

**An Analysis of the Political Career of Sir Thomas Modyford and
His Years as Governor of Jamaica, 1664-1671**

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Introduction

Thomas Modyford is among the most important and colorful figures in Caribbean and colonial history. As Governor of Jamaica, his policies encouraged and promoted privateering as no governors before or after were able to do. His name has become synonymous with British privateering during the 1660s, and he counted among his best friends such infamous figures as Henry Morgan. Expeditions he organized and sponsored were responsible for the capture of numerous Dutch and Spanish colonies, both with and without the official sanction of the British government. The Spanish in particular suffered from his maneuverings; in fact they feared and hated him so much that one of the unspoken agreements of the Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1670 was his removal as Governor.

There can be no doubt of Modyford's political adroitness. His defections from the Royalist to the Commonwealth cause in Barbados in 1652, then back to the Royalist camp in 1660, all without losing status or favor, should be proof enough of that. However, any belief that his maneuverings were solely for his own benefit and that the best interests of England and the Caribbean never entered his mind sells Modyford short, because exercising his office was not as simple as it may appear on the surface. Modyford was a brilliant tactical politician, who had a knack for appearing to be on everyone's side without compromising his own interests. Because of his family connections he had a system that allowed him to send both official and unofficial reports to the home country, and this allowed him considerable flexibility in setting agendas. Because of his personal background, Modyford came to the office with the perspective of both colonist and English citizen. The combination of factors largely contributed to

the success of his term as Governor. His balanced perspective furthered his instinctive political gifts, but it also kept Jamaica firmly British during a decade in which Caribbean possessions changed ownership constantly. This is the reason Modyford is important to study. His judicious balancing of obedience to his superiors in the British government with the best interests of Jamaica and Port Royal—two items often in stark opposition to each other—is a case study rarely matched in the history of European Colonialism. By studying Modyford, the conflicts he faced, and the largely successful solutions he engineered, it is possible to gain insights into the larger picture of the parent-colony dynamic at this time, particularly in the British Empire.

Thesis

Thomas Modyford's policies on privateering and Spanish relations, while aided and abetted by his political skill, were largely driven by a complex interaction between local and distant domestic pressures, the actions of the Spanish themselves, and the necessity of promoting and defending the region he was charged with governing. Without this dynamic, self-reinforcing loop of inside-outside action and reaction, the "Governor Modyford" of today's history books would not exist.

Historiographical Opinion of Modyford's Success

Thomas Modyford's tenure in Jamaica has received mixed reviews from twentieth century historians. However, it difficult to spell out competing schools of thought because very few works have focused on Modyford as the principal subject. It is easier to analyze his status within the historical community by the context in which he is treated, rather than by the usual method of examining specific theories developed over the years. Historians whose works focus on Modyford himself or on the development

of Jamaica generally have the most favorable views of his actions and character. Those focusing on other areas of the Caribbean tend, not surprisingly, to see him in less glowing terms. The most diverse opinions, and to some degree the most objective, come from historians who have written analyses of Charles II, British restoration government, and foreign policy related topics.

To the historian Carlton Rowe Williams belongs the distinction of writing the most detailed summary of Modyford's life and career to date. He is also perhaps the most sympathetic towards Modyford. Williams names him as one who stands tall among the most prominent men of the early English Empire, and prefers to focus on his virtues and accomplishments while downplaying his mistakes. Williams sees him as a complex and fascinating figure, "Shrewd, suspicious, calculating, determined, ambitious, and self-willed, yet at the same time . . . charming, witty, magnanimous, concerned about men's welfare, and dedicated to justice."¹ At the same time, however, he admits that the complexity of Modyford's character will probably always inspire debate, which the differing opinions of other historians would seem to bear out.

Other historians to date have only treated Modyford within much broader contexts. They all admit he was a shrewd and skilled Governor, and did well to deal with Jamaica's short-term problems, but many take a decidedly less appreciative view of his long-term accomplishments and his character as a whole.

British historian Vincent Harlow, who in the 1920s wrote a historical survey of seventeenth-century Barbados, spoke for some historians examining other areas of the Caribbean. He depicted Modyford as a schemer and an opportunist using his abilities to

¹ Williams, "Thomas Modyford," 653

benefit himself first and foremost. While this was an indisputable part of Modyford's character, to focus on it unfairly neglects his love of King and Country, which also played roles in Modyford's thinking. However, such a view is hardly surprising when one considers that Harlow is sympathetic towards Barbados, a colony governed by the Willoughby family. Since they had what was at best a strained relationship with the Modyfords after 1652, Harlow would naturally hold a less congenial view of the latter.

Another British historian, A.P. Thornton, wrote a detailed examination of British colonial policy during the restoration. With the exception of one glaring mistake, he treats Modyford with reasonable objectivity, which is all the more interesting given that he credits Harlow as one of his advisors. Thornton's Modyford is an astute Governor who used what he had to good advantage, but did little to assist Jamaica's long-term growth.

These are some of the prevailing views on Modyford among historians studying early modern Britain and the Caribbean. Until more in-depth studies of his life and character are conducted, these contextual analyses will have to suffice as the primary foundation for judging him.

Family Background

Thomas Modyford was born in Devonshire in 1620. He was the eldest of five sons, and their father was a former mayor of Exeter. He received extensive schooling, eventually deciding on a career in law and receiving training as a barrister. One of his cousins was George Monck, one of the most influential men in England. It was Monck who was Cromwell's chief general during the Interregnum, but it was Monck who was also most directly responsible for restoring Charles II to the throne after Cromwell's

death. As a reward for Monck's service, Charles II created the new title of Duke of Albemarle and bestowed it upon him. Having a cousin he was on good terms with so close to the King would prove a blessing for Modyford many times over.

Education and Training

Modyford began his studies in a Latin grammar school at the tender age of six. The English grammar school aimed to teach boys to read, write, and speak Latin, thereby preparing them to eventually study at a university or the Inns of Court.² After six years of study Lincoln's Inn, the oldest and most prestigious of the Inns of Court, accepted him as a student during the Christmas season in 1632. Modyford was eleven years old at the time; normally boys did not move on to advanced studies before at least age fourteen. Modyford proved a capable and industrious student in his six years of grammar school, however, and sufficiently advanced in his Latin, so the Inn made an exception. Modyford left Exeter for London in January 1633 accompanied by his cousin Richard Duck, who was already a student at Lincoln's Inn and agreed to act as Thomas' caregiver in the beginning.

Except for occasional visits home, and a stretch of about 18 months in 1636 and 1637 when plague forced the Inns to close, Modyford spent the next eight years of his life at the Inns and the surrounding London area. Although he never strayed from his studies and training to become a lawyer, he also took advantage of London's worldliness. He exposed himself to many different opinions and ways of life. These experiences arguably developed his political skill as effectively as the formal legal and political training he received from Lincoln's Inn. He certainly would not have

² Williams, 93

experienced such a menagerie of beliefs and lifestyles by remaining in Exeter.

Modyford received his call to the bar in 1639, and in the spring of 1640 he walked out of Lincoln's Inn, a professional lawyer ready to launch his career.³

Early Years in the Caribbean

Thomas Modyford's time in the Caribbean began with his arrival in Barbados in 1647. He passed the years between leaving Lincoln's Inn and leaving for the Caribbean in his home region of Exeter and Devonshire. This part of England remained firmly Royalist during the English Civil War, and for a time Modyford involved himself in both Royalist activity and his budding legal practice. However, he was too restless and ambitious a man to remain content as a country squire, especially in a country moving towards control by Roundheads. He therefore began looking for a place where he could begin a new life and bequeath a lasting legacy to his descendents, and quickly decided on the Caribbean. Accordingly, he left an England whose Puritan grimness was little to his liking and traveled to Barbados with a few thousand pounds in his pocket.⁴ Barbados was a natural choice because it was a haven for Royalists during the English Civil War. In a fine example of historical irony, it was not Barbados but rather Antigua for which Modyford initially set sail. Unfortunately Modyford's supply ship sank en route, stranding him on Barbados until more servants and supplies could be sent. By the time the relief ship arrived, Modyford decided he liked Barbados better and remained there. Upon his arrival, Modyford set himself up as a landowner, purchasing approximately 500 acres of farmland for growing sugar, tobacco, ginger, and cotton.⁵

³ Williams, 171

⁴ Pope, The Buccaneer King, 52

⁵ Pope, 52-53

As with most Caribbean islands, landowners held a great deal of power in Barbados. This suited Modyford well, and his political connections through Monck could only improve his position.

Two of the contradictions that surround Modyford are evident even in these early years. They illustrate well Modyford's political adroitness, and the ability to place himself on both sides of the fence that served him so well during his years as Governor. Although he was a Royalist at heart, he never came out and openly declared his support for one side or the other. Instead, he departed for a Royalist-held island, but without severing his connection to Monck. Since Monck served as a general under Cromwell, he was obviously no Royalist. Rather, he shared Modyford's gift for practical politics, always charting the most expedient and popular course. After Cromwell's death, he stepped in with his army and facilitated the restoration of Charles II because he could sense it was what the majority of English people wanted.⁶ He also shared Modyford's vision of British expansion in the Western Hemisphere, which is probably one of the reasons they got along well. The second contradiction lies in Modyford's position as a landowner. During this time, and into the years beyond his term as Governor, plantation owners and privateers rarely got along. Each had needs and goals that often contradicted each other, especially in trade and other economic realms. Although they shared a common interest in preventing the opening of trade with Spain, which would drastically reduce available privateering jobs and raise the price of slaves for plantation owners, in most other respects they had little in common. Modyford, however, proved to be much more supportive of both privateering and opening trade than his landowning

⁶ Pope. 83

background would suggest. Having been a landowner, though, he was conscious of their concerns, and one of his great achievements was avoiding the landowner-privateer conflicts that plagued other governors, especially on the larger islands such as Jamaica.

