

America's Virgin Islands

America's Virgin Islands

A History of Human Rights and Wrongs

SECOND EDITION

William W. Boyer

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*To my daughter
Helen Hoy Boyer*

We cannot enjoy half slavery and half freedom. We want it all or nothing. We don't want to be revolutionists; we don't want to be communists; we don't wish to be branded against organized government. We want to be the same as every member of this American nation, and we are entitled to that privilege.

I am told you cannot oppose government, but, by God, government can hear us cry, and must hear us protest, and we are going to protest until we get the form of government we wish.

Casper Holstein, 1934

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Preface to the Second Edition

In October 2008, the publisher of the first edition of this book, Keith Sipe, asked me to consider researching and writing a second edition to update the book for the period 1980 to 2010. I accepted this challenge and spent several weeks during June and July 2009 in the Virgin Islands to conduct the necessary research. I found very few of those still alive who helped me in my research during the late 1970s. Among others, they were: Emerita Professor of History Dr. Marilyn Krigger; former governor and historian Dr. Charles Turnbull; long-time leader of down-islanders George Goodwin; and retired linguist, social scientist and historian Emeritus Professor Dr. Arnold Highfield who, though he was then vacationing in Vermont, nevertheless offered me valuable advice. I will always be indebted to Krigger, Turnbull, Highfield, and Goodwin for helping me conduct research for both editions. Although I missed those who had passed on, I shall never forget their past contributions.

During my 2009 research visit, I found my first edition had been well received, a fact that facilitated meeting many gate-keepers of knowledge who were forthcoming and generous in helping my research for this second edition. They were: Patricia Abbott, Madeleine Anduze, Julie Bederman, Dr. Lawrence Benjamin, Dr. Ingrid Bough, Annice Canton, Dr. Carlyle Corbin, Gerard Emanuel, Wilfredo Geigel, Robert Johnson, Rudolph Krigger, Edgar Lake, Susan Lugo, Dr. Frank Mills, Mario Moorhead, Judith Rogers, Dr. Malik Sekou, Lawrence Sewer, Oswin Sewer, Rachelle Shells, Beverly Smith, Dr. Gilbert Sprauve, Dr. Tibor Toth, Joel Turnbull, and George Tyson.

My greatest debt of gratitude is owed to Emerita Professor Marilyn Krigger who taught Virgin Islands history for many years at the University of the Virgin Islands, and who read and critiqued my drafts of both editions of this book. I am especially indebted also to: Professor Edward Ratledge of the University of Delaware for providing me an office and resources to write this second edition; Dr. Dan Rich, former Provost of the University of Delaware, who arranged for the University to fund, in part, my 2009 research visit to the Vir-

gin Islands; and my wife, Dr. Nancy Boyer, and my daughter, Helen Hoy Boyer, who supported and assisted my research.

My research for this second edition was greatly facilitated by the resources and staffs of: the von Scholten Collection of the Enid M. Baa Public Library and Archives in Charlotte Amalie; the Ralph M. Paiewonsky Library of the University of the Virgin Islands on the St. Thomas campus; the Caribbean Collection and Archives of the Florence Williams Public Library in Christiansted; the Library of the University of the Virgin Islands on the St. Croix campus; and the Morris Library of the University of Delaware.

Regardless of all the help I have received, I alone am responsible for any errors or shortcomings in this second edition.

W.W.B.
Newark, Delaware
March 2010

Preface to the First Edition

Ever since I wrote a master's thesis in 1949, entitled *Civil Liberties in the Virgin Islands of the United States*, I harbored the intention of updating that work and publishing it as a book. Accordingly, I returned to the Islands for this purpose. Knowing that a scholarly history of the Islands, that emphasized or adequately treated the American period, had yet to be written, I abandoned the effort of updating my thesis* and decided to write that history of the Islands from the time of their discovery by Columbus in 1493 to the present, but with emphasis on the American period since 1917. The following is the fruit of that decision.

Columbus named them the "Virgin Islands," and although Denmark called them the "Danish West Indies" while they were under that country's rule, the term "Virgin Islands" is generally retained throughout this work and refers to those Caribbean islands purchased by the United States in 1917, and are not to be confused with the nearby British Virgin Islands.

A number of difficulties confronts one bent on writing a serious history of the Virgin Islands. Foremost, of course, is the expense, especially for a mainlander. Besides round-trip airfare; the cost of living in the Islands substantially exceeds that of the mainland. By avoiding the tourist season—roughly December through May—and living frugally, I was able to maximize my expenditures during seven research visits over a three-year period. Newly-made friends in the Islands were great money-saving helpers. A special debt of gratitude is owed to the late Dr. Charles P. Messick who had provided for a special fund to cover my professional expenses to supplement the Charles P. Messick Professorship I hold at the University of Delaware. My research in the Islands was also supported by a grant from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society, and I am particularly grateful in this respect to George W. Corner, Chairman of the Society's Committee on Research. Finally, a grant from the Dean's office of the College of Arts and Science, University of Delaware, supported the typing of this book manuscript.

