African Cultures and Creolization on an Eighteenth-century St Kitts Sugar Plantation*

One of the most important developments in Atlantic history has been the incorporation of Africa into narratives of slave life and culture. Once considered a vague background or a prologue, Africa is now seen as fundamental to understanding crucial features of American slavery. Once seen as alienated, isolated, atomized members of a crowd, enslaved Africans are now deemed to have come in groups, occasionally with family members. Previously noted for its patterns of randomization, the Middle Passage is now portrayed as clustering people who shared common languages and cultures. The process of enslavement, it used to be emphasized, stripped slaves of culture, initiative, even personality; now, slaves are often characterized as drawing on African resources that remained intact to a significant degree.[1]

Despite this back-and-forth, the key question remains the extent to which Africa or America should take centre stage in the shaping of enslaved people's lives and identities. The debate — whether construed as continuity versus disjuncture, connection versus rupture, persistence versus creation, or Africa- versus American- centred models — has become overly polarized. Africanist scholars often are pitted against their Americanist colleagues, one group 'survivalists' and the other 'creationists'.[2] The Atlantic Ocean is either a bridge or a barrier. Africa-centered approaches emphasize African ethnicities as playing vital roles in the New World, whereas America-centered approaches focus on the rapid formation of a new hybrid culture — creolization — associated with the growth of an American-born, creole population.[3]

The oppositional character of this debate oversimplifies the complex reality of how identities formed. The birth of new ethnicities, or ethnogenesis, occurred on both sides of the Atlantic. Well before the onset of the transatlantic slave trade, African polities routinely seized captives and incorporated them into new societies and cultures. In spite of — and, in some ways, because of — the heightened violence of the slave trade, cultural adaptation and community formation proceeded apace. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Fante, for example, rose to prominence in what is now southern Ghana by amalgamating a variety of cultural traditions. The Fante might be considered Atlantic Creoles, peoples known for their multilingualism and cultural adaptability. Further south, Kongo peoples, too, were Atlantic Creoles well before leaving their native lands: they incorporated aspects of regional African cultures and adopted elements of Catholicism introduced by Portuguese missionaries. In the Americas, creolization sometimes involved inter-African syncretism, the merging of various African traditions with little input from Europeans and Amerindians. In the Atlantic World, hybridity took various forms and followed different trajectories. Identity formation was not unidirectional but multifaceted and multivalent.[4]

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[1] For two oppositional classics, see John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Mass., 1998) and Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992). For an important study that mediates between the two, see Walter Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1830* (New York, 2010).

[2] Richard Price, 'The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective', *New West Indian Guide*, lxxv (2001), 35–64.

[3] Compare, for example, Douglas B. Chambers, '"My Own Nation": Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora', *Slavery and Abolition*, xviii (1997), 72–97; and David Northrup, 'Igbo and Myth Igbo: Culture and Ethnicity in the Atlantic World, 1600–1850', *Slavery and Abolition*, xxi (2000), 1–20. Or Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, 1998); and Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford, 1978).

[4] James Sidbury and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, 'Mapping Ethnogenesis in the Early Modern Atlantic', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., lxviii (2011), 181–208; Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY, 2011), 13, 17, 21, 133, 152; Ira Berlin, 'From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., liii (1996), 251–88; Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundations of the Americas, 1585-1680* (New York, 2007); Richard Price, 'The Concept of Creolization',

To move beyond stark binaries and generalities, it is worthwhile to focus on distinct slave populations in singular places. A close-up analysis reveals details that are not immediately evident, uncovering aspects of historical processes that otherwise might be overlooked. Reducing the scale can yield insights into how plantation management and contingencies of time and place constrained a specific group of enslaved people as they manoeuvred culturally to cope with a desperate situation. A microscopic investigation into individual decisions by planters and slaves is likely to uncover that, rather than opposites, African cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity were parts of the same process of creolization. While keeping in mind the quotidian lives of slaves, the broad macro historical questions are still relevant. Where in Africa did enslaved people originate? What routes were captives forced to take to American plantations? How important was language as enslaved people began rebuilding their lives in the Americas? Paying attention to the particular, it is hoped, will provide localized answers to these broad questions, revealing that creolization is a process by which people with specific roots in the Old World, coming from diverse societies and cultures, brought together under conditions of extreme exploitation, created new identities and shared lifestyles in the New World at specific times and in specific locations.[5]

This article helps to reveal the diversity of African experiences in the New World by focusing on a single slave population at Cayon House, an exceptionally well-documented St Kitts sugar plantation belonging to Scottish émigré Robert Cunyngham (1669–1743).[6] Details provided by Cunyngham and his sons via slave lists, journals and letters enable us to follow the lives of 331 people whom he owned or rented, from spring 1729 through fall 1735.[7] At least 182 individuals were Africans who can be traced to their areas of origin with a remarkable degree of specificity. When Cunyngham inventoried his slaves, as he did annually when in residence, he noted their names, ages, occupations, values, family associations, and 'country' origins. When he penned information about enslaved individuals in his journals, he identified them by name and usually mentioned their origins, occupation or familial links. Cunyngham's attention to names and his voluminous records enable us to reconstruct associations between and among his slaves. He links wives to husbands and children to parents or siblings; he identifies mentors of newly-purchased Africans; he tallies slaves in field gangs; he places skilled workers together in boiling houses; and he mentions small groups of his slaves on other plantations — those rented to fellow colonists. Although narrow in temporal span, Cunyngham's records provide the most detail about an enslaved workforce for any eighteenth-century British American slave population. The information is unusually early — extending from the 1690s to the 1730s — and is precociously comprehensive.

This investigation divides into three sections. The first reconstructs how Cunyngham acquired his enslaved workers, c. 1690–1735, when St Kitts emerged as a true slave society through the importation of tens of thousands of Africans. He used a variety of means to obtain labourers, a process that introduced considerable heterogeneity into his workforce. The second explores the diverse origins of his African labourers. Only small groups of them shared a common culture or language, initiating a process of cultural mixing that was exacerbated by their intermingling with Creole or native-born slaves, who comprised a fast-growing minority of Cunyngham's enslaved population. The last section demonstrates that origin scarcely influenced with whom a person lived, married or worked. The case of

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in David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.) *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, iii, *AD 1420-AD 1804* (New York, 2011), 513–37, esp. 516; Christina Frances Mobley, 'The Kongolese Atlantic: Central African Slavery & Culture from Mayombe to Haiti' (Duke Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2015), esp. 345–9.

[5] For studies of specific plantations, see, for example, Michael Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978) and Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community* (Charlottesville, 1997). For selective studies of individuals, see James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, 2013); João José Reis, *Divining Slavery and Freedom: The Story of Domingos Sodré, an African Priest in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (New York, 2015).

[6] For Cunyngham, see, Eric J. Graham, *Burns and the Sugar Plantocracy of Ayrshire* (Ayr, 2009), 72–93; Sarah Barber, *The Disputatious Caribbean: The West Indies in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 2014), 14, 29–30, 44. Cunyngham's papers are now held at National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh (hereafter NRS).

[7] Our database is accessible online at www.stkittsslaves.org. Cunyngham's 331 enslaved individuals were not present at the same time.

Cayon House reveals the remarkable cultural heterogeneity of enslaved people on an early eighteenth-century sugar plantation. It illustrates how rapid creolization occurred on a Leeward Island serviced by British slaving vessels that arrived intermittently from a range of African coastal markets.

I

Before focusing on Cayon House, a word is in order about St Kitts, especially its situation when Robert Cunyngham arrived in 1689. Born into a noble Scottish family that was ruined by the English Civil War, twenty-year-old Cunyngham hoped to make his fortune on this British Leeward Island.[8] Although a famously fertile place, the sixty-eight square-mile island had experienced the same dynastic wars that had undermined the Cunyngham family. Settled almost simultaneously by the English and French in 1624 and 1625, the island was divided between the two in 1627, with the English occupying the centre, and the French its north-western and south-eastern ends.[9] Colonists poured into the island to establish tobacco plantations and staff them with indentured servants, making it briefly the most densely populated place in the Caribbean.[10] In the 1640s and 1650s, planters began to make the transition from tobacco to sugar and to introduce large numbers of enslaved Africans via nearby Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, and St Eustatius.[11] By 1666, approximately 9,000 enslaved people toiled in the English section of the island alone, and it appeared to be on its way to becoming a sugar island modelled on Barbados.[12] In the same year, though, the French ransacked the island, and as many as two-thirds of the English inhabitants fled with their slaves. An island-wide census in 1678, by which time the English portion of the island had been regained, showed just 1,897 whites and 1,436 enslaved people. English colonists returned to St Kitts in the 1680s, but the island was, upon the Scot's arrival in 1689, an impoverished and marginal place.[13]

Cunyngham took advantage of the chaos caused by constant warfare in the Leeward Islands to become a sugar planter and acquire an enslaved workforce. He first apprenticed to learn accounting but within a year joined the colonial militia and earned significant sums by plundering the French *quartiers*.[14] In 1693, his fortunes rose when he married Judith Elizabeth de Bonnefant, the niece of Jordain de Salenave (d. 1690), a prominent Huguenot planter who owned 398 acres along the Cayon River. Upon marrying, Cunyngham rented a plantation near Nichola Town in Christ Church parish, in the English quarter, one mile from the French Cayon Quartier. Pierre Buor's map dated c. 1710–1714 indicates that he also possessed or managed an estate in St John's parish (Figure 1). By 1708 an island-wide census showed that he owned seventy people, placing him in the top decile of slave-owners.[15] Since only one trans-Atlantic slaving vessel anchored in St Kitts between 1686 and 1708, he purchased some of these seventy captives from fellow planters, inherited some from his wife's family, and acquired others from neighbouring Leeward Islands.[16]

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[8] Roberdeau Buchanan, *Genealogy of the Roberdeau Family* (Washington D.C., 1876), 18–30; Vere Langford Oliver (ed.), *Caribbeana being Miscellaneous Papers Relating to the History, Genealogy, Topography, and Antiquities of the British West Indies*, 7 vols. (London, 1910–1917), i, 100–2.

[9] James F. Dator, 'Search for a New Land: Imperial Power and Afro–Creole Resistance in the British Leeward Islands' (University of Michigan Ph.D. thesis, 2011), 32–6.

[10] Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775,* 2nd edn (Kingston, 1994), 151–2; David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987), 142–3, 146, 150–1, 156–64, 166, 168, 173, 224.

[11] *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database) records just 1,746 Africans arriving in St Kitts before 1666 — too few to account for the 9,000 slaves on the island by that year. Unless indicated otherwise, all references to the transatlantic slave trade and specific vessels or traders are from the online database.

[12] Dator, 'Search', 65.

[13] Oliver (ed.), *Caribbeana,* ii, 68–77; Natalie A. Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670–1776* (Cambridge, 2010), 48.

