

CHRISTOPHER CODRINGTON

His attitudes, beliefs and role in the slave
trade — The myths behind the man

◆ *HISTORY*

◆ *CULTURE*

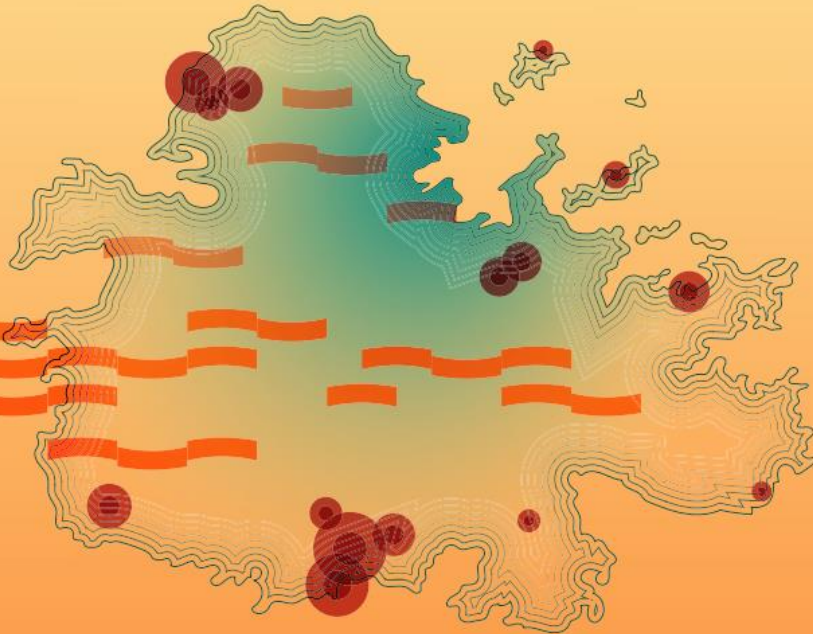
◆ *ANALYSIS*

CREATED & CURATED BY
 **museumand**
The National Caribbean Heritage Museum

PRODUCED FOR
 All Souls College
University of Oxford

MYTH #1

“He was a fair slaveowner”



REALITY #1

- ◆ The enslaved saw Codrington as a cruel abuser who ruled by fear.
- ◆ He treated people as social capital - the more enslaved workers you had, the higher your status.
- ◆ Having enslaved workers on your plantations who didn't run away, or rebel made you the envy of the plantocracy - but Codrington's methods for punishing the few who did were atrocious and inhuman.
- ◆ The enslaved weren't allowed to keep their names, speak their own languages, or carry out their own religious and cultural traditions and practices.

MYTH #2

“He was enlightened, ahead of his time”

