

# Commerce Raiding and Crisis: Guadeloupe, 1799-1802

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In January 1799, a dispatch from the Royal Navy's Leeward Islands Command commented on the recent departure from Guadeloupe of its "Director . . . Victor Hugues."<sup>1</sup> Revolutionary Guadeloupe was essentially Hugues's personal creation,<sup>2</sup> and his regime was to be followed by a series of short-lived and ramshackle administrations which proved incapable of controlling the formidable entity which he had produced. Indeed, when the Preliminaries of the Peace of Amiens came into force towards the close of 1801, this Caribbean colony was widely viewed as being in revolt against France.

Commonly styled "The Colonial Robespierre," Victor Hugues was of Marseilles origin and had seen service as a public prosecutor in the metropolitan country. His recapture of Guadeloupe from the British during 1794 led to the abolition of slavery in the colony, in line with French Revolutionary legislation. Thereafter, he was to organize the whole population, of whatever racial origin, into a disciplined and purposeful grouping. His nature was fiery, and his methods unorthodox: certainly, varied malpractice was associated with the great campaign of Guadeloupean commerce raiding which he instigated during the latter part of his regime.<sup>3</sup> When both regime and campaign ended suddenly with his brusque recall to France, there were numerous expressions of relief.<sup>4</sup>

1. Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), ADM/1/322, Letter 4, 22 Jan. 1799. Although technically incorrect, the British use of "Director" might well be taken as a comment on the extraordinary status which Hugues had enjoyed at Guadeloupe, a matter which had occasioned recurrent friction between himself and the French government.

2. For discussion of early reaction to this novel and daunting phenomenon, see H. J. K. Jenkins, "Guadeloupe, savagery and emancipation: British comment of 1794-1796," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 65 (1978): 325-331.

3. H. J. K. Jenkins, "The Heyday of French Privateering from Guadeloupe, 1796-98," *The Mariner's Mirror* 64 (1978): 245-250.

4. Nowhere more so than on British-occupied Martinique, an island colony whose seaborne trade had been a particular target for Hugues's raiding. See H. J. K. Jenkins, "Guadeloupe, Martinique and

In due course, however, Guadeloupe's efforts against shipping were to revive once more. Although lacking the near-frenzied intensity which had marked the colony's flotilla in Hugues's day, this renewed commerce raiding was characterized by a generally higher level of irregularity. Kaleidoscopic variations on the theme of malpractice meant that Guadeloupe's flotilla of 1799-1802 became at times a rather nebulous entity.

Around the close of the eighteenth century, the West Indies constituted one of the focal locations for the trading activity of the Atlantic community. Sugar and other colonial commodities caused the Caribbean to loom large in the economic calculations of various governments. In particular, this resulted in the West Indies becoming an arena for remarkable interaction between the interests of Britain, Revolutionary France, and the United States. The study of maritime operations in the eastern Caribbean from 1799 to 1802 certainly demonstrates an important American involvement, including much of the Franco-American Quasi-War. The theater also witnessed a continuation of the longstanding Anglo-French struggle, as well as a continued state of affairs within which France could exercise only limited control over Guadeloupe. In part, this reflected an ongoing process of political upheaval within France itself. But one should also bear in mind the impact of French Revolutionary ideology upon the West Indies as a whole, and the resulting tendency towards a climate of uncertainty within which many of the traditional assumptions regarding Caribbean affairs lost their validity.<sup>5</sup>

During the years immediately following Hugues's removal by the French Government, Guadeloupe's

commerce raiding: two colonies in conflict, 1797-1798," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 78 (1991): 465-475.

