Ex Tempore

Ex Tempore - Verleden Tijdschrift, Nijmegen

Ex Tempore

Hoofdredacteur:
Jetze Boon

Redactie:
Kate van der Beek
Chris Bekkenk
Jetze Boon
Nadeche Diepgrond
Bart van Duijvenbode
Rens Gilissen
Frances van der Horst
Louis van den Langenberg
Cara Peters
Roosje Rasenberg
Joost Rosendaal
Pia van de Schaft
Mariëtte Verhoeven
Jessica Vogels
Emma Zijp

Eindredactie:
Jetze Boon
Rens Gilissen
Louis van den Langenberg
Cara Peters
Emma Zijp

Druk:
Print&Bind

Afbeeldingen omslag:

Boven:
Schilderij van Jan Matejko getiteld Copernicus in gesprek met God, 1872. Via: wikimedia commons

Onder:
Schilderij van Vincent van Gogh getiteld Sterrennacht boven de Rhône, 1888. Via: wikimedia commons

Jaargang 45 (2026), afl.2
ISSN 1566-1717
Ex Tempore verschijnt driemaal per jaargang.

Ex Tempore biedt studenten, docenten, onderzoekers en alumni Geschiedenis van de Radboud Universiteit alsook alle andere historisch geïnteresseerden de mogelijkheid op de hoogte te blijven van de meest recente ontwikkelingen in de Nijmeegse geschiedwetenschap. Jaarlijks brengt de redactie drie edities uit, waarvan goed leesbare, wetenschappelijke artikelen van Nijmeegse historici over allerlei landelijk aansprekende onderwerpen telkens de kern vormen. Hiernaast bieden wij studenten de mogelijkheid om in één team samen met docenten ervaring op te doen in de redactie van een wetenschappelijk tijdschrift. Dit maakt Ex Tempore voor hen een unieke leerschool.

Redactiesecretariaat:
Ex Tempore, Postbus 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen,
telefoon: 024 3615641.
e-mail: etvt@student.ru.nl
https://extempore.nl/

Verenigingsbestuur:
Dr. M.C.J. Verhoeven (voorzitter), J.J. Boon (hoofdredacteur), P. van de Schaft (secretaris), C.J.W. Bekkenk (penningmeester)

Comité van Aanbeveling:
Prof. dr. C. van Baalen, prof. dr. M.L.F. van Berkel, prof. dr. M.E.B. Derks, prof. dr. Th.L.M. Engelen, prof. dr. W.J.H. Furnée, prof. dr. O.J. Hekster, prof. dr. A.A.P.O. Janssens, prof. dr. H.G.J. Kaal, prof. dr. J. Kok, prof. dr . J. van Lottum prof. dr. W.P. van Meurs, prof. dr. M.E. Monteiro, prof. dr. L. Spruit, prof. mr. H.L.E. Verhagen, prof. dr. T.H.G. Verhoeven.

Pdf's van artikelen vanaf 1999 zijn gratis online verkrijgbaar op aanvraag. De prijs van papieren losse nummers is € 7,50.

Abonnementsprijs voor de jaargang 2026: €20,00. Abonnement volgende jaargang opzeggen vóór 1 januari. Een abonnement kan niet tussentijds worden stopgezet.

Abonnementen kunnen worden verkregen door overmaking van het betreffende bedrag op rekeningnummer NL77 INGB 0008 1693 32 t.n.v. Ex Tempore, Nijmegen, onder vermelding van uw adres en studentnummer (indien van toepassing).