Years in Barbados

Most of Modyford's involvement in Barbadian politics does not need to be examined in detail here. What is important to know is the skill Modyford showed by furthering his career in a swirl of opposing currents that could have easily sucked in and drowned a lesser man. There are two events during his seventeen years on the island that capture this perfectly; his actions during the Royalist-Parliamentarian conflict of 1651-52, and his maneuverings against Governor Searle after 1656.

Even several years after the execution of Charles I and establishment of the Commonwealth, Barbados remained stubbornly Royalist. Governor Francis Lord Willoughby led this position of no compromise. He got along well with Modyford, as both men shared loyalty to the kingship, but a dislike of arbitrary rule. Willoughby, unlike Modyford, had initially sided with Parliament, but radicals on that side and his personal beliefs soon turned him firmly Royalist for the duration of the conflict.⁷ Prince Charles in exile appointed Willoughby Governor of Barbados in 1650, shortly before Parliament essentially declared war on the island.

Meanwhile, Modyford wasted no time involving himself in island affairs once he decided to remain. Fittingly, he led the moderate faction of Barbadian Royalists who favored reaching a compromise with Parliament. He maintained this position after a blockading fleet arrived in 1651 demanding surrender. Willoughby gave appearances at

⁷ Harlow, Barbados 1625-1685, 56

times of being interested in negotiation, but it was a show to please the moderates; he stubbornly held out. The situation deteriorated into a stalemate. The Parliamentary fleet did not have enough men available to attempt an invasion of the island, but Barbados did not have the weapons to drive the fleet away. Finally, after the extreme Royalists sabotaged several attempts at negotiation, Modyford took the initiative to resolve the situation. He assembled a meeting of moderates, announced to great approval his intention to bring peace by force, if necessary, and shortly afterward brought the regiment under his command over to the Parliamentary forces. This not only made an invasion by Parliamentary forces possible, but also sapped the spirit of the remaining defenders, so that when the invasion came it quickly ended with scarcely a shot fired.

After the surrender, Modyford worked hard to remain in favor with the Commonwealth government. On the island, his peers elected him Speaker of the Assembly in 1652. He held the position until his unpopular support for Cromwell's invasion of Cuba and Jamaica in 1655—troops which at Modyford's invitation spent several months camped in Barbados caused a great deal of disruption on the island—led people to vote him out of office. At the time, he wrote his brother that he was, "Glad to be out of politics for the time being."⁸ The respite did not last long. A game of cat-and-mouse that began in 1658 illustrates the importance of connections—a lesson Modyford never forgot.

The two central combatants in this struggle were Thomas Modyford and Daniel Searle, appointed Governor of Barbados. The rift arose in 1655 while the invasion

⁸ Harlow, 114

forces stayed on Barbados, and continued three years later. Each man had agents at Whitehall in London pleading his case. Modyford's men argued that Searle and the island government were disloyal to the Commonwealth, while Searle's men protested against what they felt were unnecessary interventions by the Commonwealth on island affairs. One of Searle's men noted that without steady and powerful support, "So bitter was the attack against Searle that it would have gone hard with him."⁹ Cromwell heard both sides, sometimes favoring one and sometimes the other. Modyford eventually realized that Searle's alliances made him temporarily impregnable and made a show of reconciliation, biding his time until a more favorable opportunity should occur.¹⁰

The favorable opportunity was not long in coming. Cromwell died in September, which caused the influence of Searle's supporters to greatly decline. They advised him to keep a low profile and avoid antagonizing anyone, but the Barbadians had other ideas. They sent a long petition to Parliament, essentially requesting independence in all but name. Modyford's supporters immediately twisted this to make it seem as if the island was in a state of rebellion and ready to renounce England entirely.¹¹ Although the Governor and Assembly quickly protested that this was not their goal at all, Modyford's gambit made the desired impression. On April 24, 1660, Parliament responded to the petition by naming Modyford the new Governor of Barbados. This was their compromise; they would not give up the right to appoint a Governor, but for the first time they were willing to make him a man from within the colony. At the same

⁹ Harlow, 120

¹⁰ Harlow, 121

¹¹ Harlow, 124

time, they also declared the Council of the island would henceforth be an elected body as well.¹²

Modyford's first appointment as Governor was a great victory, but also short-lived. His appointment was one of the last acts of Parliament before the Restoration began, an event that made his newly won commission as worthless as the paper it was printed on. Having come so far though, Modyford did not give up without a fight. No sooner did he receive word of the pending restoration than he became a Royalist once again, proclaiming his Majesty's right and title to the dominions of England and her dependencies.¹³ Obviously this was as much a bid to maintain power as it was a return to the beliefs he held closest to his heart. He need not have worried about the King's favor. Charles had written one of Modyford's supporters even before the Restoration that, "Of [Modyford] I have heretofore had a very good opinion, [and] will pardon and forget all that is done amiss." However, the law automatically restored the proprietorship of Barbados along with the King, and the original proprietary holder, the Earl of Carlisle, had signed a twenty-one year lease agreement to Francis Lord Willoughby in 1647. Charles himself had approved the lease and appointed Willoughby as royal Governor at that time. Since the old agreements did not expire until 1668, Willoughby by right still had first claim to the governorship. Accordingly, Modyford soon found himself out of a job and governed by a man ousted from power by Modyford's double-dealings less than a decade before. Defeat was temporary, however, as Modyford soon began a second term as elected Speaker of the Assembly, a position he held until Charles II appointed him to govern Jamaica in 1664. This time,

¹² Harlow, 125

no political intrigues or questions of ownership and authority stood in the way of his new position.

There can be little doubt that the stroke of bad luck which stranded Modyford on Barbados turned out to be a wonderful blessing for his career. Barbados was the most prominent and important island the British owned in the Caribbean, and his elected political positions and timely actions brought positive attention from both Cromwell and Charles II. In addition, he learned or reinforced many valuable lessons during his turbulent years on the island. He learned lessons about how to deal with royal authorities at home, the importance of having friends in the right places, how to persuade the governed inhabitants to see things the way he wanted, and other such skills that would prove invaluable during his tenure in Jamaica. It is doubtful that Antigua would have provided such valuable preparation, or that he would have received as much notice no matter how high he rose in the Antiguan government.

An Overview of the Caribbean in 1664

The British at the time of Modyford's commission held a large set of islands in the Antilles, plus Jamaica. There was also Providence Island further west, which changed hands between the British and the Spanish as frequently as one or the other could spare a fleet to land there and evict the current set of colonists. The biggest and best English colony was Barbados, first settled in 1625. The remainder were mostly among the group that would come to be known as the Leeward Islands. These were Antigua, Barbuda, St. Christopher's, Nevis, Montserrat, and Anguilla. All of these were legally claimed and colonized by the British under international law. Jamaica was neither

¹³ Harlow, 126

claimed nor colonized legally, which made it something of a special case when compared to the other British islands. Under the structure of the proprietary ownership patent, the Governor of Barbados also served as chief Governor of all the British Leeward Islands, though in practice he delegated his authority to separate governors he appointed on each island. Only the Governor of Jamaica was not under his authority, making him in effect the only co-equal of Barbados' Governor.

There were two basic classes of Englishmen living and working in the West Indies, planters and seamen. Anyone who came to settle on land in the colonies pretty much had to either own or work on a farm or plantation. Very few could make a living owning businesses in town without at least a small farm on the side, and all of the government officials on every island were plantation owners. Those unwilling to work the land often had little recourse but to become sailors. There were several kinds of sailors operating at various times. Merchant ships came and went to trade goods, and there were a few frigates of the Royal Navy here and there. Neither the military nor the merchants were averse to hiring—or occasionally impressing into service—a few extra hands. Privateering was also an option. Privateer captains owned their own ships and received commissions from island Governors authorizing them to conduct raids and reprisals against whoever the enemy of the month happened to be, and privateering expeditions always recruited fresh volunteers with the promise of spoils and good pay. Finally, there was piracy. While superficially similar, pirates differed from privateers in one crucial detail: they acted with no legal commission from anyone. Piracy was an act punishable by death.

These were the British possessions in the Caribbean. A brief look at the other sea powers reveals that Spain not surprisingly controlled the most territory. Spanish settlements studded the entire mainland from Venezuela to northern Mexico, creating the famous "Spanish Main." They also owned Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, and most of Hispaniola at this time. The Dutch owned one major island, Curaçao off the coast of South America, and several smaller islands in the Leeward group. The French held few possessions, chief of which were Guadeloupe and Martinique in the Leewards and Tortuga on Hispaniola, Port Royal's chief rival as a privateering base. However, they made up for their lack of colonies with the largest naval military presence in the region.

British foreign relations at the time Modyford became Governor

England's relations with three other European countries—France, Spain, and the Netherlands—drove its foreign policy in the Caribbean. Since the political currents from the Old World continually shifted, and an enemy one day might become a friend the next week, it made for an interesting game of West Indies hopscotch. Privateers found themselves under orders to attack one power and leave another alone, when in fact they wished to do precisely the opposite. A Governor would commission a privateer to raid a city, then discover shortly after the privateer sailed that peace had been declared with the nation owning that city, forcing the Governor—if he chose—to attempt a speedy recall of the departed privateer by dispatching an intercepting ship.