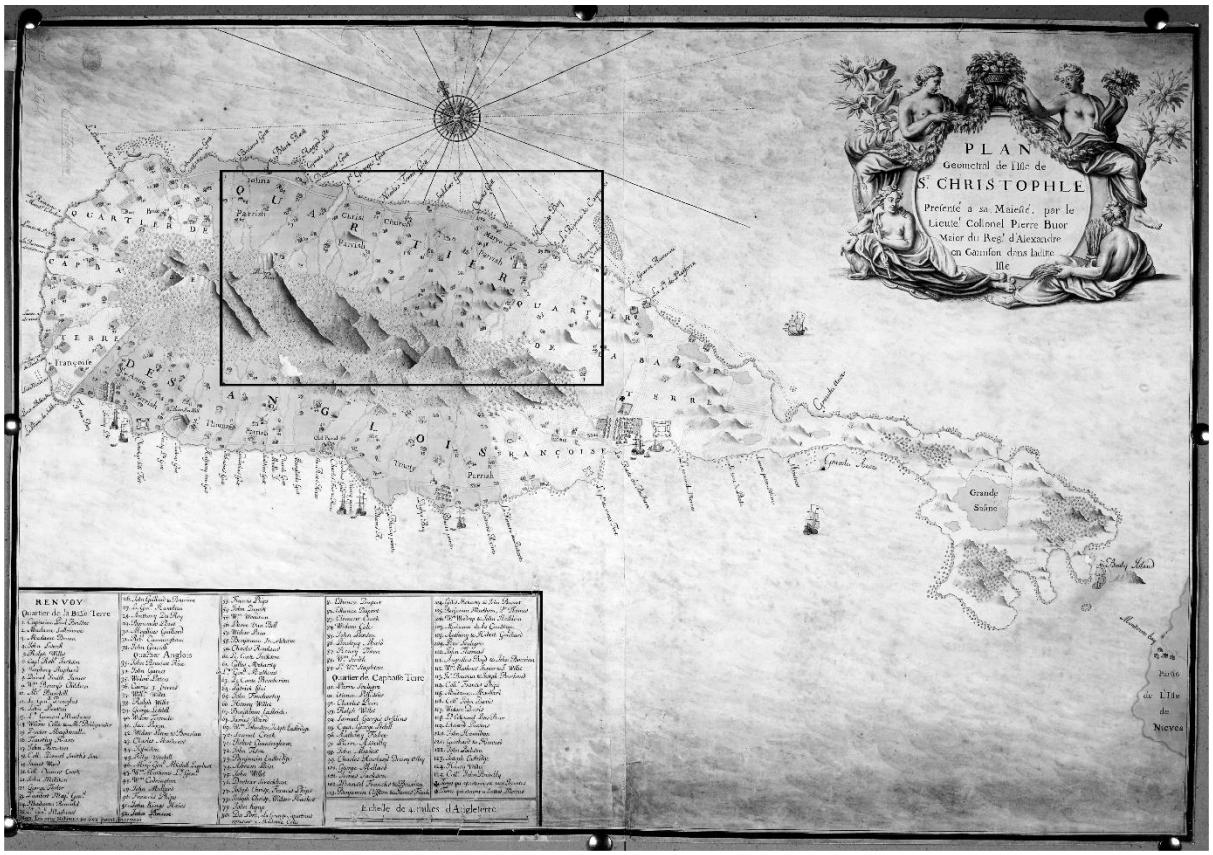
[14] Buchanan, *Genealogy,* 23. In 1690 Cunyngham contracted to work as a bookkeeper for planter Christopher Jeaffreson (Ch. Jeaffreson to Mr Cunyngham, June 18, 1692, Hamilton College, Beinecke Lesser Antilles collection, M3j).

[15] The 1708 census reported 195 colonists who owned 2,861 people. Cunyngham's total of seventy slaves ranked seventh on the list. See Oliver (ed.), *Caribbeana*, iii, 132–9.

[16] The one slaving ship that anchored in St Kitts: *Betty*, 1705, Voyage 21369. In the same 1686–1708 period, 216 ships landed at least 51,270 enslaved people in the neighbouring Dutch, Swedish, and English Leeward Islands.

In 1715 he received the Cayon House plantation when widow Elizabeth de Salenave, a year before she died, conferred her lands on her niece — Cunyngham's wife Judith.[17] According to Cunyngham's later testimony, Cayon House was, like much of war-torn St Kitts, 'uncultivated for want of Slaves' when he acquired it.[18] Buor's map depicts the Salenave's Cayon plantation as modest: the artist drew a small residence and the estate lacks a windmill.[19] The nucleus of the Cayon House slave population was probably formed by marching seventy or so captives down from his other plantations. Even so, Cunyngham needed to obtain hundreds more captives to make Cayon House's extensive and fertile acreage productive.

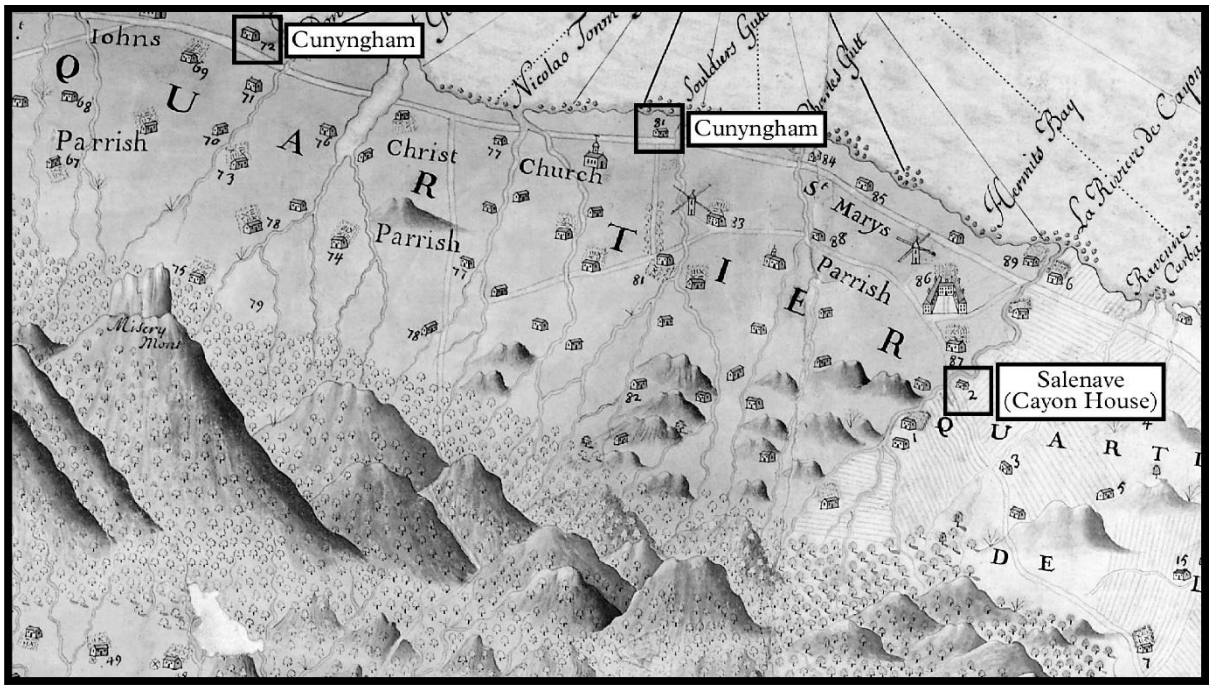
Figure 1. Northwest St Kitts, c.1714 locating Cunyngham and Salenave properties



[17] Buchanan, *Genealogy,* 23–4; Elizabeth de Salenave probate, proved 28 Mar. 1716: The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), PROB11/551/194.

[18] Attorney General v. Cunningham, [1724]: TNA, C11/999/1.

[19] By contrast, Buor's map depicted the plantation owned by Penelope Mead, located across the Cayon River, with an extensive winged mansion and a windmill. That plantation in 1711 worked 157 slaves (Vere Langford Oliver, *The History of the Island of Antigua*, 3 vols. (London, 1894–1899), iii, 94).



Notes: Buor's map includes a legend, which attaches Robert Cunyngham's name to a plantation to the west in St John's parish, which Cunyngham probably rented to others, and to a plantation in Christ Church parish near Nichola Town, where Cunyngham resided before acquiring the Salenave property to the east in Cayon.
Source: Colonel Pierre Buor, *Plan géometral de l'isle de St Christophle* [sic] (1710–1714), © The British Library Board, Maps K.Top.123.79.2 TAB, reproduced by permission.

Cunyngham inherited Cayon House just as the slave trade to St Kitts exploded in volume and transformed the island into a true sugar colony. The annexation of the French portion of the island in 1713 brought stability to St Kitts, enabling many British colonists with secure title to borrow against their lands.[20] British merchants therefore turned to St Kitts as a potentially lucrative slave market, particularly after 1720. In just fifteen years, 1721 to 1735, British vessels disembarked an estimated 19,251 enslaved Africans in St Kitts — compared to 4,137 in the previous century.[21] In the early 1720s St Kitts colonists also purchased one thousand captives per year, on average, from nearby St Eustatius, as planter demand exceeded the number of slaves supplied by British Guineamen.[22] By 1734, the island's slave population had risen dramatically to 17,355 from just 2,861 in 1708. The 3,881 whites on St Kitts in 1734, Cunyngham and eight household members among them, forced these Africans to grow sugar, increasing exports tenfold between 1700 and 1735.[23]

Cunyngham waited to populate Cayon House with large numbers of slaves until he gained legal title. As the inheritor of lands from a French family, Cunyngham was assailed by rival British claimants.[24] In 1715, he left for London to begin the process of acquiring official deeds for Cayon House. One legal victory in 1722 positioned him to raise capital by mortgaging his Cayon estate to London slave trader

[20] For the settlement of French lands in St Kitts, Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery,* 155–8.
[21] Estimates, Disembarkation Regions, St Kitts, www.slavevoyages.org.
[22] In 1727 Leeward Island governor John Hart believed that 5,600 slaves, many trans-shipped from the Dutch entrepôt, had been disembarked in St Kitts in the past five years (David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Durham, NC, 1993), 86).
[23] For St Kitts' 1734 population and sugar exports, see Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery,* 158–9. For Cayon House's expanding sugar output, see NRS, CS96/3106. The whites in Cunyngham's household in June 1734 were Cunyngham, two sons, two daughters, one granddaughter and a bookkeeper, overseer and female servant (NRS, CS96/3104, f. 68, 26 June 1734). Earlier, in 1708, Cunyngham's household included fourteen whites: three men (including Cunyngham), two women (presumably his wife and mother-in-law), five boys (presumably including sons Daniel and Charles) and four girls. For St Kitts in 1708, Oliver (ed.), *Caribbeana*, iii, 132–9.
[24] For Cunyngham's legal battles, see: William Laws, *Distinction, Death and Disgrace: Governorship of the Leeward Islands in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Kingston, 1976), 12, 17 n.31, 51, 72; K. H. Ledward (ed.), *Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations*, 14 vols. (London, 1920–1938), iii, 305–19.

and sugar broker William Coleman for £1,157.[25] Coleman's loan enabled Cunyngham's wife Judith in 1724 to purchase ten slaves from St Kitts planter and broker Drewry Ottley, slaves perhaps transported to St Kitts on slaving vessels co-owned by Coleman.[26] Meanwhile, in London, Cunyngham rebuffed neighbouring planter John Spooner's claim over a 100-acre section of de Salenave Cayon lands, 'the most Valuable part of his Plantation', Cunyngham contended.[27] In 1726 the British government annulled the provisional grants of former French land and sold sections to the highest bidders; Cunyngham secured his legal rights, and finally received his patent for Cayon House in 1728.[28]

With his property rights guaranteed by royal sanction, Cunyngham, still in London and almost sixty years of age, decided to rapidly enlarge his enslaved workforce at Cayon House. His most obvious option, buying slaves from British Guineamen, was not necessarily straightforward. In 1728, three vessels from Africa arrived in St Kitts with 668 slaves. None anchored between 10 January and 4 October.[29] Eager buyers would have limited the number of Africans whom each could purchase. When *King Solomon* arrived in Basseterre seven years earlier, for example, fifty-seven colonists purchased the 296 slaves, with most purchasing a few individuals.[30] To quickly build a large slave labor force Cunyngham therefore opted for another strategy: he hired solicitors to foreclose on St Kitts planter Walter Douglas. Five years earlier, Cunyngham had extended credit to Douglas, secured by the slaves, livestock, and equipment on Douglas's Pensez y Bien sugar estate in neighbouring St Peter parish.[31] Douglas continued to borrow; he paid Cunyngham annual interest, but failed to repay the principal. In June 1728 Cunyngham foreclosed on Douglas to cancel a debt totalling £2,414. He legally acquired livestock, sugar-making equipment, and ninety-nine enslaved people — fifty-one men, twenty-seven women, thirteen boys and eight girls — and transferred them to Cayon House.[32] Eight months later, Robert Cunyngham returned to St Kitts.