© Ex Tempore, Nijmegen 2026

Moving through the Night

The Dutch Caribbean in the Early Modern Era

Adrian van der Velde

In 1703, Hendrik van Dam—the self-identified *fiscael*, or auditor, secretary, and tax collector of the Dutch Caribbean isles of St. Eustatius and Saba—published an account with several stories that he considered to be indicative of the corruption, intrigue, and vice in the colony, all centered on his personal grievances against the governor of the island, Isaac Lamont. One story conveyed how in 1702, an adversary of the governor, a burgher named Pieter Lespier, arrived at Fort Oranje in St. Eustatius in the night on a boat from Saba with 'his wife and children in order to come and reside once again on St. Eustatius.'[1] Incensed at his presence, Lamont immediately sent for Van Dam and demanded that he arrest Lespier. Despite the fact that it was the middle of the night and he was 'already in bed', the *fiscael* went to the governor's house, dramatically laid out the reasons why this arrest was both impractical and illegal, and then refused to follow orders.[2] Temporarily stymied, Lamont sent for his nephew to carry out his wishes, only for the messenger to return with the news that the nephew was drunk and asleep, and thus in no condition to seize Lespier. Satisfied that he had scored his point and won the power struggle, Van Dam returned home and went back to bed, only for Lespier to be incarcerated the next morning.

This anecdote occupied several pages of Van Dam's publication, but the focus of this article is the seemingly insignificant detail that framed the story: it all happened during the night. Saba lies less than 30 kilometers from St. Eustatius, just a few hours sail away, so Lespier and his family may have initially embarked after dark before arriving in Fort Oranje. Their nocturnal arrival was not depicted as an unusual event, nor

1 Hendrik van Dam, *Deductie, Gedaan Maken by Ofte van Wegen Hendrik van Dam, Fiscaal van de Eylanden St. Eustatius Ende Zaba En Habitanten van de Voorsz Eylanden Aan de Bewindhebberen van de West-Indische Compagnie* (n.p. 1703) 80.

2 Van Dam, *Deductie*, 78-81.

was the conducting of business by officials during these hours. Nighttime was portrayed as a time to be abed, but drunken sleep was socially unacceptable. The story demonstrates how the night could provide time and space to move and conduct the business of daily life. Moreover, I argue that nocturnal mobility was a central feature of life in the Dutch Caribbean during the early modern era, and that people regularly moved and worked throughout the hours of the night.[3]

To set the stage, it is important to keep in mind that the tracts of land held by the Dutch in the Caribbean Sea were geographically miniscule, even though located hundreds of kilometers apart. The six islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao (the ABC islands or *Benedenwindse Eilanden*), Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten combined to total less than 1,000 square kilometers, or about two-thirds the size of Utrecht, the smallest province in the Netherlands. While there were some small plantations on these islands, the freeports of Oranjestad on St. Eustatius and Willemstad on Curaçao dominated economic activity as they embodied the idea of the Dutch Republic as an empire run by merchants. The colonies in the Guianas—Essequibo, Demerara, Berbice, and Suriname—spread across a greater swath of land, the vast majority of which the Dutch claimed but did not even explore, much less control.[4] The plantations there were worked by enslaved Africans and grew crops such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, and sugar, with the latter overshadowing all other products. These colonies were designed to be operated by companies such as the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and the Society of Suriname with the intent of generating profit for share-



3 This argument is a small component of my PhD dissertation project that considers nocturnality in the early modern British, Dutch, and French Caribbean. For more, see Adrian van der Velde '"When Unwelcome Night Came": A Nocturnal History of the Colonial Caribbean, 1660-1800' (2024).

4 While the Guianas are geographically part of South America and do not border the Caribbean Sea, historians generally discuss them as part of the 'Greater Caribbean' due to cultural and colonial connections.

holders in the Dutch Republic, albeit with mixed results.[5]