When Modyford took his post in June of 1664, war was brewing between the English and Dutch. This was not a particularly popular situation in England, because many people felt the two Protestant powers should stick together, and the sentiment extended to the Caribbean. This was primarily a commercial war, the origins of which

lay with English-Dutch conflicts over the Gold Coast in Africa. The pressure for war with the Dutch came primarily from Parliament, merchants, and seafaring classes.¹⁴ More popular among the English in the home country was war with France, a situation that was also declining because of France's alliance with the Dutch. Modyford himself was particularly eager for war with the Dutch, as they were greater trading rivals in the Caribbean than the French. He even went so far as to submit a plan to root the enemy out of all their Caribbean islands, which earned him a government commendation.¹⁵

If Modyford desired war with the Dutch, however, the citizens of Jamaica were far less enthusiastic about it, particularly those engaged in privateering. The impending war took the focus off Spain's colonies.¹⁶ To the privateers, that was precisely the problem. French and Dutch colonies offered far less available wealth and plunder, and Modyford knew this as well as any privateer in the Caribbean.¹⁷ Nevertheless, politics required him to focus on granting commissions against the northern Europeans at this time despite local resistance. As he complained to Albemarle, had he been given sufficient backing force (i.e., frigates) he would have, "Compelled them to accomplish his Majesty's intentions by attacking the Dutch."¹⁸ Politically, Spain could be dealt with later. Practicality proved this impossible.

War with the Dutch formally broke out in 1665 after a year of undeclared skirmishing. It lasted until 1667, but lost momentum in the Caribbean long before then. Instead it turned into a war in Europe against the Dutch, the French, and the Habsburg

¹⁴ Feiling, *British Foreign Policy 1660-1672*, 130

¹⁵ Feiling, 136

¹⁶ Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 111

¹⁷ Pawson and Buisseret, *Port Royal, Jamaica*, 26

¹⁸ Modyford to Arlington, 30 July 1667. Reprinted in Pope, 133

league, the latter of whom were not a sea power. The war went badly for England, as can be seen from the tone of Charles II's address to parliament in January of 1666.

The confidence of this made me anticipate that small part of my revenue, which was unanticipated, for the payment of my seamen. And my credit hath gone farther than I had reason to think it would, but 'tis now at an end.

This is the first day I have heard of any money towards a Supply...and what it will amount to, God knows. And what time I have to make such preparations as are necessary to meet three such enemies as I have, you can well enough judge.¹⁹

However, these circumstances were of little concern to the average privateer in Port Royal. They were not interested in grandiose exercises of statecraft, the status of England in Europe vis-a-vis the other great powers, or any of the other threads in the tapestry of continental power. The average privateer concerned himself with where he could earn money, where his next meal was coming from, and what offered the greatest potential rewards for himself and his crew. National loyalists among Caribbean buccaneers were few and far between. If they could not get desirable commissions from the English, the vast majority would not hesitate to obtain them from whomever else offered a better deal. In this case, a better deal meant a legal commission to attack the Spanish. One incident in particular typifies this attitude. Modyford attempted to convince a group of privateers to attack Dutch Curaçao, but as Colonel William Beeston wrote, "These parcel of privateers and ships were commanded by Mansfield, and he cared for dealing with no enemy but the Spaniards, nor would go against Curaçao"²⁰ In fact, Charles II had issued a proclamation forbidding his subjects from even sailing against the Spanish under foreign commissions, but as Beeston went on to note, "Neither were any of them being taken any notice of for continually

¹⁹ King Charles II Address to Parliament, 18 January 1666

²⁰ Journal of Colonel William Beeston, 10 November 1665. Reprinted in Pope, 122

plundering the Spaniards, it being what was desired by the generality." This was a typical example of the conflicting wills Modyford dealt with as Governor, especially early in his term of office.

Early responses to privateering

Thomas Modyford first set foot in Jamaica on June 4, 1664. Among his possessions, he carried instructions from Secretary of State Arlington that expressly prohibited him from granting letters of marque.²¹ A letter from King Charles II, sent only eleven days after Modyford's arrival, in fact reinforced these instructions:

His majesty cannot sufficiently express his dissatisfaction at the daily complaints of violence and depredation...[you are] again strictly commanded not only to forbid the prosecution of such violence for the future, but to inflict condign punishment upon offenders, and to have the entire restitution and satisfaction made to the sufferers.²²

Whether Modyford ever intended to follow those instructions or not can only be guessed at by historians, who are by no means in agreement. What is clear is that he began his term of office by making all the right gestures. One of the first things he did after arriving was to convene a meeting of the Jamaican governing council; whereat he repealed all existing privateering commissions.²³ In addition, he sent letters to the governors of Spanish-owned Santo Domingo and Cartagena, assuring them of his peaceful intentions and his desire for open trade between Jamaica and the Spanish possessions.²⁴

²¹ Pawson and Buisseret, 25

²² King to Modyford, 15 June 1664. Reprinted in Pope, 106

²³ Pawson and Buisseret, 25

²⁴ Lane, 111

The available evidence would indicate that Modyford's change of heart was partly predetermined and partly forced by the Port Royale. In a telling letter to Arlington, Modyford wrote that he:

Thought it more prudent to do by degrees and moderation what [Arlington] had resolved to execute suddenly and severely, hoping to gain them [the privateers] off more safely by fair means and reduce them to planting, to accomplish which he must somewhat dispense with the strictness of his instructions.²⁵

More to the point, however, was the effect that arbitrarily cutting off privateering would have had on Jamaica. Even some of Modyford's council members recognized this problem. Council president Thomas Lynch wrote to Arlington before Modyford arrived, "Naked orders to restrain them or call them in will teach them only to keep out of [Port Royal] and force them (it may be) to prey on us as well as the Spaniards."²⁶ It is significant to note that it was Lynch who said this, because in his attitudes on trade and privateering Lynch was perhaps the most pro-Spanish member of the Jamaican government, almost a surrogate for Arlington himself. Desertion is in fact exactly what happened. A certain Captain Munro, who turned to piracy after the revocation of his privateering commission, found himself arrested by the Port Royal authorities after English ships began filing complaints about his plundering. Modyford had Munro and all his men publicly hanged, then left their bodies chained and swinging from the gibbets just outside the city and in sight of the harbor for several months.²⁷ The buccaneer response to this drastic action was simple: they left for Tortuga and Hispaniola, and did not come back. Port Royal's dependence on their patronage quickly became evident, as within a few months commerce in the city had declined to disastrously low levels.

²⁵ Modyford to Arlington, 30 June 1664. Reprinted in Pawson and Buisseret, 25

²⁶ Lynch to Arlington, 25 May 1664. Reprinted in Pawson and Buisseret, 25

Whatever Modyford's original intent, it was now obvious if it had not been already that blatant and forcible anti-privateering measures were not going to work. The first half of Lynch's prediction about what would happen to Port Royal quickly proved correct, and without a remedy the other half might soon have come to pass as well. Although there is no written evidence, it is reasonable to assume that Modyford knew exactly the consequences of punishing Munro in such a fashion, and chose to use the unfortunate pirate as a tool to force the relaxation of the anti-privateering instructions he was burdened with. Modyford was neither stupid nor naïve. He knew the role privateering played in Caribbean economies, having lived seventeen years in Barbados and served in its government before leaving for Jamaica. It was obvious to anyone who was intimately familiar with colonial dynamics in the Caribbean—as Modyford and Lynch were—that whether desirable or not Modyford's orders could not be totally obeyed, or he would soon be left without a colony to govern. The planter class in Jamaica was not yet strong enough economically and politically to make up for the loss of the buccaneers in Port Royal. This was clearly a situation where the needs and desires of the parent country and the needs and desires of the colony were in conflict. Modyford, by settling the issue in a manner that satisfied both sides, first demonstrated the political skill and adept juggling which would become the hallmark of his time in office.

Modyford and Henry Morgan

Early in his term of office, Modyford came to know Henry Morgan. Together they took arguably the most direct role of anyone in shaping the Caribbean's future. They

²⁷ Pope, 107

met in part through Morgan's Uncle Edward, who was Modyford's first lieutenant Governor in Jamaica. Modyford thought very highly of his deputy, writing, "I find the character of Colonel Morgan short of his worth and am infinitely obliged to his Majesty for sending so worthy a person to assist me, whom I really cherish as my brother."²⁸ Upon his passing in 1665 Modyford wrote, "I shall never again meet with one so useful, so complacent and loving as Colonel Morgan was."²⁹ However, around the same time that Modyford received news of Edward Morgan's death, Henry returned from a highly successful privateering expedition which had kept him away since 1663, before Modyford's term as Governor began. The new Morgan would soon surpass the old in fame and reputation, especially with the ambitious Governor. Modyford was very impressed with Morgan's account of his raid. In the first example of what was to become a career-long habit, he reported the entire narrative to his superiors, but embellished and diminished facts to further his anti-Spanish agenda. To ensure that this report reached the right people, he also addressed it to the duke of Albemarle rather than Arlington to whom he normally reported. Arlington held a pro-Spanish policy as Secretary of State, and Modyford took no chances. This would also become a habit during Modyford's career. By sending his official reports to Arlington and his unofficial reports to Albemarle, both of which had the ear of the King, he cleverly ensured that his opinions and actions would be presented to Charles II through two different filters.