5. See, for example, Anne Pérotin-Dumon, "Révolutionnaires français et royalistes espagnols dans les Antilles," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 76 (1989): 125-158. This article appeared in a special double number (282-283) published to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of 1789 and the French Revolution's impact overseas.

commerce raiding<sup>6</sup> slipped into increased disorder, partly because of the colony's internal problems. In addition, the period c. 1799-1800 witnessed determined efforts by the United States government to enforce an embargo on trade with France and her colonies. This in turn led to a situation in which some American merchants and seafarers colluded with the Guadeloupeans, and there is good reason to believe that a number of bogus captures were arranged to conceal commercial transactions which breached official United States policy.<sup>7</sup> This matter raises many problems in connection with the surviving documentation. Whatever its defects and uncertainties, Guadeloupe's commerce raiding was an important consideration in the period 1799-1802, not least by providing a persistent source of difficulty for the British interests in the eastern Caribbean. Moreover, the very disorder in Guadeloupean *guerre de course* during this time meant that it impinged all the more widely and unpredictably upon international relations at large.

The administrative instability at Guadeloupe following Hugues's removal affected every aspect of the colony's activity,<sup>8</sup> and efforts against merchant shipping were no exception. General Desfourneaux, Hugues's immediate successor, began with attempts to concentrate the colony's flotilla in its home anchorages, but a gradual resumption of attacks on commerce followed. Much attention has been given to the rather confused diplomacy which Desfourneaux attempted with regard to the United States. The effective outcome was a communication from Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, transmitted in April 1799, which stated that improved relations would require "absolutely . . . an end to all depredations by French privateers and other French armed vessels belonging or resorting to the ports of Guadeloupe [*sic*]."<sup>9</sup> However, it is important to remember that Desfourneaux's position at Guadeloupe

was very insecure. He and his successors were like riders upon an unruly horse: just staying in the saddle was a feat, let alone attempting to direct the steed's behavior with precision.

By the following August, Desfourneaux claimed to have evidence that Guadeloupe's worst enemies were in Paris, and he appeared shaken by recent developments which threatened the complete undermining of his own position. Amidst confusion and uncertainty, local Guadeloupean elements seized and deported the luckless Desfourneaux. Reporting upon his overthrow, he asserted that many in the colony expected an early return by Victor Hugues.<sup>10</sup>

At much the same time, late 1799, the Brumaire Coup in France itself swept away the Directory and brought Bonaparte to power. In due course, his distinctive views on commerce raiding and prize law were to help end the Franco-American Quasi-War by means of the settlement stemming from the Convention of Môtrefontaine. Meanwhile, Guadeloupe came under a new style of administration which operated, rather uncertainly, during 1800 and the first part of 1801. As originally constituted, this Paris-appointed triumvirate comprised the administrators Baco, Jeannet, and Laveaux.<sup>11</sup> Confident messages were sometimes forwarded to France, but in mid-1800 Baco sounded a very different note in confidential correspondence<sup>12</sup> with Bonaparte, claiming that the metropolitan country no longer exercised any really effective power at Guadeloupe.

This same administration took a lively interest in commerce raiding. Among other measures, it brought into service a number of raiders which allegedly operated under its own direct control. But there was a marked lack of clarity in some reports, along with insinuations that various irregularities were actually rooted in other administrations. For example, play was made with an alleged "Arrangement Verbal" which was said to have been established between Desfourneaux and local interests. The administration made efforts to regularize at least some aspects of the colony's *guerre de course* by issuing complicated and cross-referenced regulations at Guadeloupe that theoretically brought matters into line with Bonaparte's general policy. However, there was clearly a gulf between theory and practice: one is left with the impression that the administrative grip on Guadeloupe's commerce raiding

6. It is noteworthy that Hugues had evidently viewed himself as a talented practitioner in maritime operations, a point emphasized in conversation with various prisoners. See, for example, J. Hay, *A Narrative of the Insurrection in the Island of Grenada . . .* (London, 1823), 97.

7. Various breaches of the embargo manifested themselves. In March 1799, for example, Captain John Barry, USN, reported upon certain Americans trading at Guadeloupe. See Dudley W. Knox, ed., *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War with France*, 7 vols. (Washington, 1935-38), 2: 473-475. The question of bogus captures is discussed more fully at a later stage in this article, with reference to U.S. Treasury comment (see note 34).