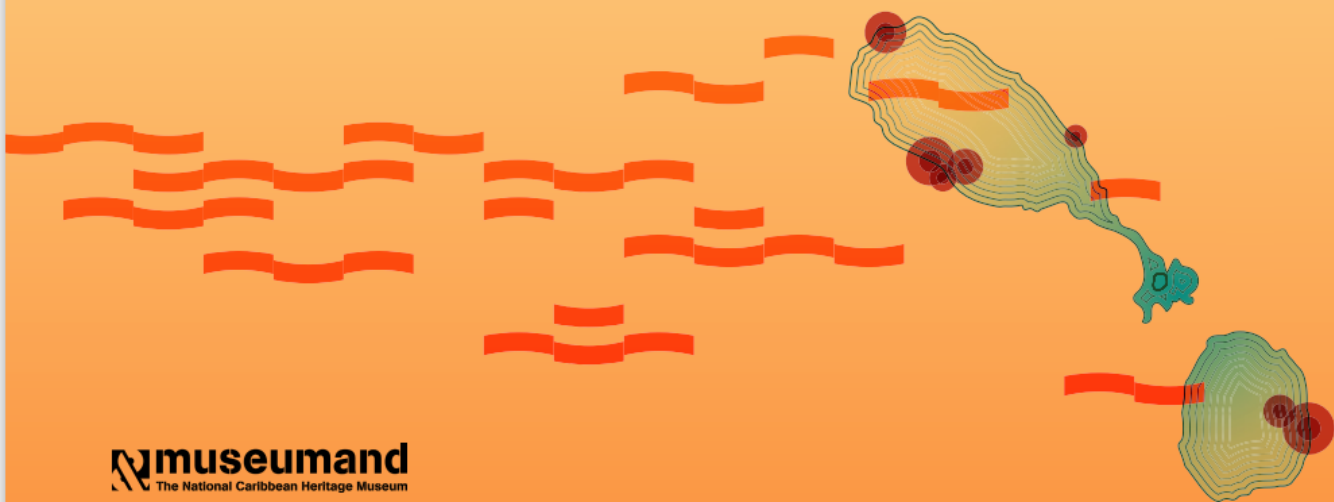


REALITY #2

- ◆ Keeping enslaved families together and encouraging them to reproduce meant cheaper ‘homegrown’ workers at a time when bringing enslaved people from Africa was getting harder and more expensive.
- ◆ Enslaved families were less inclined to run away to find family members who had been sold to other plantations - keeping the cost of replacing them or tracking them down to a minimum.
- ◆ More food meant harder working, longer living, more valuable enslaved workers, but the enslaved weren’t given a balanced diet. As on other plantations, their diet was high in carbohydrates and low in protein.
- ◆ Codrington’s actions were economic, not altruistic. His ‘care and training programme for enslaved persons’ meant he could sell them for a higher price, and profit from a lucrative new income stream - enslaved workers that were ‘better behaved’.

MYTH #3

**“He was charitable
and his plantation
was run fairly
by Christians”**

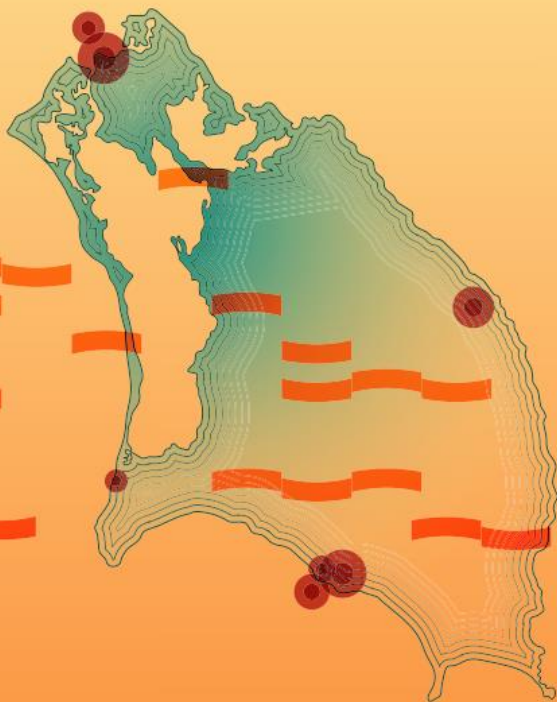


REALITY #3

- ◆ Plantation owners felt their Christian beliefs made them socially and morally superior.
- ◆ The enslaved could see that the plantocracy's behaviour belied their Christian beliefs and practices, and human decency. Carnivals became one way in which they laughed at these contradictions. They also used Christian phrases and concepts as a way of being subversive and to stealthily organise activism.
- ◆ Codrington promoted baptising enslaved workers but did not let them carry out their own spiritual and cultural practices and traditions. Teaching the enslaved Christian principles was done to make them less troublesome, 'good slaves'.
- ◆ Many enslaved used this expectation to their advantage, to gain personal rewards, or to enable activism.
- ◆ Codrington's legacy is said to be the education and spiritual wellbeing of the enslaved and their descendants - but any support they received made them more valuable and was never at the expense of the profitable plantations.
- ◆ The legacy Codrington envisaged in his will wasn't facilitated by his executors for over 100 years. They saw plantation management as others had done since the start of the Transatlantic Slave Trade - reduce the rights of the enslaved to build profits for plantation owners and managers.

MYTH #4

“History is in the past”



REALITY #4

- ◆ The breaking up of enslaved families still resonates - Caribbean society features different family groupings that have their origin in slavery - used as a way of providing support for individuals and continuity for communities.
- ◆ It's hard for Black people to trace their ancestry - denying many a sense of identity and 'home'.
- ◆ Descendants of the enslaved had to fight for centuries to be free from British rule. Many Caribbean islands became independent, starting with Jamaica in 1962, but only a handful have become republics, fully free from British rule.
- ◆ Barbados gained independence in 1966 and officially became a republic in 2021.
- ◆ 130 years after Codrington's death, emancipation freed the enslaved but didn't give them the land, money or opportunity to benefit. Employment remained an issue for Black workers right up until 1920, when unions emerged.
- ◆ The foundations of education laid during the days of slavery are still in evidence in Barbados. Education for all intensified after emancipation and today the literacy rate is among the highest in the Caribbean.
- ◆ Black entrepreneurship flourished and Black people could finally buy property and land in the islands that their descendants had given their lives for. The countries where Codrington had his estates would be unrecognisable to him.

