

In Search of Empire

The French in the Americas,
1670–1730

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page xi
<i>List of Maps and Graphs</i>	xiii
<i>List of Tables</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
<i>Dates, Weights, Measures, and Currency</i>	xxiii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xxvii

Part I: Colonies Formed	I
1 Colonial Populations	3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Aboriginal Populations	4
1.3 African Immigrants	11
1.4 European Immigrants	16
1.5 Size and Structures	28
1.6 New France	31
1.7 The French Circum-Caribbean	43
1.8 Conclusion	70
2 Settlements and Societies	72
2.1 Introduction	72
2.2 Material Conditions	74
2.3 Landholding	78
2.4 Social Groups	88
2.5 Institutions of Social Life	106
2.6 Conclusion	121
3 Production	123
3.1 Introduction	123
3.2 Tobacco	130

3.3	Fish	139
3.4	Fur	150
3.5	Sugar	162
3.6	Conclusion	187
4	Trade and Exchange	189
4.1	Introduction	189
4.2	Ineffectual Policies, Legislative Futility	190
4.3	Commercial Trade	193
4.4	Shipping	208
4.5	The Slave Trade	215
4.6	Money, Capital, and Credit	224
4.7	Conclusion	228
5	Government and Politics	230
5.1	Introduction	230
5.2	Absolutism	231
5.3	Colbert and His Successors	234
5.4	Colonial Government	241
5.5	Colonial Justice	249
5.6	Colonial Resistance	254
5.7	Conclusion	260
Part 2: Colonies Defended		265
6	The Franco-Dutch War, 1672–1678	267
6.1	Introduction	267
6.2	Opening Hostilities	269
6.3	Colonial Initiatives	275
6.4	Metropolitan Responses	283
6.5	Naval Assaults	288
6.6	Conclusion	295
7	The Nine Years' War in America, 1688–1697	301
7.1	Introduction	301
7.2	The Windward Islands	303
7.3	Saint-Domingue	313
7.4	Spanish America	320
7.5	New France	333
7.6	Acadia, Newfoundland, and Hudson Bay	341
7.7	Conclusion	355
8	The War of the Spanish Succession in America, 1702–1713	358
8.1	Introduction	358
8.2	The Trade and Treasure of Spanish America	362
8.3	Trade and War in the Circum-Caribbean	374
8.4	<i>La Course Royale</i> Reappears in the Americas	384

Contents

ix

8.5 Northern Colonies Abandoned	391
8.6 Conclusion	400
9 Elusive Empire	402
9.1 Introduction	402
9.2 Rivals for a Continent	403
9.3 Franco-Spanish Hostilities	408
9.4 Piracy's Resurgence	410
9.5 Colonies in Search of a Navy	417
9.6 Elusive Empire	420
Appendixes	423
1 Estimated Population of French America by Race and Region, 1670–1730.	423
2 Slave Populations of the French West Indies, 1670–1730.	428
3 Provisional List of Colonial Administrators, 1670–1730.	432
<i>Bibliography</i>	441
<i>Index</i>	473

Colonial Populations

I. I INTRODUCTION

Ambiguity characterised the French presence in the Americas. Whether in the vastness of North America or on the small islands in the Caribbean Sea, the magnitude of the disproportionate numbers of French men and women in the colonies and the geographical extent of the territories claimed by France became apparent between 1670 and 1730. In only one major colony did the French comprise more than half the total population in 1730. Although the number of French in the Americas tripled during the six decades after 1670, fewer than 74,000 lived there in 1730. Nearly as many Amerindians and more than twice as many Africans as Europeans inhabited these colonies. French colonial populations included three major components: Amerindian, European, and African, but each developed along very dissimilar lines. From Newfoundland to South America, Amerindian populations experienced massive declines that began long before 1670 and continued long after 1730. The French population, on the other hand, grew slowly after 1670 by natural increase, while African populations increased rapidly from forced migration. The relative distribution of these three populations in each colony was so different that it precluded the formation of any single model of French colonial development. In addition, each colonial population developed quite differently from the previous demographic histories of their constituent parts.

Appendix 1 shows the estimated population of the French Americas by ethnicity and region from 1670 to 1730. This is not the first attempt to gather all of the population data, but it is the most up-to-date and most heavily based on primary sources.¹ It is unique in its ambition to pull the data for

¹ See John McCusker, *Rum and the American Revolution: The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1989), [548]–767; Appendix B, “Population Estimates for the

all the French American colonies together and to provide total population estimates for five separate years, each fifteen years apart, between 1670 and 1730. These estimates enable some general observations to be made about the populations of the French Americas during their formative years, and permit comparisons with other European colonies.

1.2 ABORIGINAL POPULATIONS

French migrants to the Americas encountered few Amerindians wherever they settled except in Guiana and Louisiana. Unlike the situation encountered by the Spanish, only a few thousand native people lived along the Atlantic coast of present-day Canada and even fewer French men and women settled there. Long before 1670, disease and war had virtually emptied the St. Lawrence Valley and Lower Great Lakes region as far west as the shores of Lake Huron of its aboriginal inhabitants. It was the activities of the French that encouraged some Amerindians to return to the region. The French encountered the largest native populations farther west in the Upper and Central Mississippi Valley stretching westwards from the ridge of the Appalachian Mountains to the Great Plains. However, there and even in the Lower Mississippi Valley the already devastated Amerindian populations continued to decline rapidly after 1670.

