

Black Atlantic Worlds

Landscape Histories of the African Diaspora



1. Moulin. 2. Fourneaux et Chaudières. 3. Fôrmes. 4. Vinaigrierie. 5. Canes de Sucre. 6. Gros Cocos. 7. Latanir. 8. Pajomirioba. 9. Choux Caraïbes. 10. Cabane de Nègres.

SUCRERIE





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Oscar de la Torre
editor

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Manufactured in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc., 613 East Industrial Drive,
Chelsea, MI 48118 | (734) 475-9145

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

NAMES: Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture (47th : 2023: Washington, D.C.) author | De la Torre, Oscar (Historian) editor

TITLE: Black Atlantic worlds: landscape histories of the African diaspora / Oscar de la Torre, editor.

DESCRIPTION: Washington, D.C. : Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, [2026] |

“Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture XLVII.”: Page preceding title page. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: “Landscapes are key to the Black Atlantic. The history of how Africans and their descendants populated and transformed nations, regions, and ecosystems has always been attentive to the multiple meanings embedded in the landscapes of the Atlantic rim. More recently, the study of archival silences, Black geographies, fugitivity, and the connections between environment and identity has refreshed traditional conversations and formulated new perspectives of analysis, a shift that acts as the focus of Black Atlantic Worlds: Landscape Histories of the African Diaspora. Based on the Dumbarton Oaks 2023 symposium on Black Atlantic landscapes, this volume features the work of scholars from distinct disciplines addressing West African Atlantization processes on both land and water, struggles over voice and agency in landscape representation, Black geographies as a conduit for religion and spirituality, and the unexpected and connective diasporic meanings of urban landscapes. By engaging and building upon the ever-evolving paradigms of Afro-diasporic studies, these contributions illuminate the hidden figures, strategies, and ideas that constitute the Black Atlantic”—Provided by publisher.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2025020025 | ISBN 9780884025283 hardcover | ISBN 9780884025375 ebook

SUBJECTS: LCSH: African diaspora—Congresses | Africans—Atlantic Ocean Region—History—Congresses | Black people—Atlantic Ocean Region—History—Congresses | Human ecology—Atlantic Ocean Region—Congresses | Cultural landscapes—Atlantic Ocean Region—Congresses | LCGFT: Conference papers and proceedings

CLASSIFICATION: LCC DT16.5 .B86 2026

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025020025>

Volume based on papers presented at the symposium “Environmental Histories of the Black Atlantic World: Landscape Histories of the African Diaspora,” organized by Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., and held on May 12–13, 2023.

GENERAL EDITOR: Thaïsa Way

ART DIRECTOR: Kathleen Sparkes

DESIGN AND COMPOSITION: Melissa Tandysh

MANAGING EDITOR: Abigail Anderson

COVER ILLUSTRATION: Marius-Pierre Le Masurier, *Esclaves noirs à la Martinique*, late eighteenth century, oil on canvas. Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, N.Y.

FRONTISPIECE ILLUSTRATION: Sébastien Leclerc, *Sucrerie*, from Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Thomas Iolty, 1667). John Carter Brown Library, Providence, R.I.

www.doaks.org/publications

EU GPSR Authorised Representative

LOGOS EUROPE, 9 rue Nicolas Poussin, 17000, La Rochelle, France

E-mail: Contact@logoseurope.eu

The Garden and Landscape Studies program at Dumbarton Oaks
hosts the Democracy and Landscape Initiative supported by a
Humanities in Place grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
This volume was partially supported through this initiative.

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FOREWORD

It is critical, as we introduce this volume, to acknowledge that the lands on which we gather are within the ancestral territories of Indigenous peoples, specifically the Piscataway, who have recognized the lands and waters of the Potomac Valley as their homeland for thousands of years. As historians of land and place, we recognize that, prior to European occupation, Indigenous peoples stewarded the lands and waters of the American continent. Thus, we begin by recognizing the Native nations as well as their past, present, and future connections to these lands.

The Garden and Landscape Studies program at Dumbarton Oaks dates to 1951, with a proposal for early career fellows to study gardens and design in history and contemporary practice. In 1971, it was established as a scholarly program. In 2014, John Beardsley, my predecessor, commenced the first Mellon Foundation program in Urban Landscape Studies. In 2022, the Garden and Landscape Studies program launched the next phase of this initiative, *Democracy and Landscape: Race, Identity, and Difference*, which was supported by the Mellon Foundation's Humanities in Place grant. The intention was to encourage and disseminate scholarship that reframed historical narratives of landscape by engaging in a deeper inquiry into the legacies of race, identity, and difference as they shaped the practice of making public places in the land. It is in the public that we make (or break) democracies; thus, there is no more significant place than the public realm, whether it is our parks, plazas, courtyards, or streets.

In our collective work with scholars, we have sought to reimagine histories that engage with the complexities of making a place in the land for communities to thrive and for democracy to be manifested. This is challenging work, as it has rarely (if ever) been fully realized. And yet we can learn from our pasts as we seek to create different futures. This framing of landscape history shapes our archives and our collections; it affects how we share these resources and how we think about access and contributions. We seek not merely to acknowledge the colonial foundations of landscape history—a discipline grounded in art and architectural history, with their complex and contested historiographies—but to challenge and alter those foundations, thus generating counternarratives that will contribute to a better future through a deeper learning of the past.

A landscape framework underscored the 2023 symposium “Environmental Histories of the Black Atlantic World: Landscape Histories of the African Diaspora.” This was the fourth symposium in a five-year series exploring what it would mean to center histories

of land and people in our understanding of our collective pasts. Building on previous symposia—including “Segregation and Resistance in America’s Urban Landscapes” in 2020, “Land Back: Indigenous Landscapes of Resurgence and Freedom” in 2021, and “Landscapes in the Making” in 2022—this symposium explored the rich and deep scholarship of the Black Atlantic to interrogate the multiple and diverse ways that African diasporic communities made homes in place. The original organizers of the symposium, N. D. B. Connolly (Johns Hopkins University) and Oscar de la Torre (University of North Carolina at Charlotte), noted that scholars have interrogated the flow of goods, people, ideas, and forms of nonhuman life that constitute what we call the Atlantic world; however, the land and land-based practices, along with the representations and narratives about them, had yet to come front and center. This symposium offered an opportunity to build ground for such studies across geographies and disciplines. The Black Atlantic has fostered an understanding of cultural and political connectedness that foregrounds the experiences of Afro-descended peoples, decenters Europe, and locates in place and time the multiplicity of Black cultures. While African and Afro-descended peoples shaped the history of the Atlantic world since its birth in the fifteenth century, antislavery and anti-colonial efforts since have flowered into an array of abolitionist movements, practices of Black fugitivity, and a rich library of environmental, feminist, and materialist scholarship. The consistently expanding body of Black Atlantic knowledge challenges and strengthens how we understand, teach, and question histories of and on the land, especially in the context of the Western world and the development of racial capitalism.

The symposium sought to bring together place-based histories of landscapes, water-scapes, and environments of the Black Atlantic from the fifteenth through the twentieth century. By engaging the geographic breadth of the Atlantic world and its complex relationships and networks, the symposium and the current volume have sought to share scholarship on Black landscapes, both as individual places and as connection sites within larger networks. Further, and significantly, the volume seeks to engage with narratives that elevate transatlantic practices of Black resistance and resilience. The symposium generated a challenging and broad discussion that is reflected in the essays included in this volume, along with two essays that were added later to address topics thought to be missing. Nevertheless, this collection is just that—a collection of inquiries that should seed the ground for future inquiry and scholarship. With this volume, we intend to open questions and approaches to expand, challenge, and enrich studies of the Black Atlantic, as well as to contemplate what a landscape framework might contribute to the discourses of historians, activists, and teachers.

Dumbarton Oaks has been a critical center for the humanities, and the Garden and Landscape Studies program has long sought to shape and lead scholarship in landscape history. The Democracy and Landscape initiative has brought new scholars and audiences to our collective efforts and has broadened attention to the landscape humanities as a means of understanding the cultural constructs and built environments of cultures around the globe. This work has contributed to expanding the humanities to more carefully consider the agency of land as well as its flora and fauna in the histories of people, place, and politics. This volume builds on efforts to understand how spatial analysis and

the study of landscapes are essential to reading and teaching place and land narratives in the Black Atlantic.

None of this could be accomplished without a community of leaders, participants, and advocates. I want to thank N. D. B. Connolly for the initial conversations and leadership that led to this significant symposium and volume. The concept developed over years of discussions and investigations. Oscar de la Torre joined us to curate the symposium, and I am deeply grateful for his contributions. Sadly, Dr. Connolly had to withdraw from co-editing the volume for personal reasons. Further thanks are due to the leaders of Dumbarton Oaks and the Mellon Foundation for their support for this important work. Dumbarton Oaks director Tom Cummins and Mellon Foundation program director Justin Garrett Moore were essential to the development of the discourse, the symposium, and this volume. The following senior fellows of the Garden and Landscape Studies program were integral in shaping the symposium: Elizabeth Hyde (Kean University), Dianne Harris (University of Washington), Stephen Daniels (University of Nottingham), Vera Candiani (Princeton University), and Philip Deloria (Harvard University). I also acknowledge the critical work of the Mellon Advisory Board, led by Alice Nash (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), N. D. B. Connolly (Johns Hopkins University), Willow Lung-Amam (University of Maryland), Eric Avila (University of California, Los Angeles), Andrea Roberts (University of Virginia), Sarah Lopez (University of Pennsylvania), and Gabrielle Tayac (George Mason University). I thank the publications director Kathy Sparkes and managing editor Sara Taylor, as well as program coordinators Jane Padelford and Rebecca Goodman. The anonymous reviewers deserve recognition, as do our contributors, who worked so hard and with such commitment to sharing important scholarship that we hope will, in turn, lead to new questions and discourses.