Shortly after his arrival in St Kitts on 22 February 1729, Cunyngham inventoried his property, including his greatly expanded workforce. His first detailed census, taken on 1 May 1729, reveals that he owned 175 slaves — 105 more than in 1708. They were principally adults (136/175), Africans (126/175), and males (113/175) (see Table 1). The youngest of the Africans was sixteen, and the oldest seventy: the average age was thirty-six. The Creoles ranged from newborns to a forty-seven-year-old woman, but three in four were younger than sixteen, and their average age was thirteen.[33] They were children of Cayon House adults. He now owned just over twice as many adult African men as women — a pattern reflecting gender imbalances in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and, no doubt, his desire to procure the strongest workers.

Cunyngham continued to acquire enslaved people from fellow planters throughout the 1720s and 1730s. He lent money to Montserrat Lieutenant Governor Paul George and took legal action against the latter's indebted estate after his death. As a result, just after Cunyngham's first census in 1729, eight of George's slaves — two men, three women and three boys — were taken fifty miles across the sea to Cayon House.[34] Two years later, he obtained another sixty enslaved people — twelve men, twenty-six women, fifteen boys and seven girls — when he prosecuted the estate of deceased planter Bartholomew

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[25] For Cunyngham's mortgage, which he took out on November 3, 1722, see NRS, CS96/3096, ff. 39–40.

[26] NRS, CS96/3097, f. 46. William Coleman owned shares in eight slaving voyages, 1702–1745, five of which landed captives in St Kitts, 1722–1726.

[27] TNA, PC1/58/2A, [1724]); Attorney General v. Cunningham, [1724]: TNA, C11/999/1.

[28] Frank Wesley Pitman, *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700–1763* (New Haven, 1917), 104–5; www.tc.umn.edu/~terre011/basseterre.html.

[29] TNA, CO152/19, f. 176.

[30] *King Solomon* slave sales, 21 Mar. 1721: TNA, T70/957. *King Solomon's* sale record is the only one extant for slave ships arriving in St Kitts between 1680 and 1753. The buyers bought 223 captives from *King Solomon* in a single day. In this frenetic sale, one plantocrat purchased twenty-four people; while most colonists bought a single individual, the average buyer carried away four Africans.

[31] Douglas was indebted to London merchant Nathaniel Barnardiston and fellow-planters Drewry Ottley, among others, having paid them both bills of exchange that had subsequently been protested. See NRS, CS96/3096; 24 June 1723: TNA, CO152/13, f. 5.

[32] NRS, CS96/3096, f. 50.

[33] Cunyngham's Christmas 1731 census is the first to estimate slave ages: there are ages for 136 (ninety-nine Africans and thirty-seven Creoles) of the 175 slaves recorded earlier on the 1 May 1729 census.

[34] For Cunyngham's repossession of eight slaves from Montserrat, see NRS, CS96/3102, f. 4. The fees to procure George's eight slaves, including son Daniel's expenses to Montserrat, totalled £59 2s 7 ½ d.

Table 1. Robert Cunyngham's slave censuses, 1729–1735, summary demographic data

Census Date		Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Total	African	Male
1 May 1729	*Africans*	85	41	0	0	126	72%	67%
	Creoles	3	7	25	14	49		57%
	Total	88	48	25	14	175		65%
25 Dec. 1731	*Africans*	97	48	0	0	145	58%	67%
	Creoles	23	33	28	20	104		49%
	Total	120	81	28	20	249		59%
25 Dec. 1733	*Africans*	87	46	0	0	133	55%	65%
	Creoles	22	40	29	16	107		48%
	Total	109	86	29	16	240		58%
1 Aug. 1735	*Africans*	80	45	0	0	125	57%	64%
	Creoles	21	34	26	13	94		50%
	Total	101	79	26	13	219		58%

Sources: 'A List of my Negroes sworn to before John Spooner Esqr by John Rhode my Overseer', 1 May 1729: NRS, CS96/3102; 'Inventory and Estimate of the Value of my Negros Stock Mills Coppers Stills and other Plantation Utencils as I intend to place them at my two sugar works', 25 Dec. 1731: NRS, CS96/3104; 'Sundry Accompts to My Plantation at Cayon', 25 Dec. 1733: NRS, CS96/3104; 'The Schedule Being an Inventory of the Buildings Sugar Canes Mills Coppers Still Negroes Horses Mules Cattle and other Particulars upon the Plantation in Cayon Quarter' [1 Aug. 1735]: NRS, CS230/C.4/3.

Rees for unpaid debts. Whereas slaves transferred from Douglas's plantation comprised mostly Africans, fifty-eight of the sixty slaves acquired from the Rees estate, via Montserrat, were Creoles, including twenty-two children.[35] Cunyngham therefore accumulated 167 enslaved people, by far his largest acquisitions, by lending money to fellow planters and then foreclosing on them. Obtaining enslaved people by foreclosure bypassed the difficulties of sourcing captives directly from Africa, but it enhanced the heterogeneity of Cunyngham's enslaved population, especially when captives were moved to Cayon House from adjacent islands, such as Montserrat.

Although Cunyngham acquired few captives through the slave trade between 1729 and 1735, there were important exceptions. In May 1730, when the London vessel *Margrett,* carrying 206 enslaved Africans, arrived from the Gold Coast, Cunyngham acquired twenty-one individuals, all adults. The way he acquired these slaves reveals the difficulties in purchasing large lots of new arrivals. Cunyngham purchased nine slaves directly from *Margrett's* agent with short-sighted bills of exchange, and a week later he swapped some of his plantation slaves for twelve African men from *Margrett's* cargo, bought earlier by planter John Douglas, Walter Douglas's son.[36] Daniel Cunyngham (1701–1786) purchased another group of fourteen Africans from a slave ship in September 1731, while his father was in England.

[35] NRS, CS96/3104, f. 53, 'The Case': NRS, CS230/C.4/3. Cunyngham acquired sixty slaves from the estate of Bartholomew Rees via complicated legal transfers. Rees was a Barbados sugar planter, and his sixty slaves, almost all Creoles, were probably born in Barbados or Montserrat. A debt to Montserrat planters William and Rowland Tryon transferred Rees's slaves from Barbados to Montserrat, at some unspecified time, and then in 1731 Cunyngham acquired the large group from absentee planter William Tryon, the surviving brother (OSB MSS 138 Folder 463 (Brside), Ralph Payne, Baron Lavington Family Papers. James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

[36] Cunyngham's May 19, 1730 ledger entry lists nine Africans 'had out of Mr Nicholas Gallway's ship from Gold Coast'. He paid Gallway, in bills of exchange at thirty days' sight, £176 for eight slaves and then £20 for a ninth, a woman (NRS, CS96/3102, f. 12). *Margaret* is the most plausible slaving vessel consigned to Gallway: on May 9, 1730 the ship arrived at St Kitts from the Gold Coast with 206 enslaved Africans (www.slavevoyages.org, Voyage 76681; TNA, CO152/19, f. 176). Nicholas Gallway, born at Montserrat, became a planter in St Kitts and died in London in 1736 (Oliver, *History*, ii, 2–3).

After 1731, though, the Cunynghams all but ceased buying Africans from slave ships, perhaps a consequence of tumbling sugar prices.[37]

To overcome the difficulty of buying Africans directly from ships or foreclosing, Cunyngham purchased and leased from fellow planters. He bought one or two people at a time from local planters, totalling fourteen captives in ten different transactions. In December 1729, he targeted a particularly skilled individual — Dick, an Igbo carpenter, forty years of age — for £90 (versus approximately £25 for a newly imported African), the most he paid for a single person. Crucially, during the subsequent five years Dick would help build houses for the dozens of new workers whom Cunyngham obtained. Cunyngham deployed one last expedient — leasing — to bolster his enslaved population. While Cunyngham struggled to secure the deeds to his Cayon House property, he rented eight enslaved men from John Douglas. Then, in 1730, he leased thirty-nine slaves for five years from two neighbours (See Table 2).[38]

Table 2. Cunyngham's slave acquisitions, 1728–1735

Source	Slaves	%	Transactions	£
Foreclosure	167	65.5	3	4,889
Lease from colonist	39	15.3	1	*NA*
Purchase from slave ship	35	13.7	2	878
Purchase from colonists	14	5.5	10	528
	255		**16**	**6,295**

Source: www.stkittsslaves.org

By June 1732 the number of enslaved men, women, and children at Cayon House had peaked at 265. It declined soon thereafter. Given the wretched working conditions, exacerbated by periodic droughts, births could never keep pace with deaths.[39] Over the six-and-one-half year period of his journal, 1729–1735, Cunyngham recorded twenty-eight slave births and ninety-one deaths, mostly adult Africans. His creole slaves died at high rates, too, particularly in 1734 and 1735. His desire to quickly ramp up sugar production from 1729 to 1733 caused the deaths of many of these Africans, who were forced into the arduous work of planting and harvesting cane almost immediately upon their arrival. 'Seasoning' was always deadly — killing, on average, one in five people within three years of their arrival in the Americas — but the mortality rate on Cayon House exceeded even this macabre average.[40] Cayon House's population plunged to 219 people by 1 August 1735, the date of Cunyngham's last census.

Shortly after completing this final census, Robert Cunyngham returned to Scotland possessed of a 'good estate', leaving his 219 bondspeople under the management of son Daniel.[41] During the near half-century he resided on St Kitts (marked by interludes in Britain), the island had metamorphosed from a backwater to a booming sugar colony. Island whites continued to amass wealth, becoming the richest per capita in the British Americas by the eve of the American Revolutionary War.[42] Their aggrandizement rested on the ruthless exploitation of Africans. Ambitious men like Robert Cunyngham transformed St Kitts by collectively importing tens of thousands of Africans in a twenty-year period. In

[37] For sugar prices, Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery,* 496–7.

[38] Cunyngham's sons Daniel and Charles leased slaves from widows Margaret Bridgewater and Sarah Browne, the thirty-nine rented slaves working on Robert Cunyngham's plantation.

[39] Insufficient rains and shortages of provisions plagued nearby Nevis as early as 1726 and continued most years through 1732 (Edwin F. Gay, 'Letters from a Sugar Plantation in Nevis, 1723–1732', *Journal of Economic and Business History*, i (1928), 155–69). See also Alexander Jorge Berland, 'Extreme Weather and Social Vulnerability in Colonial Antigua, Lesser Antilles, 1770–1890' (University of Nottingham, Ph.D. thesis, 2015).

[40] J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750–1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford, 1988), 125.

[41] Buchanan, *Genealogy,* 23

[42] Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery,* 160.

about a decade, 182 of these Africans journeyed to Cayon House. Africans arrived at St Kitts sugar plantations in small groups, having been separated from the majority of their shipmates at sales attended by large numbers of planters. Cunyngham's subsequent acquisition of slaves through purchase or repossession added a further level of movement and dislocation. Mortality on slave ships and then on Cayon House exacerbated this displacement, making it difficult for enslaved people to remain with shipmates, friends, or family. Many dislocations aggravated the trauma of adaptation that enslaved people suffered, enhancing the heterogeneity of a slave population that was drawn from an enormous expanse of Atlantic Africa.