The French met few natives in the West Indies. Less than 50 years after first contact, Hispaniola's aboriginal population, once estimated to be several millions, had become more or less extinct.² In the Lesser Antilles, French and English pioneers had united earlier in the century to drive the Caribs out of their major settlements on St. Christopher, while the French alone fought for possession of Guadeloupe and Martinique. By 1670, few Caribs remained. The survivors either found temporary refuge on the mountainous islands of Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent, or fled to the South American mainland. In Guiana, along the coast of *Terre firme*, few Amerindians survived after

British Isles and the Western Hemisphere, 1680–1775” is based on secondary sources for non-British colonies. His population estimates for Canada, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland for 1670, 1700, and 1730 are also for white populations only and mingle French and English populations together in the last two cases. They also precede the work of Hubert Charbonneau and the members of the Programme de recherches en démographie historique at the Université de Montréal. The estimates for the French West Indian colonies were all gathered from secondary sources. The recent study by Stanley L. Engerman and B. W. Higman, “The demographic structure of the Caribbean slave societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” in *General History of the Caribbean*, vol. 3, *The Slave Societies of the Caribbean*, ed., Franklin W. Knight (London: UNESCO, 1997), 45–104, ignores the seventeenth century and relies on McCusker for the early eighteenth century.

² Shelburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, *Essays in Population History: Mexico and the Caribbean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 401.

one and a half centuries of contact with Europeans. French settlers found few natives to contest their areas of settlement.

About 10,000 aboriginals lived in what is now Atlantic Canada before European contact. This included about 1,000 Beothucks who dwelt in Newfoundland, but few if any lived along the south coast by 1670.³ Epidemic diseases substantially reduced the number of Algonkian-speaking Mi'kmaq long before the early seventeenth century when the French established their first small trading posts in Acadia. As early as 1611, Father Pierre Biard, SJ recorded increasing mortality among the Mi'kmaq inhabitants of Nova Scotia.⁴ Population densities may have been relatively high among these seminomadic hunters of the sea as well as of the eastern boreal forests, but by 1670 they probably numbered about 2,000 after more than a century and a half of contact with European fishermen and traders. The decline continued into the second quarter of the eighteenth century. A 1705 estimate claimed there were two French for every Indian in Acadia, which is not far off the numbers in Appendix 1.⁵

By 1670, however, the native population in the Saint Lawrence Valley had more than recovered its earlier levels. Warfare and probably disease decimated the populations inhabiting this region during the sixteenth century. While the French encountered many seasonal migrants, they found few permanent inhabitants when they returned during the first decade of the seventeenth century. After an initial decline from 500 to 200 individuals in

³ Hubert Charbonneau, "Trois siècles de dépopulation amérindienne" in *Les populations amérindiennes et inuit du Canada, Aperçu démographique* (Montréal: Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1984), 32; and Olive Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 100.

⁴ Cited in Virginia P. Miller, "Aboriginal Micmac Population: A Review of the Evidence", *Ethnohistory*, 23, 2 (Spring, 1976), 117-27; also Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage*, 100-4.

⁵ Mi'kmaq population estimates are in a very unsatisfactory state. Charbonneau, "Trois siècles", 32, indicates approximately 9,000 precontact Micmac and Abenaki, but Miller, *op. cit.*, argues for a precontact population of 35,000 based on her acceptance of Biard's revised 1616 estimate of 3,500 as "the nadir population". She rejects earlier conservative estimates of population densities for composite hunting bands and then halves the chief maximalist aboriginal/nadir population ratio, all of which amounts to selecting a number she feels comfortable with. Her own evidence, adduced from later seventeenth century sources, reduction of life expectancy, diminished family size, polygyny giving way to monogamy, and diminished birth rates all suggests that Biard's 1616 estimate cannot be accepted as a "nadir population" and that the Micmac continued to suffer serious population decline at least until the beginning of the eighteenth century. John G. Reid, "1686-1720: Imperial Intrusions" in *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*, eds., Philip A. Buckner and John G. Reid (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 79, suggests this much smaller nadir population. See also Olive P. Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 111.

the 1620s and 1630s due to the impact of European disease, the population began to recover during the 1650s as refugees from Huronia entered the area. Iroquois and Abenaki followed later and lived among the French.⁶ By 1676, 20 to 30 percent of the Mohawk nation had moved to the Canadian mission of Kanawake; 300 were reported living there compared to between 900 and 1,500 in Iroquoia. By 1680 the mission held at least 400 Christian Mohawks.⁷ In 1682 the French established the mission of St. François de Sales on the Chaudière River for Abenaki refugees from the Atlantic coastal region. Three years later the total population of domiciled natives had grown to about 2,100. More than three-quarters of them (1,598 in all) lived in four villages whose residents came to play a remarkable role in the history of New France. War and disease continued to exact their dreadful tolls, but new captives and additional refugees increased the domiciled Amerindian population slowly to about 2,600 by 1730.

