

Canboulay and the *Negre Jardin*: Combat, Carnival, and the City in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad

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ABSTRACT

Coming to terms with Trinidadian Carnival means dealing not only with its current manifestations but also with its often fraught history linked to imperialism and enslavement. A Catholic festivity, Carnival's development is linked not only to European influences but also to African traditions and black-based activities that developed on the island prior to emancipation (1838). This article traces two such developments: *Canboulay*, a work procession carried out by the enslaved, which turned celebratory after abolition; and the *negre jardin*, the field laborer and also a Carnival character stereotyped by the elites, who was refurbished by black revelers after emancipation. The period analyzed is between the Spanish Cédula de Población of 1783, which spurred massive immigration, and the Canboulay Riots of 1881, which decisively contributed to Canboulay's extinction. Although Canboulay was originally a procession linked to the recruitment of enslaved workers from multiple estates to labor on sugar plantations—or, at times, a form of enslaved rebellion—after emancipation, Canboulay shifted into a city-wide procession in which bands of revelers claimed the streets during Carnival. Similarly, if at first the *negre jardin* had been mockingly portrayed by the elites in their pre-emancipation celebrations, in the post-emancipation Carnival the figure reconfigured himself into a street-claiming character who marched through Port of Spain. Although both Canboulay and the *negre jardin* retained foundational characteristics of their pre-emancipation iterations—a necessary part of either manifestation—they also morphed into urban displays, tools for urban territorial takeovers, and cultural expressions that brought together Trinidadians through communal bonds.

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Introduction

Whether as a form of drudgery or an act of protest, pre-emancipation *cannes brûlées* was a foundational influence for what later emerged as a festive Carnival procession. In slavocratic Trinidad, *cannes brûlées*—French for “burnt cane” and, in French creole, spelled “Canboulay”¹—referred to practices linked to plantation labor: the burning of cane stubs to fertilize soil or eradicate pests² (the cane rat),³ and the burning of the edges of a field in rodent-infested areas to trap the animals.⁴ But the enslaved also took to deliberately setting fire to plantations to hurt estate profits, spark excitement in their cruel routines,⁵ divert the attention of authorities to engage in criminal activity, or communicate with other groups through smoke and fire⁶—all activities also called *cannes brûlées*.

It was, however, as a rallying call that the practice was perhaps most memorable. Blaring their horns, whip-cracking overseers mustered enslaved groups linked to different estates to work one specific field. The calls brought them together for cane harvesting on a site deliberately set ablaze, a process that, although it facilitated labor, also demanded that it be done in haste. Once beckoned, field laborers would march toward the flaming site, carrying torches for illumination and drums to perform rhythmic accompaniment for the work ahead.⁷

Prior to emancipation, the figure of the *negre jardin*—the “garden negro” or, for the *Port of Spain Gazette*, the “field labourer”—also began to be formulated.⁸ During *cannes brûlées*, the *negre jardin* put out the cane fires and assisted the neighboring estates in the harvest. But during the pre-emancipation Carnival it was the upper classes who depicted the figure, still identified with the cane fields. During the festive season, revelers showcased the *negre jardin* as a paltry and obtuse servant, dressed in frayed garments or what one newspaper called “sooty disguises”⁹ and lashed into action during mock marches that displayed forced plantation labor.¹⁰ This early iteration of the *negre jardin* cast him as an obedient worker, stereotyped in his toil and manners.

But after emancipation a different *negre jardin* emerged, a stick-flaunting warrior who paraded the streets in a transmuted Canboulay, no longer marching toward the fields but through Port of Spain itself. Presenting a new demeanor, the character not only exhibited scenes from the slavery of years past—coercion, punishment, harvest¹¹—but also joined revelers in groups of ten to twenty (groups known as bands) associated with blocks and streets.¹² During Canboulay, these bands would often fight each other and, at times, coalesce into a larger group to fight the police.¹³ Some bands were even entirely formed by *negre jardins*,¹⁴ who wore trousers inside out, belts adorned with ribbons and colorful handkerchiefs, mirrors and bells attached throughout their costumes, and protective garments to shield themselves from blows.¹⁵ Combative, metropolitan, and street-claiming, this new *negre jardin* was much more a fighter than a laborer, transformed by abolition.

For some fifty years after emancipation, Canboulay would persist as Carnival’s opening procession.¹⁶ Between midnight and dawn,¹⁷ masqueraders, including the *negre jardin*, moved through the streets and squares of Port of Spain while bearing torches in their recollection

1. John Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay, and Calypso: Traditions in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 20. Newspapers featured different spellings: “Canne boulée” in the *Port of Spain Gazette*, March 26, 1881, 5; “Cane-bouler” in the *Trinidad Chronicle*, February 21, 1871, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 69; “Canboulé” in the *Trinidad Chronicle*, February 26, 1879, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 83.

2. Cowley, *Carnival*, 20.

3. John Norris Brierley, *Trinidad: Then and Now* (Port-of-Spain: Franklin’s Electric Printery, 1912), 319–20.

4. Cowley, *Carnival*, 20.

5. Hollis Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago—1763–1962* (Chicago: Research Associated School Times and Frontline Distribution, 2001), 161–62.

6. A. C. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies, Vol. II* (London: Whitaker, Treacher, and Co., 1833), 301.

7. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 161.

8. *Port of Spain Gazette* (hereafter PSOG in notes), March 26, 1881, 5.

9. *Trinidad Sentinel*, February 2, 1860, 3, in John Cowley, “Music and Migration: Aspects of Black Music in the British Caribbean, the United States, and Britain, before the Independence of Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 1992), 189.

10. *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 16, 1881, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 21.

11. Cowley, *Carnival*, 39.

12. Charles William Day, *Five Years’ Residence in The West Indies, Vol. 1* (London: Colburn and Co. Publishers, Great Marlborough Street, 1852), 313–14.

13. For fighting between bands and police, see PSOG, February 17, 1858, 3. For fighting between bands, see *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 2, 1881, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 87.

14. Interview with Lennox Pierre

by Tony Hall in J. D. Elder, "Cannes Brûlés," *TDR* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 41.

15. Daniel Crowley, "The Traditional Masques of Carnival," *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, no. 3/4 (March 1956): 195.

16. Last attempts at Canboulay were in the 1880s. See *San Fernando Gazette*, March 1, 1884, 3; *POSG*, February 15, 1888, 3; *POSG*, March 6, 1889, 5.

17. *Trinidad Standard*, February 23, 1846, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 38.

18. *Trinidad Chronicle*, February 21, 1871, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 69.

19. Cowley, *Carnival*, 80.

20. *Trinidad Standard*, February 23, 1846, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 38.

21. Interview with Lennox Pierre by Tony Hall in Elder, "Cannes Brûlés," 41.

22. Bridget Brereton, *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1996), 8.

23. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783–1962* (1981; Champs Fleurs: Terra Verde Resource Centre, 2009), 14.

24. For the Cédula, in Spanish, see Rosario Sevilla Soler, *Immigración y Cambio Socio-Económico en Trinidad (1783–1797)* [Immigration and socio-economic change in Trinidad (1783–1797)] (Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1988), 199–200.

25. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 13–14.

26. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 22.

27. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 13–14.

of enslavement¹⁸ and, perhaps, in celebration of its extinction.¹⁹ Singing and drumming, they paraded "from one end of the town to another" in what was sure to be a raucous season.²⁰ Aggressive in their conduct, ferocious members of the bands encircled drummers and musicians, who marched behind the elected royalty of Canboulay, while women and children remained at the rear, carrying more sticks and torches.²¹ Born out of both labor and revolt, Canboulay and the negre jardin morphed as change struck Trinidad, bearing new modes and meanings linked to their histories of enslavement but also, crucially, to the new conditions of post-emancipation Trinidad.