* The thesis, nevertheless, was published in 1982 by Antilles Graphic Arts, Inc., Sunny Isle, St. Croix.

Another difficulty for scholars is the paucity of reliable statistics and historical records in the Islands. Here the situation is not only deplorable, but it is sad. Despite frequent declamations of Virgin Islanders of the need to protect and preserve the culture of the Islands, in point of fact few Islanders are interested in establishing a well organized and professionally administered, government supported, territorial archives service that would bring together copies—if not originals—of those documents concerning the history of the Islands that are known to repose in the national archives of Denmark, The Netherlands, Germany, England, France, Portugal, Spain, a number of African countries, and the United States. Of these, the archives of Denmark and the United States are the most important.

Assuming availability of necessary research funds, it is not enough for a researcher to have linguistic facility in the Danish language to research the archives in Copenhagen. The researcher must also be competent to transcribe the old Gothic script in which Danish documents are written, or be provided with translator service. Some Virgin Islanders believe that some of those documents that reflect adversely on Danish rule have been purged from the Danish archives. This may be true, but apparently more than three thousand linear shelf feet of historical documents relating to the Islands still remain untapped in the Royal Archives of Denmark. Most of these materials, which pertain to the history of the Virgin Islands prior to 1917, are unregistered, unmicrofilmed, and, therefore, simply unavailable to scholars.

Only one scholarly study of the Islands under Danish rule, based on research of Danish archival material, has ever been published in English, namely Waldemar Westergaard's *The Danish West Indies Under Company Rule, 1671–1754* (1917). Scholars interested in undertaking Danish archival research would be required to spend several years in Denmark, to learn the Danish language and archaic Gothic script, and to spend much money. Hopefully, this problem in time may become resolved, but it will require considerable funding by the United States Government under an agreement with the Government of Denmark.

In 1977, the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) modestly funded a feasibility study for planning the microfilming of documents in the Danish and other archives relating to the history of the Virgin Islands, undertaken by George Tyson of the controversial Island Resources Foundation (IRF) of St. Thomas, and resulting in his paper *The Historical Records of the U.S. Virgin Islands: A Report and Program Plan* (1977). This plan called for establishment of a Virgin Islands Historical Records Program and suggested that the Virgin Islands government contract with the nongovernmental IRF to implement, coordinate, and administer it. Lieutenant Governor Henry Millin of

the Virgin Islands, among others, charged that this proposal was an attempt to usurp government functions in establishing an archival service in the Islands in violation of UNESCO standards. IRF's subsequent proposal to NEH for funding Mr. Tyson to write a pre-1917 history of the Virgin Islands, largely based on Danish archival research, was not approved.

Meanwhile, the Virgin Islands government has no archives, except in name only, having changed the name of the St. Thomas Public Library in 1978 to the Enid M. Baa Library and Archives. The Government of the Virgin Islands has no filing or records system, no records retention system, and no archives system. Each government official decides what records under his or her jurisdiction should be retained or destroyed. As each Governor has left office, he has taken his files with him. The scholar, given such anarchy, is thus denied access to important public records.

After Governor Melvin Evans took office in 1971, he acquired an old ship that formerly served as a navy prison on the Great Lakes. Some government files since 1972 are stored in cardboard boxes in the hold of this decrepit ship, which is located on the western end of St. Thomas Harbor, under lock and key and without any staff or supervision. No directory of their location exists, and access to these records requires the written permission of the Lieutenant Governor. The boxes of files are stacked haphazardly in this damp, unlighted hold exposed to rot and rodents. A worse place for housing public records could not exist. In St. Croix, all public safety records were allegedly destroyed in 1974 because they were stored in mahogany file cases that someone wanted. Other public records said to have been stored in the old fort in Frederiksted—site of the emancipation of slaves in 1848—are rumored to have been burned to make the fort usable for the 1976 bicentennial celebrations.

The records in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., pertaining to the Virgin Islands have been quite useful. Record Group 55, Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands, totals 190 cubic feet and covers the period of U.S. administration of the Islands from 1917 to 1943, but a few documents date as late as 1950. There are additional records in other record groups in the National Archives relating to the governing of the Virgin Islands by the United States Government. Most of these represent records of agencies in Washington that have had supervisory responsibilities of one kind or another over the Islands. Of particular significance are records of the Interior Department's Office of Territories and its predecessor, the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, relating to the supervision of the insular government from 1931 to 1951. I express my gratitude to Richard C. Crawford of the National Archives, who served as my contact archivist.