The original population of the vast region known to the French as the *pays d'en haut* or Upper Country remains unknown. The Upper Country stretched westward from Montreal to the head waters of the Mississippi, including the Great Lakes' drainage basin north to James Bay and south to the mouth of the Ohio River. Minimum, moderate, and maximum population estimates provide fuel for countless learned debates among anthropologists, ethnohistorians, and historians, but only studies of discrete groups will add to the scant knowledge currently available.⁸ Following the Iroquois war against the Huron, Neutral, and Erie, and the pushing back of Algonkian-speaking peoples to the northern margins of the Great Lakes Basin, no one occupied the lands of present-day southern Ontario. A few dispersed peoples may have resumed hunting and fishing by 1670, but this region remained sparsely populated for a long time afterward.⁹ Oral history claims that large-scale warfare between the Iroquois and Ojibwa during the final decades of the seventeenth century left the latter in possession of most of present-day Ontario, but when, where, and how many were involved remain a matter

⁶ J. A. Dickinson et J. Grabowski, "Les populations amérindiennes de la vallée laurentienne, 1608-1765", *Annales de démographie historique* (1993), 51-66; but also see Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage*, 107.

⁷ Francis Jennings, *Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The covenant chain confederation of Indian tribes with English colonies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 176.

⁸ See John D. Daniels, "The Indian Populations of North America in 1492", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 49, 2 (April, 1992), 298-320. John A. Dickinson, "The Pre-contact Huron Population: A reappraisal", *Ontario History*, 72, no. 1 (March, 1980): 173-4, revises figures for the Huron upwards to between 25,000 and 30,000 after Champlain. Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered*, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 231-42, discusses the evidence and methodologies for determining both population estimates and declines.

⁹ Lucien Campeau, sj, *Catastrophe démographique sur les Grands Lacs; les premiers habitants du Québec*, Cahiers d'histoire des Jésuites, No. 7 (Montréal: Editions Bellarmin, 1986), 95-7.

of conjecture.¹⁰ The Iroquois nations living south of the lower Great Lakes lost more than half of their population to war, famine, and disease between 1689 and 1700.¹¹ Between 1670 and 1730, native populations in the vast region to the west experienced major transformations and shifts frequently characterised by large fluctuations, but always in steady decline.¹²

The once powerful if loose confederation of Illinois nations who numbered approximately 10,500 in 1670 quickly rose and fell during the next twenty years.¹³ Even the most remote nations quickly experienced rapid declines. West of Lake Michigan, the Winnebago, Menominee, Sauk, and Fox each declined from many thousands in the early seventeenth century to a few hundred by 1709. They probably numbered no more than 1,800 by 1730.¹⁴ The population of the Fox Indians faced genocide, dropping from an estimated 12,000 in 1665 to a mere 400 by 1736.¹⁵ The total number in the region will never be known because hundreds of refugees and captives swirled in from eastern, western, and southern areas replacing thousands of dead and dying, the victims of pathogenic invasions and intertribal warfare which occurred on scales never before experienced. These continual migrations spread smallpox, influenza, measles, and scarlet fever throughout northeastern North America from the Atlantic to the Great Plains, north to Hudson Bay and south to the Gulf Coast.

The microbial invasion attacked people living south of the Ohio in the Mississippi Valley from both south and north. Diseases, epidemics, and slave raiding radically altered Amerindian societies of the Lower Mississippi long before the French arrived at the end of the seventeenth century. The estimated 70,000 natives in 1700 were far fewer than just two decades before, and the number was decreased by half again during the next quarter of a century. Around 1726, the Indian population was no more than 35,000.¹⁶ A detailed estimate of a slightly larger area stretching north from the Gulf of Mexico to the mouth of the Ohio, as far west as East Texas and Arkansas, and in the east

¹⁰ Leroy V. Eid, "The Ojibwa-Iroquois War: The War the Five Nations Didn't Win", *Ethnohistory*, 24, 4 (Fall, 1979), 197-234.

¹¹ Jennings, *Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*, 206-7.

¹² Conrad E. Heidenreich and J. V. Wright, "Population and Subsistence" in *Historical Atlas of Canada*, ed. R. C. Harris (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Plate 18. Also, see Plates 35 and 37-40 by Heidenreich showing the great movements of population during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

¹³ Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths, Invasions of North America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 124; also George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1940), 145-61.