8. For a brief summary, see H. J. K. Jenkins, "Guadeloupe 1799-1803: A Haiti Manqué," *History Today* (April 1980): 13-16. In the period, the question of "San Domingo" (Haiti) attracted much attention to the western Caribbean, just as Guadeloupe did to the eastern part. However, despite some obvious parallels, the circumstances of these two colonies were very different in several important ways.

9. Knox, *Naval Documents* 3: 109.

10. Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter AN), Colonies C7a 51, folios 66, 67, 71, 72.

11. The composition was to undergo various changes. Laveaux, for example, was replaced because of allegedly stirring up additional unrest.

12. AN, Colonies C7a 52, folios 115 *et seq.*

was both questionable and uncertain.<sup>13</sup>

In May 1801, Admiral Lacrosse took charge at Guadeloupe as Captain-General — a title which reflected Bonaparte's radical changes in colonial affairs. In short order, Lacrosse's decision to style his residence a palace and his pretentious scheme for an art college aroused sharply adverse criticism.<sup>14</sup> More seriously, his implementation of Bonaparte's racist policies, coupled with his own arrogance, made Lacrosse hateful to many Guadeloupeans. Late in 1801 he was overthrown and deported. The British promptly captured the vessel carrying him but quickly released him as news of the Preliminaries of the Peace of Amiens reached the Caribbean. Thus, during the last weeks of 1801 and the opening months of 1802, a longstanding tendency towards disorder and confusion blossomed into a most peculiar and interesting situation with regard to Guadeloupe, its internal affairs, and its external activities.

The flotilla presided over by the various administrations just considered was, understandably enough, the setting for an unusually high level of irregularity. Although most forms of this had been evident in Hugues's day, his successors' inability to achieve firm control seems to have occasioned an upsurge in the scale of various abuses. It would appear that a notable instance involved the creation of pseudo-Guadeloupean raiders, many of them actually Spanish vessels which rarely, if ever, came within sight of Guadeloupe. The sale of privateering licenses to the operators of such craft was a subject upon which the Guadeloupean authorities tended to be less than forthcoming. In early 1801, for example, a long communication<sup>15</sup> was prepared on the subject of anti-shipping operations, clearly intended as a defense against wide-ranging accusations. However, it was obscure and evasive on the ticklish matter of Guadeloupe's "agents Extérieurs" and their distribution of privateering licenses in the Spanish colonies and elsewhere. A further problem reflected the removal of Hugues's autocratic presence, and it involved an apparent blossoming of so-called "picaroon" activity, i.e. forays by very small raiders which had no claim to any authorization at all.

In general, the lion's share of Caribbean commerce raiding in the period of the French Revolutionary Wars involved vessels which were commonly styled "privateers." However, many such vessels did not qualify for that term in its strict sense, a fact which makes several

of the usual methods for examining privateering phenomena inappropriate and unsatisfactory in this particular instance. Some craft referred to as privateers lacked licenses or else carried papers of the most questionable sort; others switched nationality almost at the hoisting of an ensign. At times, moreover, the line between privateers and vessels in the service of colonial regimes became exceedingly indistinct.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding the points just made, there is convincing evidence that genuine Guadeloupean raiders (as distinct from bogus ones) did operate effectively in the period between Hugues's removal and the Peace of Amiens. Indeed, it is clear that vessels of this sort were the mainstay of French commerce raiding in the eastern Caribbean. It is equally clear, though, that the activity of the Guadeloupean flotilla fluctuated markedly from time to time. This was linked with the colony's internal difficulties, and it also reflected matters such as British and American naval countermeasures or the fruits of Franco-American diplomacy. Whatever eclipses it suffered, Guadeloupean effort against shipping was regularly renewed.