Thaïsa Way
Director, Garden and Landscape Studies
Dumbarton Oaks

PREFACE

The Environment Surrounding This Black Atlantic Book

N. D. B. CONNOLLY

The time between the conceptualization of this volume and its publication has proven tumultuous in ways still unfolding. When Thaïsa Way, Oscar de la Torre, and I first drafted the call for papers for the “Environmental Histories of the Black Atlantic World” symposium in 2022, our work seemed pretty straightforward, even easy. The timing couldn’t have been better. Two years after the summer of 2020, we carried out our search for papers amid a series of reckonings sweeping through the higher education, nonprofit, and corporate sectors. Institutions wrestled with the persistence of white supremacy in American life, with many acknowledging their civic (if not financial) debts to slavery. The moment affirmed the efficacy of protest and the necessity of research in the defense of both Blackness and Black people. The appetite for such projects was handsome, the funding for work thusly dedicated flush. In keeping, the richness of the proposals we received, and the subsequent brilliance of the resulting papers, affirmed that a new book like ours—combining approaches in environmental studies and the study of our shared Black Atlantic past—had met, well, history.

Three short years later, there isn’t even a Gulf of Mexico anymore. According to the U.S. government and its partners at Google Maps, it is now the “Gulf of America.” Textbooks and other learning materials for K–12 education have already begun to reflect this and other dramatic revisions to the world we once knew. The National Endowment for the Humanities, formerly working under a mandate to fund research broadly, canceled over 1,200 grants totaling more than \$420 million in scholarly support.¹ Within days of the Trump administration assuming power in January 2025, more than \$3 trillion in executed and proposed federal funding cuts included the defunding of climate science, medical

research, and environmental appropriations, and, soon thereafter, the punitive impounding of federal funds from American universities.

In an hour of such broad crisis, what might a book of essays on environmental history, Blackness, and the Atlantic world have to do with what ails us?

Everything. The last time federal funds had been widely withheld from American universities was 1969. At that time, the U.S. government's enforcement of civil rights legislation and recent Supreme Court rulings on racial desegregation included the seizure of funds from over 130 educational institutions.² More than \$70 million was withheld from Columbia University, for instance, as punishment for its reluctance to hire Black faculty.³ That's more than \$500 million today. Diversity, equity, and inclusion had real teeth in those days, it seems. At that same time, inside universities, demands for Black studies entailed student occupations of central administrative buildings and disruptions at academic conferences, with many genteel racists among the professoriate forced, temporarily anyway, into the shadows.⁴ These combined pressures—Black political awakening on college campuses and the threat of government impound—helped desegregate curricula for more than a thousand colleges. And many elite universities, as part of this response, developed, among other investments, their first programs dedicated to the study of the Black Atlantic.⁵

Our understanding of the Black Atlantic world remains wed, at any given moment, to the robustness of our political support for it.⁶

Consider this sense of “environment” as you read this book. The volume you hold arrives, certainly, during a hostile time in the lifespan of Black Atlantic study. This book also inherits, however, resilient practices of mind and political steadfastness far more ancient than the now-waning age of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Long before the Ivory Tower welcomed it, the Black Atlantic variously ebbed or grew from the everyday provisioning practices of Black folk living off the sea and from the land. It swam in the intellectual streams of Pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism. It crested through the revolutionary fervor and nascent anti-colonial writing coming out of Haiti and the wider nineteenth-century circum-Caribbean. The events of Pan-African Congresses, the Garvey Movement, and countless expressions of scholarly Third World solidarity are decidedly Black Atlantic occurrences, too.⁷

But even more than all that, as the pages that follow affirm, the Black Atlantic is a self-conscious analytic frame with its own modernities and modalities, with its own cartographies and nautical charts. The polyglot Black Atlantic speaks not only in the rich lexicon of culture—of, say, negritude, marronage, *tambiko*, or the Ring Shout. It speaks through the trees and rivers and hills and crops and roads and refuges that braided together a people and their places.

In that way, this book, too, weaves us, as readers and writers, into the places and histories currently churning around and beneath us. It ties us into this, our Black Atlantic environment. Make no mistake: this book's authors—its arguments—enter an intellectual, institutional, and political moment where anything related to a non-white Atlantic—and, certainly, any “Black” topics—has been regarded in government circles as suspect,

if not altogether criminal. Black knowledge is, once again, fugitive knowledge.⁸ And yet, with the past as its evidence, this book proves that white supremacy, despite its apparent, present-day re-institutionalization, cannot threaten an end to our humanist, anti-racist commitments. Read what follows, then, not as an endangered offering of a crumbling DEI era. Enjoy it, instead, as among the first scholarly installations of what comes next, of what the Black Atlantic consciousness will become.

NOTES

- 1 “At Least 1,200 Grants Canceled as NEH Cuts Target Humanities Across US,” *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/2025/04/07/neh-grants-canceled-cuts/>.
- 2 Leon E. Panetta and Peter Gall, *Bring Us Together: The Nixon Team and the Civil Rights Retreat* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971).
- 3 Alan Hirsch, “Hopkins Complies with Hiring Guidelines,” *JHU News-Letter*, February 14, 1975.
- 4 Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
- 5 The first of these was the Johns Hopkins University’s Program in Atlantic History, Culture, and Society. Copycat programs soon followed, as universities attempted to comply with federal law and placate student unrest by recruiting scholars from the Caribbean, Africa, and various corners of Black America. N. D. B. Connolly, “Past Done Silenced: Desegregation and the Assertions of Atlantic History” (paper presented at the Johns Hopkins University Department of History Seminar, April 12, 2021); and David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Neither Slave Nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972). See also Madina Thiam, “The Caliphate, the Black Writer, and a World in Revolution, 1959–1969,” *Journal of African History* 64, no. 2 (2023): 174–83.
- 6 The same can be said of the white Atlantic. During the late nineteenth century, scholars like Herbert Baxter Adams and Edward Augustus Freeman imagined the Atlantic world as the bridging of then-new research universities in North America with those of European “fatherlands” in England, France, and Germany. During the 1940s, white Atlantic visions became largely Pan-American visions dominated by southern U.S. senators in the service of the Cold War. They used federal resources to assert a scholarly vision—a so-called Atlantic System—that, for military and economic reasons mostly, asserted the links between the Anglo- and Latin Americas. Expressions of Atlantic work in this period, claims historian Trevor Burnard, “came from a reformulation of Wilsonian universalism among Americanists, [and] an internationalist mindset . . . concentrated on fostering links in an ‘Atlantic community’ of countries with a common heritage of ‘Western Christendom.’” See Herbert Baxter Adams, “Cooperation in University Work,” November 17, 1882, reprinted in *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1882), 41–42; Michael G. Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Trevor Burnard, “Only Connect: The Rise and Rise (and Fall?) of Atlantic History,” *Historically Speaking* 7, no. 6 (2006): 19–21; and Forrest David, *The Atlantic System: The Story of Anglo-American Control of the Seas* (1941; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973).
- 7 Baron de Pompée-Valentin Vastey, *The Colonial System Unveiled*, trans. and ed. Chris Bongie (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014); Marlene L. Daut, *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); and Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Verso, 2018).
- 8 Jarvis Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021).

Victuals from the Plantationocene

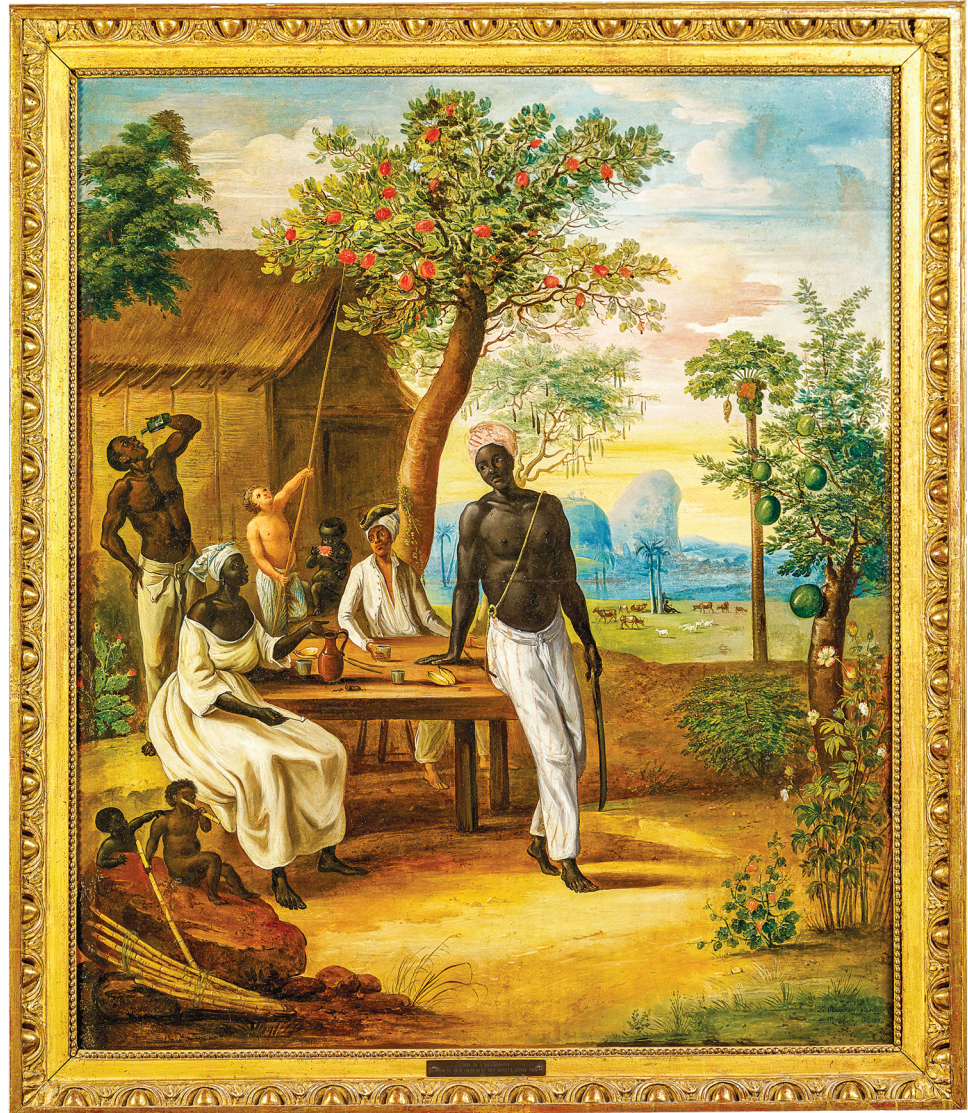
Provision Grounds and Black Personhood in an Eighteenth-Century Martinican Painting