II

The most novel aspect of Robert Cunyngham's Cayon House sugar plantation — an otherwise typical British Caribbean sugar estate in its management and size — was the notice paid to the captive Africans' origins. British American planters were largely inattentive to their enslaved workers' homelands, especially when compared to their French, Spanish or Portuguese counterparts.[43] Cunyngham's records are hence extraordinarily valuable, shedding light on the precise origins of 182 Africans overall (although the most he owned at any one time was 154). Residing for more than half of his adult life in a plantation colony dominated by African workers, he learned to distinguish people by language, height, build, scarification, and filed teeth. By questioning slaves, unravelling their replies, and noting toponyms, he made sense of their diverse backgrounds.[44] Senior African slaves, who spoke both a natal language and Creole, helped him decipher perplexing answers.[45] Occasionally he identified a person as being from a particular place, but then changed his mind when he obtained new insights. He also distinguished between African and Creole captives. Those born in St Kitts or a nearby island bore no scars or filed teeth and spoke Creole.[46] Cunyngham ascertained and defined an African's 'country' primarily by a language, which seasoned Africans helped him identify.

In addition to his locally gained insight, Cunyngham brought book knowledge to bear in determining an African's 'country'. He owned a large library in St Kitts, including books and maps that identified African placenames, peoples, and political units. His copy of Bohun's *Geographical Dictionary* (1688), for example, included kingdoms, language groups, and coastal castles. His Bosman's *New and Accurate Description of Guinea* (1705) distinguished between African 'countries' (geographic areas) and 'kingdoms' (political systems). His copy included Hermann Moll's fold-out *New and Exact Map of Guinea, Divided into y^e Gold, Slave and Ivory Coast*, which located 'Kingdoms' and 'adjacent Countries' that extended 50–100 miles inland from the Gold and Slave Coasts. He also owned Gordon's less informative *Geography Anatomiz'd*, which mentioned provinces and kingdoms along the African coast.[47] Through his reading, Cunyngham learned about African places, peoples, and kingdoms.

The six African coastal regions that Cunyngham encountered in his reading — Senegambia, the Windward Coast, the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast (Bight of Benin), the Bight of Biafra and the Loango Coast (West-Central Africa) — cover the homelands of his 182 Africans. They also correspond reasonably well to the dominant patterns of the early eighteenth-century British slave trade. In the first twenty years of that century, private merchants massively expanded the slave trade on the Gold Coast. As a result,

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[43] Gabriel Debien, 'Les Origins des Esclaves des Antilles', *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, xxvi (1964), 755–99; Edgar F. Love, 'Marriage Patterns of Persons of African Descent in a Colonial Mexico City Parish', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, li (1971), 79–91; James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 265–6; Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil,* 6–20, 97–133.

[44] Paul E. Lovejoy, 'Ethnic Designations of the Slave Trade and the Reconstruction of the History of Trans-Atlantic Slavery', in Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman (eds.), *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity* (London, 2002), 9–42.

[45] St. Kitts planter Charles Pym kept a slave list, which was 'as exact as I can get from the Negroes there's no white person on the Island, that knows any thing of the matter' (Charles Pym, St Christophers, 31 Dec. 1735: John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, Stapleton MS 6/3). We refer to St Kitts Creole English as Creole.

[46] Adam Jones, *Zur Quellenproblematik der Geschichte Westafrikas: 1450–1900* (Stuttgart, 1990), 62–7.

[47] List of books: NRS, CS96/3096, ff. 17–8; NRS, CS96/3103, ff. 16–20; Edmund Bohun, *A Geographical Dictionary, Representing the Present and Ancient Names of the Countries … of the Whole World* (London, 1688), [129], [437], [467], [620]; William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1705), 309, 324, 335, 337, 387; Patrick Gordon, *Geography Anatomiz'd: Or, the Geographical Grammar* (London, 1725), 316, 319, 321, 324, 330, 333.

four in ten slaves arriving in St Kitts in this period came from that region: they formed a quarter — the largest single group — of Cunyngham's Africans.

With slave prices rising rapidly on the Gold Coast in the 1720s and 1730s, British merchants searched for alternate sources on the African coast. They discovered that enslaved people could be purchased for lower prices and in large numbers in riverine Biafran ports and further south at cliff-top posts on the Loango Coast. Over a third of Africans arriving in St Kitts during Cunyngham's time came from these two regions — somewhat more from West-Central Africa than from the Bight of Biafra.[48] By contrast, Cayon House incorporated twice as many Biafrans as West-Central Africans. Together they comprised another third of Cunyngham's Africans. The British continued to trade in the Bight of Benin and Senegambia and, from the mid-1720s onwards, pioneered a smaller trade for slaves on the Windward Coast. Cunyngham purchased and acquired captives from all three regions in fairly equal numbers, and they comprised the final third of his African complement. Together with the third from the Gold Coast and the third from Biafra or West-Central Africa, Cunyngham's enslaved workers formed a diverse group. A dominance of one region might indicate his preference for that area. If he had such a preference, it did not translate into his purchasing pattern. The places in Africa visited by British slave ships collectively forecast the geographic composition of his workforce (Table 3).[49]

As well as noting African coastal origins, Cunyngham's records suggest how linguistic families channelled to each littoral region. Thus, most of his twelve 'Mandinga' and eight 'Bambara' slaves arrived in St Kitts aboard British ships departing the Gambia River, a several-hundred-mile long waterway that bisected the arid savannah lands in the interior. These people would have spoken Mandinka and Bambara, respectively, two closely related Mande languages. Surprisingly, however, two of Cunyngham's Bambara captives came from a Gold Coast ship. Unless vessels embarked slaves in the Gambia River en route to the Windward and Gold Coasts — an unusual voyage pattern — supply lines from Bambara radiated from modern-day Mali and Guinea south to Atlantic outlets along the Windward, Ivory or Gold coasts, a several-hundred-mile journey on foot for those captured.[50] There also were occasional north-south supply lines from the 'Kingdom of Mandinga' to the Windward Coast, a reason why 'Mundinga' slaves later appear in ships departing that region. Captors forced some Bambara and Mandinga people apparently to trudge several hundred miles along trade routes that connected to Atlantic outlets from Senegambia to the Windward Coast.[51]

Three 'countries' — Mina Canga, Mina Goura and Bulai — comprised Cunyngham's Windward Coast contingent. He used the term 'Mina' in these 'country' names as a geographical adjective, indicating contiguity to the Gold Coast, rather than as an ethnic designation. Most of his Windward Coast group were Mina Cangas, dwelling near Cape Mount, Cape Mesurado or Bassa. These captives would have spoken Vai, a Mande language, or Bassa or a related Kru language. Contemporary sources place Mina Goura anywhere between the hinterland of Cape Mount (west Liberia) and the Bandama River (central Ivory Coast).[52] If Mina Goura was near Cape Palmas, as many of these sources suggest, then Cunyngham's one enslaved person from there spoke Grebo, a Kru language.[53] His one 'Bulai' was likely one of the Baule people from the east-central Ivory Coast, speakers of Baoulé, an Akan language that belongs to the Kwa family. His Windward Coast captives may have been enslaved, marched east, and sold at ports on the Gold Coast. More likely, they were embarked on the Windward Coast by ships

[48] Cunyngham's 'Congo' slaves were shipped from the Congo River estuary and from Cabinda and Loango to the north.

[49] Slave-trading estimates for the Gold Coast likely include some Windward Coast slaves, embarked en route to coastal forts, and some individuals from the Bight of Benin.

[50] For contemporary definitions of Bambara, see Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouvelle Relations de l'Afrique Occidental*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1728), iii, 334. For 'Bamana', see also Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill, 2005), 96–100.

[51] In 1790, for example, the Liverpool slaving vessel *Colonel* arrived at Kingston from Bassa and Cape Mount, ports on the Windward Coast, with 'Canga & Mundingo Slaves' (*Daily Advertiser* (Kingston), 18 Mar. 1790).

[52] Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century written sources, including maps, located Grouwa near Cape Palmas. See: Nicolas Villault, *Relation des costes d'Afrique, appellées Guinée* (Paris, 1669), 146, 163); *Le Grand Dictionnaire Geographique*, 10 vols. (Amsterdam, 1726–1739), ii, 2C, 818; v, M, 72. Today the Gouro (Guro, Kweni) people inhabit lands in southwest-central Ivory Coast (James S. Olson, *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary* (Westport, Conn., 1996), 322).

[53] P. E. H. Hair, 'An Ethnolinguistic Inventory of the Lower Guinea Coast before 1700: Part II', *African Language Review*, viii (1969), 227.

that then travelled to the Gold Coast — a voyage pattern that would explain Cunyngham's grouping of enslaved people from both the Windward and Gold Coasts as 'Mina'. Slaves originating from the hinterland of the Windward Coast would consequently undertake the Middle Passage with enslaved people hailing from homelands hundreds of miles further east and speaking languages unrelated to their own.[54]

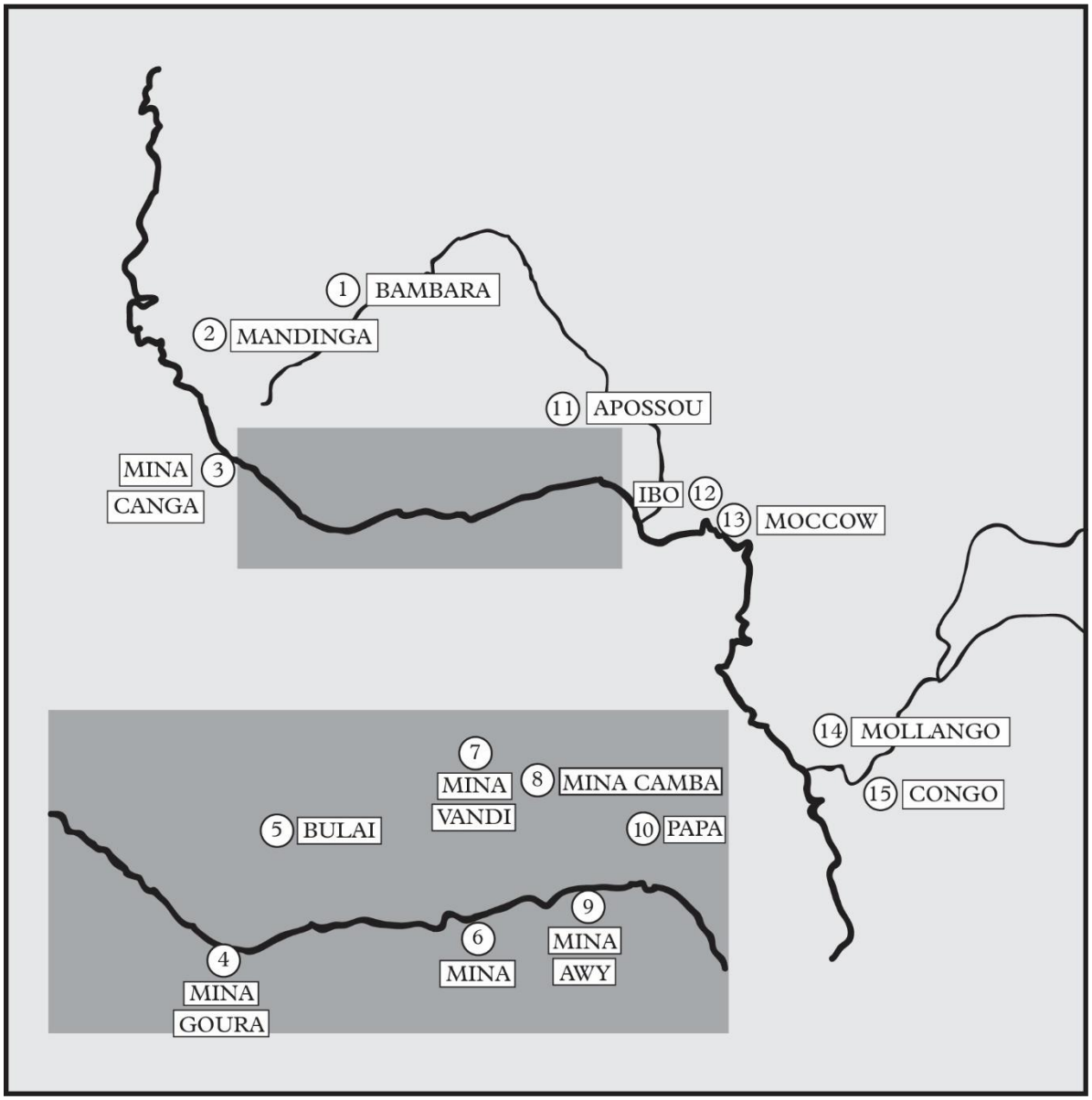
Table 3. Cunyngham's 182 African slaves' 'countries' by region of departure and compared to slave trading estimates