Modyford's relationship with Henry Morgan bears close examination. Along with Modyford's brother James, this has been dubbed the trio that would, "Stupefy the

²⁸ Modyford to Arlington, date unknown. Reprinted in Pope, 106

²⁹ Modyford to Arlington, 16 November 1665. Reprinted in Pope, 118

chanceries of Europe by the audacity of their attacks."³⁰ At a glance, it might seem strange for such men to become friends. Morgan was born in Wales to a family of soldiers; his two uncles each won renown fighting on opposite sides of the English Civil War. Morgan grew up with strictly a military education and influence on his life. As he later confessed, "The office of Judge Admiral was not given me for my understanding of the business better than others, nor for the profitableness thereof, for I left school too young to be a great proficient in that or other laws, and have been more used to the pike than the book."³¹ This is quite a bit different from Modyford's family background discussed earlier and nearly the polar opposite of the extensive education and legal training Modyford received. However, beyond the surface differences the two men had things in common. Most obviously, both of them had a connection to George Monck. Modyford was of course his cousin, and Monck knew Morgan's Uncle Thomas through the English Civil War. Both men also shared an adventurous nature and desire to expand their worldly horizons. Morgan first came to the Caribbean as part of Penn and Venables' military expedition against Hispaniola in 1655, the same expedition that would result in the eventual capture of Jamaica. It is unknown whether he volunteered for duty, or whether he was kidnapped and impressed into service. Either way, Morgan learned a great deal during the expedition, things that would serve him well when he led his own raids in the next decade.

Modyford put Morgan in charge of expeditions because he knew there was no better privateering captain available. Morgan held respect and authority among the men he recruited for raids, and if he was average or worse as a naval captain (he seldom

³⁰ Pawson and Buisseret, 28

returned with the same ship in which he left), he was unmatched in the Caribbean as a military strategist, which befitted his family background. His family connections, modest though they were, gave him name recognition with the English government, which in turn made it easier for Modyford to get away with embellishing his reports about Morgan's exploits. Furthermore, Morgan never took any actions without a clear and authentic commission from Modyford, so he was technically never guilty of breaking any laws.³²

For practical reasons then, Modyford's association with Morgan could not make more sense. Morgan's utility was not just limited to his work as a privateering captain. As a privateer himself Morgan knew the way they thought, which gave Modyford a psychological edge in dealing with restless buccaneers under his rule. Morgan's military knowledge could also be (and was) applied to the defense of the island and mustering of local militia. This was of particular concern in 1666, when Modyford discovered that local defense had deteriorated to virtually nothing, with the militia having declined from 600 men to 150, and the forts fallen into a state of disrepair.³³

Modyford's actions against the Dutch and French considered

Modyford may have earned praise for the audacity of his anti-Dutch vision in the Caribbean, but reality proved his ideas somewhat less practical. Under the command of Edward Morgan, Modyford launched a major expedition against the Dutch in April of 1665. The expedition set off to capture the Dutch possessions of Curaçao, St. Eustasius, Saba, Statia, and Bonaire, and the French possession of Tortuga, and sack

³¹ Morgan, Henry "The Office of Judge Admiral". Reprinted in Pope, 65

³² Pope, 129

³³ Pope, 122

the Dutch trading fleet at St. Kitts. If completely successful, such an expedition would have virtually wiped the Dutch out of the Caribbean and significantly weakened the French, as both would have been reduced, with the exception of French Martinique, solely to owning islands of minor significance. However, the harshness of reality quickly intruded. The buccaneers hired to man the ships mutinied before they even left port, and refused to participate until the leaders guaranteed their traditional payment of equally distributed spoils and plunder. Further complicating matters, Edward Morgan abruptly died during the capture of their first target, St. Eustasius, apparently of a heart attack. After the captures of St. Eustasius and Saba proved greatly disappointing for buccaneers accustomed to generous amounts of plunder, the new leader Colonel Cary could not persuade them to continue on to Curaçao, and the expedition straggled home as a disappointment. Modyford later dispatched a smaller expedition against the Dutch which captured Tobago early in 1666, but that was the extent of major anti-Dutch actions organized and sponsored directly by Modyford.

The reason for such a relatively small amount of activity relates to the difference between the needs of Jamaica and the needs of England, and the impossible situation in which Modyford found himself. It was in the British interest to pursue war with France and Holland at this time, or at least with Holland. The Dutch were maneuvering and competing with the British all over the globe, and they were the only nation able to challenge British mastery of the sea at this time. On the other hand, peace with France would have been preferred, but their alliance with the Dutch and fear of seeing England rule the seas unchallenged made it impossible. Louis XIV and his ministers tried as a third party to negotiate a settlement between the two commercial powers for a long

time, but when war became inevitable, France made the only logical decision for themselves. The Anglo-Dutch conflict took priority in Europe over whatever else was going on at the time, including a budding potential crisis in the succession to the Spanish throne.

For Jamaica and other parts of the British Caribbean, it was a different story. In this part of the world, Spain was the desired target. Evidence of this was shown earlier regarding the Mansfield incident, where instead of departing to take Curaçao as they were supposed to, the men instead sailed off to capture Santa Catalina from the Spanish, "Averting publicly that there was more profit with less hazard to be gotten against the Spaniard, which was their only interest."³⁴ In fact, it was probably smartest for Modyford to avoid provoking the French at least, because Tortuga was a major buccaneering base. Modyford's courting of the buccaneers paid off in this regard, because had he not sided with them before the outbreak of hostilities, it is very likely that the French would have sent an expedition against Jamaica.³⁵

Pursuing a change in policy against the Spanish in the Caribbean

The undermining and eventual reversal of Arlington's orders not to grant letters of marque against the Spanish is a good case study in Modyfordian manipulation. It was rooted, however, in a very practical need: to safeguard the city against potential assaults by the Spanish, Dutch, or French. After the *HMS Hector* and the *HMS Diamond* were sent back to England in February of 1660, there were no British naval vessels stationed at Jamaica, nor would there be another until the *HMS Oxford* arrived in October of

³⁴ Modyford to Albemarle, 8 June 1666. Reprinted in Pawson and Buisseret, 26-27

³⁵ Lane, 111

1668.³⁶ This meant that for eight years and eight months, Port Royal and Jamaica were entirely dependent on privateers for naval protection in the event of an attack. With the commissions revoked and no more apparently forthcoming, the privateers had all left for more lucrative pastures in other parts of the Caribbean. In addition to this, the apparent neglect from the home country had led to discouragement among the permanent residents of the island, and this in turn led to a drastic decline in the registry rolls of the volunteer militia. As mentioned earlier, in February of 1666 the militia's size had declined to 150 men. Just one year earlier it had counted 600 men, many of them now departed along with the privateers. With only 150 available defenders and almost no remaining naval protection, Jamaica would have been defenseless in the face of a determined foreign invasion at this time.

Faced with this mounting crisis, Modyford took decisive action. He convened a meeting of the Council of the Indies that same February, and in a carefully orchestrated maneuver he succeeded in getting the Council to pass a resolution urging the approval of granting letters of marque against the Spanish, and to state their reasons in the official log of the meeting.

Because it furnishes the island with many necessary commodities at easy rates. It replenishes the island with coin, bullion, cocoa . . . and many other commodities, whereby the men of New England are invited to bring their provisions and many merchants to reside at Port Royal.

It helps the poorer planters by selling provisions to the [private] men-of-war. It hath and will enable many to buy slaves and settle plantations . . . It draws down yearly from the Windward Islands many an hundred of English, French, and Dutch, many of whom turn planters.

It is the only means to keep the buccaneers on Hispaniola, Tortuga, and the South and North Cays of Cuba from being their enemies and infesting their plantations. It is a great security to the island [of Jamaica] that the [private] men-of-war often intercept Spanish advices and give intelligence to the Governor

³⁶ Pawson and Buisseret, 42

The said men-of-war bring no small benefit to his Majesty and his Royal Highness by the fifteenths and tenths [shares in prize money]. They keep many able artificers at work in Port Royal and elsewhere at extraordinary wages. Whatsoever they get the soberer part bestow in strengthening their old ships, which in time will grow formidable. They are of great reputation to this island and of terror to the Spaniards, and keep up a high and military spirit in all the inhabitants.

It seems to be the only means to force the Spaniards in time to a free trade, all ways of kindness producing nothing of good neighborhood, for though all old commissions have been called in and no new ones granted, and many of their [Spanish] ships restored, yet they continue all acts of hostility, taking our ships and murdering our people, making them work at their fortifications . . . For which reasons it was unanimously concluded that the granting of said commissions did extraordinarily conduce to the strengthening, preservation, enriching and advancing the settlement of this island.³⁷

The accuracy of these reasons will be examined below.

"It replenishes the island with coin, bullion, cocoa . . . and many other commodities . . ." Perhaps true, if one considers the material gains of privateering to be a means of replenishing the island. However, Jamaican plantations contained every crop it is possible to grow in the Caribbean, and no amount of privateering could in a reasonable amount of time yield an equal amount of crops to even a single harvest season on Jamaica's numerous plantations. Coin and bullion certainly flowed freely into Port Royal. That cannot be disputed. However, whether that coin benefited the city is another issue entirely. Much of it ended up concentrated in the hands of either the privateering captains, who always kept a larger share for themselves than the rest of the crew, or with the innkeepers of Port Royal, as the crew members frequently spent the majority of their shares on "services" the inns provided. So while true on the surface, this is a spurious reason to support privateering. Additionally, regardless of how lucrative privateering was in the short term, Jamaica's long-term health required a

³⁷ Minutes of the Council of the Indies Meeting, 22 February 1666. Reprinted in Pope, 122-123

thriving agricultural economy, not one dependent on the riches of others. Being a body composed of large plantation owners, the Council knew this as well as anyone.