C.C. McKEE

PAINTED IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, *Esclaves noirs à la Martinique* by Marius-Pierre Le Masurier constructs a vision of idyllic idleness in the provision grounds that developed in the background of the plantation in the colonial Caribbean (Figure 6.1). Here, the enslaved are not pictured as entities distinct from nature; rather, plant and Black human life are inextricably linked. The positions of figures and plants repeat and reinforce each other across the canvas. The defiant crook of an enslaved man's raised elbow as he takes the last drops of his eau-de-vie ration finds its corollary in the verdant swath of a green branch that creeps into the visual field above him. The central cashew tree adopts a contrapposto curve that is repeated by another bare-chested enslaved man leaning against the table with his machete at his side. But perhaps these formal similarities are overstated; the painting does smack of stagy, didactic schematism, with its extreme attention to botanical verisimilitude and exaggerated gestures that force an opaque narrative into the composition. Nevertheless, one can also glimpse parallel Black knowledge of the landscape in the production of victuals in Le Masurier's colonial genre scene, as a means of persistence under the conditions of enslavement.

Little is known about Le Masurier, the French artist who worked on the island of Martinique in the latter half of the eighteenth century, or his oeuvre of six known paintings from the Caribbean.¹ Based on the dates inscribed with his signature, it appears that he arrived in the colony in the mid-1770s, that his earliest canvas from Martinique is dated 1775, and that he likely accompanied his patron Maximilien Claude Joseph de Choiseul-Meuse, *aide-major général à la Martinique* in 1766, then *commandant de l'île en second* before becoming *brigadier des armées du roi* in 1779. He was a practicing painter as early as 1769, and he worked in the Caribbean through at least 1782, the date of his last

FIGURE 6.1
 Marius-Pierre Le
 Masurier, *Esclaves
 noirs à la Martinique*,
 late eighteenth century,
 oil on canvas. Musée
 du quai Branly, Paris.



known pair of canvases from Martinique. Art historian Christelle Lozère argues that “the works of Le Masurier, as symbolic as they are political, attempt to give European spectators a pacifying and ideal vision of colonial Caribbean society at the end of the eighteenth century, while the morals of these Creole elites were critiqued and even the legitimacy of slavery was increasingly contested.”² Expanding on this point, the ecological relationship between the raced bodies and comestible tropical plants in these paintings is charged with a multitude of interwoven and conflicting referents that challenge the painting’s aesthetic pacification and expand considerations of Black existence beyond cane field monocultures into the provision grounds.

The titular *esclaves noirs* are not the sole actors in this composition. Rather, the figures are represented in relation to the particularized fruiting plants, flowers, and cacti

that surround them. They are in or near their *jardin-case*, or provision ground, a small plot of land often located near slave huts and provided to the enslaved by masters for the cultivation of foodstuffs. The fruiting cashew, calabash, and tamarind trees; the prickly pear cactus; the flowering cassava and yam plants; the star fruit on the table; and the cut sugarcane in the foreground are all depicted with an attention to detail that rivals many botanical and natural historical depictions from the period. Attending to the relationship between enslaved figures and the natural world in Le Masurier's colonial genre scene reveals the enslaved epistemologies and ontologies that emerged alongside the capitalist colonial system. This essay proposes an art historical method that reads colonial painting as containing multiple interpretive entry points. From one perspective, this essay traces painting's capacity to reify colonial power by purporting a natural historical objectivity in its representation of the provision ground, one of the most tenuous spaces under its control. From another, I argue that *Esclaves noirs* holds interpretive valences beyond the aesthetic conventions of genre painting adapted to the tropics. Rather, the painting offers glimpses of Black life in the Caribbean that persisted beyond the confines of the plantation and that were informed by clandestine epistemological inheritances from Indigenous Caribbeans. As a mediated aesthetic object, *Esclaves noirs* stands at the intersection of these coeval modes of existence, offering a distillation of the Black contestation and acquiescence that might be articulated in relationships to the environment that existed outside the machinery of cash crop production. In sum, Le Masurier's *Esclaves noirs* purports to serve the human and environmental extraction of the Plantationocene by bringing the plot under the sway of the plantation—to evoke Sylvia Wynter's dichotomy elaborated in the following section—but opens onto alternative modes of reading the coeval Black ecologies that resided in the provision ground.

The Plot and the Plantationocene

Explicating the multiple relationships to land that emerge in Le Masurier's painting places us at the center of contemporary ecocritical debates around the role of colonialism in constructing historical frames capable of contending with the simultaneous ecological and human violence of enslavement on the plantation. Perhaps the most fleshed-out conceptual engagement with this knot of historical issues that bleed into our present is that of the "Plantationocene," developed by feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway and anthropologist Anna L. Tsing, along with an interdisciplinary cadre of ecocritical scholars. This neologism signals the central role of plantation ecology in our contemporary climate crisis by proposing an alternative periodization of modernity founded upon the "devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor."³

The Plantationocene seeks to amend the epistemological limitations of the "Anthropocene"—which presumes a universal human culpability for climate change—and the "Capitalocene"—which conjoins capitalist production to environmental devastation with fossil fuel use during the Industrial Revolution.⁴ Both Haraway and Tsing

point to the Plantationocene as a radical reduction of ecological time and space. For Haraway, it “disrupts the generation time of all the players” and “radically simplifies” potential networks by setting up “situations for the vast proliferation of some and the removal of others . . . an epidemic friendly way of rearranging species life in the world.” Where Haraway’s Plantationocene emerges from the dynamics of enslaved and genocidal labor extraction (across living scales), Tsing focuses on the reduction of diverse ecological networks under the monocultural regime of the Plantationocene: “The plantation was precisely the conjunction between ecological simplifications, the discipline of plants in particular, and the discipline of humans to work on [the plantation]. . . . [The Plantationocene’s legacy] is so naturalized that many people believe that it is the meaning of the term agriculture.”⁵ The term conceptualizes the violence of colonial agriculture in the Caribbean—with its synonymous monocultures of sugar, cotton, tobacco, and indigo, among others—as an epochal turning point for the violent degradation of ecological relations between humans and other-than-humans, with a legacy that continues today, notably in the form of palm oil plantations.

However, by exclusively focusing on the cash crops that dominated the white Euro-Creole imagination (and padded their coffers), one necessarily excludes from view the coeval forms of subsistence agriculture developed by Afro-Caribbeans that upheld slave societies and provided the enslaved with a measure of economic autonomy from the early colonial period and after abolition. Geographer Judith A. Carney proposes a widening of the lens to take the whole of the plantation into account: “What the concept does not yet effectively do is bring into relief the subaltern archipelagos of agrobiodiversity that the Plantationocene spawned. Enslaved men and women established food plots in their dooryard gardens and in other plantation areas deemed unsuitable to the commodity crop. . . . Slave food plots were also sites of liberatory practice and resistance.”⁶ Although Carney overstates the extent to which the plot functioned as a site of liberation for the enslaved—as we will see, these crops and the economic mobility they provided were as advantageous for the master as they were for the enslaved—the provision grounds are a critical site to nuance and expand historical narratives of Caribbean slavery in the Plantationocene that myopically focus on the environmental domination of monocultures.

From a colonial art historical perspective, the Plantationocene provides a heuristic through which the visual and material manifestation of plantation agriculture is positioned as the site of represented modern industrial capitalism. Attending to racialization and modernity as mutually constituted on the plantation and its environs represented in *Esclaves noirs* allows relationships to the environment other than that of agribusiness’s model of devastation to come to the fore. Representations of the plantation, and the Caribbean environment more generally, during the eighteenth century were intended for white Creole audiences at the apex of colonial society and European audiences who would never set foot in the colonies. Nevertheless, the aestheticized inclusion of Black life at the center and on the margins of these representations offers important insight into the parallel forms of environmental knowledge employed by the enslaved to press against the limits of their servitude.⁷

The opportunity for the enslaved to develop and implement their creolized knowledge of the Caribbean environment in the form of agriculture also established the beginnings of a parallel economy. Historian Oscar de la Torre distinguishes a parallel economy from the more traditional structure of an internal economy, where Afro-Caribbeans employed their botanical knowledge to negotiate their enslavement on economic terms by selling their harvests or offering their services to Europeans and Creoles.⁸ Oscar de la Torre's proposal of a "parallel" economy developed by enslaved Afro-Brazilians instead of an "internal" one maintains the degree of control the enslaved had in the negotiation of slavery while also shifting its terms toward an "environmental creolization" that relied on forms of Black and Indigenous knowledge of the landscape that exceeded those of colonial cash crop economies. Thus, the production of vegetable produce and medicinal plants for individual sustenance and sale at the scale of the provision ground rather than the plantation instantiates alternative forms of cultivation, human and nonhuman relations, and persistence under the conditions of slavery and exhaustive agriculture into discourses of the Plantationocene.

The Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter offers a productive ecocritical theorization *avant la lettre* of the anti-dialectical relationship between the provision ground and the broader plantation structure in her 1971 essay "Novel and History: Plot and Plantation."⁹ Wynter opens by articulating the relationship between culture and economy in the Caribbean: "the plantation-societies of the Caribbean came into being as adjuncts to the market system; their peoples came into being as an adjunct to the product, to the single crop commodity—the sugar cane—which they produced."¹⁰ This relationship to the market is staged as the "clash that was inherent and inbuilt . . . between the plantation system, a system owned and dominated by external forces, and what we shall call the plot system, the indigenous, autochthonous system."¹¹ European discovery of the New World ushered in a "one-way transformation" that sought to sever Man from a reciprocity with Nature in the interest of rendering land legible only as the means to realize exchange value. For Wynter, the market is the before and the behind of modern racialization. In her unpublished manuscript, "Black Metamorphosis," Wynter begins her theorization of the production of (white, European) Man, emblemized by the plantation owner, whose being was constituted by his individual rights of property. The distribution of the plot was meant to participate in this historical process by maximizing planter profits and providing the enslaved a circumscribed means of obliquely participating in the market. Black being, by contrast, resisted the coterminous commodification of land and body in the plot as an affirmation of African social philosophies rooted in land's use value that were therefore retained, adapted, and modified on the provision ground.¹² As a result, "Caribbean society is that of a dual relation between plantation and plot, the two poles which originate in a single historical process, the ambivalence between the two has been, and is . . . at once the root cause of our alienation; and the possibility of our salvation."¹³ The simultaneous alienation and salvation that ripples across the scale of the plot and the plantation bifocalizes the hyperopia of the Plantationocene in order to see the inevitable relationship between Black ecologies in the provision ground and its dependence upon the proto-capitalist market.

Wynter's theorization of the plot-plantation dynamic unveils the tortuous capitalist-ontological restraints placed upon Black personhood in the Plantationocene that lurk beneath the surface of *Esclaves noirs*. Critically, Wynter suggests that the homonymic plot (as provision ground and narrative) traverses aesthetics and market conditions as a form of resistance, or persistence, in the terms of this essay: "We suggest that this plot system was, like the novel form in literature terms, the focus of resistance to the market system and market values."¹⁴ If we follow Wynter's model of testing aesthetic form against material conditions in the Caribbean, as the cradle of the Plantationocene, then colonial painting becomes another critical aesthetic means of tracing the ambivalent relationship between plantation and plot. In "Black Metamorphosis," Wynter positions the plot as the site where a Black materialist aesthetics in the form of folk culture were sown and guarded: "The plantation was the property of the master—mere land—as the slave was the property of the master—mere labor. But on the plot, on the provision ground, the cultural pattern was established. Here his was the relationship of a man to the earth. . . . For the earth—in the New World form had herself become ambivalent: she was both the source of sustenance as the peasant plot and also provider of alienated and alienating land for the plantation."¹⁵ Le Masurier's genre scene purports a colonialist objectivity via botanical verisimilitude, and yet the very painterly truth proffered by *Esclaves noirs* also holds the possibility of reading coeval forms of Black personhood that resided in environmental epistemologies cultivated in the provision ground's fertile soil.

Colonial Contestation, Black Knowledge, and the Provision Ground

Le Masurier's paintings of Black life represent a decisive shift in eighteenth-century French depictions of the Caribbean because they construct a visual repertoire attentive to the nuances of racialization. Rooted in the expository images of natural histories, visualizations of the French Caribbean during this period hinged on idealized representations of the landscape to excise the onerousness of enslaved labor by naturalizing the Black body within the mechanisms of colonial agriculture. An image of a colonial *sucrierie* by Sébastien Leclerc in Dominican priest and natural historian Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre's *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François* is indicative of this approach (Figure 6.2).¹⁶ Here, a vision of Black labor synthesized with the tropical landscape is realized both compositionally and schematically. As art historian Nicholas Mirzoeff described a related print from the same volume, the scene "is not a literal depiction . . . but its schematic representation, which makes visible both the process and the power that sustained it."¹⁷ It accompanies Du Tertre's extensive discourse on sugar production and collapses the months-long process into a dense temporal moment that depicts the various tasks required to extract and refine sugar from the cane. Akin to Du Tertre's displacement of their labor, dangerous as it was, through passive language, these anonymized enslaved figures are rendered little more than staffage and cursorily acknowledged as cogs necessary to ensure the perpetuation of the colonial machine. In her reading of enslaved figures laboring on an indigo plantation in William Gerard de Brahm's 1757 map of the South Carolina coast, Black feminist theorist Tiffany Lethabo King emphasizes that beneath and within the capture and pacification



of colonial imaging practices lies the possibility to read “Black bodies on plantation landscapes as shifting, moving, and unstable figures that elude full knowability.”¹⁸ In the cartouche, “their bodies and activities represent the moments in which the plants, water, lime—and, perhaps, even muscles due to strain and fatigue—break down to their most basic chemical elements.” As the facade of pictorial stability (a proof of colonial power) fades, “Black bodily movements can exceed the logics of labor and render the Black body an opaque space that confounds already available frames of legibility.”¹⁹ King’s approach to the potential capacities for Black materiality to move within the purportedly totalizing authority of colonial enslavement even at its core—the labor necessary to process cash crops into commodities—challenges Plantationocene narratives as limited to repressive ecological reduction and simplification. If one approaches these images attentive to the hesitations and alternative points of contact, one might locate the coeval Afro-Caribbean ecologies that exist within the frame.

While sugar production is the titular subject of Du Tertre’s image, the various indigenous plants that occupy the foreground speak to these alternative environments that were cultivated alongside plantation monocultures. A numeric key defines each site of the refining process and each plant at the bottom of the image, thereby leveling, to some degree, the distinction between sugar production and other vegetal products of the landscape.²⁰ Two varieties of palm, the medicinal pajomirioba (*Cassia occidentalis*), two species of *chou caraïbe* (members of the *Araceae* family) that were used for their tubers and leaves, and a banana tree are displayed across the foreground of the composition, distancing the viewer

FIGURE 6.2 Sébastien Leclerc, *Sucrierie*, from Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Thomas l’olly, 1667). John Carter Brown Library, Providence, R.I.

from the labor of sugar production taking place in the middle ground. This encyclopedic approach to representing the Caribbean aligns itself with the genre of natural history, which sought to present the totality of the colonies' foreignness to metropolitan readers. Yet this vegetal abundance also points to the necessarily plural colonial environments that existed around the forcibly extracted enslaved labor that ravaged and restructured the Caribbean landscape. The *cases de nègres* (slave huts) are listed outside the sequence relevant to sugar and among the noncommercial medicinal and comestible plants that would have been cultivated by the enslaved. It occupies a space less easily categorized within the taxonomy of sugar production and suggests the multiple agricultural modes that coexisted in the colonial Caribbean.

Ordering the slave hut among the names of local flora in the print from Du Tertre's natural history implicitly signals the centrality of enslaved Black labor to the parasitic relationship between the plantation and the plot. This is because even in Du Tertre's mid-seventeenth-century text, an already established practice of enslaved Afro-Caribbeans working outside of the cane fields on Saturday was described: "The negroes who have Saturday free to nourish themselves and to look after themselves in the fashion of those from Brazil go to work on this day for the inhabitants who feed them and give them ten livres of tobacco [*pétun*] for their effort."²¹ Foremost, this method was advantageous for white Creole planters; by giving the enslaved land to cultivate, they were further absolved of providing the imported rations, like the salt beef or salt fish, proscribed in the 1685 *Code Noir* that were often unreliable and insufficient.

Published in the early eighteenth century, the Dominican priest Jean-Baptiste Labat's *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l'Amérique* extended Du Tertre's natural history and described the effects when planters granted the enslaved

some cantons of land in places separate from the plantation complex, or close to the woods, to make their tobacco gardens and to plant potatoes, yams, millet, Caribbean cabbage, and other things either for their sustenance, or to sell. . . . These gardens produce an infinity of commodities for them. I have known Negroes who made more than one hundred crowns of tobacco and goods every year. When they are taken to a market, where they can easily transport their herbs, their melons, and other fruits, they see it as the happiness of the century, they are well looked after, they and their families are even more attached to their masters, who they see themselves as protecting and helping with their small transactions.²²

In his description, Labat describes what historian Gabriel Debien identifies as a difference between the *jardin-case*, located within the confines of the plantation itself, and the *jardin-nègre*, provision grounds located on the periphery of the plantation or even further afield in the overgrown hills that could not be converted to sugar cultivation.²³ In their earliest instantiations, these *jardins-case* were located between huts or in a more communal space between groups of huts.²⁴ Where the *jardin-case* could be nominally folded into European notions of property ownership with individually tended plots of land, the larger *jardin-nègre* that developed over the course of the eighteenth century in the French

Caribbean was a creolized approach to food production, subverting white colonial order with African and Indigenous cultivation techniques. The plantation owner distributed this land, which was seen as overgrown and useless to European eyes blinded by fields of sugarcane. After this initial allotment, however, the enslaved redistributed it among themselves based on African traditions retained and modified during the Middle Passage and after generations of enslavement in the Caribbean. “Was the African social structure of subsistence crops retained?” asked Debien in his study of Afro-Caribbean diets under slavery. “The colonist probably did not involve himself, but since the majority of field slaves were women, Africa also found itself there in the work of the *jardins-nègre*. The tasks had to be divided, men prepared the soil, women planted, weeded, and harvested.”²⁵

Debien’s analysis emphasizes the provision ground’s operation within and around the pace of plantation agriculture, specifically that of sugar cultivation. The crop cycle of sugar cane typically lasted between ten and twenty-four months, with the cane taking about a year to fully ripen. The wet season in the Caribbean, roughly spanning from July to January, was optimal for growing cane because it is a water-intensive crop and requires natural watering along with irrigation for maximal output on islands with often limited access to fresh water. The dry season, spanning from February to June, was optimal for sugar processing because there was a lower chance of heavy rain that would rot the cane. Cane production and harvest was a relentless machine because planters would often stagger field use so that they could be planted and harvested seriatim, ensuring a steady flow of sugarcane to the mill. It dominated the landscape and structured society. As Debien suggests, the provision ground, by contrast, planted a parallel social temporality that took place around land use inherited from Africa and operated in an ambivalent relationship with the market.