African region / 'country'	Language (family)[1]	Men	Women	Total	Slave-trading estimates to St Kitts (1713–1735)
Senegambia				*11.0%*	*6.4%*
1. Bambara	Bambara (Mande)	6	2	8	
2. Mandinga	Mandinka (Mande)	8	4	12	
Total		14	6	**20**	**759**
Windward Coast				*11.5%*	*4.6%*
3. Mina Canga	Bassa (Kru)[2]	13	6	19	
4. Mina Goura	Grebo (Kru)	0	1	1	
5. Bulai	Baoulé (Kwa)	1	0	1	
Total		14	7	**21**	**552**
Gold Coast				*26.4%*	*42.3%*
6. Mina	Akan (Kwa)	20	23	43	
7. Mina Vandi	Kasem (Gur)	3	0	3	
8. Mina Camba	Dagbani (Gur)	2	0	2	
Total		25	23	**48**	**5,043**
Bight of Benin				*17.0%*	*10.2%*
9. Mina Awy	Ewe (Kwa)	13	0	13	
10. Papa	Fon (Kwa)	7	8	15	
11. Apossou	Kposo (Kwa)	2	1	3	
Total		22	9	**31**	**1,219**
Bight of Biafra				*22.5%*	*17.2%*
12. Ibo	Igbo (Benue-Congo)[3]	9	7	16	
13. Moccow	Ibibio (Benue-Congo)	16	9	25	
Total		25	16	**41**	**2,045**
West-Central Africa				*11.5%*	*19.3%*
14. Mollango	Vili (Benue-Congo)	1	0	1	
15. Congo	KiKongo (Benue-Congo)	19	1	20	
Total		20	1	**21**	**2,293**
Totals				***182***	***11,911***

Notes: Table ordered approximately north to south; 'country' numbers match those in Figure 2.
Table 3 identifies fifteen African languages and five language families. Of the fifteen, Vili and KiKongo were the most likely languages to be mutually intelligible.
[1] Linguists often disagree about how to group languages into branches, families, groups or phyla.
[2] Some 'Mina Canga' slaves, if embarked near Cape Mount, may have spoken Vai (Mande language family).
[3] Linguists formerly classified Igbo as a Kwa language.
Sources: www.stkittsslaves.org, created from information in NRS CS96/3097, CS96/3102, CS96/3104, CS96/3105, CS230/C.4/3. For St Kitts' slave imports c.1713–1735, http://slavevoyages.org/estimates/.

[54] Guineamen destined for Gold Coast or Bight of Benin markets often visited the Windward Coast en route. See, for example, Humphry Morice to Captain William Snelgrave, London, 15 July 1721: Morice Papers, Bank of England, M7/6).

Figure 2. Approximate origins of enslaved Africans on Cayon House, c. 1729–1735



Note: Figure 2 geographical locations based on Robert Cunyngham's African 'countries' recorded in his censuses and journal.

Gold Coast ports drew linguistically diverse captives from an expansive hinterland. The majority (43/81) of Cunyngham's 'Mina' slaves were speakers of Twi or Fante, both of them Akan languages, who hailed from the densely populated, but war-torn, forest lands near the sea. But Cunyngham also identified Vandi (Kasem speakers), Camba (Dagbani speakers), and Awy (Ewe speakers) among his 'Mina' enslaved people, in addition to the Canga (Bassa speaking) and Goura (Grebo speaking) slaves already mentioned.[55] The inclusion of captives with a diverse array of languages among the 'Mina', albeit in small numbers, implies that Akan states were enslaving people from beyond their borders earlier than

[55] In his censuses and journal, Cunyngham writes 'Mina Comba' or 'Mina Combu': we assume he references Camba. 'Awy', we suggest, is the town of Woe near Keta, ten miles east from the Volta River. The language of Woe is Ewe, spoken today in southeastern Ghana/southern Togo; the phonetic similarity between Awy/Awey/Away and Ewe supports placing Awy along the western Bight of Benin. See Ole Jestesen (ed.), *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657–1754*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 2005), ii, 608, 611; Robert Norris, *A Map of the Slave Coast* (London, 1793).

previously believed. Historians have assumed, for example, that Asante, a militaristic Akan empire, did not begin enslaving Gur-speaking people from the northern savannah until it invaded the area in the 1740s and 1750s.[56] As at least five of Cunyngham's slaves spoke Gur languages, either Asante began raiding northward earlier in the eighteenth century or lengthy trade routes fed Gur-speaking captives to the coast. The inclusion of Ewe-speaking people as 'Mina' likewise indicates that trade networks or military campaigns extended beyond the River Volta, the Gold Coast's eastern border.[57] Cunyngham's 'Mina' slaves consequently spoke six languages from three separate language families and hailed from homelands in a several-hundred square mile region that encompassed forests, savannah, and riverine estuaries.[58]

Cunyngham did not label eighteen Africans from the Bight of Benin as 'Mina', and presumably the ships carrying them arrived directly from ports further east from Mina Awy along the Bight. He divided them into two groups: fifteen 'Papas' and three 'Apossous'. Papa probably does not refer to captives taken from the Kingdom of Popo but rather to people enslaved by Allada, a powerful state that sold its captives at Whydah, its client kingdom.[59] Evidence for Cunyngham's understanding of 'Papa' emerges from his copy of Bosman's *New and Accurate Description of Guinea* (1705), which discusses the 'Kingdom of great *Popo*', thought to be in 'the Country of *Ardra* [Allada]'.[60] In 1724, Dahomey conquered Allada and became the leading slaving power in the Bight of Benin. Dahomey's king, Agaja, styled himself 'Emperor of Pawpaw', continuing the association between slaving states and the thousands of 'Papa' captives whom those states shipped off throughout the 1720s and 1730s.[61] These prisoners were almost certainly speakers of Fon, or another related Gbe language, placing their language in the same sub-division of the Kwa family as Ewe. His three 'Apossou' slaves, by contrast, were probably Akposso people who hailed from west of Atakpamé in today's south-west Togo border and who spoke Kposo, a language that relates closely to Ewe and Fon.[62]

While Cunyngham's records reveal that more extensive slave trading networks existed in Upper Guinea and on the Gold Coast than historians have previously recognized, the opposite is true of the Bight of Biafra, where his captives principally came from coastal areas. Most slaves departing Biafran ports during the eighteenth century, it is generally assumed, were Igbo speakers, a populous group who inhabited lands sixty miles from the sea. Cunyngham certainly bought Igbo people — sixteen of his forty-one Biafran captives. But they were outnumbered by twenty-five 'Moccow', Efik/Ibibio speakers who came from lands west of the Cross River and had likely been shipped from Old Calabar. Thus, Cunyngham's records suggest that in the early eighteenth century, coastal — Efik and Ibibio — peoples may have constituted a majority of the captives forcibly transported from the Bight of Biafra.[63]

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[56] For slaving routes feeding captives to Gold Coast ports, see Akosua Adoma Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century* (Accra, 2004); Randy J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014), 127. As Shumway notes, Asante, Akan speakers, may have enslaved individuals because they did not speak Akan—they were outsiders (Rebecca Shumway, 'Naming our African Ancestors: Pushing, and Respecting, the Limits', *Journal of the Early Republic*, xl (2020), 199).

[57] Law, *Slave Coast,* 243.

[58] On the definition of 'Mina', see Hall, *Africa and African Ethnicities,* 3–4; Robin Law, 'Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of 'Mina' (Again)', *History in Africa*, xxxii (2005), 247–67.

[59] Robin Law, *The Kingdom of Allada* (Leiden, 1997).

[60] Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 335, 337. Cunyngham wrote 'Papa' instead of 'Popo', following contemporaries. The term 'Papaw' appears in Jamaican newspapers: 'Papaw Sarah'; a 'Papaw Negro Man' (*Weekly Jamaica Courant*, 10 Feb. 1719, 2 Nov. 1726). See: Douglas B. Chambers, ed. *Runaway Slaves in Jamaica (I): Eighteenth Century*, 3 (http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00021144/00001).

[61] See Robin Law, 'Further Light on Bulfinch Lambe and the 'Emperor of Pawpaw:' King Agaja of Dahomey's Letter to King George I of England, 1726', *History in Africa*, xvii (1990), 211–26. For the slave trade in the Bight of Benin, see also Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991); Silke Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World: The Western Slave Coast, c. 1550– c. 1885* (Woodbridge, 2015)

[62] Apossou might associate with Kpessi-speakers from Kpessi, a town east of Mono River, north of Atakpamé, and 125 miles from the Atlantic coast. But there are many more Ikposo (Kposo) speakers who live west of Atakpamé, making that association with Apossou plausible (Law, 'Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans', 257; Louise Sebro, *Mellem Afrikaner og Kreol: Etnisk Identitet og Social Navigation i Dansk Vestindien, 1730–1770* (Lund, 2010), 73, 75–8; William J. Frawley (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, 2nd edn., 4 vols. (Oxford, 2003), i, 383, 385).

[63] For 'Moccow' and Igbo captives at Old Calabar, see Northrup, 'Igbo and Myth Igbo'; Stephen D. Behrendt, A. J. H. Latham and David Northrup, *The Diary of Antera Duke: An Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader* (Oxford, 2010), 104–11; G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2010), 26–42.

Cunyngham's twenty-one West-Central African captives hailed from just two 'countries': twenty from 'Congo' and one from 'Mollango' (or Mallungo/Mullungo). The designation 'Congo' may allude to the trade routes along which captives trudged to the coast rather than to a specific natal location. 'Congos', for example, may have passed through the former Kingdom of Kongo on their way to ports on the Loango Coast.[64] In any case, sea-bound captives typically spoke dialects of KiKongo.[65] Cunyngham's one 'Mollango' may have told him that he was a subject of the *ma-Loango* — meaning that he hailed from the Kingdom of Loango, in which case he likely spoke Vili, a related language to KiKongo. Unlike the diverse captives drawn from West Africa, the twenty-one West-Central Africans would probably have had little difficulty communicating with each other, given that they all spoke Kongo languages. Cunyngham's captives originated, then, from both an enormous expanse of the coast — ports strung across 3,500 miles — and from homelands located, in some cases, several hundred miles into the interior.[66]

The fifteen different languages of the 182 Africans belonged to five distinct families. This linguistic heterogeneity needs to be balanced against cultural elements shared by the enslaved Africans, and an individual's ability to partially understand those who spoke related languages. Linguists group languages based on 'genetic' relationships, tracing descent from a common, often no longer extant, ancestral tongue over thousands of years. Language families, they contend, relate to shared cultural zones.[67] Africanist John Thornton has influentially argued that using 'linguistic diversity as a measure of cultural diversity… may exaggerate the importance of these differences'. He uses language to divide 'Atlantic Africa', Gaul-like, into three 'culturally distinct zones': Upper Guinea (Senegal to Cape Mount), Lower Guinea (Cape Mount to the Cameroon), and West-Central Africa (the Cameroon to the Kalahari). While people within each of these regions spoke different languages, they were integrated, he claims, through proximity and trade. Moreover, cosmopolitan Africans — especially traders and travellers — would have learned the languages of neighbouring people, helping to break down barriers to communication. Thornton argues that captives arriving in the Americas from these broad regions could communicate with each other and had the building blocks of a common culture.[68]

A language's genetic relationship to others, however, does not mean mutual intelligibility, and it is hard to believe that a shared belief in cosmology or rituals played greater roles than language in cultural formation and retention. The African language families are as dissimilar as their European counterparts: Benue-Congo and Mande languages are as distant from each other as Romance languages are from Slavic. Mono-lingual Africans, like their European counterparts, would find it impossible to communicate with those whose languages belonged to a separate family of languages.[69] For example, Cunyngham's five speakers of Gur languages would have been unintelligible to the numerous people who spoke Akan. Although their homelands bordered each other, Kwa (to which Akan belongs) is distinct from the Gur family of languages. Akan-speakers knew those speaking Gur languages as the Kassenti, a Danish missionary related, because that is what speakers of Gur 'called out …when they f[e]ll into the hands of the marauding [Akan]'. 'Kassenti' meant, in one of the Gur languages, 'I do not understand you'.[70]

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[64] For slaving routes in Angola, see Phyllis Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1576–1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* (Oxford, 1972), 122–35; Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison, 1996), 140–72.