Illustrative of this was a report<sup>17</sup> made by Captain Alexander Murray, USN, during February 1800. Commenting on the continuing hazard in Guadeloupean waters, he stressed that the smaller types of raider were "like Hydra's heads & multiply daily." In the following month, a dispatch from the British Leeward Islands Command described the same location as being "covered with the Enemy's small privateers," adding that it was currently proving "impossible to reduce their number materially."<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note how British and American operations could dovetail into each other at about this time. A typical instance involved HMS *Southampton's* capture of the *Tendant*, a sloop-rigged Guadeloupean raider of thirty-five tons, which was taken together with a prize which she had in company — the *Prudence*, a brig of New York ownership.<sup>19</sup> Cases where the British recaptured seized American merchantmen, and *vice versa*, were by no means uncommon.

The question of diminutive raiders, raised by Captain Murray, is of particular interest with regard to Guadeloupe's flotilla subsequent to Bonaparte's assumption of power in France. Bonaparte was firmly

13. AN, Colonies C7a53, especially folios 33, 34, 47, 48, 57, 58.

14. Valuable information on Lacrosse's administration is contained in AN, Colonies C7a 55 (unfoliated); see especially "Extrait de la Correspondance du Capitaine Général."

15. AN, Colonies C7a 54, folios 31-36.

16. For discussion of the confused international attitudes which blurred various traditional distinctions, see H. J. K. Jenkins, "Privateers, Picaroons, Pirates: West Indian Commerce Raiders, 1793-1801," *The Mariner's Mirror* 73 (1987): 181-186.

17. Knox, *Naval Documents* 5: 176-177.

18. PRO, ADM/1/323, Letter 13 (first series).

19. See *Southampton's* log account, PRO, ADM/51/1323, 1 Jan. 1800, and ADM/1/323, Letter 18 (first series).

convinced that such small fry were impossible to keep under firm administrative control, and he wished to have them banned. In February 1801, the authorities at Guadeloupe made specific reply to this point, arguing *in favor* of numerous small raiders. They claimed that any substantial reduction in the overall number of Guadeloupean raiders would ease "les inquiétudes de l'Ennemi," perhaps occasioning serious problems for Guadeloupe itself, described as "L'unique point" of resistance to the British in that part of the world. It may well be significant that this same communication made reference to the earlier successes of the "flibustiers," i.e., buccaneers.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the parallel which could be drawn regarding attacks on shipping by those old-time marauders, there was an obvious comparison between the lawlessness associated with buccaneering and the increasingly serious turbulence within the Guadeloupean community just prior to the Peace of Amiens.

The present writer has discussed elsewhere the paucity of the surviving documentation for some aspects of Guadeloupe's flotilla in the French Revolutionary Wars. To some extent, this is due to irregularities in the period itself and the reluctance of those involved to set down facts that might later prove embarrassing. In part, also, the problem reflects the subsequent destruction of many documents in various misfortunes. Regarding Hugues's great campaign of commerce raiding, British records dealing with scores of captured raiders can often provide insights into the Guadeloupean flotilla which are otherwise unobtainable.<sup>21</sup> Similar remarks apply to the period under discussion here, although in this instance there should also be reference, of course, to American records relevant to numerous captured raiders.

Illustrative of American naval successes, the *Enterprize* took the *Flambeau* in Guadeloupean waters during July 1800, and this prize represented the more substantial vessels in the colony's flotilla.<sup>22</sup> A comparable raider was the schooner-rigged *Perséverance*, captured by the British Leeward Islands Command at much the same time. She was given this appraisal: "... does not appear to be 12 Months old, American built, the Bottom fastened with treenails and Nails — is pierced for 16 Guns." Her dimensions were stated thus: tonnage 133 tons; length on deck 79 feet; beam 20 feet 8 inches; draught 11 feet.<sup>23</sup> The *Perséverance* may well

have been an American freighter captured by the Guadeloupeans, renamed and adapted for raiding purposes.