With its focus on the slave hut and provision ground, *Esclaves noirs* departed from many pictorial precedents that centered on the great house or sugar works as metonyms for the plantation. Le Masurier chose, instead, to paint a practice of distributing land for cultivation by the enslaved that began in the late seventeenth century, when French planters took up the method of managing the enslaved *à la façon du Brésil*, imported by Dutch plantation owners after their expulsion from Brazil by the Portuguese in 1654. The landscape paintings of the Dutch painter Frans Jansz Post offer a valuable counter to Le Masurier’s intimate genre scene and provide insight into the European aesthetic conventions that were adapted to the American tropics. Post’s paintings render the emergence of the ecological and economic dimensions of the Plantationocene while also obfuscating the violence required to extract sugar from cane (Figures 6.3 and 6.4). Post arrived in Dutch Brazil in January 1637 under the patronage of Governor Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, who came on the request of the Dutch West India Company, along with the still-life painter Albert Eckhout and the scientists Willem Piso and Georg Marcgraf. The colony was founded only seven years prior, when the Dutch successfully expelled the Portuguese and established control over nearly half of the colonized territory in Brazil. As a landscape painter trained in Haarlem, Post was tasked with recording the fortresses, civic and military buildings, and the landholdings in the young colony. A selection of Post’s drawings from the period was published in the 1647 and 1660 editions

FIGURE 6.3

Frans Post, *Landscape in Brazil with Sugar Plantation*, 1660, oil on canvas. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.



FIGURE 6.4

Frans Post, *A Sugar Mill*, 1660, oil on canvas. Collection Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Gift B. de Geus van den Heuvel, 1938 / Photography: Studio Tromp.



of Caspar van Barlaeus's *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia* (History of Events During Eight Years in Brazil). They reflect the Dutch Golden Age landscape tradition that Post would have learned in Haarlem: an elevated vantage point distinguished by an extremely low horizon line that allows for a sweeping vista over the landscape and an expansive sky, typically dappled with clouds.

The majority of Post's Brazilian landscapes, however, were produced in the Netherlands after his eight-year sojourn in the colony for a Dutch clientele who had never been to, and would likely never travel to, the New World. These works produced from memory take a diverse range of subjects, including churches as well as Brazilian and colonial villages. Among these paintings are *Landscape in Brazil with Sugar Plantation* and *A Sugar Mill*, both produced around 1660 and both representing the architecture, machinery, and human labor that consolidated around circum-Caribbean sugar plantations at this time. Moreover, their production, over a decade after leaving the colony and after the Dutch were expelled from Brazil, and their aesthetic strategies demonstrate the utility of painting to obfuscate colonial violence. In an essay on the artist, Dante Martins Teixeira notes that there are marked compositional differences between the paintings executed in Brazil and those produced in the Netherlands for a domestic market. When he returned to Europe, Post exaggerated the landscape topography and the flora and fauna that populate the foreground of his paintings to naturalize the plantation in the colonial landscape.²⁶

A ripening pineapple, a melon on the vine, and the cacti situated amid shady foliage along a path catch the viewer's eye in *Landscape in Brazil with Sugar Plantation*. The *repoussoir* device invites the viewer to look back onto the scene of sugar production in the middle ground and the landscape dotted with plantations that extends into the distant background. This invitation, however, also installs a critical distance between the white European viewer and the Black labor that is the painting's narrative center. The various stages of extraction and refinement are represented in sequential vignettes loosely framed by the archways that run diagonally into the depth of the middle ground: enslaved African laborers throw a pile of bagasse, the dry, fibrous cane material that remains after the juice has been extracted, into the furnace that fuels the set of boilers that evaporate the water from the cane juice extracted via milling after the cane is cut in the field and carted to the sugar works. The spatial recession of Post's painting invites a reading from left to right, from the foreground path to the distant hills beyond. However, if interpreted in this linear fashion, the refining process is represented in an order nearly opposite to the actual progression of events. Moreover, Post limits the plantation architecture to the sugar works, a church, and the plantation manor. By unmooring the refining process from its temporal sequence and excising the spaces of Black life, Post's painting aligns with the Plantationocene's narrow vision of plantation ecologies that mechanized both the land and Black labor.

Painted at about the same time, *A Sugar Mill* adopts a similar, but mirrored, compositional strategy. The foreground presents an even wider array of Brazilian flora and fauna, where snakes feast on mammalian prey and colorful birds perch, all entwined with lush vegetation shaded to a darkness reminiscent of the *sottobosco* genre of still life popular during this period.²⁷ Again, the sugar works occupy the most detail in a middle ground

presided over by a church and plantation house. Unlike Post's other representation of sugar processing, the middle of this canvas gestures toward the before and after of sugar production, with an enslaved figure leading an oxcart laden with sugarcane from the field and a ship perhaps ready to cart the barreled sugar back to Europe for consumption. Although Post painted these canvases after Portuguese forces had recaptured the Dutch enclave in Brazil, art historian Liza Oliver reminds us that they should not necessarily be read as records of colonial nostalgia but as generalized representations of the Dutch sugar economy in the West Indies.²⁸ These painterly aesthetic conventions move beyond the pragmatism of Du Tertre's didactic plate; they perpetuate the colonial oppression of the Plantationocene by obfuscating any glimpse of Blackness in the plantation geography, as there are no enslaved dwellings or provision grounds to be seen. They mediate the colonial landscape in ways identified by Wynter, where the plantation is "mere land" driven by "mere labor," devoid of the provision ground's culture that ecologically weaves the human into the landscape. Post's Brazilian canvases painted from the Netherlands work in concert to alienate the agricultural crop from the enslaved labor required to process it, underscored by the presence of the overseer and planter class in both paintings as arbiters of the market.

Even when the view was shifted to the provision ground and slave hut, Le Masurier's canvas functioned to aestheticize these supposedly marginal spaces on the plantation as an idyllic vision of natural abundance produced without labor. Labat's description of enslaved cultivation indicated that provision grounds gave the appearance of a burgeoning mercantilist resource with which the enslaved could participate in the colonial economy. However, their status as property placed enslaved Afro-Caribbeans in a complex relationship to wage earning. Myriad historians have argued for the provision ground as a site of resistance or, more neutrally, as a means for the enslaved to participate in the islands' internal economy by selling surplus produce.²⁹ In the context of enslaved provision grounds in Bahia, historian B. J. Barickman specifies that acknowledging this economy does not seek to "rehabilitate" arguments about slavery's mildness. On the contrary, it reveals one of the many "shifting terrains" where the day-to-day struggle between masters and slaves played itself out.³⁰ Building upon Barickman's emphasis on the intricacies of Afro-Caribbean struggles for personhood within the system of slavery, Oscar de la Torre elaborates on how the parallel economies that operated within colonial enslavement unveiled forms of Black endurance. These historians, among others, have demonstrated the extent to which the enslaved employed their labor beyond the plantation in the plot and that the fruits of their labor afforded them the opportunity to enter into the colonial economy with the sale of comestibles.