¹⁴ Jeanne Kay, "The Fur Trade and Native American Population Growth", *Ethnohistory*, 31 (1984), 276-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁶ Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 17, 44.

to below the ridge of the Appalachian chain, gives larger numbers but draws similar conclusions. Peter H. Wood indicates that the estimated aboriginal population of 160,500 in 1685 had declined by nearly two-thirds to 59,000 only forty-five years later. French Louisiana was a misnomer if ever there was one. In 1730, Amerindians still comprised more than 90 percent of the total population of the region, and while this does not disguise the massive decline in their numbers during the previous half century, the white, largely French population, had been recently surpassed by Africans who already made up more than 5.5 percent of the total.¹⁷

Conditions in the West Indies were different. On Saint-Domingue, the western, French-occupied portion of the island of Hispaniola, none of the precontact population survived. In 1685, Governor de Cussy claimed that the only Indians in the French settlements were female captives taken during pirate raids and brought back to the island.¹⁸ The census of 1687 indicated some Indians in the colony, but two-thirds of them were indentured or enslaved and all lived on the island of Tortuga.¹⁹ Most were probably Caribs captured in raids. According to Father Jean-Baptiste Margat, S.C. in 1729 not a single native remained in Saint-Domingue. Indeed, he added, not a trace of their passing could be found.²⁰

The situation was equally tragic in the Lesser Antilles. By 1670, few native people survived. Historian Philip Boucher claims as “a reasonable guess” that 7,000 to 15,000 Caribs once inhabited many of the Lesser Antilles.²¹ Shortly before the middle of the seventeenth century, after the French and English had expelled them from St. Christopher, Guadeloupe, and other islands, as many as 5,000, including refugees, may have lived on the island of Dominica. Coupled with emigration to the South American mainland, ongoing disease and war led to further catastrophic decline. African-derived, mosquito-employing pathogens such as falciparum malaria and yellow fever may also have played deadly roles among the Caribs who had lived for

¹⁷ Peter H. Wood, “The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685–1790”, in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, eds., P. H. Wood, G. A. Waselkov, and M. T. Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 36–7 and Table 1, 38–9. I have incorporated data for subregions V to X as making up French Louisiana.

¹⁸ Pierre de Vaissière, *Saint-Domingue: la société et la vie créole sous l'ancien régime, 1629–1789* (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1909), 74–5.

¹⁹ AN, SOM, G¹ 499, no. 18.

²⁰ Jean-Baptiste Margat de Tilly, S.C., *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrits des missions étrangères*, nlle. éd., Tome 7, *Mémoires d'Amérique* (Paris: J.G. Merigot, le jeune 1781), 153; from a letter dated 2 February 1729 concerning the history of the destruction of the island's original inhabitants.

²¹ Philip P. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492–1763* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 35. Gérard Lafleur, *Les Caraïbes des Petites Antilles* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 21, gives a much larger number, estimating that, as late as the 1620s, 20,000 to 30,000 Caribs inhabited the Lesser Antilles.

more than a century with Africans captured from the Spanish.²² An English estimate of Indians on St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Dominica in 1672 reported 1,500 bowmen but added, “w[h]ereof 600 are negroes”.²³ Father Jean-Baptiste Labat visited Dominica in 1700 and estimated Carib numbers at less than 2,000, which appears far too high. Other estimates indicate Dominica’s Carib population had declined to 600 by 1683 and to 400 in 1730.²⁴

Other Caribs fled further down the island chain to St. Vincent, which reportedly had a population of 6,000 in 1683.²⁵ Two-thirds of this number were thought to be Black Caribs, the offspring of African female captives brought to the island by polygamous Island Carib males, or possibly the offspring of escaped slaves from Martinique and Barbados who seized the daughters and wives of native people. This estimate may be too high though, and the two groups may have lived apart. Thirteen years later, the two populations of St. Vincent were reported to be living on opposite sides of the island: 1,200 to 1,500 runaway slaves from neighbouring islands on one side, and two to 3,000 natives who had great commerce with those of the Orinoco River in South America on the other.²⁶ A 1704 estimate gave their number as nearly 5,000.²⁷ Whether these people emerged as an autonomous Afro-Carib community remains unknown. A French estimate that 4,000 to 5,000, including both Black and Island Caribs, inhabited the Lesser Antilles in 1713 may be low. The same year a report claimed between 7,000 and 8,000 Indians and former slaves (or maroons) lived on St. Vincent; another report dated 1719 placed St. Vincent’s population at 7,000.²⁸ Well before the turn of the eighteenth century, the majority were probably Black Caribs, because Yellow or Island Caribs were as susceptible to African pathogens as they were to European ones.²⁹

Many Caribs appear to have departed Martinique and Guadeloupe following the peace negotiated in 1660 between themselves and the French. They

²² Jean-Pierre Moreau, *Les Petites Antilles de Christophe Colombe à Richelieu, 1493–1635* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 69–74. For a contrary view see Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild C. Ornelas, “After the Encounter: Disease and Demographics in the Lesser Antilles”, in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, eds., Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 50–67.

²³ CSP, CS, vol. 8, no. 896, Enclosure in Governor Stapleton to the Council of Trade and Plantations, 17 July [o.s.] 1672.

²⁴ Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 96–7; he also gives a 1713 estimate of 400 to 500 Indians.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, citing Col., C^{SA} 3, f. 268v Bégon and Blénac to Seignelay, 13 February 1683.

²⁶ [François] Froger, *Relation d’un voyage fait en 1695, 1696, 1697 aux côtes de l’Afrique . . . par Monsieur de Gennez* (Paris: Chez Nicolas Le Gras [1697], 1700), 195.