"It is the only means to keep the Buccaneers on Hispaniola, Tortuga, and the South and North Cays of Cuba from being their enemies It is a great security to the island" This is the most accurate and factually correct of all the claims offered. It was well known that the French Governor of Tortuga openly courted Jamaica's privateering contingent during the mid-decade conflict, and that privateers bore little loyalty to their home country if it stood in the way of doing their jobs. An account of the privateers based in Jamaica taken in 1663 revealed, "11 frigates and brigantines belonging to Jamaica . . . manned with English, Dutch, and Indians, besides four others. Also three small ships, carrying 100 Jamaicans and 12 guns, under a Dutch captain . . . which have left the island."³⁸ There is no account that says any of these Dutchmen left Jamaica behind when England and Holland went to war. In November 1664, even before the war in Europe broke out, Modyford's brother-in-law Thomas Kendall wrote the following:

"That it be referred to the Governor of Jamaica to use all possible means to get in the privateers, which must be done by fair means, and giving them leave to dispose of their prizes when they come in, otherwise they will be alarmed and will go to the French at Tortuga, and his Majesty will not only lose 1,000 or 1,500 stout men, but they will still take Spaniards and disturb the trade to Jamaica, and if war break out with Holland, will certainly go to the Dutch at Curaçao and interrupt all trade to Jamaica; for they are desperate people, the greater part having been in men-of-war for 20 years."³⁹

Fortunately, the Jamaican authorities never had to test the validity of this prevailing wisdom, because as noted earlier it more than likely would have proven correct, with dire consequences for Jamaica's well-being.

³⁸ Calendar of State Papers (CSP), America and the West Indies, Volume V #621

"The said men-of-war bring no small benefit to his Majesty . . . by the fifteenths and tenths." This seems to be an exaggerated claim, because in reality the crown received very little monetary benefit from this policy. Consider the case of the expedition against Cuba by Captains Myngs and Swart in 1662. When it returned, the Admiralty Court settled the accounts as follows. The captured ships sold for £390. 10s. 0d., and the sugar and molasses taken from the ships and the raid were sold for £729. 7s. 6d., for a total of £1119. 17s. 6d. Out of this, £72. 18s. 6d. were reserved for the Lord Admiral's tenth, and £305. 4s. 6d. for the king, including the required fifteenths. The remaining £741. 14s. 6d. went to the privateers.⁴⁰ £305 was not a lot of money for a government even in this time period, yet by contemporary standards this was considered a successful raid. Thus it can be seen how little the crown received in direct cash flow from privateering activity. Large raids which netted tens of thousands of pieces of eight were seldom any more beneficial, because the privateering captain or the port authorities (or both) often took steps to ensure that after paying the crews the majority of the prize ended up in their hands alone.

"Yet they continue all acts of hostility, taking our ships and murdering our people, making them work at their fortifications." This was a factually correct statement, the proof of which can be cited in numerous cases, and the practice would continue. Later that same year the Spanish captured Providence Island, with the defenders surrendering when they received assurances they would be allowed to return to Port Royal. Instead they found themselves imprisoned in Panama, forced to repair fortifications in the city of

³⁹ CSP V #843

⁴⁰ Pawson and Buisseret, 24

Portobelo.⁴¹ However, the statement ignores the English share of the blame for the ongoing conflict. Each side did enough to provoke the other that neither had much justification for claiming to be the wronged party.

Despite the distortions of fact in the Council's reasoning of its resolution, the success of Modyford's action is indisputable. A short time after the meeting, Modyford was given, "Latitude to grant or not grant commissions against the Spaniards."⁴² This small opening was all Modyford needed to firmly seize the initiative for his colony.

The State of European Affairs 1665-1667

The opening volleys of the English-Dutch war of 1665 touched off a larger chain of events that affected all the nations of Western Europe. Although not a combatant, Portugal perhaps stood to lose the most. They signed a firm marriage alliance with England in 1661 over the objections of Spain, who still regarded Portugal as a vassal state. However, from the beginning England proved unable to completely fulfill its terms of the alliance, and Spain hoped (and Portugal feared) a prolonged war might force England to cease its aid to Portugal entirely. For a while it appeared this might come to pass, especially when France chose to involve itself in the war as well. The French, partly because of ties with Holland and partly for their own reasons, declared war on England in January 1666, but they already had warships in the West Indies. Those sailed as far back as the previous April.⁴³ England and Spain were also in the midst of long-running treaty negotiations at the time. In question were issues concerning ownership of Tangier and Jamaica, trade in the West Indies, and the state of

⁴¹ Lane, 113

⁴² Pawson and Buisseret, 26

⁴³ Thornton, West-India Policy Under the Restoration, 89-90

Spanish-Portuguese relations. Spain still claimed both Tangier and Jamaica as well as maintaining its claim to exclusive rights "beyond the line", and did not wish to sign a peace treaty with Portugal for which the English pressed. They hoped the war might force England to abandon one or all of these stipulations.

By the middle of 1666, something had to give. The ongoing war with the Dutch was proving to be a costly burden rather than a boon for England, and France, which did not have much stomach for the conflict to begin with, was equally eager to get out. The Spanish now had their problems as well. King Philip IV died in September 1665, leaving that country to the rule of a sickly child heir and his regent, and setting the table for the problem of Spanish Succession that would torment European diplomats for the next fifty years.⁴⁴ This also left England with a momentary diplomatic advantage over the Spanish, which it pressed in an attempt to resolve some of the issues mentioned earlier. Although the English ultimately rejected the treaty drafted by their ambassadors in Madrid at the end of 1665, it became the basis for the peace of Breda in 1667, a treaty almost wholly favorable to English interests. In the meantime, however, the undeclared war continued in the Caribbean, and Modyford was in the center of the maelstrom.

Modyford's Political Situation in 1666

Modyford's permission from Albemarle to grant commissions against Spain, arrived in Jamaica on March 1, 1666, nine months after being written and scarcely a month after the Council of the Indies unanimously passed Modyford's arguments in favor of privateering. In the intervening months, the stability of Europe deteriorated

⁴⁴ Thornton, 90

tremendously. Thus, the Governor of Jamaica became a man of international significance at a particularly awkward moment.⁴⁵ But Modyford, never one to refrain from taking control of a situation within his grasp, took full advantage of the opportunity that now lay before him. However, in typical Modyfordian fashion, he took great care to paint himself as the victim and plead necessity before exercising his newly granted powers. In a letter to Arlington dated August 21, 1666, Modyford made it a point of emphasis to highlight his two years of restraint in dealing with the Spanish, despite appeals to the contrary from his constituents in and around the privateering business.⁴⁶ The reality was quite different of course, as Modyford had as much as possible turned a blind eye to anti-Spanish activity ever since his early aborted attempts at a crackdown, and he had begun using his newly granted powers of "discretion" almost as soon as they reached his hands. But the British at home only knew what was reported to them, either by Jamaican officials or the complaints of Spanish governors and ambassadors. The latter obviously had no knowledge of Modyford's trains of thought, and Modyford himself penned most official reports from the former. Therefore if Modyford claimed discretion his superiors had little choice but to believe him.

The Raids of 1668

Carlton Williams likened Jamaica in these years to an English cruiser in a Spanish sea. Because all Spanish governors in the Indies openly held the point of view that the Englishman was an illegal intruder, he argued, "The best defense was offense; the best protection was attack."⁴⁷ The analogy is apt. The peace of Breda had only given

⁴⁵ Thornton, 94

⁴⁶ Modyford to Arlington, August 21, 1666. Reprinted in Thornton, 94

⁴⁷ Williams, 419-20

England rights of passage to resupply its colonies in the Indies. It did not recognize any claims to Jamaica, which therefore remained a point of contention between the two sides. It also meant Thomas Modyford could not afford to relax. Upon hearing rumors of a possible invasion attempt on Jamaica by the Spanish, Modyford summoned Henry Morgan in January 1668 and granted him a new commission. Morgan's instructions were, "To draw together the English privateers, and take prisoners of the Spanish nation, whereby he might inform the intentions of that enemy"⁴⁸

Morgan sailed the following month. His first target was Puerto Principe, in Cuba.

According to Morgan's official report of this raid:

"There we found that 70 men had been pressed to go against Jamaica; that the like levy had been made in all the island, and considerable forces were expected from Veracruz and Campeche to rendezvous at Havana and from Porto Bello and Cartagena to rendezvous at St. Jago of Cuba, of which I immediately gave notice to Governor Modyford. On the Spaniards' entreaty we forbore to fire the town, or bring away prisoners, but on delivery of 1,000 beeves released them all."⁴⁹

From the available evidence it is unclear whether Morgan chose Puerto Principe because of gathered intelligence, or whether he happened to stumble upon a town plotting a Jamaican invasion by singular good fortune. Morgan himself offers a contradictory account, first stating that his men were "driven" to the south keys of Cuba, implying they did not intend to go there, then admitting that once they put ashore they, "Marched 20 leagues to Puerto Principe on the north of the island."⁵⁰ That naturally implies that the town was a target from the beginning, otherwise why go so far out of their way to assault it? Of course, there is also the issue of whether or not

⁴⁸ Williams, 425

⁴⁹ CSP V #1838

⁵⁰ CSP V #1838

Morgan actually uncovered such a plot or fabricated it along with the six officers under his command who also signed the report, but that is an unanswerable question.