Charles F. Reid edited in 1941 his comprehensive and annotated *Bibliography of the Virgin Islands of the United States* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co.), which has proven a quite usable indicator of sources for me. Professor Arnold R. Highfield of the St. Croix branch of the College of the Virgin Islands is in the process of updating Reid's bibliography. He is also engaged in translating the works of the Moravian missionary Oldendorp, which should shed considerable light on the history of slavery in the Islands. I am indebted to Dr. Highfield for his suggestions regarding sources, for insights he has shared, and for his edited volume, *A Bibliography of Articles on the Danish West Indies and the United States Virgin Islands in the New York Times 1867–1975* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978) on which I relied.

I am also indebted to history Professor Marilyn F. Krigger of the College of the Virgin Islands in St. Thomas. Professor Krigger directed me to many sources and read the entire manuscript. Her prudent observations and constructive comments have proven very helpful and I thank her for her generosity, encouragement, and interest.

I wish, too, to especially acknowledge: Blanca Ropes, former Deputy Clerk of the U.S. District Court in St. Croix, for facilitating my research and helping me gain access to court records and other documents; George Goodwin, President of the Alien Interest Movement in St. Thomas, for his many kindnesses that enhanced my understanding of the problems of foreign workers and their dependents in the Islands; and Attorney Gustav A. Danielson, CPA, for imparting to me understanding of many complexities of public finance and utilities regulation in the Islands as well as directing me to various sources that would otherwise have remained undiscovered.

My greatest debt of gratitude is owed to John P. Collins, whose rare empathy and altruism prompted him to share with me his extensive personal files on public affairs in the Islands and to introduce me to anyone he thought could help me. Knowing him has enriched this book and my life.

There are many others whose help of one kind or another evokes my grateful acknowledgement. Listed alphabetically, they are: George Alexis, Attorney Edwin Armstrong, Enid M. Baa, Ulrich Benjamin, Attorney James A. Bough, Attorney Robert Bowles, Commissioner Milton C. Branch, Omar Brown, Anvil Browne, Annamaria Carrera, Senator Hector Cintron, Vincen M. "Beef" Clendinen, Luc Cuadrado, Attorney Mario N. de Chabert, Delegate Ron de Lugo, Dr. Peter P. de Zela, Professor Isaac Dookhan, Chuck Downs, Professor Thomas Drake, Attorney Thomas Elliot, Gerard Emanuel, Governor Melvin H. Evans, Jeffrey Farrow, Janet Foster, Comptroller Darrell E. Fleming, Geraldo Guirty, the late Governor William H. Hastie, James E. Henry, Elroy Hill, Delita Jacobs, Larry Kavanaugh, Professor Paul Leary, June Linqvist, Senator John

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I am indebted, too, for the helpful assistance of the staffs of the Public Libraries of St. Thomas and St. Croix, the Library of Congress in Washington, and the Morris Library of the University of Delaware.

This book would not have been written without the encouragement of my wife, Barbara Massey Boyer, who read the entire manuscript and offered many perceptive criticisms and suggestions.

Regardless of all the help I have received from many different quarters and persons, I alone remain responsible for the errors and shortcomings in this book.

W. W. B.
Newark, Delaware
May, 1982

Introduction

When most Americans think about the Caribbean, they may think of Fidel Castro's Cuba, because it was the Castro regime that brought them the Bay of Pigs, the missile crisis, the Soviet presence in the Caribbean and the flood of refugees into Florida. Relatively few Americans think of the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, and still fewer think of the little noted Virgin Islands of the United States—represented as tiny specks on the map. This last condition, however, is changing, for the U.S. Virgin Islands are rapidly beginning to rival Florida and California as a popular tourist mecca.

Most continental Americans can be forgiven for not knowing about their American microcolony—the U.S. Virgin Islands. After all, this island group has been given slight attention in history books, by scholars, or even by the contemporary press. Indeed, the American news media—whose job it is to know about such places—is woefully ignorant about the American Virgin Islands and the surrounding Caribbean. For example, while a filmstrip on television's ABC evening news of April 6, 1979, was depicting a volcanic eruption on the British Windward Caribbean island of St. Vincent, commentator Frank Reynolds wrongly informed a nationwide audience of millions that St. Vincent was one of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The United States Virgin Islands are a small group of islands, constituting the easternmost point of U.S. territory, located midway in the great curving archipelago of Caribbean islands—stretching from Cuba to Trinidad—between the Greater Antilles to the west and the Lesser Antilles to the east and south. The U.S. Virgin Islands consist of three main islands—St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix—and about fifty small islets and cays, the largest of which are: Hassel Island and Water Island guarding the harbor of St. Thomas; Outer Brass, Inner Brass, Hans Lollik, and Thatch Cay surrounding St. Thomas; Loango off the coast of St. John; and Buck Island immediately to the north of St. Croix.

