



**THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE CIRCULAR**

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# The West India Committee Circular



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## Leading articles

**American government issues travel warnings  
for the Caribbean**

Crime rates are climbing in the Bahamas, with the increasing murder rate causing the US Embassy to issue a warning to Americans in the Caribbean, which has traditionally been a popular holiday destination, welcoming over 9 million visitors in 2023. The Embassy noted that the spike in the murder rate was caused by “*retaliatory gang violence*”, and that killings had taken place at all hours, including daylight, on the streets.

Americans were advised to exercise caution when walking and driving at night, to use extreme caution on the eastern part of New Providence, and to keep a low profile and, if necessary, to offer no resistance during attempts at robbery. The US State Department issued an update to its existing Level 2 warning about travel to the country, warning that there is gang-on-gang violence that is primarily located in towns and inner cities, affecting the local population.

Bahamian Prime Minister, Philip Davis, noted a few days later that the Government had a strategy to tackle the crime issues facing the nation during the course of 2024, and would be introducing amendments to the Bail Act to ensure that bail is automatically revoked for suspects who violate the terms of their bail.

The Bahamian government has also issued statements to reassure visitors of their safety, noting that the island’s level 2 safety rating had not changed, and was shared with a variety of other popular tourist destinations.

The Bahamian government’s strategy is based around five main pillars: prevention, detection, prosecution, punishment, and rehabilitation. From New Year to 3<sup>rd</sup> February, the death toll in the Bahamas has already reached 21 persons.. As with many Caribbean islands, tourism is vital to the Bahamian economy, comprising some 70% of GDP and employing over half of the nation’s workforce.

Despite the reassurances of the Bahamian government, on 4<sup>th</sup> February, two American women, visiting from a cruise ship, claimed that their drinks were drugged and that they were sexually assaulted by two staff members at the Pirates Cove Zipline and Water Park in Freeport. Two suspects have now been arrested in relation to the incident by the Royal Bahamas Police Force, which is investigating in partnership with the American F.B.I. The Pirates Cove Resort denies the allegations, saying the women’s account does not match their surveillance footage.

The US State Department has also issued another Level 3 travel warning for Jamaica, the second highest level, claiming that “*Violent crimes, such as home invasions, armed robberies, sexual assaults, and homicides, are common.*”

*Sexual assaults occur frequently, including at all-inclusive resorts*". The Jamaican Tourist Board issued a statement saying, "There are very distinctly defined areas within Jamaica that the advisory cites as having high risk for crime, so the majority of the island's tourism product remains unaffected. Overall, the crime rate against visitors to Jamaica remains extremely low at 0.01%," Jamaica's murder rate has also dropped by 24% in the first month of this year, compared to the same period last year.

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### **Leprosy in the Caribbean**

The ancient disease of leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, has once again reared its head in the Caribbean. St. Lucia recorded 11 new cases of leprosy throughout 2023, an 120% increase from the previous year. A case of leprosy has also been confirmed in Barbados, the first on the island since 2022. The increase in cases has resulted in nearby nations, such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines, increasing surveillance for the disease. St. Vincent and the Grenadines have not recorded a case of leprosy since 2019.

Leprosy was first detected in the Caribbean in the mid-1600s and is believed to have arrived with either Europeans or Africans. The disease represented a far greater threat to public health in the Caribbean in previous centuries, with dedicated Leper colonies, such as Chacachacare off the coast of Trinidad, to where those who had the disease were banished. Historically, those who suffered from the seemingly incurable and disfiguring disease were publicly shunned, in many cases being viewed as a punishment for sin, an attitude which also contributed to their banishment.

The disease is spread when an infected person coughs and sneezes and another breathes in

the droplets repeatedly over a long period, meaning that the spread of infection can be prevented through the use of facemasks and regular handwashing. A large portion, possibly as much as 95%, of the human population is also naturally immune to the disease and it can take several years for a person to display symptoms and become infectious.

Today leprosy is treatable via a multiple drug therapy treatment, normally consisting of dapsons, rifampicin and clofazimine over the course of several months, and poses no major threat to the public. However, it still occurs in over 120 countries, largely in tropical Africa and Asia, with some 20,000 cases yearly worldwide.

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### **The situation in Haiti**

The security situation in Haiti has continued to deteriorate in recent months, with Prime Minister Ariel Henry forced to resign under pressure from the leaders of the gangs that have essentially taken control of the country. The majority of the violence is still in Port-au-Prince, where it is estimated that over 80% of the capital is under the control of the gangs. Large numbers of weapons are being smuggled into the country, a majority of them believed to be from the USA.