After Puerto Principe, Morgan's expedition sailed for Porto Bello on the coast of South America. This was definitely a planned assault. According to Morgan, "Being formerly informed of levies made there also against Jamaica, and also by some prisoners who had made their escape . . . that divers Englishmen were kept in irons [there], they thought it their duty to attempt that place."⁵¹ This raid was by all standards quite successful. In addition to the loot taken, the privateers eventually received 100,000 pieces of eight from the Spanish as ransom money to free the town. Thus, having dutifully carried out Modyford's orders and foiled the Spanish invasion plot, Morgan's forces returned to Jamaica in mid-August 1668.

Ongoing Anglo-Spanish Peace Negotiations and the Panama Incident, 1669-70

The year 1669 brought a change in policy and hope to the British that peaceful co-existence and increasing trade with Spain lay just around the corner. With the creation of the triple alliance between the English, Dutch, and Swedish in 1668, and their agreement to guarantee Spanish security in May 1669, Arlington's pro-Spanish leanings finally began to carry some weight. The new British ambassador to Spain, William Godolphin, arrived with instructions to negotiate a permanent treaty with Spain, one that would specifically address and resolve the issues between the two countries surrounding the West Indies. Godolphin found the Spanish government receptive, and negotiations quickly commenced. Arlington anticipated a favorable reaction, and as a result he dispatched a letter to Modyford that arrived in Port Royal on May 11, ordering

⁵¹ CSP V #1838

him to cease hostilities against Spain and recall all privateers under his commission.⁵²

Modyford acquiesced and quickly set to work carrying out his instructions.

As circumstances would have it, though, just as the English demanded and received Modyford's restraint, and shortly before Godolphin and Arlington broached the subject of their proposed treaty, the Spanish decided to launch their own offensive. In April 1669, the Spanish crown issued a *cedula* to its West Indies governors, declaring total war on all English shipping and possessions south of the Tropic of Cancer. This was a catch 22 for Modyford. On the one hand, he was under strict orders to behave, because the negotiations in Madrid were critically important to England. On the other hand, he could hardly sit back and do nothing while the Spanish plundered and pillaged his ships and men at will, and perhaps even planned an invasion of Jamaica itself. Two surprise raids by Spanish captains in June and July 1670 only heightened fears that worse things were on the way.

At first, Modyford worked strictly within his guidelines. This job required even more of his political skill than usual, because the Duke of Albemarle died shortly before the Spanish raids began, leaving Modyford without a voice at court. Modyford's brother James wrote to Thomas Lynch, "The Duke of Albemarle's death, that only befriended us, this war, our making a blind peace, no frigates, no orders coming, gives cruel apprehensions."⁵³ So Modyford proceeded very carefully, doing what he could under his standing orders while seeking permission from Arlington for broader action to ensure Jamaica's security.

⁵² Arlington to Modyford, May 11, 1669.

⁵³ J. Modyford to Lynch, 1670. Reprinted in Williams, 572

After the summer raids by the Spanish, however, Thomas Modyford stepped up his security measures and prepared for a counterstrike if needed. He convened the Council, and there they voted to organize an expeditionary force under Henry Morgan's command. They authorized Morgan, "to strike at any place where 'vessels,' 'stores,' or 'forces' were assembled as a threat to Jamaica."⁵⁴ Arlington, to whom Modyford constantly dispatched updates during these tense months, finally penned a reply that arrived in August. "His Majesty's pleasure is," Arlington stated, "that in what state soever the privateers are at the receipt of this letter, he keep them so till we have a final answer from Spain." He further instructed Modyford that, "No descent be made . . . upon any lands or places possessed by the Spaniards."⁵⁵

Modyford's political survival instincts did not allow him to contradict a direct order, and it is clear from the tone and wording of Arlington's letter that when he referred to "keeping the state" of the privateers as is, he meant that they should remain in Jamaica, at peace. However, it was not skill that allowed Modyford to find a loophole in this command, but rather blind luck. The day before Arlington's letter arrived in Port Royal, Henry Morgan's expedition set off for Isle de Vaches to gather its strength. Accordingly, since that meant the privateers were in a state of war, Modyford did as Arlington instructed and kept them so! He did, however, send a messenger to rendezvous with Morgan and deliver Arlington's "no descent" instruction. Morgan promised only to land for provisions or to attack any Spanish military forces threatening

⁵⁴ Williams, 573

⁵⁵ Arlington to Modyford, August 13, 1670. Reprinted in Williams, 574

Jamaica. Modyford then wrote to Arlington, informing him of all circumstances and Morgan's promises of discretion.⁵⁶

The actions of Morgan, and the subsequent diplomatic furor it caused, could be the subject of an extensive essay in and of themselves. The sequence of events is well documented, but bears some review because of the hot water Modyford found himself in for it. Briefly, some prisoners from Rio de la Hacha, rescued by some of Morgan's ships assigned to forage for supplies, reported a mustering of soldiers in Panama for the conquest of Jamaica. Morgan's expedition therefore left in early December, successfully assaulted Panama in January, spent a month looting and pillaging, and returned to Jamaica by April. There is much more to the story, but those are the key facts. However, Modyford's timing was much less fortunate than in August. Once again, a letter arrived right after the privateers departed. Except this time, the letter came from Modyford with instructions that Morgan should pull back because peace had been declared! Realizing the risk to both their necks, Modyford dispatched couriers to search for Morgan at once. None succeeded, and the raid progressed without knowledge of the changed circumstances.

The crisis of 1669-70 illustrates Modyford at his finest. Never once did he directly contradict the orders of his superiors. Yet he managed, through skillful maneuvering and a bit of luck, to once again balance every contradiction thrown at him without compromising the safety or interests of Jamaica. Between the need for self-defense locally, and the need to turn the other cheek because of the distant peace negotiations, many governors might have found themselves at a loss to reach a satisfactory decision.

⁵⁶ Williams, 575

And even though the Panama raid was an unnecessary victory, fought only because of the delay involved when messages traveled between Europe and the Caribbean by sailing ship, it may have been unintentionally beneficial to the British, much like the later Battle of New Orleans in the American War of 1812. Modyford wrote Arlington as far back as August that he believed, "A little more suffering will inform [the Spanish] of their [weakened] condition and force them to capitulations more suitable to the sociableness of man's nature."⁵⁷ Modyford did not trust the Spanish, and in his mind bloodying their nose one last time before peace took hold might remind them who really held the power in the West Indies. Although such a claim must remain speculation, it is a fact that Jamaica's security was never again seriously threatened. And it is likely that the British government approved of his reasoning, even if diplomacy still required that Modyford be severely punished for it. So even in the twilight of his career, Modyford still found a course of action in a difficult situation that satisfied everyone, except the Spanish of course.

After England signed the formal peace with Spain, one that granted many of the privileges the British sought in the Caribbean, Thomas Modyford's fate was sealed. Among the treaties many provisions is article IV, a passage that seems to almost speak of Modyford directly.

The said Most Serene Kings shall take care that their Subjects do accordingly abstain from all force and wrong doing: and they shall revoke all Commissions and Letters of Marque, or otherwise containing license to take prizes . . . and whosoever shall do anything to the contrary, he shall be punished not only criminally according to the merit of his offense, but shall also be compelled to make restitution and satisfaction for the losses to the parties damnified.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Modyford to Arlington, August 1670. Reprinted in Williams, 575

⁵⁸ Anglo-Spanish Peace Treaty, July 8/18, 1670

However, the key passage, something that had been Britain's goal for many years, came in Article VII.

Moreover, it is agreed, that the Most Serene King of Great Britain, his heirs and successors, shall have, hold, keep and enjoy for ever . . . all those lands, regions, islands, colonies, and places whatsoever, being or situated in the West Indies, or in any part of America, which the said King of Great Britain and his subjects do at present hold and possess.⁵⁹

For Modyford, who had wholeheartedly supported Cromwell's Western Design fifteen years earlier—and written the Lord Protector advice about how best to achieve it—these words meant the reward of seeing a long-held vision come to pass. However pleased he may have been at recognition of English sovereignty and prospects of eventually seeing open trade though, Modyford was still a politician at heart, and one who suddenly found his long and successful career in serious jeopardy with the passage of the peace treaty.

The End of an Era

Although there is no proof of it, "It is highly probable that Spain made the recall and punishment of Governor Modyford a condition to her signing this treaty."⁶⁰ Even if they did not, however, it would have been politically risky for the British to leave him there. England wanted their new treaty with Spain to last, and had Modyford stayed, naturally the Spanish would have scrutinized every action he took for even a hint of hostility towards them. To give the peace treaty momentum, and as an act of good faith, Modyford had to go. The raid against Panama certainly did not help. In fact, when news of the raid reached Spain, even though Modyford was by then back in

⁵⁹ Anglo-Spanish Peace Treaty, July 8/18, 1670

⁶⁰ Williams, 579

England, "Charles II and his ministers had to apply all their arts of diplomacy to salvage the . . . agreement and to prevent the Spaniards from seeking reprisal."⁶¹

Accordingly, the king appointed Lord Carlisle new Governor of Jamaica in June 1670, and appointed Thomas Lynch acting Governor. Because of processing time and delays, Lynch did not reach Jamaica until a year later. Lynch had instructions to arrest Modyford, on the charges of committing, "Many depredations and hostilities against the subjects of his Majesty's good brother the Catholic King . . . [contrary to the] King's express commands."⁶² These orders were carried out shortly after Lynch's arrival, and although he treated Modyford kindly he also employed some trickery to complete the deed, which severely damaged his popularity when word of Modyford's arrest was made public and caused lingering bad feelings for some time afterward.