The emphasis on the market activities of the enslaved in natural histories and travel narratives during the eighteenth century provided a scene of mercantilist pastoralism familiar to a white audience. Colonial Caribbean visual cultures perpetuated these visions of enslaved participation in the colonial economy to further articulate Blackness and the Caribbean landscape as under the thumb of white authority, with their presentation of slavery's landscape as timeless, immutable, and carefully controlled. The colonizing eye could only see and represent the Caribbean environment if it denied the tenuousness of its control over creeping vines and the contestations of its terms enacted by the enslaved

themselves. Le Masurier's *Esclaves noirs* paints the plot in its ambivalent economic relationship—one that is also necessarily cultural, if we follow Wynter—to the market from the perspective of the plantation. This idyllic scene attempts to render enslaved labor's alienation invisible and transpose genre painting in the Caribbean for the planter class patron, for whom land could only be aesthetically legible as property. Yet, representing the plot in the valorized medium of painting also extends the possibility of reading other forms of Black persistence beyond its conscription at the nexus of labor, land, and capital. Perhaps this is why explicit representations of the provision ground are rare in the eighteenth century and why Le Masurier's contemporaries preferred only to gesture toward it in scenes of commercial exchange at the market. Although Le Masurier painted at least one market scene of Saint-Pierre, the most notable painter of Caribbean markets was Agostino Brunias, an Italian painter working in the Anglophone Caribbean.³¹

By depicting the space of the provision ground, rather than the market, to decorate a colonial official's home, Le Masurier sought to reify order through its aestheticization. Yet the pictorial conventions of representing the colonized Caribbean landscape were necessarily rife with contradiction. In the same frame as the artist's penchant for botanical verisimilitude and sentimentality exist parallel creolizations of the environment that could be pictured without being fully revealed. That is to say, the representation of colonial authority in plantation societies was always positioned in relation to the possibility of slavery's collapse, with the provision ground at its heart.³²

Centering the *jardin-case*, *Esclaves noirs* provides insight into Afro-Caribbean knowledge and use of the landscape that existed beyond both the cane field and the island market. The painting thus contains subtle challenges to the security of Plantationocene authority and exists in conflict with the painting's ostensible decorative purpose. It is crucial to note that the fidelity of Le Masurier's botanical representations participates in a broader artistic tradition of representing tropical plants as engravings in scientific treatises, although Le Masurier's painting does not claim to participate directly in the generation of scientific knowledge and the majority of these prints were published later in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³³ The representational assemblage of this *jardin-case*, with its enslaved cultivators and botanically accurate Caribbean plants used for sustenance and medicinal purposes, alludes to the profound degree of knowledge enslaved Afro-Caribbeans had of their surroundings and the influence this knowledge had on their white Creole masters. For example, enslaved populations likely learned the health benefits of the indigenous cashew fruit and nut from the Caribs before their expulsion from the island in 1660 and transmitted this knowledge to the planter class on Martinique.³⁴ The smooth, globular green fruits that hang on the small foreground tree appear to be calabash.³⁵ The calabash was a central vegetal product in African cultures, used for food when harvested young and transformed into bowls, utensils, and instruments when harvested mature and dried. These practices were brought to the Caribbean, where Labat observed that the calabash was "the ordinary plate and cooking utensils of our negroes, the Caribs, and the majority of lower class inhabitants."³⁶ Finally, the tamarind tree, which emerges from behind the central figure with its slender brown pods, also had myriad medicinal properties and was used throughout the Caribbean.

Labat notes that tamarind jelly was frequently consumed by the English because they were subject to “debilitations of the stomach, which are the fruits of their intemperance with food and drink.”³⁷ The relationship of these plants to the titular enslaved Afro-Caribbeans reveals the fissure in this intrusion of the white colonial gaze into the Black space of the *jardin-case*. Moreover, the compositional relationship between tropical plant and enslaved figure offers alternative forms of movement and reveals a coeval knowledge of the landscape that formed a foundation upon which the enslaved could endure the brutal reality of slavery while simultaneously mobilizing that botanical knowledge for their own gain.

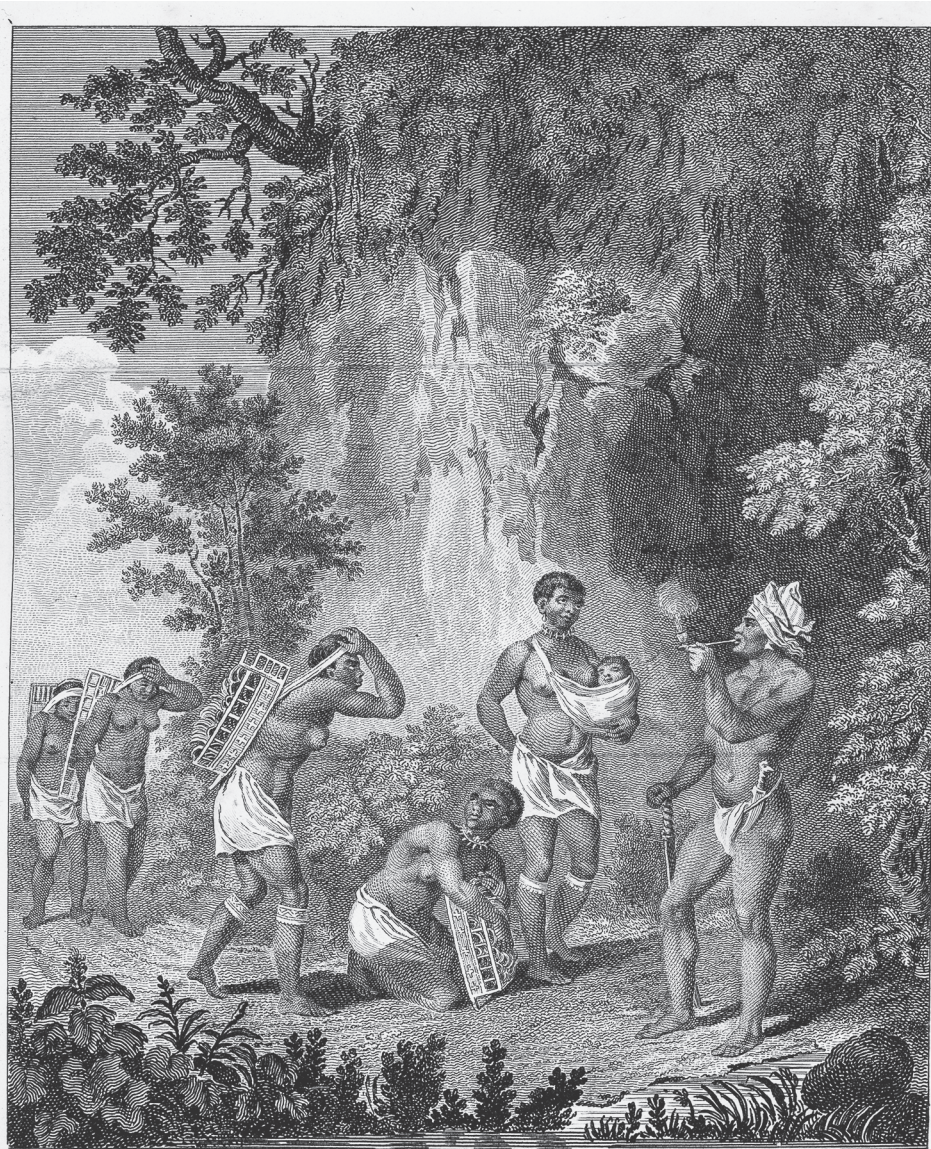
Le Masurier’s painting triangulates the creolized encounters born of and against the Plantationocene in the heart of the provision ground. As Wynter reminds us, the modest space of the plot was fertile ground for mitigating the alienated relationship between man and earth that was the plantation. Instead, the plot established a cultural pattern derived from contact between Black, Indigenous, and white populations in the Caribbean and all the attendant complexities, violent elisions, and clandestine transfers this contact implied. This was knowledge developed under the conditions of slavery, transmitted orally from Africa, born of contact between Maroons and Indigenous Kalinago, provided but never fully revealed to the master.

Blackness and Indigeneity in the Provision Ground

In the middle ground of *Esclaves noirs*, where two Black figures tend a flock of cattle and goats, Le Masurier inadvertently gestures toward another form of cultivation that was largely outside the white colonial agricultural systems that defined the Plantationocene. This is the space of the *jardin-nègre*, also called the *jardin potager* or *ichtali* by the Indigenous Kalinago.³⁸ Distinct from the *jardin-case*, the *jardin-nègre* was maintained by slash-and-burn techniques adapted by the enslaved from the Indigenous population in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because these plots of land were typically located at the edge of the plantation or in the wilderness beyond. Although the colonial expulsion and genocide of Indigenous Caribbeans—including the Taino, Arawak, and Kalinago—was extensive by the end of the seventeenth century, there is evidence suggesting that these seafaring communities remained in secluded enclaves. Just over a decade after a massacre orchestrated on the French islands in 1660, the 1671 census reported only seventy-two “sauvages mestis et capouis” living between all of the French islands in the Lesser Antilles; yet in 1685 this number notably increased to 116 free and 138 enslaved “Caribs.”³⁹ The discrepancy between these figures indicates limitations in the census and implies Kalinago communities evaded colonial recognition into the eighteenth century. This is inadvertently corroborated in 1705 by Labat, who recounted his interactions with Kalinagos and remarked that “many others” lived on Cabesterre, the Atlantic side of the island.⁴⁰ In these remote settlements, Indigenous Caribbeans and Black Maroons would cultivate reciprocal modes of existence largely extricated from the Plantationocene. Yet even the Afro-Indigenous communities that emerged beneath European conquest could not completely escape the aestheticizing gaze of colonial painting.