QUESTION #1

How can Codrington's legacy take a positive turn?



ANSWER #1

- ◆ Create a space for Black health and wellbeing - including treatments and counselling that can be experienced by people in the Caribbean and Britain.
- ◆ Widen access to the Codrington Collection beyond academia - to ensure that anyone with an interest in Codrington and his legacy can easily access this important international resource. Make sure that the procedure for accessing resources is clear and publicly available i.e. that advance notice via email is currently required to visit the collection request access to specific materials.
- ◆ Establish a fully funded Black Writing Award in Oxford and the Caribbean islands where Codrington had his estates (Barbados, Barbuda, Antigua and St Kitts) - for school age children and young people, including those in further education and undergraduates.
- ◆ Publish an annual paper focused on Black education, health and wellbeing - in reference to the principles espoused by Codrington.
- ◆ Shine a spotlight on the stories of descendants and establish a support service to help trace ancestry - through local and national media in Britain and the Caribbean islands where Codrington had his estates (Barbados, Barbuda, Antigua and St Kitts).
- ◆ Hold an annual event for Black students, academics and heritage organisations to talk about the impact and legacy of Codrington, on or around his birthday.

QUESTION #2

What is life like for people of Caribbean descent in Britain?

SOURCES:

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org>

<https://www.stophateuk.org/about-hate-crime/racism-in-the-uk/>

ANSWER #2

- ◆ Black people have made a significant contribution to life in contemporary Britain, across every aspect of society. Despite standing shoulder to shoulder during two world wars and helping to rebuild Britain, racial inequality persists in the 21st century and devastates many people's lives.
 - ◇ 46% of ethnic minority children are living in poverty in Britain, compared to 26% of white British families
 - ◇ For every £1 of white British wealth, Indian households have 90-95p, Pakistani households 50p, Black Caribbean 20p, and Black African and Bangladeshi households 10p.
 - ◇ Black people are 18 times more likely to be stopped and searched than their white counterparts.
 - ◇ Fewer than 1% of students at GCSE level study a book by a writer of colour.
- ◆ Racially motivated Hate Crimes are the highest reported type of Hate Crime in the UK - and they rose by a shocking 73% in 2021. The 'us and them' 'black and white' 'keeping Black people in their place' mentality of the transatlantic slave trade still pervades British society, whether it takes the form of overt racism, discrimination, unconscious bias or the various microaggressions experienced by Black people every day.
- ◆ The enslaved community shared their history and life experiences through oral traditions such as storytelling and singing, including their mistreatment at the hands of plantation owners like Codrington, and how they resisted. Their descendants have continued to add to this tradition with a growing library expressing their own experiences in the form of poetry, prose, fiction, non-fiction and more. Finally, the importance of these reference works is starting to be acknowledged - at least politically and educationally, but there is still a long way to go.
- ◆ Just as the enslaved showed their defiance and resistance to the mistreatment they endured, Black people in modern Britain have used uprisings to assert their rights and improve conditions. From the Nottingham Race Riots of 1958 to the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020.

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ABOUT MUSEUMAND:

Museumand, The National Caribbean Heritage Museum is a social history and community museum celebrating and commemorating the Caribbean contribution to the UK. Working across the UK and beyond, we uncover, discover, capture and share Caribbean stories. Some of these stories are well-known, others are new discoveries about the experiences of the Windrush Generation settling into a new country and its communities. We address contemporary issues facing the Caribbean diaspora today through historical happenings of the past. Every story is powerful and we honour them by presenting them in ways that make

people sit up and take notice - through art, music, performance and more. Our exhibition-events are inspiring original, compelling and engage people of all ages from varying communities to come together. We work in partnership with everyone from national and international institutions, to grassroots community organisations and with individuals also, to make sure the Caribbean contribution to life in Britain is understood, shared and celebrated. We have partnered on projects with organisations including the V&A, The National Trust, Museum of London and UK Parliament.

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THIS IS THE END OF THIS CHAPTER

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