²⁷ Col., C^{SB} 2, no. 73, Du Parquet to Pontchartrain, 20 October, 1704.

²⁸ Col., C^{SB} 3, no. 42 extract, Phélypeaux to Pontchartrain, 8 March 1713; ADG-7B/1826 Pierre to Jean Pellet, Martinique, 20 August 1719, recounting a disastrous slave-raiding expedition.

²⁹ Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 97, citing Col., C^{SA} 19, ff. 72–3.

virtually disappeared from Guadeloupe after 1671 when the 51 “sauvages, métis et tapouis” listed in the census represented less than 1 percent of the island’s population. None were listed in 1686, although 16 appeared in the island’s census a decade later.³⁰ Afterwards, Amerindians were usually listed together with other nonwhites as slave or free. The last census to record the presence of Caribs on Guadeloupe in 1730, enumerated 76, including 23 children.³¹ The same general conclusion held true on the more populous islands of St. Christopher and Martinique. Caribs generally disappeared into the nonwhite population listed as either slave or free.³² By 1686, the census recorded only 254 Caribs, both free and slave, in all the French Lesser Antilles and Cayenne.³³

Disease and slave hunting devastated the Amerindians of Guiana on the South American mainland. Of the estimated 13,000 in the interior about 1670, perhaps only one-fifth remained in 1730.³⁴ By the time of French contact with the Galibis between the Maroni and the Oyapock Rivers at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the latter had become masters of the coast. They had arrived from the lower Amazon and Orinoco Rivers shortly before and pushed out the resident Arawak people. However, the coastal region proved to be fatal, and the Galibis population declined by 90 percent during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.³⁵ Thought to number 9,500 in 1604, they totaled no more than 3,500 in 1666. A steady flow of refugees from the Amazon estuary fleeing Portuguese slavers disguised their continuing decline after 1685, but the French offered little protection. Pirates were notorious slave raiders, and after 1704, Governor Ferolles encouraged attacks on the natives and promoted their sale in the slave markets of the Antilles. Indeed, after 1687 only Indian slaves (about 100 annually) were counted in the few surviving censuses.

The most extraordinary feature of this dismal account of death and social destruction is that, despite the devastation visited upon the native peoples of the Americas, the survivors continued to play important roles in the history of the French colonies: as warriors fiercely resisting colonial incursions, as partners in trade, as agents of imperial conflict, and as independent actors pursuing their own tribal policies. They continually exercised their varied interests for as long as their reduced numbers and diminished resources allowed. Whether because of the nature of the colonial economies or the

³⁰ AN, SOM, G¹ 468, no. 56; 499, no. 18; and 469, f. 13.

³¹ Guy Lasserre, *La Guadeloupe, étude géographique*, 2 vols. (Bordeaux: Union française d'impression, 1961), 1: 270.

³² AN, SOM, G¹ 498, no. 56; and 499, nos. 13–14 and 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, G¹ 498, no. 56.

³⁴ This paragraph is largely based on Jean Hurault, *Français et Indiens en Guyanne, 1604–1972* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1972), 23–4, 84–9, 92–3, 120–1, 353–5, 358, and 363.

³⁵ Bernard Chérubini, *Cayenne: ville créole et polyethnique, essai d'anthropologie urbaine* (Paris: Karthala-Cennadom, 1988), 30.

small number of European immigrants, Amerindians influenced the shape of French colonial societies in ways that are only now beginning to be studied.³⁶

1.3 AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

The invading populations of Africans and Europeans grew by immigration and by natural increase, but their respective roles in the development of the French colonies are neither well-known nor clearly understood. Historians make far too much of government immigration policies, for example, without acknowledging that they largely failed. Historians also generally exclude Africans from any demographic consideration at all. The forced migration of Africans is normally studied from an economic rather than a demographic perspective. Studies of Africans in the Americas are in their infancy, but it seems clear that population increases in most parts of the Caribbean and Brazil came through continual forced migration.

The accurate number of slaves carried from Africa to French American colonies will never be known, especially for the period preceding 1715. Work on early African demography in the French West Indies is just now getting under way.³⁷ The evidence is scant and chiefly anecdotal. The picture is also complicated by the limited nature of the French slave trade during the seventeenth century.³⁸ Current historiography contends that most Africans were brought to the colonies by French slave traders, but little evidence exists to support the claim.³⁹ Fewer than 6,000 slaves were acknowledged in official correspondence to have reached the islands and Guiana during

³⁶ See Jan Grabowski, "French Criminal Justice and Indians in Montreal, 1670–1760", *Ethnohistory*, 43, 3 (Summer, 1996), 405–29 for a particularly important example.

³⁷ See David Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); also, David Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: An Overview", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 58, 1 (January 2001) 34 paras. 2 april 2002: <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/58.1/eggus.html>

³⁸ Though his CD-ROM identifies 23 French slaving voyages and 6,300 imputed slaves embarked at Africa during the seventeenth century, Professor Eltis has kindly provided an update of his data. He has added 26 additional voyages between 1646 and 1700 and revised his imputed total of Africans embarked to 15,000. Eric Saugera, *Bordeaux port négrier, chronologie, économie, idéologie, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Karthala, 1995), claims 53 voyages occurred between 1643 and 1700, but an average of less than one slaving ship per year during the century does not make a slave trade.