[65] For the provenance of 'Congo' slaves, see Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780–1867* (New York, 2017), 88–92.

[66] For West-Central Africans in the nineteenth century, see Robert W. Slenes, 'Metaphors to live by in the Diaspora: Conceptual Tropes and Ontological Wordplay among Central Africans in the Middle Passage and Beyond', in Ericka A. Albaugh and Katherine M. de Luna (eds.), *Tracing Language Movement in Africa* (Oxford, 2018), 343–63; and Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida, 'African Voices from the Congo Coast: Languages and the Politics of Identification in the Slave Ship *Jovem Maria* (1850)', *Journal of African History,* lx (2019), 167–89.

[67] Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville, 2002), 349–462.

[68] Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 184–95, 185 (quotes). For another division of Atlantic Africa, see Lovejoy, 'Ethnic Designations', 35–7.

[69] P. E. H. Hair, 'The Historical Fragmentation of Black Africa: Myth and Reality', in P. E. H. Hair (ed.), *Black Africa in Time-Perspective* (Liverpool, 1990), 3–17.

[70] Johann Jakob Bossard (ed.), *C.G.A. Oldendorp's History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John*, trans. Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor, 1987), 164. For the linguistic identity

Even slaves who spoke languages belonging to the same family would have struggled to communicate with each other. Consider, for example, the seventy-five people on Cayon House who spoke languages in the Kwa group — the largest cohort of 182 Africans when organized by language family. Each of these languages 'share', as one scholar has noted, 'many properties at all levels of the grammar' because they derived from the same mother tongue.[71] In the case of languages within the same sub-division of the Kwa family, such as Gbe, these similarities can be sufficiently strong to make them mutually intelligible. Cunyngham's thirteen 'Mina Awy' (Ewe speaking) and fifteen 'Papa' (Fon speaking) slaves, for example, would have had little difficulty communicating with each other, because they all spoke Gbe languages. But these shared 'properties' are not sufficiently close among languages situated on distant branches of the Kwa family tree to ensure mutual intelligibility. Akan speakers would have been unable to communicate with Ewe or Fon speakers. Igbo was formerly placed in the Kwa languages, but it is so dissimilar from Akan or Ewe or Fon that current linguistic classifications place Igbo in the Benue-Congo language family.[72] On Cayon House, speaking a second language would have done little to break down these linguistic barriers.[73] If Cunyngham's Akan speakers learned Ewe, and vice versa, they would collectively only comprise one third of all African-language speakers. Given that the remaining Africans were splintered into much smaller linguistic cohorts ranging from a single individual to twenty-four people, bilingualism would not have enabled any of Cunyngham's Africans to communicate with more than a handful of other people on Cayon House.[74]

Cunyngham's Cayon House plantation was a veritable Tower of Babel. Certainly, some of his slaves spoke two languages, but most originated from geographically distant 'countries' that had little linguistic contact with each other. This linguistic heterogeneity stemmed initially from the complexities of the African coastal slave trades that directed captives to Cayon House. The continental African slave trades that initially seized Cunyngham's captives pooled people from a variety of linguistic groups in coastal regions. Britain's trans-Atlantic slave trade compounded this heterogeneity by drawing enslaved people from an enormous number of ports, some of them several-thousand-miles distant from each other, and funnelling them to St Kitts. Even after their arrival in the Leeward Islands, many Africans faced the added dislocation of being resold, as Cunyngham sought to acquire scarce enslaved workers from other planters. Seen in this way, three slave trades — African, trans-Atlantic, and intra-American — together formed a system that roiled enslaved people and prevented any single ethno-linguistic group from predominating at Cayon House.

III

The culturally diverse Africans who arrived at Cayon House needed to assimilate to an existing slave community that was starkly divided by occupation, gender, culture, and language.[75] They forged associations with already established residents, living with some, perhaps marrying, or working with others. At Cayon House, linguistic affinity, even common African origin, played little role in shaping these decisions. Perhaps with input from senior residents, Cunyngham allocated new Africans to existing households so that they could learn island ways. The elaborate division of labour needed to efficiently grow, harvest, process and barrel sugar meant that enslaved workers occupied numerous skilled and unskilled positions. Labour was gendered, dividing men, who held the majority of skilled roles and all boiling house positions, and women, who principally toiled in the large field gangs. Cunyngham

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of captives exported from the Gold Coast and interviewed by Oldendorp, see Adam Jones, 'Oldendorps Beitrag zur Afrikaforschung' in Gudrun Meier et al. (eds.), *Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, Historie der Caraibischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan, iv, Kommentarband* (Herrnhut, 2010), 181–90.

[71] Claire Lefebvre, *Creole Genesis and the Acquisition of Grammar: The Case of Haitian Creole* (Cambridge, 2006), 61.

[72] John R. Watters, 'East Benue-Congo', in John R. Watters (ed.), *East Benue-Congo: Nouns, Pronouns, and Verbs* (Berlin, 2018), 1–2. Igbo speakers might not necessarily understand one another, due to dialectical differences. Linguists thus debate whether there are many languages in the Igbo zone (Dmitri van den Bersselaar, 'Creating "Union Ibo": Missionaries and the Igbo Language', *Africa*, lxvii (1997), 276–84).

[73] For the bilingualism of Fon speakers, see, for example, John Thornton, 'The Coromantees: An African Cultural Group in Colonial North America and the Caribbean', *Journal of Caribbean History,* xxxii (1998), 165–6.

[74] Discussion based upon Cunyngham's ownership of 265 slaves on 1 June 1732 (his peak ownership). There were 154 Africans, of whom fifty-one spoke Akan or Ewe. See www.stkittsslaves.org, 1 June 1732 'Virtual' Census.

[75] Unless stated otherwise, the information in this section derives from www.stkittsslaves.org.

assigned enslaved people to these various roles, while they no doubt manoeuvred to benefit themselves, their family members, and friends. During integration, the paths of newcomers diverged as they gained new housemates, spouses, and workmates — a process that continued as Africans aged.

Although Cunyngham likely subjected each African he purchased to a carefully planned 'seasoning' regime, his papers detail only how he sought to integrate fourteen men and seven women taken from the slaving vessel *Margrett* in 1730. When he brought the newcomers — all aged from twenty to thirty — to Cayon House, he allocated new Africans to existing households so that they could learn what St Kitts planter Charles Spooner termed 'the Manner of Living and the Customs of the Island', in exchange for work in their provision grounds.[76] African male seniority accounted for most of these allocations. The sixteen enslaved mentors were among the elite within Cayon House's slave community. All but one individual were men; all were African. They were survivors. Having arrived twenty-five to thirty years earlier, they had seen many of their shipmates perish. Gradually they had become inured to the brutal realities of plantation life. Every guide was married. Four had at least two wives and numerous children — on a plantation in which half of the adult slaves were 'solitaries' — reflecting their senior status within the stratified slave community.[77] The mentors' occupations confirmed their place at the tip of Cayon House's social pyramid: all were skilled workers, and none laboured in the field. Cunyngham likely believed that his sixteen seasoned mentors had evolved strategies for enduring plantation life, skills that he hoped they would teach potentially rebellious new Africans.

Seniority concerned Cunyngham more than cultural homogeneity when he matched mentors with newly arrived Africans. Consequently, most African newcomers would have found it almost impossible to communicate verbally with their guides. He paired only five of the twenty-one new arrivals with a mentor speaking the same language, and only nine of the twenty-one with speakers of languages from the same family. Unusually, when he had to find a mentor for a Mina Vandi, Cunyngham had a choice of two Mina Vandis, both about fifty years of age: Wallace, a boiler; and Great Coffey, a driver and cooper. He selected Great Coffey, possibly due to his valued status as a driver, and named the newcomer Coffey, perhaps both as an honour and as a motivator for the mentor. More typical of the advisee-mentor relationship was Bambara-speaking London, who was assigned to Doctor Ham, a KiKongo-speaking surgeon.[78] Their homelands were 3,500 miles apart, and they would have not been able to communicate with each other verbally. There were no Bambara slaves in residence, but if language intelligibility had guided Cunyngham's mentorship pairings, any of his seven Mandinka-speaking men would have suited Bambara London, given that they all spoke Mande languages.

Language overrode seniority only when the skill to be taught required technical precision, such as sugar boiling. Thus, Cunyngham placed the three Awy shipmates — newly named Bristoll, Codgeo and Piero — with Will '& the other Awy Young Negro Men'. Will was a Mina Awy boiler, aged about thirty, and valued at three times the amount Cunyngham paid for the newcomers. Two of the 'other Awy Young Negro men' were also boilers — the original Codgeo and Daniel —both aged about twenty-five. Granting Codgeo a namesake may have rewarded his proficiency. Sugar boiling was skilled work that needed to be carefully taught because the quality of the product determined sale prices in London and, in turn, Cunyngham's profits. Mentors needed to explain precisely how much lime to add to boiling sugar, when to ladle the mix into smaller coppers, how to avoid overheating, and when to determine the exact moment of crystallization.[79] Such technical information could not be relayed in blunt Creole

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[76] Evidence of Charles Spooner, *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council Appointing for the Consideration of all Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations* (London, 1789), iii, A, no. 10. Regarding senior mentors in Surinam teaching Creole (Sranan and Saramaccan) and Creole usage, see Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Creole Languages and their Uses: The Example of Colonial Suriname', *Historical Research,* lxxxii (May 2009), 268–84, esp. 275. Regarding work on mentors' provision grounds: William Beckford, *Remarks upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica* (London, 1788), 27–8; Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1793), ii, 119–20.

[77] Four of the mentors had at least two wives or fathered children with more than one woman. For polygamy on St Kitts, see for example, *Report of the Lords*, iii, A. No. 14. See also Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Polygamy: An Early American History* (New Haven, 2019), 115–49.

[78] For slave surgeons (Creoles rather than Africans), see Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 51, 73–4, 127–31, 171–3.

[79] Gaspar, *Bondsmen*, 103–4.

