within in the context of an increasingly plural society in post-emancipation Trinidad.
4. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Raboteau explores these questions in his chapter entitled "Death of the Gods." For the delineation of the specific factors explaining differences between the U.S. and other parts of the diaspora see pp. 87-92.
5. See for example: Monica Schuler, "Akan Slave Rebellions in the British Caribbean" *Savacou* 1 (1970): 8-31, Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), and Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean 1736-1831* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
6. Since the formal recognition of orisha worship by the Trinidad government, coupled with the affects of Trinidad's own "Black Power" movement from the 1970s, the so-called orisha movement has attracted a small but significant number of followers who have adopted the religion as a preferred, or more authentic, spiritual practice for people of African descent. Many such latter-day converts often downplay the mixing which has occurred between African origins and Roman Catholicism. Rather, they seek to cast orisha worship as the virtually pure epitome of cultural self-determination by Africans in diaspora.
7. Correspondence, John Brownell, Nassau, Bahamas, 29 September 1829. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Collection, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (hereafter cited as WMMS Papers). MMS. 4C. West Indies (Various) 1833-1906. Box 128, File 1829.
8. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1981), p. 22.
9. For the Yoruba presence in Trinidad see: Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Suns*. For the Bahamas see Cleveland W. Eneas, *Bain Town* (Nassau, Bahamas: Cleveland and

Muriel Eneas, 1976).

10. Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Suns*, p. 37.

11. J. D. Elder, "The Yoruba Ancestor Cult in Gasparillo," p. 7.

12. Sylvia Ampson. Tape recorded interview conducted 24 February 1994, Caratel, Trinidad, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

13. Sylvia Ampson. Interview, 24 February 1994. Another Trinidadian (Norman Carr of Saint Mary's Village, Moruga) interviewed in 1994 also confirmed this specific characterization of Mayo.

14. *The Trinidad Chronicle*, No. 337, 3 March 1868.

15. Patrice Williams, "A Guide to African Villages in New Providence" (Nassau, Bahamas: Department of Archives, 1979), pp. 5-8. Williams derives these descriptions from the correspondence of Governor William Colebrooke who in 1835 reported to the Colonial Office on the history and nature of various Bahamian settlement patterns.

16. "Archives Exhibition of Settlements in New Providence" (Bahamas Department of Archives, 1982), p. 22 and Williams, "A Guide to African Villages in New Providence," pp. 5-8. According to these sources surveyor Burnside selected the name "Grant's Town" in honor of former Bahamian Governor Major General Lewis Grant under whom he had served.

17. Williams, "A Guide to African Villages in New Providence," p. 9 and "Settlements in New Providence," p. 53. The latter publication by the Bahamas Department of Archives explains that between 1840 and 1850 a private black business man, Charles H. Bain, purchased the Bain Town land which he then divided for resale "at moderate prices to African people."

18. Correspondence, Isaac Whitehouse, Nassau, Bahamas, 27 July 1850. WMMS Papers. MMS 4C. West Indies (Various). 1833-1906. Box 218, File 1850.

19. Cleveland W. Eneas, *Bain Town*, p. 28. Terms such as "Nonga," "Nango" or "Nago" have appeared not only in the Bahamas but also elsewhere in the Americas in reference to people of reputed Yoruba ancestry. In a paper recently presented to the African Studies

Program at the University of Pennsylvania, Nigerian scholar Olabiyi Yai traced the origin of such terms to the "Anago" dialect—one of several linguistic antecedents of the modern Yoruba language.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Eneas, *Bain Town*, pp. 32-33.

22. "[An Appeal:] Mission at Montserrat, Trinidad, Among Liberated Africans and their Descendants" 8 October 1869. Enclosed in Correspondence, W. Bovell Laurie, Rector of St. Philip's and St. Peter's Trinidad, 17 June 1870. Archives of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Rhodes House Library, Oxford (hereafter cited as USPGL Papers). Original Letters Received 1850-1938, D40 2A, West Indies 1861-1874, [Diocese of] Barbados 1868-1870.

23. During the 1830s at least two Anglican missionaries also worked in south Trinidad under the sponsorship of the multi-denominational Church Missionary Society. At first glance, it seems possible that such Anglican missionaries might provide an alternate explanation for the nominal baptism of the Montserrat Africans. Several factors, however, make this possibility seem unlikely. Firstly, Trinidad's largest numbers of liberated African arrived during the 1840s after the heaviest years of activity documented for these missionaries in the CMS archives. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, these CMS priests appear to have focused their efforts around Savanna Grande located many miles to the south of the Montserrat Hills. For documentation of the activities of these prior Anglican missionaries see Correspondence, J. G. Mulhauser and A. W. Eckel, Archives of the Church Missionary Society, CWO Series, Rare Book Library, University of Birmingham, England.

24. *The Trinidad Chronicle*, No. 337, 3 March 1868.