An interim presidential transition council, supposed to be comprised of 7 voting and 2 non-voting individuals, has still not emerged following Mr. Henry's resignation. Nor is it clear what the aim is of those who have forced him from power. Prime Minister Henry was unable to return to Haiti after gangs seized control of Toussaint Louverture Airport, and is now in Puerto Rico. Major figures amongst the gang and rebel leaders include Jimmy Chérizier, a 47 year old former police officer,

with the sobriquet 'Barbecue', who appears, for the moment, to have established an alliance of different gangs, and has made demands for a more just and equitable system of government, without providing details about how this would take place.

Whilst 'Barbeque' may not be the most powerful of the various faction leaders, he has established himself as a leading presence in the media. Other figures include Johnson André, known as Izo, another powerful gang leader, who has secured control of the maritime routes in Port-au-Prince bay and who is also attempting to spread his influence beyond the capital to other towns. Mr. André's gang has extensive smuggling and drugs trafficking networks, with it even being reported he has sold weapons to his own rivals.

Guy Phillipe, another former police officer, who was involved in the 2004 coup against President Bertrand Aristide, has made it openly known he wishes to be President of Haiti. Successfully winning election to the Haitian senate in 2016, he was arrested and extradited to the USA on charges of accepting bribes, whilst working as a senior police officer, to allow drug shipments to America. He has recently been returned to Haiti after serving his prison sentence in the USA.

A multinational security force is planned to restore order in Haiti, but this will undoubtedly be met with hostility and violence by the gangs. A Kenyan proposal to send police officers to aid the Haitian authorities was blocked by the Kenyan High Court. Mr. Henry has been in Kenya to discuss reviving the measure, when this latest upsurge in violence began.

### **Notes of Interest**

Tristan Louwrens, an Antiguan sailor in a sailing team that won the ORC Lanzarote to

Grenada race, winning the coveted RORC Trans-Atlantic Championship Trophy. The race started in the Canary Islands on 7<sup>th</sup> January and finished 11 days later in Grenada.

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In Dominica, former Government Minister and Special Envoy Dr. Kenneth Darroux was charged in connection with the importation of firearms accessories without a valid licence. He pled guilty and was fined \$5,000.

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A group of companies has banded together to create a new passenger ferry service. The new consortium, Connect Caribe, includes firms such as Upturn Funds, Windward Ferries Ltd, Ramps Logistics, Anthony Hinkson Consultancy Services and JS Cruises and Tours. By the end of the year they hope to have three vessels, with passenger services and a dedicated cargo vessel, operating routes across the Caribbean.

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On 11<sup>th</sup> January, voters went to the polls in Sint Maarten, the Dutch territory, to determine the next legislative body. 22,553 eligible voters elected the new 15-member legislature. Themes dominating the election included the territory's economic recovery, the cost-of-living crisis, issues relating to transparency and accountability in government, education and healthcare.

Turnout was at 65.08% and no party secured a majority, with both the largest parties, the National Alliance and the United People's Party, securing fewer seats than at the previous election. A new government was formed from the Unified Resilient St. Maarten Movement (URSM), the Democratic Party, the Party for Progress, and Nation Opportunity Wealth, all of whom secured two seats. URSM leader Luc Mercelina is now Prime Minister, replacing Silveria Jacobs of the National Alliance.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda has visited China to open his nation's new embassy in the Chaoyang District of Beijing. During his visit, he also met with Chinese Premier Xi Jinping.

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Six Roman Catholic Nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne were taken hostage in Haiti on 19<sup>th</sup> January, alongside two other people. Fortunately, all eight hostages were released the following Wednesday (24<sup>th</sup>). The Nuns and others were kidnapped whilst riding a bus in Port-au-Prince. No information has been released indicating who was responsible for the kidnapping or if a ransom was paid. The incident led religious leaders to issue a letter criticising the Haitian government's failure to tackle the gang situation in the country.

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The British overseas territory of Anguilla is expected to earn \$45 millions worth of revenue by the end of 2024 through its .ai internet domain. With the increasing success and popularity of Artificial Intelligence in the form of Chatbots and other programmes, the ai domain is becoming increasingly sought by software developers. Elon Musk's AI startup xAI launched its Grok chatbot from its X.ai web domain in November last year. Anguilla's commercial registry reports that companies are registering approximately 21,000 .ai domains every month.