Modyford had no chance to enjoy returning to England. The *Jamaican Merchant* sailed straight up to the Tower of London and dropped him off there as a prisoner. His son Charles, who had been incarcerated in proxy since May to ensure the father's cooperation, was finally allowed to leave at the same time. Although Modyford was luckily not condemned to death, Arlington made his confinement very harsh. He became a "close" prisoner, which restricted both his freedom of motion within the tower and contact with the outside world. A jailkeeper guarded him 24 hours a day, even though he hardly needed it. Charles was not even allowed to visit his father for several weeks after they exchanged places. When he did visit, it always happened with Arlington's permission, something he at times arbitrarily denied.⁶³ This state of affairs

⁶¹ Williams, 593

⁶² Williams, 582

⁶³ Williams, 595

lasted many months. It was not until August 14, 1672, nine months after his arrival, that Modyford's term of "close" confinement ended.⁶⁴ He remained a prisoner in the tower, but now he could go anywhere in the compound, see whomever he wished inside the walls, and receive visitors without going through Arlington first. However, it would be another year yet before Modyford finally walked out of the Tower a free man. The Spanish pushed for his continued confinement right up until the end.⁶⁵

Modyford spent the remaining years of his life tending to his family's affairs and securing a legacy for his descendents. He returned to Jamaica, served a few years as chief justice of Jamaica's Supreme Court, and eventually died there at the age of fifty-nine. The citizens of Jamaica inscribed a fitting eulogy on his tombstone.

Mistake not reader, for here lies not only the capital deceased body of the honorable Sir Thomas Modyford, Baronet, but even the soul and life of all Jamaica, who first made it what it now is. Here lies the best and longest Governor, the most considerable Planter, the ablest and most upright Judge this Island ever enjoyed.⁶⁶

The Governor Modyford of history is indeed a complex figure. But as much as he shaped his own legacy, so it was provided to him by circumstance. The intransigence of the Spanish in this theater of war, the character of the privateers, the idealism of an ever-hopeful home government issuing directives Modyford could not possibly carry out, Jamaica's involvement in English wars, and the aftermath of the Anglo-Spanish peace agreements were all circumstances Modyford could not change. For all the choices Modyford made of his own free will, these things as often forced his hand. If he is given credit for nothing else, it must be conceded that when faced with an important decision, he always made it with the best interests of those he was charged to serve and

⁶⁴ Williams, 597

⁶⁵ Williams, 601

protect in mind. That perspective was the one constant of his most significant actions, from his timely defection that saved Barbados from protracted civil war to his final issuing of commissions in 1670.

Jamaica in the Years After Modyford

It is difficult to compare Modyford's performance as Governor to those of his successors. Changing times and changing circumstances made his seven years unique. Jamaica in 1671 was no longer a frontier outpost established in the heart of enemy territory. It was now a legitimate addition to the British Empire. As such, the home government demanded proper adherence to the laws of England. In contrast to the few rather basic instructions Modyford received with his commission in 1664, Thomas Lynch received thirty-five specific directives that he was expected to obey. Some of the more interesting included the following:

4. With the advice of the Council to call assemblies, to make laws and levy moneys; said laws to be as agreeable to those of England as may be, and to be in force two years and no longer unless confirmed by his Majesty.

16. To cause a survey to be taken of landing places and harbours and erect such fortifications as shall be necessary, at the public charge there.

24. To give all possible encouragement to persons of different opinions in religion, he shall dispense with the oaths of supremacy and allegiance

26. His Majesty is content that no custom be laid in Jamaica on any good exported or imported for 14 years . . . but that they not be exempted from custom in England, as the rest of his Majesty's plantations.

33. For the better encouragement of all belonging to the privateer ships to come in, immediately . . . to proclaim a general pardon . . . of all offences committed from June 1660 to the said publication . . . and that if they will plant they shall have 35 acres by the head⁶⁷

The interesting thing about some of these instructions, and many of the others not listed here, is that Modyford suggested or instituted many of them in the first place!

⁶⁶ Roberts, *Jamaica. The Portrait of an Island*, 232

⁶⁷ CSP Volume VII, #367

Jamaica was a haven for Jews throughout Modyford's tenure as Governor, and he would have even admitted Dutch immigrants if he had been allowed to. He frequently initiated repairs or improvements to Jamaica's fortifications in times of war, often paying for them out of his own pocket because public funds did not go far enough. And it was Modyford's suggestion that privateers who wished to retire ought to be given land as encouragement. A policy to promote settlement already existed wherein Modyford promised 30 acres per head to anyone who gave security to bring a complement of white servants to Jamaica within two years; giving land to the privateers expanded on that concept. Another directive to Lynch suggested that he should encourage the improvement of plantations and cacao walks, something Modyford by instruction and example had done for the planters his entire time in office.

It can be seen from these directives that Modyford left a permanent legacy in Jamaican government, even if the institution itself changed dramatically with his departure. But what about practical results? Here the verdict is less clear. Carlton Rowe Williams took a very positive view of his accomplishments:

Had he not taken a frontier outpost and established therein sound civil government and condign justice? Had he not received into his care a raw, frontier society, multiplied the folk threefold, set them to peaceful pursuits, and seen them prosper? Had he not stepped ashore upon fertile soils barely used, taught their owners the arts of planting, expanded their cultivation, and seen them become the base of a thriving economy? Had he not, for seven years, midst great turmoil in the Indies, with virtually no resources in hand, kept his colony secure and, at last, seen His Majesty's sovereignty internationally recognized therein? . . . Whatever the future held for him, naught could cancel these achievements of his years on tropical shores.⁶⁸

Other historians viewing the same evidence have come to decidedly different conclusions. A.P. Thornton pointed out that the population was scattered, many of the

⁶⁸ Williams, 587

settlements decaying, and there were fewer white inhabitants than in 1664.⁶⁹ However, this last point appears to be incorrect. Thornton lists the count of Jamaica's white population at 7,768 on March 29, 1673, according to his sources. The census of 1662, taken under D'Oyley, lists a combined white population of 2,956 (2,458 men, 498 women and children).⁷⁰ Modyford himself only brought somewhere between 1,000 and 1,700 settlers in his train when he became Governor, and nothing in the records indicates that 3,500 or so additional white people besides those contracted with Modyford suddenly migrated to Jamaica between 1662 and 1664. In fact, Thomas Lynch wrote to Arlington on May 25, 1664, "They have many hopeful plantations if supplied with Negroes, but the inhabitants do not number more than 5,000 at the most . . ."⁷¹ Several sources also indicate that "scattered" and "decaying" are adjectives that could just as easily be applied to the population and settlements of 1664, so it is not as if the quality of life severely declined under Modyford's rule. Additionally, some 9,000 people of African descent inhabited Jamaica by the time Modyford left office, up from only 584 a decade earlier.

The State of Other Colonies Compared to Jamaica

For a demonstration of just how effective Thomas Modyford's leadership in Jamaica was, one need only look at the turmoil surrounding some of England's other Caribbean possessions. Although most of these islands lacked the natural advantages of Jamaica, which limited the variety of agriculture and the size of the population they could sustain, there is no question that effective government played a role in making them productive

⁶⁹ Thornton, 149

⁷⁰ CSP V #204

⁷¹ CSP V #744

and attractive to potential settlers. Three of the most potentially attractive islands will suffice, as with few exceptions the rest were very sparsely inhabited and even more sparsely written about.

Barbados, long the crown jewel of English colonies in the Caribbean, faced a series of setbacks in the 1660s, some brought from without and some due to internal conflicts. The Navigation Acts of 1660 and 1663 began the trouble. In essence, they cut England's Caribbean colonies off from trade with the rest of the world by enumerating a list of goods that could be exported only to British ports, and requiring all supply ships going to the colonies to go through England first. As historian Vincent Harlow writes, the individual interests of the colonies were subordinated to the ideal of a self-sufficient Empire protected by a powerful mercantile marine.⁷² These Acts hit Barbados particularly hard, because it was almost exclusively a sugar producing island at the time, and the Acts plus the settlement of other plantation islands combined to send the price of sugar plummeting by 1661.

The rest of the decade saw an ongoing struggle between the planter-dominated Barbadian government and anyone they perceived as a threat to their interests. This not only included the developing Jamaican colony and the English tax collectors, but also the other Leeward Islands and the Governor himself. They even resisted the restoration and rebuilding of St. Christopher after that island was decimated during the 1665-67 war. As C.S.S. Higham writes:

Since St. Christopher had begun to grow sugar the Barbados planters had become more and more jealous of its competition; it seemed to them a good chance now that St. Christopher was wasted and in French hands to leave it there. At the bottom of the

⁷² Harlow, 169

opposition to Willoughby in Barbados lay hatred of his policy of expansion, which might raise competitors in the sugar trade or draw off too many of their inhabitants.⁷³

This Barbadian insecurity stemmed in large part from over-reliance on sugar planting. Whether by design or necessity, Barbados failed to develop a second cash crop during this period, thus tying its economy primarily to the fortunes of the sugar market. The drop in sugar prices combined with a 4.5% duty on trade goods made life difficult for Barbadian planters, and they responded in kind. Their attitude made planters on the Leeward Islands restless, and some began agitating for freedom from Barbados. Despite Barbadian protests, the government of the Leewards became a separate entity in 1670.