This article is divided into four sections. The first sketches Trinidadian history between the Cédula de Población (1783) and emancipation (1838), providing context for the early emanations of Canboulay and the negre jardin. The period saw the growth of Catholic populations in Spanish-controlled Trinidad as they immigrated from diverse national backgrounds; the establishment of a plantation economy based largely, but not entirely, on sugar; British takeover at the tail end of the eighteenth century; and the formation of a society predominantly founded on modest estates, quick urban development, and small enslaved cohorts. The second section traces Black cultures between 1783 and 1838, highlighting cultural expressions that influenced later expression of Canboulay and the negre jardin. Among the group's activities were the organization of hierarchical societies called *convois*; the rooting of group events in small-scale territories called yards; the practice of a ritual called *Kalenda*; and Canboulay itself, which during the period was, once more, linked to either labor or rebellion. The third section examines upper-class Carnival celebrations. Here the focus is not only on the parties organized by the French and British, but also on their costumes—one of which was the negre jardin—and in their own reenactments of Canboulay. The final section traces societal shifts linked to emancipation; the introduction of indentured servitude; and the island's economic transformations and urban growth up to the 1880s, when the authorities eradicated Canboulay. The section then analyzes the effects of post-emancipation shifts on Canboulay and the negre jardin. Although Canboulay and the negre jardin preserved some early features, after abolition they shifted into city-centered manifestations associated with band formation, territorial control, and fierce fighting—crucial expressions that were part of a reshaped Carnival.

The Spanish Cédula, French Migration, and British Takeover

The Cédula de Población decisively changed Trinidad. Up to 1783, the island was yet one more neglected Spanish colony in the Caribbean. Trinidad lacked precious metals, remained sparsely populated, and was covered by a forbidding forest, making it of little use to the imperial power.²² But the Spanish had plans for the territory. Through their bill, they would quickly populate the island with a white planter class driven by sugar profits, tropical comfort, and, above all, land grants and tax exemptions.²³ The policy, which granted different-sized lots to immigrants based on creed, race, and number of enslaved workers,²⁴ immediately grabbed the attention of French planters across the Caribbean, who saw an opportunity to accumulate wealth.²⁵ The majority of these immigrants were well-established planters, conservative in politics and imbued with the prejudices that came with enslavement—and resistant to the emerging ideals espoused by the French Revolution.²⁶ By the late 1780s, it was clear the Spanish had succeeded in their plan: plantation sites were founded, the Catholic population grew, and Trinidad, which had never been a site for extraction, began to generate considerable profits.²⁷

28. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 24.
29. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 24.
30. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 23–25.
31. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 37.
32. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 29–33.
33. Milla Riggio, "Playing and Praying: The Politics of Race, Religion, and Respectability in Trinidad Carnival," *Journal of Festive Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 204.
34. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 18.
35. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 45.
36. Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (1962; repr., New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 78.
37. Williams, *People*, 65.
38. Williams, *People*, 67–68.
39. Williams, *People*, 72.
40. Williams, *People*, 83.

By the 1790s free people of Black or mixed descent were also arriving in groups from the French Caribbean.²⁸ The groups chiefly settled in the island's burgeoning towns, living in households or on small plots rather than large estates. Accompanied by small cohorts of enslaved workers, this second wave of French settlers was a larger presence, and by 1797 their population numbered 4,476, compared to 2,151 local whites.²⁹ Most of the arriving immigrants, in contrast to their more conservative counterparts, supported some ideas emerging from the French Revolution, with republicanism, for the planters, remaining as the most dangerous. This created tensions between the planter class and the arriving cohort,³⁰ and by the early nineteenth century the dominant planter class tightened its control over the colony.³¹ Far from homogeneous, the French groups lived in constant apprehension.

Tensions increased as the British took an interest in Trinidad. Soon English merchants began to establish trade relations along the island's shores, and their presence quickly spread. As the colony developed under the Spanish Cédula, British leaders grew fearful that the new French group, drawn to revolutionary ideals, would take over Trinidad. Soon the French and British were clashing on Caribbean waters, and by 1796, after the French forced Spain to declare war on their mutual rivals, Trinidad was exposed to British invasion. The paltry Spanish navy, however, readily succumbed to the forces led by General Ralph Abercromby in 1797,³² and in 1802, through the Treaty of Amiens, the Spanish ceded Trinidad to the British Empire.³³ Throughout the entirety of the nineteenth century and for many years after, the territory would serve British interests, and its modest but productive infrastructure would fill its coffers.

The Spanish Cédula and British takeover radically transformed Trinidad's economy. After 1783, Trinidad's productive output grew considerably, and by the time the British claimed governance, the colony not only featured multiple sugar plantations, but also cotton, coffee, and cocoa estates—and production soared.³⁴ British conquest also encouraged its own investors to flock to Trinidad at a time when sugar prices were exceptionally high, and the empire's merchants readily invested in property.³⁵ Between 1812 and 1833 the island's sugar and coffee exports nearly doubled while cocoa sales skyrocketed, weighing over three million pounds, a colossal amount compared to the ninety-six thousand pounds of 1797.³⁶ Flaunting economic influence, by the beginning of the century the British were a prominent group—a group that, moreover, held political leadership.

But as they settled, the British had to decide what to do about slavery. By the turn of the century, both the British people and Parliament were convinced of the unprofitability of the system, its lack of political expediency, and its inhumanity, and they were ready for a change.³⁷ Regarding Trinidad, Parliament decided that the island's population would not be supplemented by the African trade even prior to its prohibition throughout the empire in 1807. Also, the local planters were not to establish a self-governing political body,³⁸ and the British government would hold complete control over political decisions—measures that further sheltered the colony from the maintenance of enslavement.³⁹ Such a crown colony system, novel at the time, was a foundational characteristic of Trinidadian society, especially since the enslaved population was to remain smaller—and more valuable—than in other British Caribbean colonies, such as Jamaica and Barbados.⁴⁰ As a consequence, the island's comparatively small number of enslaved individuals not only hindered the establishment of large plantations but also bolstered a society based on small estates and greater settlement in cities. By 1815, Port of Spain held the

41. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 38–39.
42. Williams, *People*, 84.
43. Riggio, "Playing," 204.
44. Shannon Dudley, "Creativity and Control in Trinidad Carnival Competitions," *World of Music* 45, no. 1 (2003): 15.
45. *Trinidad Gazette*, February 20, 1822, 2.
46. Frederick Urich, *The Urich Diary, Trinidad 1830–1832: The Diary of Frederick Urich*, trans. Irene Urich, ed. Anthony de Verteuil (Trinidad: Litho Press, 1995), 46.
47. Urich, *Diary*, 114.
48. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 147–48.
49. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, 288–89.

highest percentage of enslaved populations among the colonial capitals throughout the British Caribbean, bearing as much as 23.5 percent of the island's population,⁴¹ while in 1833—five years prior to abolition—80 percent of enslavers held fewer than ten workers in bondage.⁴² The early establishment of enslaved groups in towns, especially Port of Spain, facilitated communal bonds among Blacks living in cities—cities that after emancipation would serve as the main settings for Carnival celebrations and Canboulay processions.

The Cédula de Población and subsequent British takeover generated profound changes in Trinidad's cultural realm. The conditions emerging after the Spanish Cédula marked Trinidad for its lack of a single colonizing hegemony.⁴³ Also, the Cédula encouraged Catholic immigration, and throughout the nineteenth century Catholics persisted with their Carnival celebrations on an island governed by Protestants.⁴⁴ British bureaucrats, however, took to participating in the festivities, even organizing some events themselves, chief among them the annual Governor's Ball.⁴⁵ The division among the French—that is, the split between conservative planters and the later, more republican-oriented immigrants—may also have encouraged the British to attend the pompous French parties as a signal of their alignment with the more conservative group. And the enslaved also brought cultural activities that would transform Trinidadian culture. A colony on the move, Trinidad shifted in its population and governance, and local culture followed—whether through the expressions of the enslaved or the festivities of the elites.

Black Cultures

Black expressions throughout the pre-emancipation period were essential for shaping later cultural expressions. But Black participation in pre-emancipation Carnival remains mostly a matter of conjecture, and this is largely due to the scarcity of primary sources. A clerk named Frederick Urich, however—who documented his routines between 1830 and 1832—mentions Black participation, serving as a rare source. In an entry from 1831, Urich claimed to have witnessed "African dances" performed by "various masked bands" during the season, accompanied by "the enthusiasm of the negroes and negresses."⁴⁶ In the following year, Urich claimed once more to have taken to the streets "to see the masks," remarking that, among the revelers, "nearly all were coloured folk."⁴⁷ While Urich's diary lacks detail, his account remains an essential reference for documenting Black participation in Carnival.