³⁹ Robert L. Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century an Old Regime Business*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 11–12, leaves the mistaken impression that during the seventeenth century the French organised a regular slave trade, which though small, "displayed all the major characteristics of its eighteenth century successor". See also Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 52. Clarence Munford, *The Black Ordeal of Slavery and Slave Trading in the French West Indies, 1625–1715*, 3 vols. (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 1991), 1: 155–238, provides a disappointing, unconnected narrative that is anecdotal rather than analytical. The few numbers given (156, 160–1, and 174) are unreliable.

the three decades before 1700 when the estimated total slave population exceeded 33,000. One estimate is that about four times that number of Africans (124,500) were imported into the French Caribbean during the previous quarter century.⁴⁰ Not all slaves were delivered by interloping traders. Pirates were notorious suppliers of cheap slave labor. The French also raided other islands for slaves and purchased them from Carib raiders. The English claimed that during the 1667 war, the French carried off some 1,500 slaves from St. Christopher, Antigua, and Montserrat, and during the early 1680s Caribs sold captured slaves to French planters for rum and firearms despite a royal order prohibiting the practice.⁴¹

By 1670, Africans were already shaping French West Indian societies. While the source of these early forced migrants remains hidden in the unknown actions of interlopers and raiders, nearly 16,000 Africans resided in the French Lesser Antilles, where they comprised more than half the total population (see Appendix 1). Fifteen years later, the number of slaves in the colonies, including Guiana and Saint-Domingue, had risen to 25,000. The rate of increase declined considerably thereafter, but by 1700 slaves were nearly twice as numerous as whites, comprising nearly 65 percent of the French Circum-Caribbean population. Yet, the question remains: How did this occur? Moreover, half the period was occupied with the Nine Years' War, or the War of the League of Augsburg, when French slave ships were scarce on the Atlantic. The mystery deepens. Between 1701 and 1715, the number of Africans in the French West Indies grew more rapidly than at any time during the previous 30 years, even faster than during the subsequent fifteen years. By 1715 the slave population numbered nearly 77,000 – more than three times the white population in the French islands. In addition, between 1716 and 1730, more than 110,000 Africans were probably carried into the French colonies.

An estimated 390,000 slaves were imported into the French Circum-Caribbean during the years before 1730 (see Table 1.1). Whether surprisingly large or not, the figure is 2.4 times greater than the total number of Africans residing in the colonies in 1730. Owing to the striking similarity in the growth of slave populations in Jamaica and Saint-Domingue and the fact that the French islands were “sugar islands” with intensive land cultivation, high African-to-creole slave populations, and high male–female sex ratios among the slaves, Philip Curtin assumed a net annual rate of natural decrease of 5.4 percent, which largely accounts for the discrepancy between

⁴⁰ Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 26 and 119.

⁴¹ CSP, CS, 1669–1674, no. 896; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves; The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972), 124. See also CSP, CS, 1681–1685, no. 1126; and Col., B 10, f. 41 royal ordinance, 23 September 1683.

Table 1.1. *Estimated Slave Imports into French American Colonies to 1730*

Colony	Years	Slaves Imported	Annual Average	Percentage
Saint-Domingue	to 1680	4,000		
	1681-1730	176,560	3,530	
	Subtotal	180,560		46.1
Martinique	to 1670	15,830		
	1671-1730	91,260	1,690	
	Subtotal	107,090		27.3
Guadeloupe	to 1699	10,000		
	1700-1730	83,080	2,680	
	Subtotal	93,080		23.8
Louisiana	to 1730	7,000		1.8
Guiana	to 1730	4,000		1.0
Total		391,730		100

Source: Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 75-84; see especially Tables 20 and 21.

the high import and low population estimates.⁴² This may be quite reasonable, even conservative. Gabriel Debien claimed slave mortality between 5 and 6 percent was a minimum.⁴³ During a fourteen-year period later in the eighteenth century, at least 129 new slaves were added to a Saint-Domingue plantation in order to keep the number around 150, which implies an annual depletion rate of 6.1 percent when the harshness of living conditions may have increased along with the supply of slaves.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the number of imported Africans was at least 10 (perhaps as much as 20) times greater than all of the permanent European migrants to French America, including New France.

At least three-quarters of the Africans carried into the French colonies were transported in non-French ships.⁴⁵ Otherwise, the slave population

⁴² Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 26.

⁴³ Gabriel Debien, *Les Esclaves aux antilles françaises (XVIIe - XVIIIe siècles)*, (Basse-Terre: Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe; Fort-de-France: Société d'histoire de la Martinique, 1974), 345.

⁴⁴ Gabriel Debien, *Plantations et esclaves à Saint-Domingue* (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1962), 50-1, cited in K. G. Davies, *The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 76, n28.