Table 4. Twenty-one slaves from the Gold Coast, 19 May 1730, 'placed' with Cunyngham's resident slaves

Name	Age at Christmas 1731	'Country'	'With whom placed' (age on Christmas 1731)	Future occupation[1]
Men				
London	25	Bambara	Doctor Ham, **Congo** surgeon, age 40	**Mason**
Farrey	25	Mina Camba[2]	Irwin, **Igbo** carter, 60	**Boiler**
Coffey	25	Mina Vandi	Great Coffey, Mina Vandi driver and cooper, 50	**Fireman**
Poli	20	Mina Awy[3]	Great Casar, **Papa** driver (age NA)	**Mason**
Manti	25	Bambara	Andrew, **Moccow** cooper, 40	**Boiler**
Sassiracow	25	Mina Camba	attends Sampson, Mina carpenter, 50 and Scipio, **Congo** carpenter, 45	**Boiler**
Basset	*NA*[4]	Canga	Frank, **Mina Awy** cattle carter (age NA)	*NA*
York	25	Canga	Argyle, **Mina** fireman, 45	Fireman
Accara	20	Awy	Andrew, **Moccow** cooper, 40: 'put wth Andrew to be a Cooper'	Cooper
Bristol	25	Awy	Will, Mina Awy boiler, 30, '& the other Awy Young Negro Men'	Boiler
Codgeo	25	Awy	Will, Mina Awy boiler, 30, '& the other Awy Young Negro Men'	Boiler
Piero	25	Awy	Will, Mina Awy boiler, 30, '& the other Awy Young Negro Men'	Boiler
Walpole	30	Mina	Irwin, **Igbo** carter, 60	**Fieldworker**
Peter	25	Mina	Agay, **Apossou** fireman, 50 and Edenburgh,[5] **Mina Canga** fireman, 35 or Edenburgh, **Moccow** carpenter, 50	Fireman
Women				
Phoda	*NA*	Mina	Agay, **Apossou** fireman, 50	*NA*
Ancilla	30	Mina	Agay, **Apossou** fireman, 50	**Fieldworker**
Abannaba	*NA*	Mina	Fortune, **Moccow** sawyer and boiler, 55	**Fieldworker**
Affoo	30	Mina	Nero, **Moccow** Carpenter, 45	**Fieldworker**
Prisilla	*NA*	Mina	Thom, **Congo** boiler (age NA)	*NA*
Dido	30	Mina Goura	Andrew, **Moccow** cooper, age 40	*NA*
Aruba	30	Papa	Catrina, Papa poultry keeper, age 55	*NA*

Notes: **Bold** indicates different African origin or future occupation than 'mentors'.
[1] All slaves but Accara, London and Poli worked also in the fields.
[2] 'Mina Combu' in the document (see text).
[3] Listed on 19 May 1730 as from Mina Assandi [Asante?], but corrected to Mina Awy on subsequent censuses.
[4] *NA*: No further biographical information available about the African individual, probably renamed Johny, who died 18 Jan. 1731.
[5] probably fireman Edenburgh, if 'mentors' had the same occupation (see Sampson and Scipio, mentors of Sassiracow).
Source: www.stkittsslaves.org.

commands. For less skilled work, Cunyngham elected not to place newcomers from *Margrett* with captives speaking their natal or related languages. He was content to allow enslaved mentors to teach the newcomers in Creole. Forcing Africans to abandon their native language was, perhaps, a deliberate strategy to accelerate the traumatizing process of assimilation.

Unlike their mentor assignments, the *Margrett* arrivals could choose whom to marry, yet language still played a subsidiary role in their decisions. Senior mentors did not marry any of the seven women from *Margrett,* even though adding to or forming polygamous households was an option. Since enslaved men were a majority on the plantation, the women found no shortage of eligible partners. As a result, *Margrett's* women had opportunities to marry partners who hailed from culturally and

linguistically similar areas of Africa if they so wanted. Of the five women who survived their seasoning, four married. Two of these women's partners are known. Neither was a male shipmate, perhaps a result of taboos against such unions. Mina Ancilla married Scipio One Hand, a Mollango shepherd 35–50 years of age, and they almost certainly communicated in Creole, given that their languages — Akan and Vili respectively —were mutually unintelligible. If Ancilla chose her partner, African language intelligibility was not her principal concern, especially given that Akan speakers were the numerically largest group of African men at Cayon House. In contrast, Ancilla's shipmate Aruba, a Fon speaker, married Fon speaker Charles, a fencer who was more than twice her age. Perhaps Charles sought a younger partner with whom he could learn of their shared birthplace, and to whom he could provide food and clothing that would help his countrywoman survive her seasoning. Inversely, African men had extraordinary difficulty in finding wives, especially those who spoke a similar language: four years after their arrival at Cayon House, only four of the eleven surviving *Margrett* men had married. None of the four married a woman who shared his language, although one couple spoke languages that both belonged to the Kwa family.

What was true for *Margrett's* Africans applied to the entire Cayon House slave population: most of them married outside their language groups. Ninety-nine family groupings can be identified, including sixty-eight marriages. Excluding the nineteen Creole–Creole marriages of Bartholomew Rees' largely Creole slaves, forty-nine marriages included at least one African-born partner. Even subsuming African homelands into six broad slave-trading regions yields only fourteen endogamous marriages (see Table 5). The most common endogamous pattern (six examples) occurred among Bight of Biafra Africans, with four Moccow–Igbo marriages and two Igbo–Igbo marriages. Moccow-Igbo marriages were regionally — not ethnically — based, as was the case in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Amazonia.[80] Among Akan-speakers ('Mina'), who comprised about a quarter of Cunyngham's African slaves, women outnumbered men. Yet only four Minas married endogamously. The other Akan-speakers chose partners who spoke Creole (5), Ibibio (4), KiKongo (4), Mandinka (2), Bassa (2), Ewe (2) and Kposo (1). None of these spouses would have been able to communicate with each other in their native languages or, indeed, a closely related African language. Most deprived of an endogamous option were the fourteen KiKongo-speaking men at Cayon who had to marry outside their group, since Cunyngham owned no women from that African 'country' after late 1729.[81] Two married Creoles, and another four married women who spoke Mandinka, Akan, Bassa and Ibibio — all unintelligible to KiKongo.

Just as language yielded to other factors in determining a newly arrived African's mentor, and eventual spouse, so it played little role in work. The way Cunyngham divided his workforce geographically intensified linguistic heterogeneity. In 1731, he forced half his captive slaves to occupy new houses and grounds on a newly built sugar-processing 'works', named Morning Star, several miles from the existing buildings at Cayon House.[82] He distributed his 249 slaves fairly evenly between the two: 132 he retained in the old works and 117 he dispatched to Morning Star. Cunyngham did not place large numbers of slaves from the same African language families in either unit. Each 'works' assembled about two in five Creoles and one in seven Minas. Likewise, slaves speaking Mandinka, Bambara, Bassa, Ewe, Fon, Igbo, Efik/Ibibio and KiKongo were all fairly equally distributed. If Cunyngham had wanted to group his workers by African languages he could have located all Akan speakers on Cayon House and all Efik/Ibibio or Igbo speakers on Morning Star. He also could have placed his seventeen Mandinga and Bambara (speakers of Mande languages) together. Cunyngham adopted no such strategy, instead ensuring heterogeneity that accelerated the process of creolization, as with his selection of mentors.

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[80] We include Moccow-Igbo marriages as endogamous, though individuals may have spoken mutually unintelligible Efik (an Ibibio dialect) and Igbo. For Amazonia, see Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil*, 22, 179, 181, 183. In other places and at different times, many or even most Africans were able to form conjugal unions within ethnic groupings. See, for example, Sweet, *Recreating Africa,* 32, 44–50; Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington, 2003), 87–104, 109.

[81] Congo slave Dinah (alias) Buba died on November 29, 1729. The fourteen Congo men were those alive on the plantation on or after Christmas 1731, when Cunyngham consistently records family associations.

[82] NRS, CS96/3102, [f. 18], 28 June 1730. In 1731, Cunyngham began 'to lay out Negrohouses at the Morning Star' (NRS, CS96/3104, f. 2, 11 Nov. 1731). The following year he also aimed to buy additional 'Mountain land' adjacent to the new works to further expand production (William Coleman to Cunyngham, London, 17 Jan. 1733: NRS, CS230/C.4/3).

Table 5. Broad regional origins of African spouses, Cunyngham plantation, 1729–1735

Husband's Region	*Wife's Region*							
	Sene-gambia	Windward Coast	Gold Coast	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra	Congo region	Creoles	Totals
Senegambia	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
Windward Coast	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Gold Coast	1	1	**4**	0	1	0	4	11
Bight of Benin	0	0	2	**2**	0	0	2	6
Bight of Biafra	1	2	3	2	**6**	0	1	15
Congo region	1	2	1	0	1	0	2	7
Creoles	0	2	0	0	1	0	**2**	5
Totals	4	7	12	4	10	0	12	49 marriages
Endogamous marriages							**14**	

Note: Table layout based on B. W. Higman, 'African and Creole Slave Family Patterns in Trinidad', *Journal of Family History*, iii (1978), 173.
Source: www.stkittsslaves.org.

Mixing is also evident in the field-work gangs within which enslaved people spent their long working days on both Cayon House and Morning Star. Only once — in 1733 — did Cunyngham list his field hands in gangs. On that occasion he divided them into three units, two for adults and one for children. Michell, a thirty-one-year-old Creole, headed one gang of ninety enslaved people. The majority — fifty-one — were Creoles, but the thirty-nine Africans spoke ten different languages, almost all of them mutually unintelligible. African workers within Michell's gang would have consequently formed distinct linguistic cohorts, ranging in size from two Bambara speakers to twelve Akan speakers. 'Tamar Johnys Gang' of eighty-four enslaved people, headed by forty-year-old Creole Tamar's Johny, was similarly linguistically diverse.[83] The sixty-five Africans within the gang formed distinct linguistic and cultural cohorts, notably the speakers of Akan (13), Efik/Ibibio (13), Ewe (10) and Bassa (9). Finally, Jourdain, an eighteen-year-old Creole (and valet), drove the 'Little Gang' comprising twenty-six Creole children.[84] Creole-speakers, then, formed the largest linguistic bloc in all three gangs, although Africans speaking an array of languages outnumbered them overall.[85]

Creolization remained the dominant story in Cunyngham's large boiling and distilling house, where Africans worked in groups at his copper vats. In addition to the five Mina Awy men who formed one nucleus of such skilled boilers, Cunyngham deployed seven Congo boilers, one of whom he bought from a neighbour, likely because he could communicate in KiKongo. He also rented two Moccow boilers, perhaps to assist in Efik some of the three Moccow boilers whom he owned. Still Creoles — ten of them — formed the largest group of boilers, while another thirteen enslaved boilers hailed from an additional eight African countries.[86] Stoking the fires that heated the vats were fifteen firemen from seven Africa countries. In the large roofed building Cunyngham also located his distillery, where molasses was

[83] Johny was the son of Tamar, and he was a Creole transferred to Cayon House from Montserrat when Cunyngham acquired Bartholomew Rees' captives. Tamar, his mother, does not appear in Cunyngham's slave censuses or journal.
[84] NRS, CS96/3104, f. 60.
[85] Individual slaves in plantation groupings and field gangs appear in www.stkittsslaves.org.
[86] Thirty-two slaves owned by Cunyngham worked as boilers, although not all at the same time. He also rented eight boilers. There was considerable turnover. Cunyngham, for example, noted nine deaths among his boilers, so there was constant replacement and training.

distilled into rum. Harry, from Congo, and King Quamina, from Mina, both about fifty years of age, were his slave distillers, while Harry worked also a boiler. Alongside were a white sugar boiler and white distiller, two men who would have communicated in Creole with Harry, King Quamina and the diverse group of Africans.[87]

Whether slaves spent most hours in field gangs or a boiling house, the pressures they faced to assimilate to a Creole society exceeded their opportunities to retain localized African traditions. Some Africans might communicate with each other in their natal languages in fields or buildings; some walked back to their huts and spoke their languages with household members. But many more individuals needed to learn how to communicate in Creole. Madgey and Phibba, Mina Canga slaves and wives of Clem, for example, laboured together in the same field gang, as did Clem's other wife, Louisa. Louisa was a Creole, and Clem, born about 1682, was an Ibo fencer and gardener. If Madgey and Phibba spoke Bassa in the fields, they presumably reverted to Creole to communicate in Clem's polygamous household. Similarly, a few boilers and firemen who worked side-by-side inside Cunyngham's sugar works may have spoken a mutually intelligible African language or dialect. But they needed to know Creole words to communicate with their white supervisors and, for almost all those Africans who had married, with their spouses. Will, a Congo boiler, worked with at most seven other Congo boilers or firemen, but his household included wife Rosanna (Mina Canga) and teenage daughter Betty, a Creole.[88]

As Madgey, Phibba, Congo Will and Rosanna assimilated to living on a St Kitts plantation, so too did others from Africa. Senior African men helped disoriented new arrivals regain strength and learn about the daily and seasonal routines on a sugar plantation. These seniors spoke Creole, most having lived in the Leewards for at least twenty years. A few taught their protégés skills the new arrivals then honed on the plantation. But most mentors had spoken different African natal languages and worked different jobs than their novices. Most had married younger women, usually fieldworkers, and typically from a different 'country' and language family. The newcomers resided initially in mentors' houses, multi-heritage households in which residents spoke Creole, the lingua franca of the field gangs and the boiling house. Cunyngham divided his labourers so that each 'works' included the range of field and skilled slaves required to produce sugar. By ensuring that no African 'country' dominated an occupation, the planter could split his workforce and still maintain cultural heterogeneity, whether in the fields or the sugar-processing facilities. Living and working on a sugar plantation alongside people from diverse and often distant parts of Africa facilitated the emergence of a new creole culture.