Most Guadeloupean raiders were evidently a good deal smaller. Examples taken by the British c. 1800 included the *Furet* (a 72-ton schooner mounting four carriage guns), and the *Quatre Amis* (a 25-ton schooner mounting two carriage guns). Some members of the flotilla were of even smaller size, such as the *Hiron-delle*, a 10-tonner with an armament of swivel pieces.<sup>24</sup> It is understandable that small vessels of this sort could be propelled easily enough by oar power, a technique to which they commonly resorted. In fact, the tactics of Guadeloupe's raiders were sometimes more reminiscent of galley warfare than of fighting sail's heyday.<sup>25</sup>

Examples of the application of oar power to Guadeloupe's *guerre de course* were found in the flotilla's "rowboat privateers." Captures of such craft figured from time to time in naval correspondence of the period. These open boats usually carried between a dozen and twenty men apiece, and small arms were often supplemented by a swivel gun or a light-calibre carronade mounted on a slide in the bow. At first sight, it might seem that so meagre a raider would have had a seriously limited capability, but this would be to overlook the small size and low freeboard of many freighters operating in the Caribbean. Well handled, a rowboat privateer could snap up suitable prizes without too much difficulty. Granted the climatic conditions, exposure was not an immediate problem for crewmen; thus, rowboats were by no means limited to brief coastal excursions, and a lug-rig was commonly fitted for passage-making purposes.

There were some notable raider-captains associated with Guadeloupe's flotilla in the period 1799-1802, and it is useful to cite a few at this stage, together with some comment on the vessels which they commanded during the final stage of the Quasi-War. Three such raiders were Captain Mounier of the *Alliance* (fitted-out by the armateur Mey), Captain Ragoudin of the *Général Dugommier* (fitted-out by the armateur Tholozan), and Captain Maindebourg of the *Patriote* (fitted-out by Aznour Souffrin et Cie).<sup>26</sup>

Consideration of Guadeloupe's commerce raiders, 1799-1802, leads on to the relevant prize court proceedings. Unfortunately, there are often serious

20. AN, Colonies C7a 54, folio 36.

21. Jenkins, "Guadeloupe, Martinique and commerce raiding," 470.

22. Apart from more formal records, the *Flambeau* received considerable attention in the American press. See, for example, a New York news item included in Knox, *Naval Documents* 6: 213.

23. PRO, ADM/1/323 Letters 22 and 23 (first series) and appended material.

24. *Ibid.*, Letter 18 (first series) and appended material.

25. Jenkins, "Guadeloupe, Martinique and commerce raiding," 469.

26. These three captains are from a more extensive listing in H. J. K. Jenkins, "Privateering from Guadeloupe 1794-1802" (unpublished typescript, 1986, National Maritime Museum, London, MS 86/092), pp. 72-73.

problems of documentation for Caribbean prizes taken in those years by raiders under French colors. The level of abuse and malpractice in proceedings at Guadeloupe and some other colonies was such that it seems unlikely that any thorough, frank, and genuinely accurate record of such proceedings ever existed. In the case of Guadeloupe's documentation, moreover, invasion, internal disorder, and natural disaster have all combined, in the intervening years, to destroy a good deal of what was set down on paper.<sup>27</sup> Another noteworthy point is that, in Hugues's day, a number of prizes conducted to Guadeloupe were evidently disposed of without any prize-court proceedings at all,<sup>28</sup> and it seems probable that instances of this sort became more common after his departure from the colony.

A measure of uncertainty and disorder affected the whole question of prize law in the decade leading up to the Peace of Amiens. Both Britain and France came to view prize procedure more as a weapon than as the product of formal deliberation. With Guadeloupe moving towards virtually independent policies, the colony sometimes produced legal measures which outraged not only enemies and neutrals but the French government itself.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the general severity of France's prize courts (both metropolitan and colonial) towards neutrals led to temporary changes in some British procedures during the French Revolutionary Wars, a matter which a leading treatise was later to describe as reflecting very unusual circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