Around the same time that Le Masurier was working in Martinique, Agostino Brunias painted a number of canvases depicting Kalinago and mixed Afro-Indigenous communities who populated the nearby island of St. Vincent. Brunias was an itinerant Italian painter who worked on the British Caribbean islands of Dominica, Barbados, St. Vincent, Grenada, St. Kitts, and Tobago from 1764 to 1775 under the patronage of Sir William Young, an Antiguan planter and later governor of Dominica, and who returned to the Caribbean in 1784, painting there until his death on Dominica in 1796. In a work like *Chatoyer the Chief of the Black Charaibes in St. Vincent with His Five Wives* (ca. 1780)—circulated as a print by Charles Grignon in the Jamaican planter Bryan Edwards’s epic colonial history of the British West Indies—Brunias departs from his typical engagement with other Caribbean mixed-race populations, especially in the space of the market. Instead, he presents Chatoyer, the Kalinago hero, as fixed to the Caribbean landscape (Figure 6.5). The original composition was painted between the two so-called Carib Wars of 1769–1773 and 1795–1797, when the Garifuna (or those of mixed Kalinago and Black heritage) on St. Vincent rebelled, with the assistance of the governor of nearby Martinique, against the British attempting to settle the island. Brunias represented the St. Vincent Kalinago and Garifuna in a number of paintings from the period. Art historian Mia Bagneris notes that “only in these works does the artist take care to represent the West Indian landscape with any degree of accuracy. In general, he is content to allow a lone palm tree or two to mark the scene as Caribbean, otherwise leaving the flora unidentifiable or imprecise.” Yet in a related work from the period, *A Leeward Islands Carib Family Outside a Hut* (Figure 6.6), “the specific species represented can be clearly identified as the heliconia (also known as balizier or *baliri*) to the left and a native palm tree in the centre of the work, both indigenous to St. Vincent.”⁴¹ Despite their divergent subject matter, Le Masurier’s *Esclaves noirs* and Brunias’s paintings of Indigenous Caribbeans served similar ideological functions when the provision grounds located on the outskirts of the plantation entered the frame. Ultimately, these two manifestations of colonial genre painting pacify threats to colonial authority by rendering even the most peripheral spaces of control visible. Yet Le Masurier’s suggestion of a *jardin-nègre* in the painting’s middle ground can also be read against itself. Because of their geographic separation from the main building complex of a given plantation, they were subject to less direct control by plantation overseers and allowed African-Indigenous agricultural practices to develop.

Esclaves noirs reiterates this exchange between Indigenous and African agricultural systems with flowering plants in the foreground but necessarily shifts the terms into the more inferential symbolic lexicon of painting. The shorter plant with orange flowers appears to be a variety of yam; the taller, with pale pink, five-petaled flowers, is manioc. Yams were tuberous staples central to African alimentary culture, and their centrality in the provision ground is evidence of the distinct relationship enslaved Africans developed to their new island surroundings. Manioc, by contrast, is indigenous to the Americas and was exported to Africa in the sixteenth century by Portuguese traders. However, raw manioc contains prussic acid, poisonous to humans and animals alike, and requires processing before it can be consumed. First, the tubers are peeled, then boiled; the liquid is pressed out, then they are grated, and the pulp is toasted to produce a flour that was the main



CHATOYER the CHIEF of the BLACK CHARAIBES in S^t VINCENT with his five WIVES.

Drawn from the life by Agostino Brunias - 1773. From an original painting in the possession of Sir W^m Young Bart. P.R.S.

Published March 11. 1796. by J. Stockdale, Piccadilly.

FIGURE 6.5 Charles Grignon, after Agostino Brunias, *Chatoyer the Chief of the Black Charaibes in St. Vincent with His Five Wives*, engraving, 1796. The Library Company, Philadelphia.



FIGURE 6.6
Agostino Brunias,
*A Leeward Islands
Carib Family Outside
a Hut*, ca. 1780, oil on
canvas. Yale Center
for British Art,
New Haven.

carbohydrate in the Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean diet. This process was practiced by Indigenous communities throughout the American tropics, passed along to enslaved Africans as another instance of environmental creolization in the colonial Caribbean and South America, and described by Du Tertre, Labat, and numerous other French natural historians.⁴² White colonists, and particularly the elite planter classes, slowly developed a taste for the potentially dangerous root in the eighteenth century, often preferring expensive imported flour or more familiar grains raised in the colonies. Le Masurier's representation of the *jardin-nègre* and the tuberous staples that were central to both African and Indigenous diets departs from the totalizing logic of the Plantationocene and adds a third

term to Wynter's plot-plantation dyad. The plot at the edge of the plantation, inflected by both Black and Indigenous agricultural practices, functions to reveal the coeval spaces of domination and contestation, knowledge cultivation and suppression, and Black persistence in the face of enslavement.

Conclusion

The flowering portion of these two staple root vegetables frames the foreground of Le Masurier's painting. They ascend to meet the calabash tree and palm that recede in the middle ground, metaphorically implying the links in this ecological chain of agricultural production that ran parallel to sugar in the Plantationocene. More explicitly, Le Masurier stages a formal juxtaposition in his painting as the slope of these flowering plants is mirrored on the left-hand side by the bundle of sugar cane and rock upon which two cherubic Black children play, one teasing the other, who is absorbed in sucking every last drop of the sweet juice. This consumption perhaps temporally presages the production of the eau-de-vie sipped by the adult figure behind them, a fermented by-product of the refinement process that was distributed to fortify and pacify enslaved field laborers. Despite their proximity to the main figural group, the pair of Black cherubs stands apart within the composition, typical of the staffage construed as supplemental to a composition. They do not participate in the exchange of gazes between the titular enslaved nor do they appear to interact in the same environment, cast as they are in a deep shadow that does not necessarily extend to the figures gathered around the table. Because of these formal qualities and against generic conventions, I contend that this pair of figures and pair of plants can be read differently; they pose an allegorical dialogue between environmental scales and knowledges in the Plantationocene. The cherubs are linked to the sugar cane and signal the pastoral ideal employed by proslavery discourses throughout the Atlantic to paper over colonialism's Indigenous genocide, slavery's exhaustive labor regime, and the ever-present threat of violence to maintain control. Here, the Plantationocene follows its reductive logic in a different vein, including only a few canes instead of expansive fields. The position of cane as innocently consumed by Black children symbolically near (yet compositionally separate from) the *jardin-case* allows for this Afro-Caribbean space to become legible for a white Creole audience in the plantation manor. The *jardin-case* is folded into the productive labor of the plantation machine; to use Wynter's language, the plot is subsumed within the plantation logic as mere land.

Although staffage can only signify quietly in a composition, the rhyming presence of the yam and manioc plants contests the security of this representation by gesturing toward the coeval forms of creolized Black agricultural practice in the provision ground as a means of persisting within slavery's ecology. While African techniques were retained, transformed, and practiced in the *jardin-case*, this was not simply "a re-creation of Africa in the Caribbean," as Jill Casid argues in the context of the British Caribbean. Nor were these provision grounds an "assemblage and intermixture in contrasting opposition to the plantation landscape." Here, Casid proposes a doubled reading of the plantation in which the orderly geometry of the estate appears diametrically opposed to the disorderly jumble

of slave huts and gardens. However, she asserts these spaces contest the same tropical landscape that was fundamentally foreign to both enslaved Africans and white Creoles using “similar techniques and often in similar terms.”⁴³ In the case of the British Caribbean, colonial discourse sought to both enfold “the hybrid production of the slave garden as a subservient part of the plantation landscape” while also delimiting it as a “failed copy.”⁴⁴ From this perspective, the provision ground challenged imperial authority as “a menacing and appropriating mimesis of colonial relandscaping as picturesque intermixture.”⁴⁵ Thus, the muted contestation posed by the pair of flowering tuber plants shifts the enslaved gathering into another key, a set of practices and conversations that cannot quite be contained by colonial authority.

The set of pairs in the foreground stage an allegory of the Plantationocene, to modify Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s formulation for understanding the “disjunctive relationship between the human and the planetary environment” and alternative approaches to it.⁴⁶ Le Masurier’s aesthetic idealism that was meant to render Black life in the provision ground comprehensible and beautiful to the Creole planter class also provides the means for its own unraveling. Along the transversal axis of this painting that diverted attention toward the fiction of idyllic enslavement and away from the disastrous ecological effects of plantation monocultures, other minor means of Black personhood were sown in the provision ground. By juxtaposing these two agricultural practices, *Esclaves noirs* brings the plurality of the Plantationocene into focus through Black environmental practices as much as it intended to obscure them.

NOTES

- 1 Jacques Foucart, “Note sur le peintre Le Masurier: À propos d’un récent achat du Musée d’Aquitaine,” *La tribune de l’art* (2013), <http://www.latribunedelart.com/note-sur-le-peintre-le-masurier-a-propos-d-un-recent-achat-du-musee-d-aquitaine>; Anne Lafont, “Fabric, Skin, Color: Picturing Antilles’ Markets as an Inventory of Human Diversity,” *Anuario colombiano de historia social y de la cultura* 43, no. 2 (2016): 121–54; and Christelle Lozère, “Architectures et arts de vivre des élites des Antilles françaises au XVIII^e siècle,” in *Un monde créole: Vivre aux Antilles au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Annick Notter and Érick Noël (La Crèche: La Geste, 2017), 72–80.
- 2 Lozère, “Architectures et arts de vivre des élites des Antilles françaises au XVIII^e siècle,” 80: “Dans un contexte prérévolutionnaire brouillonnant et sulfureux, les œuvres de Le Masurier, aussi symbolique que politique, tentent de donner aux spectateurs européens une vision apaisée et idéale de la société coloniale antillaise de la fin du XVIII^e siècle, alors que les mœurs des élites créoles sont critiquées et que la légitimité même de l’esclavage est de plus en plus contestée.”
- 3 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 206.
- 4 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*; Donna J. Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” *Environmental Humanities* 6 (2015): 159–65; and Donna J. Haraway et al., “Anthropologists Are Talking—About the Anthropocene,” *Ethnos* 81, no. 3 (2016): 353–64. Haraway acknowledges that the term “Capitalocene” emerged sui generis in multiple contexts, including an email exchange with Andreas Malm in 2009 and in Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015).
- 5 Gregg Mitman, “Reflections on the Plantationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing,” *Edge Effects* (2019), <https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene/>.
- 6 Judith A. Carney, “Subsistence in the Plantationocene: Dooryard Gardens, Agrobiodiversity, and the Subaltern Economies of Slavery,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48, no. 5 (2021): 1094.
- 7 Carney, “Subsistence in the Plantationocene,” 1082; and Zev A. Cossin and Mark Hauser, “Sugar Economies: A Visual Economy of the Plantation Landscape in Colonial Dominica,” in *Historical Archaeologies of Capitalism*, ed. Mark P. Leone and Jocelyn E. Knauf (New York: Springer, 2015), 399–418.
- 8 Oscar de la Torre, *The People of the River: Nature and Identity in Black Amazonia, 1835–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 52, 60–61.
- 9 Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History: Plot and Plantation,” in *We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk About a Little Culture: Decolonizing Essays, 1967–1984* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2012), 291–99.
- 10 Wynter, “Novel and History: Plot and Plantation,” 291.
- 11 Wynter, “Novel and History: Plot and Plantation,” 292.
- 12 Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” (unpublished manuscript, 1970s), 63. The theorization of Man against the Human occupies much of Wynter’s scholarship. In her 2003 article, Wynter articulates the categorical distinction, where Man “overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself” and splits into the enlightened political subject “Mani” and the “bio-economic subject of “Man2.” Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 260, 266, 269, 318. Both are speciously secured against the Otherness of Blackness and Indigeneity, defined as desubjectified labor with no claim to land-as-property.
- 13 Wynter, “Novel and History: Plot and Plantation,” 295.
- 14 Wynter, “Novel and History: Plot and Plantation,” 295.
- 15 Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis,” 63.
- 16 Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Thomas Iolty, 1667), 122–27.
- 17 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A History of Countervisuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 52.
- 18 Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 123.
- 19 King, *The Black Shoals*, 128.
- 20 Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 138. Garraway argues that this pictorial tactic “negates the historical contingency and