Other sources, however, show that the enslaved regularly celebrated Christmas.⁴⁸ A telling account by one A. C. Carmichael, a white woman who lived on an estate during the early 1830s, recalls such moments:

The first Christmas I was at Laurel-Hill, ... we had a cold dinner at three o'clock, that our negroes might have the sole use of our kitchen and oven; ... The music consisted of four female singers, one drum, and three women with calabashes hollowed out, so that a few stones may be put in them; this they flourish up and down, and rattle in the same way as a tambourine. There was no drinking or fighting; they supped very late, and kept it up until near sun-rise; and danced the next night, as long, and as merrily elsewhere.⁴⁹

Carmichael's testimony displays the enslaved taking what is perhaps a rare opportunity to celebrate among themselves. During the season, groups also went from house to house to offer their holiday wishes to neighbors and, on some occasions, perform music in what amounted

50. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, 291.
51. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 168–69.
52. Cowley, *Carnival*, 13.
53. Susan Campbell, "Carnival, Calypso, and Class Struggle in Nineteenth Century Trinidad," *History Workshop Journal* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 1988): 3.
54. Cowley, *Carnival*, 13.
55. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 169.
56. Cowley, *Carnival*, 13–14.
57. Campbell, "Carnival, Calypso," 3.
58. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 169.
59. Campbell, "Carnival, Calypso," 3.
60. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 119.
61. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 174.
62. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 118–19.

to interactions between social classes and also enslaved groups linked to different estates. As Carmichael recounts, a "party of negroes from Paradise, the adjoining estate, came to wish us a good Christmas. They had two fiddlers, ... and returned on New Year's Day; and pleased and entertained us with their songs and merriment."⁵⁰ During Christmas, a moment to circulate and revel, the enslaved left their estates, coming into contact with other groups and households.

But the holidays were not the only festive moments—the enslaved also came together in associations called convois, or Black societies that assembled in areas near the estates themselves. The convois not only featured kings and queens but also judges, princes, and soldiers in what were hierarchical societies.⁵¹ They also held distinguishing names that may have referred to the origins of their members,⁵² such as the Regiment Danois (Danish Regiment, referring to the then-Danish colonies of Saint Thomas and Saint Croix), or names bearing intimidating titles such as Le Convois des San Peurs (The Fearless Regiment).⁵³ Although the convois established group membership based on Caribbean origins, enslaved groups arriving from Africa and, at times, free Blacks also joined.⁵⁴ Each convoi, during its gatherings, also decided on routes for upcoming celebrations,⁵⁵ and bore flags and uniforms that could be used as symbols of power or parody and that, moreover, may have also held magical properties.⁵⁶ As a form of communal bonding, the convois served to bring people together in a setting that buttressed a sense of belonging among the enslaved.

Although the landed gentry may have at first tolerated the convois, law enforcement soon took to restricting the groups after rumors spread concerning their participation in rebellions. Such was the case, for instance, in 1805 after some convois were suspected of inciting riots on the Shand Estate⁵⁷ and on an estate in the southern part of Trinidad.⁵⁸ Concerning the Shand uprising, convois members were later beheaded by colonial authorities in a brutal display that, however, did not squash convoi activities.⁵⁹ As widespread societies, the convois were crucial for network formation among the enslaved, the establishment of hierarchies among members, and regularly bringing members together in group revelries.

Another feature of the convois was their association with areas called yards: social and spiritual⁶⁰ spaces that featured drumming, dancing, and ritual practices.⁶¹ The yards were territories that held symbolic importance for each convoi, and were routinely utilized for their communal gatherings. In the yards, for instance, the enslaved performed what were called "Big Drum" dances, which could involve convoking ancestors as they beckoned the spirits to dance and sing. Sometimes groups from outside a particular yard also participated, dancing according to their own yard cultures in events that featured communal eating, praying, and singing.⁶² As areas that regularly brought together those associated with a particular territory, pre-emancipation yards served as enclaves for group identity formation, reinforcing space as a crucial marker for each group—an essential characteristic that would persist in post-emancipation Carnival.

63. Riggio, "Playing," 215. The article, a valuable source concerning Kalenda—or Kalinda—features an interview with Rondel Benjamin, founder of the Bois Academy of Trinidad and Tobago, a researcher and practitioner of the stick fight.

64. The patois word *bois* means stick fighting, and those partaking in the fight are called *boismen*. See Riggio, "Playing," 205.

65. Riggio, "Playing," 205.

66. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 164.

67. Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Suns* (Dover: Majority Press, 1991), 176.

68. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 162.

69. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 177.

70. Riggio, "Playing," 215–16.

71. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 164.

72. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 145.

73. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 68.

74. Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival; Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 70.



Figure 1. Watercolor "Calinda, dance of the Negroes in America." François Aimé Louis Dumoulin (1783). [Public Domain](#).

And the yards also featured Kalenda, another crucial element. Kalenda, a West African ritual of music and dance that brought stick fighting to the Caribbean, was embedded in African notions of kingship. In Trinidad, it was linked to the secret societies and networks among the enslaved.⁶³ The practice involved two people, called *boismen*,⁶⁴ wielding sticks up to four feet long, who fought while surrounded by others in a ring called a *gayelle*.⁶⁵ In contention, each fighter attempted to strike the other, and fights would end once a contestant drew blood from an opponent. The blood could then be drained into a special hole for ritualistic purposes, before another boisman took the fallen fighter's place.⁶⁶ Sacrificial blood could also be smeared onto those considered spiritually deprived to infuse them with energy in what was perhaps another cultural retention from Africa.⁶⁷ The sticks could also be blessed by ancestral spirits or even left in cemeteries to be enchanted by the deceased.⁶⁸ Blessings were an important feature since victory was not achieved solely by fighting prowess, but also by invoking magic.⁶⁹ In Trinidad, Kalenda was a warrior sport, an aggressive form of play that also functioned as an act of religious devotion or political resistance and as a marker of cultural identity; it was also a ritual of containment, as its violence was governed by rules in a managed and contained space.⁷⁰

Music was an important feature of Kalenda. During fights, supporters danced while performing movements that simulated the attacks themselves, all while they sang boastful tunes about their own fighter's skills.⁷¹ Some songs retained sonic and thematic elements from Yoruba work chants and war songs, an influence which harkened back to African practices.⁷² Supporters also used their performances to ward off opposing fighters, even though some supporters might also have sung and danced in praise of visiting rivals.⁷³ As they chanted, the circling audience responded to the chantuelle's—that is, the lead singer's—calls with their own one- or two-line verses.⁷⁴ Chants usually featured lyrics that magnified fighting dispositions, such as the verses "I come to measure your grave" or "I advancing on you like a roaring lion," all while drummers maintained a regular beat to maintain a lively atmosphere.

75. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 167.

76. Riggio, "Playing," 215–16.

77. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 149.

78. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 167.

79. Cowley, *Carnival*, 20; Brierley, *Then and Now*, 319–20.

80. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 161–62.

Lead singers and prominent boismen, moreover, often held leadership positions in their own yards and convoys.⁷⁵ As a unifying activity, Kalenda was linked to displays of combat prowess and group distinctiveness while performed in yards associated with community—a dangerous form of play linked to sound and dance that would persist, after abolition, as a marker of Black identity during Carnival.⁷⁶

Whites also took to Kalenda. In the yards, they joined the enslaved as they sang along during bouts, sometimes adding their own verses to the call-and-response chants.⁷⁷ Some also even took to fighting, perhaps in attempts to confirm their domination over Africans or to trivialize the cultural practices of the enslaved. In turn, the enslaved took the opportunity to channel a violent expression toward groups that represented the widespread system of control to which they were subjected,⁷⁸ even though the activity may have also held a ludic character as members partook of what was, after all, a communal practice. During Kalenda, practitioners—whether free or enslaved—supported exchanges between ethnicities and societal strata in delimited territories that held symbolic importance for the participating groups.



Figure 2. Lithograph of Caribbean stick fighting. Agostino Brunias (1779). ©John Carter Brown Library, Box 1894, Brown University, Providence, R.I. 02912. [Public Domain from Wikimedia Commons](https://www.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Agostino_Brunias_-_Stick_fighting.jpg).

Finally, there was Canboulay. Prior to abolition, the practice referred to labor routines associated with cane harvesting.⁷⁹ At other moments, Canboulay alluded to acts of resistance among the enslaved,⁸⁰ practices referenced in a song performed by the enslaved and recounted by Carmichael:

Verse
Fire in da mountain,
Nobody for out him,
Take me daddy's boo tick (stick),
And make a monkey out him.

81. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, 301.

82. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, 301.

83. *POSG*, March 26, 1881, 5.

84. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 161; Cowley, *Carnival*, 20.