Extreme attitudes on the part of the French were to some extent a reaction against widespread abuses involving flags of convenience. In the eastern Caribbean, the neutral Scandinavian colonies played a notable role in this matter. In 1797, for instance, Victor Hugues claimed that at St. Thomas a British merchantman could be turned into a so-called Danish one for a fee of just "six piastres."<sup>31</sup> Changing circumstances were to lead to many American freighters following the same proce-

cedure, and it seems to have become quite common for the Guadeloupean prize court to ignore such easily purchased changes. Thus, various difficulties arise because a considerable number of vessels specified in the court records as being American were, technically at least, of some different nationality.<sup>32</sup>

Closely linked with such matters were the efforts of the United States government, during the Quasi-War, to impose an effective embargo which would prevent Americans from trading with France or its colonies. It is a striking fact that British diplomatic opinion viewed the American embargo as "not less important" than the "vigorous measure . . . authorizing American vessels of war to capture French cruisers."<sup>33</sup> But within the confusion of the period, some American interests resented governmental moves of the sort mentioned, notwithstanding the general circumstances of the Quasi-War. Thus, with the specific intention of circumventing regulations, a number of American freighters took to operating under flags of convenience c. 1799-1800. Further, as already noted, there was sometimes American collusion with such colonies as Guadeloupe in the form of bogus captures which masked what was actually commerce conducted in breach of official U.S. policy.

In this matter, the United States government was encountering a problem which had long bedevilled almost every other power with a substantial presence or interest in the West Indies. Smuggling was endemic, and the line between that and collusion with an enemy was often very blurred in the minds of traders and seafarers. The naval and colonial authorities of Britain, France, and Spain had all complained of their own merchants on many occasions. Arguably, there was an inherent dynamism to the trade patterns of the West Indies which could make national policies and governmental restrictions seem curiously irrelevant in a setting of salt water and eager markets. Such thinking was perhaps fostered, for some Americans, by the very circumstances of the Quasi-War, with the U.S. viewing itself more as an outraged neutral than as a definite combatant.

For its part, the U.S. Treasury was to charge that some American vessels had been deliberately steered close to commerce-raiding bases and had then been taken "in consequence of pre-concerted arrangements." Although many captures of American vessels were genuine ones, the Treasury insisted that it could "unquestionably" establish that various other seizures were "fraudulent." It further asserted that, in many cases, the papers furnished by American shipmasters did

27. Similar remarks apply to other French colonies as well. One should particularly mention the destruction in France itself during 1871 of much evidence related to appeals against various colonial decisions.

28. For discussion of an instance involving obvious malpractice by the Guadeloupean authorities and their Swedish counterparts at St. Bartholomews, see H. J. K. Jenkins, "The Case of the *Courier*, 1794-98," *The Mariner's Mirror* 76 (1990): 69-73.

29. An outstanding example was the Guadeloupean Decree of 13 Pluviôse Year V. See H. J. K. Jenkins, "Controversial legislation at Guadeloupe regarding trade and piracy, 1797," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 76 (1989): 97-106. This article was included in the special commemorative number mentioned in note 5.

30. W. Shee, ed., *Abbot's Law of Merchant Ships and Seamen* (London, 1847), 593. This eighth edition is the standard edition of the work.

31. AN, Colonies C7a 49, folios 198-199.

32. This point is discussed, with particular reference to prizes taken by Captain Honoré Andrieu, in Jenkins, "Privateering from Guadeloupe 1794-1802," 47.

33. PRO, FO/5/22, Liston to Grenville, 2 June 1798.

not allow of effective distinction between real capture and collusion.<sup>34</sup> Overall, it is plain that there must be considerable caution when approaching what has survived of Guadeloupe's prize court records for the particular years indicated.

Responding to urgent enquiries from the French government at the time of the Convention of Môtrefontaine, the authorities at Guadeloupe produced a series of statements regarding prizes said to have been sold at the colony from September 1799 to December 1800. These documents show signs of hasty preparation, including confusion on the subject of some important dates. According to this material, just over three hundred vessels of various nationalities were disposed of in the stated period.<sup>35</sup> However, a proportion of these "prizes" would actually have involved collusion between mercantile interests and the Guadeloupeans. In addition, some captured vessels had probably never received attention from the prize court at all, and hence were not included in the listings.