IV

The processes that impelled creolization at Cunyngham's Cayon plantation could operate rapidly, and our story of creolization challenges a growing scholarly consensus that prioritizes African origins in shaping enslaved lives in the Americas.[89] As planters in St Kitts and neighbouring islands built enslaved workforces from the 1690s to 1730s, they purchased slaves from British captains who, over these four decades, frequented more and more African coastal markets as the trade expanded. The shifting backgrounds of Cunyngham's slave population mirror changes in slave supplies. In the late 1720s, when Cunyngham began bolstering his estate, the Africans he acquired came from ten 'countries' ranging from the Gambia River south to the Congo estuary. By June 1732, when his slave force peaked at 265 individuals, the planter owned slaves from fifteen African 'countries'. Widening heterogeneity

[87] NRS, CS96/3104, f. 9. John Brunkhurst, the boiler hired on 17 January 1732, was probably son of Antigua sugar planter John Brunkhurst. He also was a doctor. Distiller Gabriel Adrian, hired for four years, earned £20 per year (Barber, *Disputatious Caribbean*, 145).

[88] Excluding Creole–Creole marriages, eighteen boilers or firemen married but only two married a woman who plausibly spoke their natal language.

[89] For works prioritizing African origins: Henry B. Lovejoy, *Prieto: Yorùbá Kingship in Colonial Cuba during the Age of Revolutions* (Chapel Hill, 2019), 8–9, 14–15, 135–7; Lisa A. Lindsay, 'Extraversion, Creolization, and Dependency in the Atlantic Slave Trade', *Journal of African History,* lv (2014), 135–45; James H. Sweet, 'Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive: Method, Concept, Epistemology, Ontology', *Ibid.*, 147–59; David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill, 2016), 24–6. Burnard's work on late seventeenth-century Jamaica is an exception to this consensus. He states that there were 'considerable' obstacles 'placed in the path of African slaves wanting to recreate African cultures in Jamaica' (Trevor Burnard, 'The Atlantic Slave Trade and African Ethnicities in Seventeenth-Century Jamaica', in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool, 2007), 155).

occurred in part because Cunyngham purchased twenty-one slaves in 1730 from *Margrett*, a vessel that arrived in St Kitts from the 'Gold Coast'. *Margrett*, though, embarked Africans along an extended 'Mina Coast' from Cape Mount to Ewe-speaking lands east of the Volta River, a thousand-mile coastline of villages speaking dialects of languages in three linguistic families. Fewer than half of his *Margrett* slaves spoke Akan.[90]

Shipmate bonding occurred on *Margrett's* coastal and Middle Passage journey and for some, bonds deepened as creolization advanced.[91] Shipmates London and Poli, who spoke Bambara and Ewe, would not have understood each other in their African languages, but they began learning a smattering of Creole along with skills in masonry. Their language learning progressed over the next two years, and in November 1732 Cunyngham began hiring them out to build storehouses in Basseterre and repair plantation buildings, including a boiling house owned by John Spooner in Frigate Bay, five miles away. London and Poli always travelled with a white mason, usually James Imbris, but sometimes with masons Imbris and John Webber. London and Poli may have spoken Bambara and Ewe, respectively, at Cayon House or Morning Star, but when working with Imbris and Webber they spoke Creole. Similarly, Cunyngham's four hired-out carpenters, all born in Africa, hailed from different natal language zones and would have communicated in Creole when they worked for other planters in St Kitts.[92]

When London and Poli returned to Cayon after their stints away, they and other *Margrett* shipmates encountered more and more slaves born locally and speaking Creole. When in October 1731 Cunyngham acquired the fifty-eight Creoles from the estate of Bartholomew Rees, he overnight doubled the number of native Creole speakers. The slaves he rented from neighbours Margaret Bridgewater and Sarah Browne also were mostly Creoles, including twenty-one adults and teenagers, and some worked alongside *Margrett* newcomers. There also was a small, but growing, number of island-born children who survived infancy. By 1735 Creoles had attained a critical mass at Cayon House: for every 100 slaves owned by Cunyngham, forty-three were Creoles, outnumbering the largest African group, the Akan-speakers, by three to one. By 1743 — just fourteen years after Robert Cunyngham began rapidly peopling his sugar estate with Africans — Creoles were almost certainly in the majority. That year son Daniel wrote to his father in Scotland that eighteen enslaved children had been born in a recent ten-month period and that he might be able to purchase twenty or more seasoned, likely Creole, slaves from an estate sale in Tortola. With these additions, and the 'tender usage of your Breeding Women', Daniel assured his father, he would 'never have occasion to Buy another Negro'. Daniel's confidence, perhaps over-confidence, reflected the rapid transformation of Cayon House's slave community from African to Creole.[93]

Nearby in Cayon parish, John Spooner's sugar plantation followed a similar creolization trajectory. Spooner had owned his Cayon estate since about 1720, and from 1726 he began expanding his slave holdings.[94] Like Cunyngham, Spooner built his workforce via slave purchases and births and he also may have acquired slaves through transfers from other estates, perhaps including his Bourryau in-laws who owned plantations in Cayon and neighbouring Christ Church parishes. Though no slave lists or censuses survive during the formative years of Spooner's Cayon plantation, several exist that were kept later by son Charles Spooner.[95] In 1772 the Spooner Cayon plantation worked 223 enslaved people: two-thirds (150) were Creoles; and the seventy-three Africans spoke six different languages that belonged to five different linguistic families. Among the Africans, half were recorded as 'Ebbo',

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[90] Historians should be wary of over-estimating the number of Akan speakers on vessels arriving from the 'Gold Coast'. Rucker states that most slaves exported to the Western Hemisphere, 1700–1760, could speak Akan, a claim that is not credible (Walter C. Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture, and Power* (Bloomington, 2015), 98).

[91] Regarding shipmate bonds, see Walter Hawthorne, '"Being Now, as It Were, One Family:" Shipmate Bonding on the Slave Vessel Emilia, in Rio De Janeiro and throughout the Atlantic World', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, xlv (2008), 53–77.

[92] Cunyngham's hired-out carpenters: Dick (Ibo); Nero (Moccow); Sampson (Mina); Scipio (Congo). Perhaps Dick and Nero could communicate in Igbo or Ibibio.

[93] Daniel Cunyngham to [Robert Cunyngham], St Christophers, 19 June 1743: NRS, CS230/C.4/3.

[94] Spooner likely purchased the Cayon plantation from the executors of Paul de Brissac, who died in 1719. His purchase promoted disputes over legal title (www.historicstkitts.kn/ places/spooners-plantation-cayon). The Spooner lists from 1772 were unusual in reporting African origins.

[95] TNA, PRO 30/8/348, ff. 205–7, Chatham Papers. John Spooner's daughter Sophia married St Kitts planter Zachariah Bourryau, both individuals named in Spooner's will (1752).

presumably Igbo or Ibibio speakers, and a further eight were 'Moco' Efik-speakers. In the 1750s and 1760s the export slave trades from Bonny and Old Calabar had expanded. By 1772 Cunyngham's Cayon House plantation perhaps also had proportionally more African workers from the Bight of Biafra than documented in 1729–1735, but the number of Creoles would have kept increasing, perhaps to the level of two-thirds as on the neighbouring Spooner plantation.

Creolization was a process that occurred out of both necessity and choice on the part of enslaved people, and it powerfully shaped their lives in the Americas, more so than their African 'roots'. Given the diversity of Africans on Cayon House, most newcomers did not share a specific culture but rather a general cultural orientation or set of underlying principles. Africans adjusted to New World bondage, wherever possible, by drawing upon familiar ideas and practices rooted in their homelands. But Africans on Cunyngham's Cayon House estate struggled to find large numbers of countrymen and countrywomen with whom they could make this adjustment. Exposed to many more languages than prevailed in their homelands, they would have used Creole as the prevailing medium of daily interaction on Cayon House with remarkable speed.[96]

This microhistorical study has obvious limits, even as a reduction in scale can reveal aspects of larger historical processes that otherwise might be missed. It concerns just one plantation, even though connected to others and embedded in a larger plantation context. Its setting is a small Caribbean island, even if situated against a Leeward Islands background and offering a welcome addition, in the British West Indies context, to the typical fixation on Barbados or Jamaica. It extends over a short temporal span, even as it uncovers dynamic change. Focusing on a single plantation demonstrates that sweeping claims about 'survival' or 'creation' fail to account for the complexities of the numerous slave trades that forced enslaved Africans to the Americas over the long history of Atlantic slavery. Tracing specific populations of captives along slave routes demonstrates that in particular places and times, like St Kitts in the early eighteenth century, creolization was powerfully important for shaping enslaved people's lives. In other locations and periods, the slave trade grouped people who shared an African origin, allowing them to draw more fully on their shared culture and language as they faced American slavery. Transcending a binary debate that flattens complexity and change over time, the particular informs the general.

While illuminating a part of the panoramic canvas of slavery in the Americas, microhistory also enables us to simultaneously maintain a focus on enslaved people — individuals whose lives often fade from view when we adopt a broader perspective. Although Cunyngham's census and ledger entries concerning his hundreds of captive workers are frustratingly devoid of personality and individuality, they still allow us to piece together life histories. Thus, 'Doctor Ham' (named after the Biblical figure perhaps) was about forty years of age in 1730, spoke KiKongo and married Aqui, an Efik-speaking 'Moccow' fieldworker five years his senior. Intriguingly he merited the occupational designation of 'surgeon' in Cunyngham's lists, and so he was presumably a healer who knew how to set bones and the like. Ham became mentor to London, a Bambara man recently purchased by Cunyngham from *Margrett*, but Ham did not pass on his trade, for London became a mason. Still, Ham, who probably visited other plantations to care for slaves, was an appropriate guide for London, who needed to know the neighbourhood, since he would be frequently hired out.

From seemingly intractable material, plausible inferences can be drawn respecting slave mentoring patterns, household arrangements, family formation, work organization, individual life histories, and above all the interplay of African heritages and New World innovation The available evidence tells us little about beliefs and values, even if it is exceptionally rich regarding the precise origins of Africans. Cayon House was populated by people such as Ham and London, KiKongo and Bambara speakers, in addition to husbands and wives, parents and children, mentors and novices, field hands and sugar boilers, shipmates and Creoles. In many ways a harrowing Hobbesian nightmare, this St Kitts plantation was also a diverse and complex social world that deserves recovery.

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[96] As missionaries learned later in St. Croix, Creole language learning could occur quickly ('Extract of a Letter from Brother Matthew Wied, dated Friedensberg, in St. Croix, July 23, 1818', in *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren*, vii (London, 1818), 18–9).