⁴⁵ Col., C^{9A} 3, Du Casse to Pontchartrain, 15 December 1696, claimed the majority of slaves came from smuggling. The French, he declared, had never transported one-quarter of the number that arrived.

could not have reached the estimated levels in 1700. Dutch interlopers who did so much to develop sugar production in the French colonies might have carried Africans to the islands during the seventeenth century, but the most recent study of the Dutch slave trade found virtually no evidence. The Dutch, who landed nearly 13,000 slaves at Spanish American ports while they held the *asiento*, failed to deliver the contracted numbers.⁴⁶ They probably had no slaves for the French. This is not the place to recount the failure of French monopolists to establish a slave trade during the final quarter of the seventeenth century. It is sufficient to report that they came nowhere near supplying the 44,000 slaves called for in their contracts.

The first 15 years of the eighteenth century also remain an enigma. War returned to the West Indies, but it did not appear to affect slave migration. Between 1700 and 1715, slave populations increased faster than during any other time between 1670 and 1730, growing by 131 percent from 33,343 to 76,893. Yet, the slave population of the French Circum-Caribbean grew by 43,450 despite a negative rate of natural increase.⁴⁷ A recent estimate that French slave traders carried an average of 1,416 slaves annually from Africa to the West Indies between 1708 and 1713 may be quite accurate.⁴⁸ Others delivered the rest. The French took 3,200 captives from Nevis in 1706.⁴⁹ Although French raiders may have delivered several thousand captured slaves from other West Indian colonies, and planters undoubtedly sailed to Dutch and Danish colonies to acquire more, foreign interlopers probably delivered the largest portion of more than 50,000 Africans who arrived in the colonies from 1700 to 1715.

Between 1713 and 1730 the French slave trade grew by leaps and bounds as private entrepreneurs responded to easier access to credit and capital to supply a larger proportion of Africans to the West Indies than before. The largest change to the trade occurred in January of 1716, when letters patent opened Africa from the Sierra Leone River to the Cape of Good Hope to all French merchants on the condition that they pay a 20-livre head tax on each African landed in the Americas and fit out in one of five specified seaports.⁵⁰ Important new studies on the French slave trade have yielded an improved view of the number of slave imports for this period. Using shipping records rather than Curtin's assumptions and arithmetical calculations, Robert Stein estimated the French delivered 89,294 Africans

⁴⁶ Johannes M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34-5, 40.

⁴⁷ Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 170; also Paul Lachance, "The Demography of French Slave Colonies, Part 1 (1700-1760)", unpublished paper presented to the Social Science History Association, Chicago, November 1998, 14.

⁴⁸ David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 166.

⁴⁹ Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763*, reprint (London: Frank Cass, [1936] 1963), 181-2.

⁵⁰ Stein, *The French Slave Trade*, 13-16.

Table 1.2. *Slaves Arriving in French America, 1713-1730, by Quinquennial and by Colony*

Years	Total Africans	Average Per Year
1713-1715	14,756.2	4,891.7
1716-1720	21,414.8	4,283.0
1721-1725	24,961.4	4,992.3
1726-1730	29,578.3	5,915.7
1713-1730	90,710.0	5,039.5
Colony	Number of Africans	Percent Slaves
Saint-Domingue	48,659.4	53.6
Martinique	33,439.7	36.9
Louisiana	4,660.0	5.1
Guiana	2,234.6	2.5
Guadeloupe Grenada	1,717.0	1.9
Total	90,710.7	100.0

Source: From David Eltis's calculations based chiefly on the Mettas-Daget, *Répertoire numérique*.

to the French colonies during the period.⁵¹ Work by the late Jean Mettas, edited and published by Serge Daget, is more specific and involves real slaves carried in actual ships.⁵² According to David Eltis who has rendered the records into computer readable form, 90,710 Africans reached French America in French ships during the 18 years from 1713 to 1730, inclusive (see Table 1.2).⁵³

Eltis' number receives independent confirmation from a contemporary document reporting the French slave trade delivered a total of 54,057 Africans to the Americas between 1 July 1722 and 1730.⁵⁴ However, even

⁵¹ Ibid., 211 Table A9.

⁵² Jean Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, édité par Serge Daget, 2 vols. (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer et Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1978-1986).

⁵³ I gratefully acknowledge Professor Eltis's generous assistance and draw attention to his ongoing research on the Atlantic slave trade in association with members of the W. B. De Bois Institute at Harvard University. He generously reworked the data from the Mettas-Daget *Répertoire* for the eighteen-year period, adding imputed totals for eleven ships for which data on slave numbers were unavailable, and gave me the result, which appears in Table 1.2.