Chorus

Poor John! Nobody out for him

Verse

Go to de king's goal [sic, likely gaol, or jail]

You'll find a doubloon dey;

Go to de king's goal,

You'll find a doubloon dey.

Chorus

Poor John! Nobody for out him⁸¹

In her account, Carmichael also made observations concerning the lyrics. For the Scotswoman, “poor John” referred to John Bull, a caricature that epitomized the British, who had “nobody out for him.” Regarding the verse “fire in da mountain,” Carmichael claimed it represented a cane field set on fire as both a diversion and a signal before the enslaved “go to de king’s goal [jail]” to “find a doubloon”—that is, to steal. Finally, the “boo tick” refers to the Kalenda fighting sticks, carried by groups in their rebellious acts.⁸² Bearing multiple meanings even prior to abolition, early Canboulay featured foundational traits that would accompany its very development throughout the nineteenth century.

But Canboulay was also a work procession sparked by an overseer’s call. According to the *Port of Spain Gazette*, once an overseer linked to a particular plantation blared his horn,

gangs of the neighbouring Estates proceeded alternately, accompanied with torches at night, to the Estate which had suffered [the fire], to assist in grinding the burnt canes before they became sour. The work went on night and day until all the canes were manufactured into sugar.⁸³

The enslaved from multiple estates simultaneously marched, toward the field, to aid the harvest in what was called cannes brûlées.⁸⁴ This early procession—fiery, sonorous, mobile, laborious, communal—was foundational for the Canboulay that emerged after abolition. Fettered to a sense of both pain and resilience, early Canboulay carried essential meanings associated with movement and resistance that would persist after emancipation.

Throughout the pre-emancipation period, the enslaved were part of a series of settings and activities—the convois, yards, Kalenda, Canboulay—that would, after abolition, shift in their content and meaning as they were integrated into Carnival. These expressions were important for the establishment of communal bonds and identities linked to territory. Indeed, although Carnival was not the main cultural expression among the enslaved—Christmas, perhaps, held that position—the group’s mores and activities served as incipient practices that later influenced Carnival, a local celebration which, after abolition, they would quickly dominate.

85. Description based on POSG, February 16, 1831, 3; Pierre Gustave Louis Borde, *Histoire de l'île de la Trinidad sous le Gouvernement Espagnol: Ptie. Colonisation, 1622–1797, Seconde Partie* [History of the island of Trinidad under the Spanish government: Colonization, 1622–1797, second part] (Paris: Libraires-Éditeurs 25, 1882), 268–69.
86. Borde, *Histoire de l'île de la Trinidad sous le Gouvernement Espagnol: Colonisation, 1622-1797, Seconde Partie*, 268–69.
87. Andrew Pearse, "Carnival in Nineteenth Century Trinidad," *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, no. 3/4 (March 1956): 179
88. My translation of "ce n'était que bals et concerts, déjeuners et diners fins, parties de chasse et de rivière; le carnaval, qui durait depuis la Noël jusqu'au mercredi des Cendres, n'était qu'une longue succession de fêtes et de plaisirs. L'entrain le plus naturel, la gaité la plus communicative présidaient à ces amusements; chacun y faisait assaut d'esprit et d'amabilité. Comme de brillantes fusées, il en partait des gerbes de bons mots, de saillies heureuses, de lazzis comiques qui faisaient le sujet des conversations du lendemain." Borde, *Histoire de l'île de la Trinidad sous le Gouvernement Espagnol: Colonisation, 1622-1797, Seconde Partie*, 268–69.
89. Soler, *Imigracion*, 199–200.
90. Borde, *Histoire de l'île de la Trinidad sous le Gouvernement Espagnol: Colonisation, 1622-1797, Seconde Partie*, 306–7.

White Carnival

Celebrated by political and economic elites, the indoor Carnival was an elegant affair. On their mansions and estates, landowners, bureaucrats, and socialites all came together to drink and revel during the warm days and nights associated with the season. As they gossiped and mingled, they wore elaborate masks, exchanged witty remarks, and babbled away about the latest plays and fashions arriving from Europe. The more imaginative of guests exhibited their expensive costumes to enraptured attendees, parading their brazen outfits throughout the ostentatious ballrooms. Their feasting was accompanied by dancing and singing, and the stories and jokes of the previous days were certain to become the tittle-tattle of the next.⁸⁵

To be sure, elites of all types and manners enjoyed the lavish indoor Carnivals, events that were part of a weeks-long festive season.⁸⁶ Early in the nineteenth century, Carnival was part of an extended season of constant reveling, closing a spell of merriment that began weeks prior with Christmas, which occupied a special position among Protestants.⁸⁷ The unusual arrangement was perhaps a byproduct of Spain's recent successes and failures concerning Trinidad—that is, if their Cédula had successfully populated the colony with Catholics, indirectly encouraging Carnival, their failure to halt a British invasion buttressed, circuitously, an emphasis on Christmas. The process supported an extended period of merriments, which saw Christmas and Carnival open and close, respectively, the season. Odd as it may seem, it was through its immigration policy—and posterior capitulation to a Protestant power—that Spain decisively contributed to the development of culture, joining British Protestants with a significant French presence.

And French immigration had truly been massive. Bearing such a prominent influence, it comes as no surprise that the arriving white planters shaped local Carnival. According to nineteenth-century historian P. G. L. Borde—whose work included interviews with members of traditional French families—during their weeks-long celebrations the French partook in a variety of activities. For Borde,

There were only balls and concerts, fine lunches and dinners, hunting and river parties; the carnival, which lasted from Christmas until Ash Wednesday, was nothing but a long succession of festivals and pleasures. The most natural spirit, the most communicative gaiety presided over these amusements; everyone there made an assault of wit and friendliness. Like brilliant rockets, sheaves of witticisms, happy sallies, comic jokes were sent off which were the subject of the next day's conversations.⁸⁸

The group's economic success supported such extended periods of merriment. Immigrating on the Cédula's terms, the planters had access to large land grants based not only on race and creed, but also on the number of enslaved workers brought to the island.⁸⁹ In this regard, it is no surprise that the French hosted lavish parties that featured not only dancing and feasting, but also hunting and fishing.⁹⁰ A pervasive force, the French consolidated Carnival as a flamboyant celebration largely based on the leisure time at their disposal and, crucially, the resources they flaunted: estates, workers, wealth.

At times joining the white French cohort, British landowners and high-ranking bureaucrats also participated in the festivities. The group, much like the French themselves, also hosted Carnival events, keeping their guests entertained in their indoor balls with witty exchanges and uplifting

91. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 133–34.

92. *Trinidad Sentinel*, February 2, 1860, 3, in Cowley, "Music and Migration," 189.

93. *Trinidad Gazette*, February 20, 1822, 2.

94. *POSG*, April 18, 1827, 2

95. *POSG*, February 16, 1831, 3.

96. *POSG*, March 26, 1881, 5.

97. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 128.

98. *Trinidad Sentinel*, February 2, 1860, 3, in Cowley, "Music and Migration," 189.

décor. During such fêtes, jokes and remarks could become erotic innuendos, which at times even progressed to liaisons within an often licentious atmosphere. On their large and well-kept lawns there was also dancing, and it was not unusual for the British to feature celebratory gunshots from their military personnel, firework displays, and even spectacular exhibitions of cavalry charges.⁹¹ By the 1820s, the colony's budding press—almost entirely British-led—began covering British parties, the most important perhaps being the Governor's Ball. According to the *Trinidad Sentinel*, the occasion amassed "aristocratic guests" and the "lords of the land" in what were "princely balls."⁹² The *Trinidad Gazette*, moreover, claimed both the "masked ball at the Cumberland Rooms on Monday evening, and that at the house of our Governor [displayed] considerable bustle, [and] attendance at each was numerous and highly respectable,"⁹³ while the *Port of Spain Gazette*, in April of 1827, reported that "Colonel Mallet and his lady [threw a] large and respectable party" at their mansion.⁹⁴ British leaders embraced Carnival despite the season's Catholic foundations, in what became an important moment for elite exchanges.