Another Guadeloupean document listed certain American merchantmen which had been considered by the colony's prize court during the "Epoque de la Signature de la Convention."<sup>36</sup> The document referred to some fifty vessels said to have been condemned in the period from October to December 1800, and it mentioned some very questionable procedures, including the removal of goods at sea in a manner suggesting lawless pillaging that was later given cosmetic treatment at Guadeloupe. To cite another type of abuse, a brig named *Eliza* was condemned despite a statement that the relevant papers had been lost in a boat capsized: the admitted absence of this evidence was seemingly no impediment to the court. It is noteworthy that the *Eliza* had been conducted to the Spanish possession of Margarita, the documentation being forwarded from there to Guadeloupe. Indeed, less than half of the seized American vessels mentioned had been taken to ports where the French flag flew.

Although the Convention of Môtrefontaine brought an end to the Quasi-War, the Guadeloupeans still faced continuing conflict with the British for a while. It is noticeable, though, that the remaining hostilities of 1801 tended to lose momentum as the various authorities in the Caribbean became increasingly aware of European moves towards a general peace. The very likelihood of this may even have helped to exacerbate the uncertainties and misgivings felt within Guadeloupe's commu-

nity. Towards the end of 1801, news of the Peace of Amiens reached the Caribbean; however, as previously noted, the colony's Captain-General had already been deported and subsequently captured by the British. News of the peace led swiftly to his release and, thereafter, two rival Guadeloupean administrations faced each other. A ramshackle Provisional Council operated within the colony, and a sort of émigré administration was set up on the nearby British possession of Dominica. The situation was an extremely confused and perplexing one. As a result, Admiral Duckworth, then directing the British Leeward Islands Command, found it took some time to put an effective end to commerce raiding from Guadeloupe. The process had to include a stern warning that any further interference with shipping would result in those responsible being "proceeded against as Pirates."<sup>37</sup>

As a closing comment on this stage, mention should be made of a document entitled "Etat des Prises faites postérieurement à la Signature des Préliminaires de Paix," which was prepared at Guadeloupe during February 1802. A copy of this statement<sup>38</sup> reached Paris, evidently via Admiral Lacrosse's establishment at Dominica, and it carried a note to the effect that it included proceedings conducted under what was termed "le Gouvernmt usurpateur." This description of the Provisional Council as a usurper should not veil the fact that it actually asserted its full loyalty to the French government — yet another instance of the confused state of affairs at Guadeloupe in this period. Nine prizes were listed, all of which were shown as having been condemned by Guadeloupe's prize court between November 1801 and January 1802. Two of the vessels had actually been taken to Puerto Rico by their captors. All nine appear to have been British, and when the original listing was drawn up at Guadeloupe, it conceded that at least two cases would require restitution.

During the short-lived Peace of Amiens, Guadeloupe was firmly reintegrated into the French colonial structure. The process meant a return to a system of colonial administration reminiscent of the Ancien Regime, complete with the restoration of slavery. A substantial number of black troops, survivors of the forces which Hugues had created, were deported.<sup>39</sup>

The present article is essentially a study of Revolutionary Guadeloupe's commerce raiding in the particularly troubled years between Hugues's departure

34. Knox, *Naval Documents* 5: 122-124.

35. AN, Colonies C7a 53, folios 51-56.

36. This "Tableau des Bâtiments Américains condamnés . . ." was certified during January 1801 and is included in AN, Marine FF2 43 Dossier J (Guadeloupe).