⁵⁴ Jean-Claude Nardin, "Encore des chiffres: La traite négrière française pendant la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle", *RFHOM* 57 (1970), 425. Table 1.2 shows 54,539.7 slaves delivered for a slightly longer period, 1721-1730.

so, the number includes only slaves carried in French ships. Many Africans continued to be imported into the French colonies via British, Dutch, and Danish slave ships. Between 1715 and 1730, the black population increased by 83,385 (see Appendix 1), which is 15 percent greater than the number of arrivals via the French slave trade during the same period. If the average annual negative rate of increase was 5.4 percent, more than 126,000 new arrivals would have had to have landed since 1715 in order for the total black population to more than double to 164,278 during the next fifteen years. If true, the French slave trade may have supplied about 60 percent of the slaves landed in the French colonies between 1715 and 1730 compared to delivering less than one-fifth of the total during the seventeenth century.⁵⁵

1.4 EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

Whether one looks at North America or at the West Indies and Guiana, the two streams of French immigration to the temperate and tropical colonies were very thin compared to the broad rivers of white migration that ran first from Spain and then England to the New World.⁵⁶ Between 1561 and 1650 Spanish migration to the Americas exceeded 350,000.⁵⁷ More than 400,000 English emigrated to the Americas during the seventeenth century. The British Caribbean alone received an estimated 222,000 migrants from the British Isles between 1630 and 1700, and during the last four decades of the century at least 100,000 emigrated from England to North America.⁵⁸ Tiny Portugal sent more than 1.1 million emigrants overseas between 1580 and 1760.⁵⁹ The numbers of other Europeans far exceeded the trickle of men

⁵⁵ Assuming an annual negative rate of increase of 5.4 percent, the 76,793 slaves in the colonies in 1715 would number only 33,395 in 1730. Of the 160,278 slaves in the French West Indies and Cayenne in 1730, 83,385 (160,278-76,893) arrived between the beginning of 1716 and the end of 1730 and survived a similar negative rate of natural increase. Assuming continuous monthly arrivals during 180 months, 7,285.2 slaves arrived each year. During the 15-year period, 109,278 Africans, or 43.9 percent more than have been documented, entered the French West Indies. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Joan Geramita of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Queen's University, who worked out the solution to the problem.

⁵⁶ See W. Borah, "The Mixing of Populations", and M. Mörner, "Spanish Migration to the New World prior to 1800", in *First Images: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, 2 vols., ed., F. Chiapelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2: 707-22 and 737-82.

⁵⁷ Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492-1700* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 333.

⁵⁸ Engerman and Higman, "Demographic Structure of Caribbean Slave Societies", 62; Anthony McFarlane, *The British in the Americas, 1480-1815* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), 60; and Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 190.

⁵⁹ Vitorino Magalhaes Godinho, "Portuguese Emigration from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century: Constants and Changes" in *European Expansion and Migration: Essays on*

and women who voyaged from France to the New World during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and who, for the most part, sought to return home again as quickly as possible.⁶⁰ It is highly unlikely that even 100,000 emigrants ever left the shores of “la douce France” for the harsh conditions of the New World, or that one-quarter of that number settled there.⁶¹ Fewer than 3,000 French men and women actually settled in New France during the 60 years between 1670 and 1730, and though a few thousand more may have colonized the West Indies during the same period, the total for both regions may not have exceeded 10,000.

That the most populous country of Europe contributed only about 5 percent of the total European intercontinental migration between 1500 and 1800 deserves comment. While there may have been a cultural reluctance to depart from France, to sever ties of place and kinship forever, reliance on such an argument for the whole explanation is unconvincing. Recent research confirms earlier suggestions that French migration overseas was an extension of other perennial movements within France such as rural exodus or interurban labour migrations rather than a new phenomenon.⁶² Yet, the question of why so few left France remains unanswered. Despite the dreadful impact of war, famine, and disease that led to the destruction of one-third of the peasantry of eastern France during the Thirty Years’ War and to the devastation of the Paris basin during the Fronde, France’s rural economy did not experience any significant restructuring such as occurred in England, nor was the political and religious oppression as grinding as in the Iberian peninsula. Above all, peasants owned nearly half the land in France and the security of peasant land tenure remained intact.⁶³ As long as the peasant hold on land remained firm, expanding French cities and the growing royal army absorbed most of the surplus population that appeared during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

the Intercontinental Migration from Africa, Asia, and Europe, eds., P. C. Emmer and M. Möner (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1992), 18; and McAlister, *Spain and Portugal*, 340–2.

⁶⁰ P. N. Moogk, “Reluctant Exiles: Emigrants from France in Canada before 1760”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 46 (July, 1989): [463]–505.

⁶¹ Pierre Pluchon, éd., *Histoire des Antilles et de la Guyane* (Toulouse: Privat, 1882) claims the estimate of 100,000 is too low because it excludes soldiers. He offers a revised estimate of the total number of pre-1789 overseas migrants of 300,000 but gives no compelling reason for accepting it. Jean Meyer, “Des Origines à 1763” dans *Histoire de la France coloniale des origines à 1914*, eds., J. Meyer et al. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), 14–16, is more discrete; he gives no number at all for total colonial migration.

⁶² See Leslie Choquette, *Frenchmen into Peasants, Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁶³ See Pierre Goubert, “Le Paysan et la terre: seigneurie, tenure, exploitation” dans F. Braudel et E. Labrousse, eds., *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, vol. 2, *Des derniers temps de l’âge seigneurial aux préludes de l’âge industriel, (1660–1789)*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), 130–9; also Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, [1973] 1975), 119–22.