Along with congregating the colony's wealthiest, the ostentatious events also served as an opportunity for elite publics to showcase their often extravagant costumes. Describing a "Masquerade Ball struck up at Bruce's Hotel," the *Port of Spain Gazette* noted the display of a wide array of elaborate masks, such as the "lovely Swiss damsels, French marquises, English noblemen, grooms, postillions, priests and friars," and even someone dressed as a "character of *Paul Pry* [*sic*]," a recently arrived European play featuring a meddlesome character. And the costumes, of course, contributed to the gala—at least according to the *Port of Spain Gazette*. For the paper, "most of the characters were extremely well supported, and afforded much amusement" in an event that "would have gladdened the heart of [even] the most consummate croaker."⁹⁵ A central feature of Carnival, costumes and characters derived from the Old World were a regular part of elite displays.

But guests also wore costumes ridiculing the enslaved—an essential aspect of such events. Among the more popular outfits was the *negre jardin* or "field labourer," an attire which, in the ballrooms, stereotyped plantation workers in their work and manners.⁹⁶ In costume, masqueraders imitated cane harvesters, wearing tattered clothing associated with the figure and mocking them with their behavior.⁹⁷ In an article published by the *Trinidad Guardian* and republished years later by the *Trinidad Sentinel*, a writer mentions that the "aristocratic guests" wore the "sooty disguise of the *negre Jardin*" during "the balls given at the Governor's residence," which displayed "guests in all the varied and ludicrous disguises" associated with the times.⁹⁸ In their portrayals of the *negre jardin*, elite revelers highlighted the enslaved as racially marked characters linked to menial labor, further distending Trinidad's societal and ethnic chasm in stereotyped displays; it was a costume that further marginalized the figure, identified with the rural cane fields in what was a clear mockery. As a festive occasion associated with splendor and excess, the indoor festivity offered the opportunity for guests to exhibit their enthusiastic engagement with European high culture, spend their accumulated wealth on lavish parties and figurines, and demarcate the festivity as a quintessential elite space segregated from popular groups.

The upper classes, moreover, also showcased their costumes in public celebrations. According to the *Trinidad Gazette*, during the 1822 Carnival "our streets for these last few evenings have presented a great variety of *dresses* if not *characters*. Numbers appeared disposed to be very

99. *Trinidad Gazette*, February 20, 1822, 2.
100. Frederic Bayley, *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies* (London: William Kidd, 1833), 214.
101. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 133–34.
102. *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 16, 1881, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 21.
103. Roderick Cave, "The First 'Trinidad Guardian,'" *Publishing History* 3 (January 1978): 62.
104. *POSG*, February 20, 1828, 2.
105. Williams, *People*, 87.
106. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 77.
107. William Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labor in The British West Indies* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1861), 109; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 80.
108. Sewell, *Free Labor*, 109; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 78.
109. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 9.
110. Campbell, "Carnival, Calypso," 5–6.

merry if they knew how; but we are inclined to believe that the youth of both sexes, lookers on, and to whom novelties are generally allowed to be pleasing, derived a [great] share of amusement."⁹⁹ And the elites may have also been accompanied by members of the middle and working classes. In another account, traveler Frederick Bayley, who visited the West Indies between 1826 and 1829, described local Carnival as a communal moment that brought together all kinds of people. According to Bayley, "Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were nothing compared to the changes that took place in the persons of the Catholics of Trinidad. High and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, [all] found masking suits for the carnival."¹⁰⁰ Groups of masqueraders also moved from one house (open to visitors) to the next, circulating the streets on foot or by carriage all while continuing their jokes, remarks, and music making through the night.¹⁰¹ Far from solely featuring indoor balls, pre-emancipation Carnival also included public revelry and display during what was an important moment for class intermingling.

But on the streets the groups also performed an imitation of Canboulay—another crucial aspect. In a telling account relayed by the *Trinidad Chronicle*, an elderly man claimed to have witnessed "many members of the middle and in some cases the upper classes" accompanied by a reveler "with a whip pretending to drive the people before him to extinguish a night-fire in the cane-piece." According to the witness, the masqueraders imitated "slaves tramping in time and singing a rude refrain, to a small negro-drum and carrying torches to light their way along the road," emulating the *negre jardin*. For the writer, the revelers "came from the principal houses of the Town in an orderly way, bent on amusing themselves in a harmless manner and at the same time amusing others" in what was "done as a lark to laugh over afterwards. It was a laughable burlesque, and the performers respectable people."¹⁰² During the pre-emancipation period it was the white upper classes who showcased representations of Canboulay and the *negre jardin*, stripping the procession of its rebellious meanings and representing it through its association with labor, with the *negre jardin* framed as an obedient servant, marching toward his task while flogged into action—docile, droll, benign.

The pre-emancipation era was a fertile period for elite Carnival. During events, the upper classes celebrated European culture and high art, commemorated publicly, and imitated slave customs. Also, the newspapers were quite generous with regard to the British festivities.¹⁰³ Throughout the period, Carnival may well have been the season when "the morning breeze of wit, usually breaking with the dawn of day, the periodical flaws of punning puff, so agreeably snuffed, at noon, ... were carefully concentrated in that more spirited epic style of jocosity, to which character and dresses give that pantomic zest."¹⁰⁴ For some, slavocratic Carnival was certainly an ostentatious fête, and a foundational influence in the burgeoning British colony.

Emancipation, Canboulay, and the Negre Jardin

Black workers were fully emancipated in 1838, two years prior to the scheduled date.¹⁰⁵ Along with ending bondage, abolition released the new working class into a market featuring a chronically limited labor supply allied to a plentiful—and fertile—land disposition.¹⁰⁶ The workers took advantage of these circumstances to purchase small plots for themselves, squat on crown lands,¹⁰⁷ or demand reasonable pay from estate owners, demands that were sometimes met.¹⁰⁸ Others simply left the employ of their former masters¹⁰⁹ or moved to the cities in search of work.¹¹⁰ But even as emancipated workers claimed certain benefits, the British government

111. Williams, *People*, 87.

112. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 76.

113. Williams, *People*, 69.

114. The laws were the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829, "to substitute a new and more efficient system of Police in lieu of such establishments of nightly watch," and Chapter XLVII of the Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, "establishing a new and more efficient System of Police in the Room of the inadequate local Establishments of nightly Watch." See David Trotman, *Crime in Trinidad: Conflict and Control in a Plantation Society, 1838–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 53–54.

115. Trotman, *Crime*, 54–55.

116. Trotman, *Crime*, 54–55.

117. Williams, *People*, 100.

118. POSG, May 30, 1845, 3.

119. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 103.

120. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 38–39.

121. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 130–35.

122. POSG, October 8, 1887, 3–4.

and local planters continued to dictate the terms of land tenure. These groups took it upon themselves to discourage the recently freed from owning land—mainly through the imposition of property taxes—and both the Trinidad Council of Government and the planters began to shape the economy to favor large plantations rather than small homesteads.¹¹¹ After emancipation, then, both sides held some influence: the planters enjoyed political control over the island's economic activities, while the formerly enslaved could, to some degree, exploit a market in which labor was scarce and land remained abundant.¹¹²

But the recently freed would also receive the protection of progressive British laws, a crucial distinction in a colony that remained under the Crown's legislative umbrella.¹¹³ In 1838, one James Stephen was named as the new secretary of state for the colonies, put in charge precisely to steer the colonies toward a system of free labor. Concerning Trinidad, Stephen objected to planter-led bills that supported vigilante groups, passing, in 1841, a law based on model codes¹¹⁴ to consolidate a unified police force. Under the bill, state-led law enforcement would replace the vigilante squads that had been established by estate owners to surveil local populations. Once passed, the law kept many Blacks from falling prey to informal policing groups, which could have remitted them to forced labor. Stephen also refused to give consent, in 1838, to ordinances proposed by local authorities that would have undermined squatting. Among the rejected bills were Ordinance No. 7, which provided "a summary power of punishment for malicious injuries to property," Ordinance No. 8, which aimed at "preventing persons from settling on or occupying wasted and uncultivated lands without authority," and Ordinance No. 9, which stood "for the more effectual prevention of wilful [*sic*] trespass on lands."¹¹⁵ Through Stephen—a politician serving British interests—planter-class attempts to subdue the freed population were mitigated, and the recently freed held on to some of their advantages.¹¹⁶

However, as much as Black workers may have enjoyed a period of improvement, in 1845 the tide once again turned. As a measure to tackle the labor problem, the British introduced a new—and, above all, cheap—workforce into Trinidad.¹¹⁷ According to the *Port of Spain Gazette*, on May 30 Trinidadians saw "the arrival this afternoon of the long-looked-for ship, the *Fatel Rozack*, 96 days from Calcutta and 41 days from the Cape of Good Hope, with 217 Coolies [persons from India] on board—all 'in good order and conditions.'" As the newspaper continued, "these new competitors in the labor market ... may be the means of opening their [Black workers'] eyes a little to the necessity of working more steadily, and giving greater satisfaction to their employers"—employers dissatisfied with worker demands.¹¹⁸ Beginning in 1845, an entirely new workforce—comprising over 140,000 Indians by 1917—would enter Trinidad, taking over jobs and working for paltry wages.¹¹⁹

Under the developing circumstances, it is perhaps no surprise that Blacks increasingly moved to Port of Spain, supporting the growth of a city that, since the beginning of the century, had already seen rapid settlement.¹²⁰ Arriving in the colony's capital, many migrants took residence in the heart of town in areas called barrack ranges, living arrangements behind the stores and houses that crowded people together. The barracks encircled areas called yards, or open spaces where groups socialized, especially during festive occasions.¹²¹ For the *Port of Spain Gazette*, the lodgings were hazardous to the point "that not the faintest breath of air [could] reach" the quarters, while the outdoors were "stifling pestilential yards" festering with disease.¹²² Nevertheless, the yards were an essential space for facilitating communal bonds among those just arriving in Port of Spain.