The environmental setting of the Dutch Caribbean bore little resemblance to the temperate maritime climate of the Dutch Republic which had mild winters (albeit harsher than the current climate due to the Little Ice Age), cool summers, and consistent rainfall. Instead, the ABC islands were semi-arid, while the rest of the region was tropical. Consistently hot, the colonies' typical daytime temperatures ranged from 27-33°C and nighttime lows from 22-28°C.[6] This made much of the area ideal for growing the plantation crops that fueled the colonial economy. Most importantly for this study, the night was also different, specifically in its variability in time due to the proximity to the equator. The difference between the longest day and shortest day of the year in Amsterdam is 9 hours and 8 minutes. In contrast, that difference in Willemstad is only 1 hour and 25 minutes, and in Paramaribo a mere 40 minutes. Additionally, the period of civil twilight—a period of visibility between sunset or sunrise and darkness—is also shorter, 23 minutes in the colonies rather than 42-50 minutes in metropole.[7] This data shows both that the length of the night in the Ca-



5 For more information on the Dutch presence in the Caribbean during the early modern era, including the importance of slavery and some of the ways in which the colonies functioned, see Cornelis Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guinas, 1680-1791* (Assen 1985); Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, *Realm Between Empires: The Second Dutch Atlantic, 1680-1815* (Ithaca 2018); Johannes Posta, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge: 1990); *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society: Suriname in the Atlantic World, 1651-1825* (Philadelphia 2020).

6 'Climate and Average Weather Year Round', *Weather Spark* <https://weatherspark.com/y/150207/Average-Weather-in-Bonaire-Saint-Eustatius-and-Saba;-Caribbean-Netherlands-Year-Round; https://weatherspark.com/y/150280/Average-Weather-in-Sint-Maarten-Year-Round; https://weatherspark.com/y/150216/Average-Weather-in-Curacao-Cura%C3%A7ao-Year-Round; https://weatherspark.com/y/29437/Average-Weather-in-Paramaribo-Suriname-Year-Round; https://weatherspark.com/y/29070/Average-Weather-in-Georgetown-Guyana-Year-Round (all accessed 25 January 2026). Locations included are Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Maarten, Curaçao, Paramaribo (Suriname), and Georgetown (Guyana).

7 'Sunrise and Sunset Times', *timeanddate.com*, https://www.timeanddate.com/ (accessed 15 November 2023).

ribbean is consistent throughout the year and that the delineation between night and day is abrupt. People in the region experienced nights and days as being of equal length, and when the sun was about to set, they needed to quickly arrange the necessary artificial light of a candle or lamp.

However, the meaning of 'the night' transcends scientific definitions related to sunlight and the rotation of the earth. Instead, there are significant cultural norms that determine what people consider to be 'the night' and the appropriate activities for that that period. Despite the necessity of human rest and sleep, the words of the ancient Greek philosopher Euripides, 'the night belongs to thieves', mirrors the way in which many societies viewed the interval between sunset and sunrise.[8] Historically, the hours of darkness were often viewed as a time of demonic activity, dread, malfeasance, secrecy, or wickedness, an attitude that persists into the present. But not only was the night more complex than any simplistic formulation, it offered significant opportunities for historical actors. Historians use the night as an analytical category to uncover two components about the past. First, they examine how the night functioned in discourse, specifically, how the night was conceptualized and discussed in the public sphere, especially by elites.[9] So, for example, eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers such as the Dutch writer François Hemsterhuis wrote of the stars which helped overcome the 'horrors of night's darkness', a sentiment echoed by the English thinker Edmund Burke, who declared that 'dark-



8 Euripides, 'Iphigenia in Tauris,' trans. by Robert Potter, *The Complete Greek Drama,* ed. By Whitney Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. (New York 1938) Line 1017. *Perseus Digital Library,* <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0112%3Acard%3D1017.> [accessed 15 November 2023].

9 For examples, see A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York 2005); Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge 2011); Avner Wishnitzer, *As Night Falls: Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Cities after Dark* (Cambridge 2021).

ness is terrible in its own nature.'[10] Darkness and the night were hereby conflated, with light—artificial, natural, and metaphorical—serving as a way to dispel the dread they caused. While many early modern Europeans may have agreed with this perspective, such a view of the night was far from universal. Several African cultures, as well as African-descended people in the Caribbean, regarded the hours of darkness as a time of spiritual vibrancy, and they also valued the possibility for communal gathering and celebration.[11] Because of the presence of European colonists and African-descended people (most of whom were enslaved) in the Dutch Caribbean, this meant that distinct views and experiences of the night coexisted and conflicted with each other as people went about their daily lives pursuing activities related to categories such as labor, rest, and worship.