- social constructedness of sugar production, presenting the industrial process and the social system that drives it as entirely natural to the Caribbean landscape.”
- 21 Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François*, 2:519–20: “Les Nègres qui ont le Samedi libre pour se nourrir et pour s’entretenir, à la façon de ceux du Brésil, vont travailler ce jour là chez les habitants, qui les nourrissent et leur donnent dix livres de petun pour leur peine.”
 - 22 Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l’Amérique*, 8 vols. (Paris: Chez Théodore Le Gras, 1722), 3:171–72: “On donne aux Nègres quelques cantons de terre dans les endroits éloignés de l’Habitation, ou proche des bois, pour y faire leurs jardins à tabac, et [172] planter des patates, des ignames, du mil, des choux caraïbes, et autres choses, soit pour leur nourriture, soit pour vendre. C’est une bonne maxime d’avoir soin qu’ils y travaillent, et qu’ils les tiennent en bon état. . . . Ces jardins leur produisent une infinité de commoditez. J’ai connu des Nègres, qui faisoient tous les ans pour plus de cent écus de tabac, et autres denrées. Lorsqu’ils sont à portée d’un Bourg, où ils peuvent porter commodément leurs herbages, leurs melons, et autres fruits, ils se regardent comme les heureux du siècle, il s’entretiennent très bien, eux et leur famille, s’attachent d’autant plus à leurs Maîtres, qu’ils s’en voyent protéger et aider dans leurs petites affaires.”
 - 23 Gabriel Debien, “La nourriture des esclaves sur les plantations des Antilles françaises aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles,” *Caribbean Studies* 4, no. 2 (1964): 18.
 - 24 Debien, “La nourriture des esclaves sur les plantations des Antilles françaises aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles,” 10; and Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, “The Slaves’ Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas,” *Slavery & Abolition* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1–30.
 - 25 Debien, “La nourriture des esclaves sur les plantations des Antilles françaises aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles,” 19: “Il faut penser que ces jardins, étaient répartis par ménages par le maître. Ensuite les esclaves les redistribuaient entre eux. Conservait-on le cadre social africain des cultures vivrières? Probablement le colon ne s’en mêlait pas, mais du moment que la grande majorité des ‘esclaves de terre’ était féminine, l’Afrique se retrouvait là aussi dans de travail des jardins-nègres. Les tâches devaient être divisées, l’homme préparent le sol, les femmes, plantant, sarclant, récoltant.”
 - 26 Dante Martins Teixeira, “Nature in Frans Post’s Paintings of the New World,” in *Frans Post (1612–1680): Painter of Paradise Lost* (Munich: Haus der Kunst and Michael Imhof Verlag, 2006), 50.
 - 27 Karin Leonhard, “Pictura’s Fertile Field: Otto Marsius van Schreick and the Genre of Sottobosco Painting,” *Simiolus* 34, no. 2 (2009/2010): 95–118; and V. E. Mandrij, “Painted by Nature, Printed by Artists: Butterfly Materials in the Work of Otto Marseus van Schrieck and Maximilian Prüfer,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 71, no. 1 (2021): 276–312.
 - 28 Liza Oliver, “Frans Post’s Brazil: Fractures in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Landscape Paintings,” *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* 37, no. 3 (2013): 204.
 - 29 Berlin and Morgan, “The Slaves’ Economy”; Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery and the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830–1848*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016); and Sydney W. Mintz, “Caribbean Marketplaces and Caribbean History,” *Radical History Review* 27 (1983): 110–20.
 - 30 B. J. Barickman, “‘A Bit of Land, Which They Call Roça’: Slave Provision Grounds in the Bahian Recôncavo, 1780–1860,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (1994): 683.
 - 31 While a thorough engagement with *Marché de Saint-Pierre* is beyond the scope of this essay, suffice it to say that Le Masurier’s market scene serves a similar function to other contemporary representations of the internal and interisland economies that were driven by the trade in subsistence crops and medicinal plants. Opening the lens beyond Wynter’s plot and plantation dyad, the market represented an attempt to deracinate even this small-scale agricultural production from its African ground as the site of community, with use value beyond exchange. Art historian Mia Bagneris importantly distinguishes Brunias’s oeuvre from his other contemporaries working in the British Caribbean by emphasizing the fact that Brunias, like Le Masurier, turned away from representing pastoral plantation landscapes for Britain’s absentee planter class and toward representations of Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race life on the islands. Nevertheless, Brunias never represented the provision ground nor Indigenous cultivation techniques, with the notable exception of his aforementioned painting of a Kalinago family on the island of St. Vincent. Art historian Anne Lafont productively complicates this position by asserting: “Brunias’s intelligence lies in the fact that he knew how to choose a recurring event in colonial life, the fabric market, and was able to represent it through his paintings as an artistic synthesis of picturesque

and documentary elements pertaining to knowledge of colonial life and enjoyment in its pictorial imagining.” Anna Arabindan-Kesson implicates the erotic in these paintings where women of color take center stage, producing a “set of linkages between commercial visual registers in the dynamic circuits of exchange that compose Brunias’s market scenes.” Threaded throughout the scholarship on Brunias is the understanding that the aesthetic conventions of painting are employed as a means of rendering Caribbean society comprehensible, excising the Black space of the provision ground from the frame and thereby assuring the presumed white viewer of his or her position at the apex of colonial power. Anna Arabindan-Kesson, *Black Bodies, White Gold: Art, Cotton, and Commerce in the Atlantic World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 84; Mia L. Bagneris, *Colouring the Caribbean: Race and the Art of Agostino Brunias* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 61, 92–135; Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Lafont, “Fabric, Skin, Color,” 134.

- 32 Gabriel Debien, *Les esclaves aux Antilles françaises (XVII–XVIII^e siècles)* (Fort-de-France: Société d’Histoire de la Martinique, 1974).
- 33 Christelle Lozère, “Le rôle des images dans la diffusion des savoirs sur les plantes des Antilles,” in *L’usage des plantes médicinales aux Antilles et en Guyane: Les remèdes anciens au fil du temps*, ed. Jacques Dumont and Françoise Pagny Bénito-Espinal (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2015), 36–49.
- 34 Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les Français*, 2:180–81; and Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des îles Antilles de l’Amérique* (Rotterdam: Arnout Leers, 1658), 54–56.
- 35 Londa L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 236. Although these fruits may look similar to the breadfruit, which has its own important colonial history in the Caribbean, their shiny appearance and the foliage of the branches are more similar to the calabash. In addition, breadfruit was not acclimatized to the Caribbean when this painting was produced. Native to Polynesia, breadfruit was introduced to the American tropics in the 1790s by Sir Joseph Banks as a cheap food source for slaves.
- 36 Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l’Amérique*, 2:204: “C’est la vaisselle ordinaire et la batterie de cuisine de nos Nègres, des Caraïbes, et de la plupart des petits habitants.”
- 37 Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l’Amérique*, 7:37: “Les Anglois usent beaucoup de cette confiture ou espèce de conserve, parce qu’ils sont sujets à des débilités d’estomac, qui sont les fruits de leur intempérance dans la boire et le manger.”
- 38 Vincent Huyghues-Belrose, *Le jardin créole à la Martinique: Une parcelle du jardin planétaire* (Fort-de-France: Parc naturel régional de la Martinique, 2010), 9–12.
- 39 “Table contenant le nombre des habitants et des bestiaux des Isles, 1671,” ANOM DPPC G1 498 N. 54, Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence; and “Recensement général de toutes les Isles,” 1685, ANOM DPPC G1 498, Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence.
- 40 Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l’Amérique . . .*, vol. 2 (La Haye: Chez Husson et al., 1724), 146; and Tessa Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 19–47.
- 41 Bagneris, *Colouring the Caribbean*, 61.
- 42 Du Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les Français*, 2:112–18; Labat, *Nouveau voyage aux îles de l’Amérique* [1724 edition], 1:353; and Jean-François de La Harpe, *Abrégé de l’histoire générale des voyages*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hôtel de Thou, 1780), 99.
- 43 Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 197, 206.
- 44 Casid, *Sowing Empire*, 209.
- 45 Casid, *Sowing Empire*, 206.
- 46 Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 6.