37. PRO, ADM/1/323, Letter 111 (second series).

38. AN, Marine FF2 43 Dossier J (Guadeloupe).

39. Such changes contributed to Guadeloupe's rather different performance when Anglo-French hostilities were renewed in 1803. See H. J. K. Jenkins, "French Privateering from Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1803-10," *The Mariner's Mirror* 74 (1988): 287-289.

and the cessation of general hostilities. British and American naval countermeasures have received only tangential treatment in this instance. Similarly, such intriguing matters as the Guadeloupean raid upon Curaçao in 1800 have no real place here — although it might be said that this raid, against an island belonging to France's Dutch allies, was symptomatic of Guadeloupe's extraordinary condition at that time. A British military dispatch informed London that the early reports of the Curaçao raid had been discounted, because the whole affair seemed "so highly improbable."<sup>40</sup>

Despite uncertainty as to many details, there is considerable evidence that Guadeloupe's commerce raiders — most of them small, and generally styled privateers despite possible objection to that term in some cases — played a remarkable role during the period. However, it was a role which defies precise quantification in the present day. The lack of many papers related to the issue of privateering licenses by the various Guadeloupean administrations contributes to this state of affairs, as does the sometimes questionable and fragmentary nature of the surviving documentation regarding prizes and their disposal. Moreover, especially in its more disordered phases, the Guadeloupean community evidently sent to sea a number of raiders which operated without any documentation at all. The West Indies were in turmoil, and this accentuated the traditional tendency towards widespread irregularity in Caribbean *guerre de course*. Thus, there is sometimes difficulty in interpreting the evidence from naval captures: it is not always clear, for example, to what colony some particular raider can be properly attributed.

If precise information is sometimes lacking for Guadeloupe's flotilla between 1799 and 1802, then at least a number of cardinal images emerge from the evidence which is available. Regarding background, there is the image of longstanding Anglo-French rivalry in the colonial sphere, sharpened by the effects of upheaval in the wake of "The Principles of 1789." Equally, there is the image of the United States as a young giant — independence dated back a mere quarter-century or so — flexing its political, commercial, and naval muscle in the furtherance of what were still experimental policies. Such was the setting when, during mid-1799, the U.S. secretary of state informed the Guadeloupeans of his conviction that their commerce raiding could be made to pay only if it involved unjust seizures of neutrals: "So long therefore as the French Government and its agents allow of privateering, particularly in the West Indies, so long we must presume, whatever professions are made, that they mean

to make a prey of neutral commerce."<sup>41</sup>

While financial gain was certainly an important motive within Guadeloupean commerce raiding, it is possible that the secretary of state had overemphasized its significance. There were other influences at work. The period 1799-1802 was a very peculiar one in several ways and, so far as Guadeloupe and its raiders were concerned, much of this stemmed from the complicated legacy which Victor Hugues had left behind him in the colony, a legacy which continued to have powerful effect. Under his rule, Revolutionary Guadeloupe had become what a senior French officer was later to describe as a "colonie guerrière,"<sup>42</sup> i.e., an entity with the qualities of a warrior-state as well as those of a colony in the ordinary sense. Within another perspective, Revolutionary Guadeloupe might well be viewed as resembling the Algiers or Tunis of its day, a corsair state transposed to a Caribbean setting. Whatever the serious and undeniable abuses that were associated with its various administrations, Guadeloupe tended to perceive itself as an isolated and embattled fragment of territory in the midst of a most threatening environment. Thus, French Revolutionary ideology and sheer anxiety played their part in the colony's commerce raiding. It was within this context that American shipping, and that of other neutrals, tended to receive harsh treatment on many occasions.

Though Hugues's legacy was potent, the lack of his actual presence contributed to Guadeloupe's progress along an increasingly troubled path. His successors were unable to control his formidable creation, and so the colony exhibited internal disorder and alarming instability. The consequences were exacerbated by upheaval within the metropolitan country: although Bonaparte's seizure of power paved the way for a Franco-American settlement, it also led to changes in French colonial policy which proved most serious for Guadeloupe. Even so, the colony continued to exploit its tradition and geographical location so as to impinge, at times dramatically, upon seagoing commerce.

41. Knox, *Naval Documents* 3: 282-283.

42. E.-E. Boyer-Peyreleau, *Les Antilles françaises . . .*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1823), 3: 172.

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