Secondly, historians study the ways everyday people experienced and moved through the night. Several have examined sleep, the activity most associated with nocturnal hours.[12] Others have considered activities undertaken at night, including categories such as crime, dining and enter-



10 François Hemsterhuis, 'Letter on Man and his Relations,' Paris, 1772, in *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773*, eds. Jacob van Sluis & Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh 2022) 188; Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, with an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste, and Several Other Additions* (Basil 1792) 124.

11 For more on African-descended people in the Caribbean and their view of the night, see Adrian van der Velde, 'Freedom, Faith, and Fortune: Nocturnality's Opportunities in the Early Modern Caribbean,' in: V. Huber, R. Schmitz-Eser, and M. Weber (eds.), *The Bright Side of Night. Nocturnal Activities in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, (Firenze 2024) 107-131.

12 For examples, see Sasha Handley, *Sleep in Early Modern England* (New Haven 2016); also see the dialogue between Gerrit Verhoeven and A. Roger Ekirch in *Journal of Sleep Research*, beginning with Gerrit Verhoeven, '(Pre)Modern Sleep. New Evidence from the Antwerp Criminal Court (1715–1795),' *Journal of Sleep Research* 30, no. 1 (2021): e13099, https://doi.org/10.1111/jsr.13099.

tainment, labor, sex, technology, trade, and travel.[13] Such approaches are useful to reveal the quotidian, the everyday lives of the vast majority of the population who—especially in the early modern era—did not record their thoughts on the past. This second approach is what will be used here, with a focus on mobility and smuggling, two components inseparable from the experience of the Dutch Caribbean during the premodern colonial past.

Movement and Trade

Dutch power in the early modern era is often reduced to the trope of an empire of merchants. While it is important to remember the Republic's military power and the significance of the plantation economy, it is true that its prosperous trading colonies were spread across the world, from the Caribbean to Elmina, the Cape Colony, Ceylon, India, and the East Indies. These locations generated fantastic wealth for the Dutch metropole by dealing in cash crops such as coffee and sugar, finished goods such as porcelain, and the trade of human beings. The economy of the Dutch Caribbean primarily split between agricultural production in the Guianas and profitable trade in its free ports of Oranjestad (St. Eustatius was known as the 'Golden Rock' due to its vibrant mercantile economy) and Willemstad. Merchants from other European colonial empires could warehouse their goods in Dutch ports, either selling them there or arranging transport to other islands. Similarly, on their way from Africa, slave ships of British, Danish, Dutch, French, and Portuguese origin often made their first landfall at St. Eustatius because of its strategic location on the eastern side of the Caribbean Sea. Many African captives were initially purchased there at auction to work on plantations throughout the region, and those who remained unsold went back aboard the ship to move to another destination. Because of the variety of economic interests and the preponderan-

13 For examples, see Cemal Kafadar, "How Dark Is the History of the Night, How Black the Story of Coffee, How Bitter the Tale of Love: The Changing Measure of Leisure and Pleasure in Early Modern Istanbul" in: Arzu Öztürkmen et al. (eds), *Medieval and Early Modern Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies: 20 (Brepols, 2014); Bryan Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York 2000); Jeremy Zallen, *American Lucifers: The Dark History of Artificial Light, 1750-1865* (Chapel Hill 2019).

ce of enslaved people, the Dutch were a minority in their own Caribbean colonies: the islands were multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual.