Located at a latitude of 18 degrees north of the equator and a longitude of 64 degrees west of Greenwich, St. Croix lies completely within the Caribbean,

while the southern shores of St. Thomas and St. John are washed by the Caribbean Sea and their northern shores by the Atlantic Ocean.

The Virgin Islands are approximately 1,400 miles southeast of New York City, 990 miles east-southeast of Miami, and 1,035 miles northeast of the Panama Canal. St. Thomas is about 40 miles east of Puerto Rico and 40 miles north of St. Croix, while St. John is 3 miles east of St. Thomas and immediately adjacent to the British Virgin Islands, most prominent of which is Tortola. The three main islands total an area of about 132 square miles only. St. Croix is the largest, St. Thomas second, and St. John the smallest. At their greatest extremities, St. Croix is about 22 miles long and 6 miles wide with an area of about 84 square miles; St. Thomas is about 13 miles long and 2 to 3 miles wide with an area of about 28 square miles; and St. John is about 9 miles long and 5 miles wide with an area of about 20 square miles.

Volcanic in origin, the Islands are hilly, with St. Thomas and St. John having the highest peaks, and with St. Croix's northwest quadrant being a rugged, rain-forested area rising sharply from the water's edge, and its eastern promontory beyond its main port, Christiansted, consisting of a rough, arid, hilly tract. St. Croix, however, is topographically more diverse and is dominated by a broad rolling coastal plain covering its central and southern portions. Otherwise, the Islands are devoid of flat land. Innumerable bays, fringed by white sandy beaches, dent their coasts, especially those of St. Thomas and St. John, offering protection through the years for ships, smugglers, and pirates and, more recently, offering relaxation to tourists. St. Thomas Harbor, Coral Bay in St. John, and Christiansted Harbor in St. Croix are the most outstanding of these indentations.

Except for a few streams on St. Croix, the Islands have no rivers. Together with a relatively low rainfall and low moisture-holding capacity of the soils, the Islands have been plagued with frequent droughts and water shortages. Lying directly in the hurricane track, the Islands have also suffered occasionally from the destructive winds and floods wrought by hurricanes and tropical storms, most notably in the years of 1765, 1772, 1785, 1819, 1837, 1867, 1916, 1928, 1979, 1989, and 1995.

The Virgin Islands, however, are appropriately called "America's Paradise," and enjoy a near-perfect climate with an average temperature of 78 degrees throughout the year. Each island has something unique to offer the visitor—the Old World charm, architecture, and ruins of St. Croix, the most Danish of the Islands; the incomparable panoramic view from the mountain tops of St. Thomas of one of the most beautiful enclosed harbors in the world; and the

unspoiled, natural, relaxed setting of forested mountains and valleys of St. John which boasts the most beautiful beaches in the Caribbean.

The Virgin Islands are rich in Native American lore and artifacts; the Islands having been inhabited successively by three main Indian groups—the Ciboneys, the Arawaks, and the Caribs. It was allegedly at Salt River in St. Croix, on Columbus' second voyage in 1493, that the Spaniards had their first reported hostile action with New World Indians—the Caribs. As the Virgin Islands became colonized, the last of the Caribs vanished.

At present, the population of the Islands comprises a diverse mixture of peoples, including descendants of African slaves and of European (Danish, Spanish, Portuguese, and Scottish) settlers, as well as immigrants from the Eastern Caribbean, Puerto Ricans, and people from the mainland of the United States. Virgin Islanders, themselves, distinguish between native Virgin Islanders, “down-islanders” from other Caribbean islands, Puerto Ricans, continentals, French, Jews, Arabs, and persons from the Dominican Republic.

Natives, continentals, and Puerto Ricans include both black and white residents, and there are many Virgin Islanders of mixed blood, but blacks comprise the great majority. In addition, many continentals—including condominium dwellers, students, etc.—are itinerant residents living in the Islands for only part of a year. Not included are upward to 2 million tourists who visit the Islands each year.

Since the 2000 census does not break down these groups, it is not possible to know their numbers. The census fixed the total population at 108,612, with St. Croix numbering 53,234, St. Thomas at 51,181, and St. John at 4,197. The racial makeup of the territory was 76.19 percent Black or African descent, 13.09 percent White, and 7.23 percent from other races. Hispanic or Latino of any race was 13.99 percent of the population.

In many respects, the American Virgin Islands are a microcosm of the human family. The diversity of their physical environment is matched by the diversity of their people. This is a history of the Virgin Islands of the United States. It is a record of the people of the Virgin Islands and the struggles of their greater number as slaves, serfs, and citizens to gain control of their own destiny. This is a history, broadly conceived, of human rights and human wrongs.