25. Correspondence, Richard Rawle, Bishop of Trinidad [?], 13 July 1876. USPGL Papers. Original Letters Received 1850-1938, D 44B, West Indies 1876.

26. See: George E. Simpson, *Religious Cults of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti* (San Juan: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1970).

27. J. D. Elder, "The Yoruba Ancestor Cult in Gasparillo," pp. 10-14.
28. Sylvia Ampson interviews, 24 February 1994, Caratal.
29. Correspondence, Charles Penney, Nassau, Bahamas, 10 January 1832. WMMS Papers. MMS. 4C. West Indies (Various). 1833-1906. Box 131, File 1832.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Correspondence, John Corlett, Nassau, Bahamas, 22 May 1839. WMMS Papers. MMS. 4C. West Indies (Various). 1833-1906. Box ???, File 1839.
32. *Nassau Guardian*, 20 February 1993. Ironically, and many would say unfortunately, Jacob Shaw wrote these words in a letter to the editor as part of an ongoing dispute in the Bahamian church over whether or not to separate from the regional Methodist District of the Caribbean and Central America. That formal separation became a reality later in 1993, but legal and other disputes are still pending. Notably for the present study, a few of the most prominent descendants of the liberated African founders have found themselves separated from Wesley as result of their opposition to the recent decision.
33. 1844 Synod Report, Bahamas Circuit cited in William Makepeace, "A History of Methodism in Grant's Town, Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas 1847-1947," *Wesley Methodist Church: A Souvenir of the Century 1847-1947* (Nassau, 1847), p. 17.
34. [Anon.], "Leaders and Church Officers," *Wesley Methodist Church: A Souvenir of the Centenary 1847-1947* (Nassau, 1847), p. 17. In interviews conducted during 1993 and 1994 both Cleveland Eneas and Gaspare Weir—a former Wesley Church trustee—have portrayed this essay as deriving from the collective knowledge of various church members present in 1947.
35. *Wesley Methodist Church: A Souvenir of the Centenary 1847-1947*, p. 42. Gaspare Weir. Tape recorded interview conducted 24 September 1994, Montrose Avenue, Nassau, Bahamas.
36. "Grants for Adelaide Lots. Book L4 Registry." Department of Lands and Surveys, Nassau, Bahamas.
37. *Wesley Methodist Church: A Souvenir of the Centenary*, p. 42.
38. *Nassau Guardian*, Vol. XLI No. 4,572, 30 September 1885.
39. *Ibid.*
40. William Drysdale, *In Sunny Lands: Our-Door Life in Nassau and Cuba* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1885), p. 12.
41. *Ibid.*
42. For descriptions of the constituent elements of "shouting" see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, pp. 66-73, 245, 339-340 n. 69. Raboteau's own research focuses on the United States, but he also cites the work of other scholars who have included descriptions of shouting or similar religious behavior in the Bahamas, Jamaica and Haiti. See: Raboteau, p. 70.
43. Drysdale, *In Sunny Lands*, p. 13.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Anthropologist David V. Trotman draws a similar conclusion in a brief study of orisha worship and liberated African settlement in Trinidad and British Guiana. See his "The Yoruba and Orisha Worship in Trinidad and British Guiana: 1838-1870," *African Studies Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (September 1976), 1-17. Trotman contrasts the development of widespread Yoruba-derived orisha worship in Trinidad with the absence of such a development in British Guiana, despite the fact that both colonies received significant numbers of free Yoruba immigrants during the mid nineteenth century. Trotman places his greatest emphasis on the relative isolation of liberated African settlements in parts of Trinidad along with the presence of large numbers of French planters and their former slaves who had migrated to Trinidad from the francophone Caribbean. With respect to this francophone population, Trotman notes not only the syncretic meeting between Roman Catholic and Yoruba beliefs and practices, but also the role of the francophone presence in disrupting a coherent British cultural influence on the new immigrants. (He argues, for example, that the prevailing use of French patois among the population of African descent automatically disadvantaged any British Protestant missionary effort.) He contrasts this Trinidad experience with settlement patterns in British Guiana which kept most liberated Africans

confined to a relatively small area near the coast where they not only mixed more liberally with the population of former slaves, but also faced more intensive attention from both the British colonial establishment and related Protestant missionary efforts.

Trotman's work differs most significantly from the present study in that his article does not particularly challenge the implication that the development of orisha worship constituted a preferable path of acculturation, or perhaps a path with greater

African cultural integrity. (In an especially striking comment he refers to the "de-Africanization" of the immigrants in British Guiana—an adjective which while having some justification, would certainly seem an overstatement with respect to the liberated African Methodists of Grant's Town in the Bahamas.) Consistent with the orisha worship focus of his work, Trotman also offers little insight into the specific nature of the religious practices which liberated Africans in British Guiana did develop.