Because of the archipelagic nature of the Caribbean, sailing ships provided the primary means of transportation for people and cargo. Importantly for this study, sources record that ships in the region often left or arrived in ports during the night. Most ports in the Leeward Islands (*Bovenwindse Eilanden*) were located on the western coast, a fact that appears to have eased the passage of ships in and out of the harbor.[14] This was in part because the natural harbors were primarily located on that side. In addition, by being on the western coast, the topography of the land provided a small degree of shelter from the strong and consistent easterly trade winds (which travel from east to west) from the Atlantic Ocean. These winds blow regularly at about 25km per hour, which even with the impediment of an island, would still be a significant obstacle to a ship sailing out of port. However, the winds tend to subside significantly after sunset, and are the weakest around midnight, which meant that the most advantageous time to enter port was during the hours of darkness.[15] For centuries, seafarers sailed against the wind by tacking (traveling obliquely against the wind rather than directly), and this is what they would have used to enter these leeward ports. This location also eased the departure of ships,



14 19 of the 21 main ports in the Lesser Antilles were located on the western side of the island. All three of the ports on the ABC islands—Oranjestad on Aruba, Kralendijk on Bonaire, and Willemstad on Curaçao, are also on the western side of their respective islands. Phillipsburg on St. Maarten is one of the exceptions to this rule by its location on the southern coast, but it is sheltered from the easterly winds by a peninsula.

15 Detailed wind speed charts in the Caribbean for each day and hour are not available for the early modern era. By looking at modern wind charts—in this case, from 2015—for Antigua, Barbados, and Martinique (exemplar islands from the north, central, and southeastern Lesser Antilles), it is possible to see a clear pattern over the course of a day throughout the year. Wind speed abates around 8pm or 9pm and reaches its nadir between midnight and 4am. The lowest wind speeds recorded for a day occurs during darkness for roughly 70-75% of the days in each month for these islands. See 'Antigua' <https://www.windalert.com/spot/1285> 'Barbados' <https://www.windalert.com/spot/1290> 'Martinique' <https://www.windalert.com/spot/1288> [accessed 15 November 2023].

for if the harbor were on the eastern shore, they would have to be towed out by longboat or moved by kedging, a process by which a boat dropped an anchor ahead of the ship and a windlass dragged the ship along. Port authorities, harbor workers, and the ships themselves were prepared for nocturnal travel, and they used lanterns and other lights to signal what type of ship was arriving or where to go. When the ship docked, workers in the shipyard and the warehouse would often immediately begin to unload the ship, and travelers—as in the case of Pieter Lespier seen in the beginning—would disembark and seek accommodations.

Such nocturnal travel was not exclusive to the island colonies but could also be seen in places such as Suriname. For example, two Dutch troop transports left Paramaribo at midnight in 1772, replete with a 'signal-gun being fired,' even though their destination lay a mere 25 km up the river at New Amsterdam. Although there were often covert nocturnal trips, in this case it seems to have had nothing to do with strategy or necessity.[16] This shows that the captains of ships voluntarily chose to sail at night, even though visibility of submerged dangers such as reefs, rocks, or shoals would be limited.

A central component of the Caribbean economy during the early modern era was 'underground.' Smugglers connected people and goods from Africa, Asia, and Europe to the Caribbean, and the night helped hide them as they sold their goods and escaped prosecution. The prevailing doctrine of mercantilism established monopolies in the form of trading companies, such as the WIC. It also required strict control of both buying and selling, which prompted legislatures to enact harsh penalties for individuals or businesses who imported illegal goods or failed to pay tariffs and taxes. They especially targeted goods from competing empires, although the Dutch were much more lenient due to their long-established

16 John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition; against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam: In Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America ; from the Year 1772, to 1777: ... By Captn. J.G. Stedman. Illustrated with 80 Elegant Engravings ...*, Vol. 2. (London 1796), 378.

free ports.[17] Most commodities could be smuggled, and a clandestine market persisted because the benefits for sellers and buyers outweighed the potential penalty of being punished. Sellers of illicit goods capitalized on greater profits while consumers enjoyed cheaper products because smuggling eliminated tariffs, taxes, the majority of middlemen, and most of the costs of warehousing.