123. POSG, March 17, 1846, 2.
124. POSG, October 3, 1848, 3.
125. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 130–35.
126. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 14.
127. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 36–39.
128. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 32–33.
129. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 177.
130. Warner-Lewis, *Suns*, 54.
131. *Trinidad Standard*, February 23, 1846, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 38.
132. *Trinidad Standard*, February 23, 1846, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 38.
133. Day, *Residence*, 313–14.
134. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 162.
135. Interview with Lennox Pierre by Tony Hall in Elder, “Cannes Brûlés,” 41.
136. Cowley, *Carnival*, 80.
137. Day, *Residence*, 314.

The yards also hosted dancing and reveling, and by the end of the 1840s some of the yards concentrated residents associated by common origin. An 1846 *Port of Spain Gazette* article, for instance, mentions a “yard where the Martinicans dance”¹²³ in a display of ethnic cohesion, while a letter to the newspaper from a reader describes dancing and reveling during a yard celebration:

At 9 o'clock at night the yard was literally crammed with women and girls of very doubtful character, a band of drunken sailors and all the lawless ruffians of Port of Spain—yelling in chorus, dancing in circles, and clapping their hands until the uproar was fearful—the saturnalian orgies being further enlivened by every variety of swearing and profane language.¹²⁴

More and more an essential part of the city, the barracks persistently assembled people, received a continuous flow of migrants, and sustained community bonds linked to territory—all elements that had been part of the pre-emancipation yards.

Some groups also moved to areas just outside of Port of Spain—Laventille, Belmont, and the East Dry River region, for example.¹²⁵ Among the settlers were groups of indentured workers arriving directly from Africa between 1841 and 1867.¹²⁶ These groups were varied with regard to their origins and differentiated themselves by forming distinct communities in or near the capital. The La Cour Harpe region was a predominantly Yoruba area, while the region near Back Street in Laventille was Congo-dominated. In Port of Spain, the Rada population established a conspicuous cluster in Duncan Street, soon known as “Rada Street.”¹²⁷ Such a process was pivotal for supporting the formation of distinct Carnival groups—or as they would soon be called, bands—as each group sought to consolidate a unified front. However, although such groups certainly remained distinct, members also visited each other in acts of camaraderie and cultural exchange, resorting to French Creole to communicate.¹²⁸ Within this dynamic setting, Yoruba emerged as the dominating culture, a process which ensured that African-rooted culture, notably Kalenda,¹²⁹ would survive.¹³⁰

It was under these circumstances that Carnival flourished as a popular expression, and by the 1840s a reconfigured Canboulay became its opening act, taking place between midnight and dawn on Carnival Monday.¹³¹ Rather than a work march, revelers now paraded in a celebratory procession, a procession that no longer moved toward the fields but through the streets of Port of Spain. As the revelers sang and hollered, they paraded “from one end of the town to another” in what was sure to be a noisy fête.¹³² Wearing masks, the revelers also coalesced in groups, or rather, bands of ten to twenty, which often joined larger groups in a reminiscence of the gangs that came together to work the fields of cane¹³³—yet another retention of pre-emancipation Canboulay. Revelers also carried sticks three or four feet long,¹³⁴ used for fighting—sticks which had been held, moreover, during their Kalenda bouts. Aggressive in their demeanor, stick-fighters encircled drummers and musicians, who marched just behind those who had been elected as the kings and queens of Canboulay, while at the rear women and children carried even more sticks.¹³⁵ As they moved, revelers flaunted staffs and flaming torches, symbolically depicting the dousing of a cane fire and, perhaps, the overthrow of enslavement.¹³⁶ On one occasion, a band regularly tossed onto the ground one of its members, bearing a padlock and chain around his leg, who was then mockingly caned on the soles of his feet in a demonstration of former disciplinary measures. The figure would then get up and continue in the march, only to be thrown down again in a repetition of the act.¹³⁷ Indeed, in its shifts and turns Canboulay now held new

138. *POSG*, March 2, 1838, 3.

139. *Cowley, Carnival*, 32.

140. *Cowley, Carnival*, 34.

141. *Cowley, Carnival*, 60.

142. *POSG*, November 12, 1853, 2, in
Cowley, Carnival, 49.

143. *Cowley, Carnival*, 80.

144. *POSG*, February 27, 1858, 2.

145. *Cowley, Carnival*, 1-2.

meanings: if Canboulay had been fettered to the field, now it was linked to city movement; if Canboulay had been linked to work, now it was a celebratory march bearing Kalenda as a crucial feature and associated with Carnival itself.

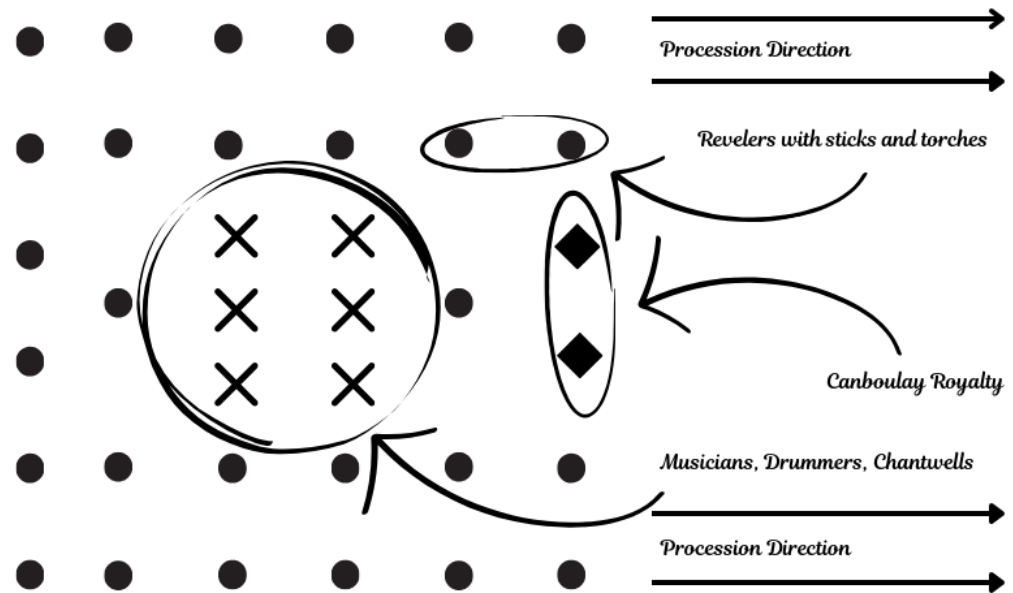


Figure 3. Sketch representing band formation during Canboulay. Based on a sketch in J.D. Elder, “Cannes Brûlées,” *TDR* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 39.

And fighting over territory was essential. One such case involved a “ferocious fight between the ‘Damas’ and the ‘Wartloos,’”¹³⁸ bands that were likely aligned, respectively, with French and British sentiments.¹³⁹ The bands, moreover, may have also been associated with different parts of Port of Spain, a display of the bands’ territorial identities. Indeed, not only were some yards and regions linked to particular ethnicities, but blocks and streets were also identified with the different imperial cultures, such as the downtown section between Henry Street and the River Saint Anns, known as the “French streets,”¹⁴⁰ or the area called Corbeau Town, an English-speaking territory also in the city.¹⁴¹ Influenced by the French and English divide and also by the pre-emancipation yards and convois, territory was a disputed element among the Carnival bands during Canboulay.