Antigua, once declared by its Governor to be worth as much as, "All the rest [of the Leeward Islands put together] except Barbados," never lived up to that promise in this era.⁷⁴ It was not entirely the Governor's fault. Antigua received a major setback when the French successfully invaded the island with eighteen ships and 1,500 men in December 1666. This naturally hurt the island's development—and its attractiveness to settlers—quite a bit. Two prominent Antiguans wrote Lord Willoughby's agent a few months before the attack suggesting that a couple of his Majesty's frigates would do wonders for the defense of the island. As one of them noted of Antigua's residents, "Their whole business is to keep what they have from the French and Indians . . . They will be in great danger except ships come from England, for the seas are now altogether in obedience to the French."⁷⁵ The conquest and reconquest left Antigua's plantations

⁷³ Higham, *The Development of the Leeward Islands Under the Restoration*, 69

⁷⁴ CSP V #1692

⁷⁵ CSP V #1224

and fortifications destroyed.⁷⁶ Therefore, when it officially returned to the English fold after the war, "All old titles and claims were made void by an Act sent for his Majesty's confirmation, by which the grand quantities engrossed by former Governors and their favorites are free for settlers. [The Antiguan Council also passed] an Act for allowing 10 acres per head to settlers."⁷⁷

Barbuda, despite its potential, was long a failure. It became the subject of a power struggle in the late 1660's. A certain Col. John Collins received a Patent grant to settle the island in 1665, and did so. The island had previously been settled by a number of families under a Captain John Noye, who came from Antigua in 1661. What happened next is in dispute, and the sources provide no clear answer. According to a trio of men supported by Lord Willoughby, Collins received the Patent from Charles II based on false information that the island was uninhabited. They also claimed these earlier inhabitants prospered growing indigo, cotton, and cattle until Collins drove them away, "By killing their cattle, destroying their settlements, and imposing unconscionable taxes, [so] that they deserted as fast as they could."⁷⁸ Collins in his rebuttal claimed his governorship came from a commission by Willoughby, not Charles II's settlement Patent. He also stated that, "The colony throve better after his coming than under Noye," and that he, "Never imposed any tax."⁷⁹ It is not known who is right in this dispute, but the point is that the colony found itself in shambles, and eventually deserted after a surprise Indian raid in September 1666. So that in 1668, Lord Arlington's secretary Joseph Williamson wrote of Barbuda, "Wholly unpeopled now, only cattle

⁷⁶ CSP V #1512

⁷⁷ CSP V #1788

⁷⁸ CSP V #1890

remaining upon it,"⁸⁰ while Collins and Lord Willoughby's men argued over who should take the blame for that sad state of affairs.

While Barbados and the Leeward Islands struggled through population problems, financial problems, squabbles between the planters and royal officials, and constant threats or actual invasions by the French, Jamaica under Modyford's leadership enjoyed prosperity and relative security despite being owned without legal title. His introduction of multiple cash crops to Jamaica allowed the island to weather downturns in one or two markets without seriously damaging the entire economy. Furthermore, Modyford managed to avoid any serious agitation or political maneuvering by Jamaican planters while he was in office. The secret of his success was the dissolution of Jamaica's Assembly, the branch of government that caused so much disruption in Barbados and the other islands. As a former Assembly Speaker himself, Modyford knew its power firsthand. "After a month's trial, he came to the conclusion that he could govern Jamaica far better without an Assembly at all. He made the Assemblymen justices of the peace, promoted many . . . within the militia, lent a number of them money, advised them as to their plantations, and so ruled Jamaica with *brio* for seven years. Jamaica's planter class was less developed than their Barbadian counterparts at the time, leading to Lynch's wry observation in 1674 that, "Governor [Modyford] . . . being well supported in England, and the Colony young and poor, nobody questioned anything."⁸¹ Even when Modyford departed, the planter class was still relatively weak on Jamaica. Yet shortly after Lynch revived the Assembly the records show that it

⁷⁹ CSP V #1890

⁸⁰ CSP V #1901

quickly fell into a similar pattern of behavior to the Assemblies of Barbados and Antigua, pressing for as much tax relief and local autonomy as it could get away with and fighting the royal Governor whenever possible.

Conclusion

From all the available evidence, it is clear that Modyford was a strong, effective Governor. However, to determine what historical lessons can be drawn from Thomas Modyford's term as Governor, there is one more question that needs to be asked: Was his situation typical of other colonial governors and frontier leaders, and if so, what did he do differently to succeed where others failed?

The answer to the first question, "was his situation typical of other colonial governors," must clearly be "Yes." Although specific circumstances differ depending on location, Modyford faced problems that, in later years, would reappear in various forms to plague colonial governors in Africa and Asia, United States lawmen in places like Arizona and New Mexico, and even Spanish missionaries in California. Frontier settlers are by nature a rough and tumble bunch. Most are interested only in survival and self-advancement, because those who do not tend to those two things first are more likely to perish first. When seen from that perspective, the gunslingers of the American West were a nineteenth century evolution of the pirates and privateers Modyford dealt with in Jamaica. Modyford himself is analogous to any frontier authority under another name. He had similar responsibilities for keeping the peace and civilizing the culture, and like American marshals or governors of large non-European populations in exotic continents, it was necessary for him to understand and sometimes accommodate the

⁸¹ Excerpted from Lynch's "Brief Account of the Government of Jamaica since His Maties

character of the people he governed. Like all frontier areas, Jamaica's distance isolated it from "civilization." Communication with distant superiors, and obtaining responses, frequently took several months. Numerous emergencies might come and go before a far-off superior even had a chance to issue instructions for dealing with the first emergency, so he needed to be prepared to take any action on the spot, and worry about justifying it later. Although Modyford did not have to deal with rebellions and raids by hostile native populations, he did have to deal with the possibility of raids and reprisals by the Spanish in the Caribbean, so the threat of attack was still present. And Jamaica had its fair share of endemic diseases that claimed the lives of settlers each year, just like any other exotic location. Whatever negative circumstances typically come with any sort of frontier community also applied to Modyford and Jamaica, and just like any colonial authority, he had to deal with them.

So how did Modyford differ from the average colonial Governor or frontier lawman? The key difference was his unique ability to understand and take advantage of the parent-colony relationship. No colony was ever an exact duplicate of its parent country, no matter how much the home authorities tried to make it so. Colonies have their own personalities, their own needs, and their own wills. These are not always going to match what the home country wants. If the colony can find a middle ground between the two sets of desires, everyone will be happy. However, this requires a unified colonial government with a balanced perspective for both sides, and a bit of foresight to anticipate what will work and what will not. Much more so than the Willoughbys, or other governors of Jamaica, Modyford grasped these principles very

early in his career. He understood implicitly the power that he held, especially after dismissing the Jamaican Assembly. While he had to be mindful of his superiors and his peers in the Jamaican Council, the initiative was ultimately his, and he knew how to use it fairly but decisively. The Willoughbys were constantly squabbling with the Assembly and Council in Barbados and returning to England to make pleas and requests in person regarding their governance of the island. Sheriffs in the American West often found themselves at odds with local judges and town marshals, resulting in conflicting laws and conflicting interpretations of laws. Modyford never once left the New World in his entire term as Governor, and with his proroguing of the Assembly negated the threat of a divided government. He simply worked with the Council to reach the best possible decision, told Arlington and/or Albemarle what he was doing, and waited for official confirmation. That willingness to take decisive action independently and risk whatever consequences might come of it was both unusual and highly successful, and a key factor in Jamaica's survival and expansion at this time.

It will never be known how successfully Modyford would have governed in peacetime. Perhaps without the constant threat of Spanish attack, or with an extended period of peace, he would have pursued efforts to curb privateering more forcefully. Perhaps he would have attracted more settlers to the island. Perhaps he would have even been more willing to tolerate the obstinacy of a colonial Assembly. These are questions for which there is no clear answer, because Modyford's seven years in office knew few extended periods of peace. It is a tribute to his ability that despite governing an island in the middle of a war zone, he was able to not only expand the population substantially, but also vastly improve the variety of crops farmed and the acreage under

cultivation. He was successful enough that when peace did come, the island was prepared to transform itself from relying on privateering as the primary source of revenue to a strong plantation-based economy. Events forced Modyford to rely on privateers, double-deal with the home government in regards to the Spanish, and enact some less-than-ideal policies on Jamaica itself. However, they also afforded him considerable opportunity to exercise his creativity and his governing talents, and did not deter him from laying the foundations for a very successful future.

Articles of Peace & Alliance Between the Kings of France and Modesty Prince Charles II, by the Grace of God King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc. and the High and Mighty Lords the States-General of the United Netherlands, Concluded the 21st day of July, 1667. Wing Collection #C2897. Early English Books 1641-1700; microfilm reel 206:17

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King Charles II. "A Proclamation for Recalling Private Commissions, or Letters of Marque, 5 January 1663." Wing Collection #C3411. Early English Books 1641-1700; microfilm reel 1452:03

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