Enslaved people and their labor on the plantations and in the cities provided the basis for most economic gain in the Dutch Caribbean, and because they were treated as a commodity, there was a profitable legal and illegal slave trade. Individuals were sometimes lured away from a plantation or household with the promise of freedom, only to be resold against their will. Most came aboard interlopers, slave ships that purchased captives on the African coast without the benefit of a legal charter provided by a company such as the WIC.[18] Colonial governments made half-hearted attempts at curtailing the trade and enacted laws to prevent smuggling, but these had little effect on ameliorating the situation.[19] The

17 The British and French initially restricted their ports to intra-imperial trade, but by 1760s they established their own free ports. This undermined the Mercantilist system and ultimately damaged Dutch trading power. See R. Grant Kleiser, 'Free Ports in the Atlantic World' in Trevor Burnard, ed. *Oxford Bibliographies* in Atlantic History, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0357.xml (accessed 15 November 2023).

18 Interlopers also were able to make port and sell enslaved people at market through the use of bribes. An example of this occurred in Hendrik van Dam's account of St. Eustatius, when interlopers came into port and the governor, his family, and his closest advisors went aboard and "stayed day and night on board the interlopers" to arrange for the sale and purchase of enslaved people on board. The clear accusation was that Statian authorities were profiting themselves and stealing from the Dutch government. See Van Dam, *Deductie* 24.

19 For example, the French in the nearby Windward Islands and Saint-Domingue published laws explicitly aimed at the sale of Indigenous people or Africans taken away from the islands to be sold elsewhere. *Ordonnance qui desend de traitteien* [sp?] *en Esclaven Indiens et Caraiben aux Isle au Vent* (March 2, 1739); *Ordonnance qui desend tous de Negres outre les Inden du Neus St. Domingue al inception der Navvies [sp?] Negres qui pourrer ported a St Domingue les Negres qui uils tendee aux Isle du Vent* (October 12, 1739), Archives Nationales d'Outre-mer, COL A 25: 249, 254

historian Linda Rupert described how the nighttime facilitated the illegal trade in enslaved people on Curaçao, 'Like nonhuman commodities, slaves were best smuggled ashore at night, under cover of darkness.' She goes on to describe how the operation worked at night. Smugglers would sail along the coastline with their captives in the hope of finding a customer. On shore, interested shoppers lit fires to indicate their location and desire to purchase the cargo on board. Once communication was made, the ship would anchor near shore and either take the captives and other wares to land or customers would come to the ship to pick and purchase what they wanted.[20] Smugglers employed this method all throughout the Caribbean, and for the beneficiaries of the smuggling, the profits and savings of these nocturnal sales were significant enough for the trade to continue throughout most of the time slavery remained legal.[21] However, the enslaved people doubtlessly felt disoriented and dehumanized as they were sold under the cover of darkness, whether they were resold or this was their first encounter in the region.

Not only did smuggling activity occur on Dutch islands such as Curaçao and St. Eustatius, but smugglers of all nationalities used them as bases for their operations. Authorities in the British, Danish, French, and Spanish Caribbean long knew that illegal trade, including that of enslaved people, originated in Dutch territory, and they decried its deleterious effects on the monopolies of the state-sponsored companies and the loss of profit for their empires. While this may have been true of colonial leadership, landholders and free people appreciated the products and supported smuggling. Similar to the sentiment surrounding Caribbean piracy before around 1730, many colonists felt that imperial taxes were burdensome and that purchasing smuggled goods or people was an activity that did no real



20 Linda Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens 2012) 81, 186.

21 The smuggling of enslaved people in Dutch territories (where slavery remained legal until 1863) continued well after the abolition of the slave trade by the British in 1815 made such traffic illegal and dangerous. For more, see Ulbe Bosma, 'Forced Relocation and Illegal Slave Trading After Abolition' in: Rose Mary Allen, Esther Captain, Matthias van Rossum, Urwin Vyent (eds.), *Slavery & the Dutch State: Dutch Colonial Slavery and Its Afterlives* (Leiden 2025) 151-160.

harm, let them assert their independence, and gave them the opportunity to save money.