Throughout the 1850s there was further change. As indentured immigrants continued to fuel the estates with cheap labor and as the Black rural exodus persisted, Port of Spain and its yards continued to grow. An 1853 *Port of Spain Gazette* article, for instance, mentions a yard on Charlotte Street, “where three or four nights a week they [yard dwellers] hold public dances, to the music of the banjee drum and shack-shack until the hour of 10 p.m.”¹⁴² And throughout the decade the bands continued to come together to the sound of horns ahead of Canboulay¹⁴³—a reminiscence of the overseer’s calls—to portray “the hellish scenes and the most demoniacal representations of the days of slavery as they were forty years ago.”¹⁴⁴ Carrying their sticks, combatants singed them over fires to remove the bark and then rubbed them with coconut oil for better use¹⁴⁵ in ritualistic and perhaps sacred preparations that harkened back to Kalenda’s blessings.

146. Cowley, *Carnival*, 80
147. *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 5, 1881, 2, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 52.
148. *POSG*, February 17, 1858, 3.
149. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. By Helene Iswolsky (1968; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 11.
150. Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 132.
151. Stephen Kingsley Scott, "Through the Diameter of Respectability: The Politics of Historical Representation in Post-Emancipation Colonial Trinidad," *New West Indian Guide* 76, no. 3/4 (2002): 273; Campbell, "Carnival, Calypso," 10. Although both authors claim the jamette class emerged during the 1860s—partly as an effect of the worsening of the urban labor market (Scott) and to the exploitation migrants endured in an overcrowded city (Campbell)—I found no evidence that this word was used throughout the decade, and it may have only made its first appearance in the 1870s. John Cowley claims that "as early as Carnival of 1871 there was a stickband name 'D'jamettes' that, by its very existence, symbolized the era." See Cowley, *Carnival*, 73.
152. Scott, "Diameter," 273.
153. Cowley, *Carnival*, 60; Brereton, *Modern Trinidad*, 135.

But some of the bands were also comprised of men dressed as negre jardins, another crucial feature.¹⁴⁶ On one occasion, the figures were commanded by "a man with a long whip, who pretended to drive them on to work and flog them when they refused" in what was "a representation of the slave driver and his slaves."¹⁴⁷ But if prior to abolition it had been the upper classes who marched, it was now the negre jardin who paraded. Indeed, if he had once been a cliché portrayed by the elites, the negre jardin now portrayed himself; if once a hopeless vassal linked to the estates, he was now a spirited presence of the masquerade. Parading through the streets, the figure now exhibited scenes from the slavery of years past—coercion, toil, scourge—but now bearing strength in numbers and the weapons of Kalenda, all while marching in a Canboulay that had shifted into revelry. And his bond with Canboulay had also changed. If the enslaved had branded cane, the reveler now brandished sticks; if the worker treaded toward the field; the negre jardin now marched through Port of Spain. Rearranged, the negre jardin shed his ludicrous demeanor, claiming the central streets of a colony that had done its best to keep him at its rural margins.

Perhaps seeing the season grow, in 1858 the island's governor, Robert Keate, declared for that year's Carnival that "the wearing of masks in the street was prohibited, and the police directed to enforce the laws against noise, rioting, and disturbance." But the bands

gave a spur to the antagonistic feeling, and the masks were openly worn by the large band, with a very large following, [which] marched defiantly by the police office, and after having severely handled several of the police, these were withdrawn, and the exultant masquers left in triumphant possession of the streets. This they retained for an hour or so, without however any further disturbance, then causing a great noise and immense dust.... However, 150 men, [sic] were marched down to the Police Station and remained during the night.... The result was that the evening passed off most quietly.¹⁴⁸

The scene portrays a band violently claiming the streets of the city. Although they repel the police at first, the authorities return. However, much like the revelers themselves, the authorities stand their ground. But both groups seem careful not to overstep the other's boundaries—a tacit opposition. During Carnival, the authorities and the bands disputed streets and city squares, and, against this backdrop, Carnival moved increasingly into competitive terrain as revelers and authorities sometimes fought each other, with both groups claiming territory. Bearing less an inversive logic—or, as Mikhail Bakhtin claims, "the peculiar logic of the 'inside out'"¹⁴⁹—than an amplification of the colony's latent tensions, Carnival also served as a proving ground for acting out Trinidad's persistent anxieties. It was not so much a liminal moment—that is, not simply limited to the season itself; rather, local tensions were amplified in battles that at times turned literal, as the bands and the police fought over the streets and squares of Port of Spain.

Conditions continued to shift in the 1860s. Uninterrupted immigration to the estates and persistent Black migration toward the cities piled great pressures onto the yards and barracks, and Port of Spain's infrastructure was unable to handle such rampant growth.¹⁵⁰ In the capital, a class of men and women emerged known as the jamettes,¹⁵¹ a word associated with the creolized French word *diameter*, connoting their position below the diameter of respectability.¹⁵² During Carnival, jamettes congregated in the city yards, where communal bonds continued to be formed and where they doggedly pursued their stick-fighting practices.¹⁵³ And Canboulay persisted, but now with greater violence. According to the *Port of Spain Gazette*, "under cover of the Masquerading foolery—two attempts at incendiarism were made, one of which was, we

154. POSG, February 20, 1864, 3.
155. Cowley, *Carnival*, 60.
156. Anthony de Verteuil, *The Years of Revolt Trinidad 1881–1888* (Port-of-Spain: Paria Publishing, 1984), 7.
157. Cowley, *Carnival*, 72.
158. Cowley, *Carnival*, 66.
159. POSG, April 17, 1875, 3.
160. *Trinidad Chronicle*, February 21, 1871, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 69.
161. Cowley, *Carnival*, 80–81
162. Patricia de Freitas, "Playing Mas': The Construction and Deconstruction of National Identity in the Trinidad Carnival" (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1994), 64.
163. *Trinidad Sentinel*, February 2, 1860, 3, in Cowley, "Music and Migration," 189.
164. Crowley, "Traditional Masques," 195.
165. Liverpool, *Rituals*, 236.

regret to say, only too successful in its diabolical object; two stores in the most mercantile part of the town—Marine Square—with every thing contained being completely destroyed before the flames could be subdued."¹⁵⁴ Women, moreover, were witnessed forming bands. Carrying baskets ostensibly filled with bread and cheese, female groups hid stones and bottles to be used for fighting. One such group, the English-speaking Don't-Care-A-Damns, was the bitter rival of the Mousselines, a band associated with the French section of Port of Spain in what perhaps reflected the linguistic or religious contentions that permeated the city. But the Mousselines also featured men—led by the band's Queen Elizabeth Simmons, the leader of the group in what was a hierarchical setup—yet another similarity with the pre-emancipation cultures.¹⁵⁵ By the 1860s, it was clear that city bands and Carnival sustained multiple features linked to the period of enslavement: stick fighting, yard associations, bonds through common origin, and even royal figures, all characteristics that were reconfigured by the fighting bands after abolition.

The 1870s saw further change to Carnival and Trinidad. In 1874, Britain lifted its preferential duties over Trinidadian muscovado,¹⁵⁶ hurting the island's already declining sugar trade. Economic crisis throughout the Caribbean also encouraged migration to Trinidad from the smaller islands. In Port of Spain, pressures over housing and jobs grew, and groups increasingly competed among themselves for scant resources.¹⁵⁷ The period also saw a sharp increase in inter-band fighting during Carnival,¹⁵⁸ and the *Port of Spain Gazette* lampooned the season. For one writer, "it is unfortunately but too notorious that in each recurring year scenes of disorder and riot of more or less a grave character occur" in what was both a display of the season's ferocity and the upper class's disdain for Carnival.¹⁵⁹ Despite these problems, however, Canboulay continued. In what the *Trinidad Chronicle* claimed were the bands' "brutish cries and shouts," the 1871 Canboulay showcased "horrid forms running to and from about the town with flaming torches in their hands, like so many demons escaped from a hot place not usually mentioned in polite society."¹⁶⁰ The morning bands of Canboulay, overcome by jamette presence, also showed clear distinctions with the groups and masks that came out after sunrise, such as the boastful pierrots, who were solely linked to the daytime revelries.¹⁶¹ In the 1870s, the jamettes claimed Canboulay, and the procession and its fights took over the streets during the procession.