As an illustration, consider the report told by Nathaniel Johnson, governor of the British Leeward islands, who complained about smuggling coming from Dutch territory. He wrote to the Lords of Admiralty in 1688, the same year of the Glorious Revolution that saw William of Orange take over the British Empire, about the person of Joseph Crisp, who he called 'a persistent smuggler of negroes and sugar to and from the Dutch Islands.' His letter laid out the considerable financial stakes of this type of illegal trade for the empire when he said, 'the Company are principally the sufferers, but by what trade of that or any other kind is with the Dutch his Majesty also is a sharer in the Losse, it occasioning the conveyance of our Sugars and other produce to their Islands, esp. of His Majesties Customes.' Although his anger seemed pointed at the Dutch, Johnson told of a British interloper that 'had on board about 200 Slaves, on the 10th of the last month [May] she arrived at Montserrat and about 12 a Clock at night landed some of her slaves.' This followed the usual nocturnal strategy used by smugglers, but the governor interrupted their operation. He sent troops to the site, they captured 60 of the enslaved people in the name of the crown, and they proceeded to put them in jail. Johnson laid out the unfavorable response to this seizure of private property, stating 'There has [been], my Lords, some opposition in a riotous manner bin given to the Companies servants seizing the aforesaid Negro's.' Nevertheless, he defended state action as a necessary example to deter future smuggling.[22] Armed confrontations, the arrest and imprisonment of enslaved people along with their transportation against their will, and the risk posed by travel in the dark, demonstrates the nocturnally-determined relationships between smuggling, movement, illegality, danger, and violence, even as it brought people in the region what they wanted—cheaper goods in what was increasingly a consumer-driven society.

22 *Governor Sir Nathaniel Johnson to Lords of Trade and Plantations. Nevis,* June 10, 1688. National Archives, Kew (henceforth NA), CO 1/64, Nos. 71, 711-XV, CO 153/2, 2-8.

Conclusion

While 'the night' functions as a type of universal in the human condition, its duration, experience, function, and utility in the Caribbean made the region a unique space. This was not because of its climate or proximity to the equator, although these differentiated it from the Dutch metropole. Instead, its singularity rested upon its status as a collection of diasporic communities. European colonists and enslaved Africans brought their own social customs and belief systems related to fear, sociability, and spirituality. Early modern creoles—people of non-Indigenous extraction, both African and European, that were born in the Caribbean—developed their own, hybrid understandings of the nocturnal world. Interactions and conflicts between them shaped nighttime norms and practices such as sugar production on plantations, a lack of streetlighting in the cities, the racialized policing of criminality and violence, secret religious ceremonies, or ostentatious entertainments such as balls and theatre performances.

Examining the night via the category of mobility allows for a deeper understanding of the early modern Dutch Caribbean, answering questions related to when people traveled, why ports were located on western shores, and who benefited from the proliferation of smuggling. People moved at night because it offered them an advantage and because they wanted to, and in this sense, the nocturnal was no different than the diurnal. Night's darkness also offered secrecy and protection from authorities, albeit incomplete. Smuggling benefited both parties in the economic exchange, even as it damaged the empire or, in a more immediate fashion, the enslaved people who were commodified. However, many of the African-descended people victimized by this illicit trade used nocturnal mobility to their own advantage, via *marronage*, and through their self-emancipation as they ran away through the night, they worked to upend the system of racialized chattel slavery. The lens of mobility reveals that the night functioned as much more than a mere temporal backdrop, but as an active historical existence that simultaneously enabled commerce, exchange, and the contested pursuit of freedom.