The negre jardin, that once one-dimensional figure, had also undergone dramatic change. By the 1870s, it was clear the character was no longer a broken attempt by elites to come to terms with their own fears, fantasies, and desires regarding the imagined Black subject—turned object in their pre-emancipation fêtes.¹⁶² If prior to abolition the estates had tagged the figure through racially marked costumes—or, as the *Trinidad Chronicle* had put it, "sooty disguises"¹⁶³—now the negre jardin took it upon himself to choose his clothing, wearing trousers turned inside-out and belts strung with ribbons and colored handkerchiefs, while his shirts and bandanas featured pads to protect his head from blows. The figure also wore a cooking pot as a helmet, while mirrors and bells, tied to his body, rattled away as he moved about.¹⁶⁴ But at times the figure also wore the tattered clothing reminiscent of enslavement, taking to the streets in an attire that had been displayed in both the fields and elite balls—where he had been ridiculed—so as to laugh at his former condition.¹⁶⁵ Part of the bands, the negre jardin and his attire continued to adapt. In an article by the *Trinidad Chronicle* concerning the 1877 Carnival, it was reported that the Maribone band intended to "come out in a uniform dress composed of a black hat, . . . a red shirt, and white and whitish trowers [trousers] with a blue band down the seam or round the waist, the intention being to represent the national colors, the 'red, white and blue'" in what was a likely reference

166. *Trinidad Chronicle*, February 9, 1877, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 79.
167. *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 2, 1881, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 87.
168. *San Fernando Gazette*, September 18, 1875, 2–3.
169. *Trinidad Chronicle*, February 9, 1877, 3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 79–80.
170. *San Fernando Gazette*, September 18, 1875, 2–3.
171. Riggio, "Playing," 216.
172. Helen Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals," *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (1999): 472.
173. Rodger M. Payne, "Religious Parades and Processions in America," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, December 19, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.543>.
174. *Fair Play*, March 1, 1883, 2–3, in Cowley, *Carnival*, 96–97.

to their French origins. But the band also chose to "bind, *negre jardin* fashion, a silk foulah [foulard] round each leg below the knee"¹⁶⁶ in what was a bid to preserve the signs and traces of the original *negre jardin* – a foundational figure that harkened back to enslavement. If once mockingly portrayed by the elites, the *negre jardin* was now reclaimed and expressly resignified by, well, himself, a city-marching figure who now bent and boosted his own mirrored image under a new light—the burning torch of Canboulay.

And the *negre jardin* continued to engage in combat. Bearing "a strange liking for breaking each others' sconces," the figure was part of the regular "fights between rival *bandes* or 'Negres Jardins.'"¹⁶⁷ For the *San Fernando Gazette*, the bands presented a "strong, hardy, and powerful physical organization, dexterous in the use of sticks."¹⁶⁸ Much as had happened a half-century prior, stick-fighting sessions continued to feature individual bouts staged while groups chanted songs of praise to their own boismen as they beat their drums in driving rhythmic patterns. Leadership positions, moreover, continued to be based on roles in music or linked to fighting. The Maribones, for instance, were "led by a Captain or *Roi*, on horse-back" in what was, once again, a display of hierarchy.¹⁶⁹ And the bands themselves, associated as ever with territory, firmly flaunted their fighting prowess, claiming yards and streets through combat. Such territorial claims were supported by the very nature of the Canboulay performance, a city-wide procession with the possibility of territorial takeovers as the bands traversed through Port of Spain. Dangerous, ferocious, and destructively violent, Kalenda's spirit persisted in brawls among the bands—bands which, after abolition, claimed the city streets in tacit disputes and sometimes literal brawls during each festive season.

Claiming the streets during Canboulay, the bands also played music that varied in its meanings. For the *San Fernando Gazette*, bands attracted new members "with drum and voice, to excite and encourage the exhibition of what should be regarded as the vilest indecency, and punished as such—gestures and songs the most seductive in character and effect, the very idea of which, fully accounts for the number of votaries which join the inglorious ranks yearly."¹⁷⁰ Through their drumming, the bands lured new members drawn precisely by what was performed—that is, the animating effects of sound among the brawling members, much like the Kalenda *gayelles* of times past. And the drums and songs also signaled violence—after all, fighting ended when drumming ceased, and the music stopped once a fighter bled.¹⁷¹ In this regard, the permeability of sound, which crosses borders with ease,¹⁷² heralded band mobility, introduced violence, and encouraged stick fighting.¹⁷³ Dancing and jeering also ensued, as did the call-and-response patterns that featured a lead singer and a retorting group—much as the chantwells had performed during Kalenda. According to *Fair Play*, the songs displayed "a few foolish sentences, composed by the leader of the Chorus to provoke some obnoxious person or band, and the sickening repetition of a refrain which gives the greatest possible amount of exercise to the lungs compatible with the least possible disturbance of the brain"¹⁷⁴ in what must have encouraged greater group involvement in the fighting ritual. Indeed, music and sound, part of a ritualized, aggressive, and sacred event, amplified band disputes, which had its fighters, year after year, take to the streets while flaunting their sticks and might—and their drums and sounds—in what had become a ferocious fête.

175. Interview with Lennox Pierre by Tony Hall in Elder, "Cannes Brûlés," 41.

176. *San Fernando Gazette*, March 5, 1881, 3.

177. Brierley, *Then and Now*, 328.

178. *San Fernando Gazette*, March 5, 1881, 3.

But it was the absence of sound that opened the fateful Canboulay Riots of 1881—a decisive event portending the end of the procession. According to an onlooker, just moments prior to that year's Canboulay, a band of *negre jardins* assembled at a crucial junction in downtown Port of Spain, where Tragarete Road, Saint Vincent Street, and Park Street converge. At midnight, then—the very start of Canboulay—"the band moved in darkness and without drums" toward the position of the police, then led by the ruthless Captain Baker. And upon approaching the authorities, "an old patois woman at the front of the band" broke what must have been an ominous hush, calling out, "'Captain Baker et tout l'homme,' (and all his men) 'au cour de la rue (at the corner of the street),' a shout which "[signaled] the fellows light their torches and start up the drums."¹⁷⁵ At this the band charged toward Baker in what was the first of many clashes on that momentous morning. Soon other bands, arriving from just outside of Port of Spain, would also fight with the police. But the authorities persisted in their "object of preventing [the bands] from entering the town proper"¹⁷⁶ even though, according to Sergeant Brierley, the police numbered "eighty men, (only four of them mounted)" compared to "an infuriated mob numbering thousands."¹⁷⁷ Armed with snider rifles and bone-splitting blackjacks, however, the police contained the amassing bands—the Maribones, Free Grammar, Broomfield, to name a few—as both groups continued to fight throughout the darkened morning. By sunrise, the scene was of a "full crop of broken heads in the regular *mêlée* that [had] ensued."¹⁷⁸ The riots had begun, and Canboulay would soon be purged.

Conclusion

Initially an act of either labor or rebellion, Canboulay underwent important changes throughout the nineteenth century. If during the pre-emancipation period the practice had referred to cane burning in order to control plantation pests, a mustering call by overseers to assemble field laborers, or riotous acts among the enslaved, after abolition Canboulay became a celebratory march. Indeed, for about fifty years a transmuted Canboulay would persist as Carnival's opening act, when bands and revelers paraded through the streets of Port of Spain to celebrate the end of enslavement. Singing and drumming, these groups claimed the city streets, fighting similar bands or the authorities while performing cultural displays linked to an Afro-diasporic experience.

The *negre jardin* underwent a similar process. During enslavement, the *negre jardin*, or "field laborer," extinguished fires on the cane plantations. However, it was the upper classes who portrayed the figure—simple, servile, rural—punished in mock displays of Canboulay. But after abolition the *negre jardin* emerged anew. Part of Canboulay's fighting bands—or of bands entirely comprised of *negre jardins*—the figure presented a refurbished demeanor, flaunting the sacred Kalenda sticks of the pre-emancipation yards and, conspicuously, claiming streets and blocks of the colony's capital. A transmuted character, the *negre jardin* shed his one-dimensional display to emerge as a combatant, a change supported by emancipation and its effects. Born out of work and unrest, both Canboulay and the *negre jardin* shifted as Trinidad itself also changed, bearing signs and signifiers associated with their histories of enslavement and, simultaneously, the societal circumstances of pre-emancipation.

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