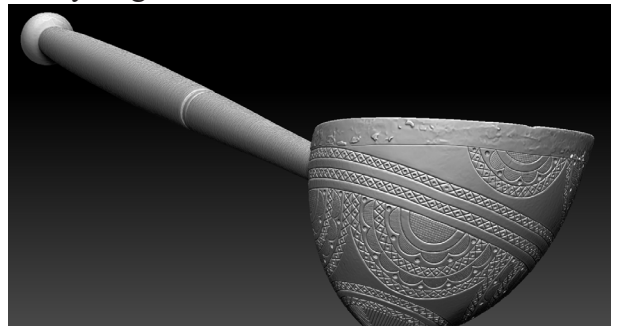
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The United States Virgin Island's Theron Thomas was named Songwriter of the Year (Non-Classical) at the Grammy awards 2024 in Los Angeles, California. Mr. Thomas (41) hails from the island of St. Thomas and paid tribute to his origins in his acceptance speech. His award comes after a year in which he has written such songs as "*Cheat Back*" for Chloe and Future; "*How We Roll*" for Ciara and Chris Brown and "*All My Life*" for Lil Durk and J.Cole.

## The West India Committee Report

The West India Committee has published a short history of the Garinagu people through our [heritage portal](#) as part of our current project, generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This includes education materials suitable for a young school audience, but also a [3D model](#) of the Ladle of Joseph Chatoyer, the only known artefact associated with the most famous member of the Garinagu, which has been produced by [SurfaceScan](#).

The model allows for people from all over the world to view the ladle and see its detailed carving, at a time when the original remains in a very fragile state.



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As part of our current project, Mr. Wells, the Committee's Director of Research and Heritage, delivered a well-received talk on the history of the Garinagu and Chatoyer's Ladle to the Welshpool and District Branch of the U3A in early January.

Mr. Wells also had the pleasure of addressing the Griffin Club in Amersham in March on the subject of the Thames River Police, first founded by the Committee in 1798.

## Caribbean Cookery

### **Caribbean Banana Bread**

Bananas are believed to have originated in South-east Asia between 8,000 to 5,000 BC. Gradually the fruit spread across Asia and Africa



and in 1516, a Spanish Priest, Father Tomas de Berlanga, transported some Banana roots to the island of Santo Domingo. It is believed the fruit's name is derived from the Arab word 'banan' meaning 'finger', as, indeed, it does resemble a human digit. Gradually, bananas spread throughout the West Indies and became an important crop. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, bananas had supplanted sugar as the main agricultural export of Jamaica.

Though over-ripe bananas are traditionally made into Banana Fritters in the Caribbean, Banana Bread, which probably originated in the United States, has grown in popularity and cooks on individual islands have added a variety of ingredients to give it a distinctively West Indian flavour.



### Ingredients

60g butter or margarine at room temperature  
180g brown sugar  
2 eggs  
3 over-ripe bananas – mashed  
1 and ½ heaped tablespoons of plain yogurt  
3 tablespoons rum  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1 teaspoon of powdered ginger

1 teaspoon of grated nutmeg  
50g desiccated coconut  
300g Self-Raising flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt

### Topping

Icing sugar  
Rum  
Desiccated coconut

### Method

First pre-heat oven to 180C and grease a loaf pan (Approximately 14 cms. x 12 cms.) Cream together the softened butter and brown sugar in a mixing bowl until smooth and fluffy, then beat the eggs, mashed bananas, yoghurt, rum and vanilla into the mixture. Then stir the desiccated coconut into the mixture. Sift the flour, baking powder, ginger, nutmeg and salt into the mixture and mix it in lightly.

Pour the mixture into the prepared loaf pan and bake at 180C for an hour. Test the loaf by inserting a skewer or toothpick and seeing if it comes out cleanly. If properly baked, remove the loaf from the tin and allow it to cool.

To make the topping, mix the icing sugar, a little rum and some desiccated coconut to make a fairly stiff but still flexible mixture. Spread the mixture over the top of the loaf.



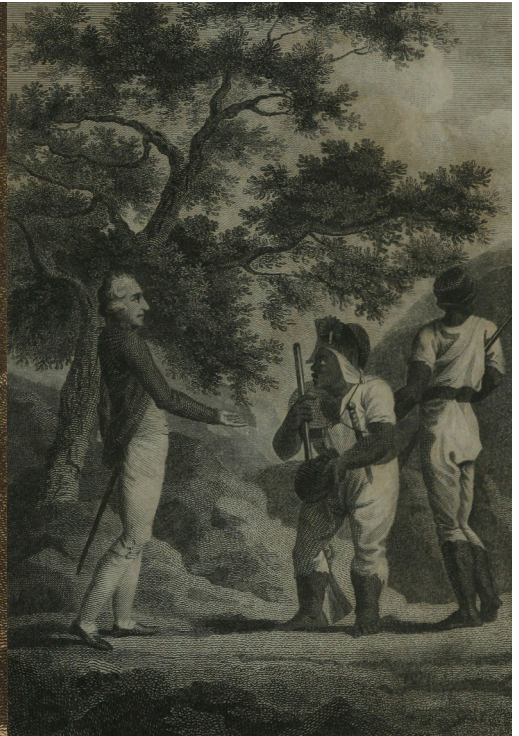
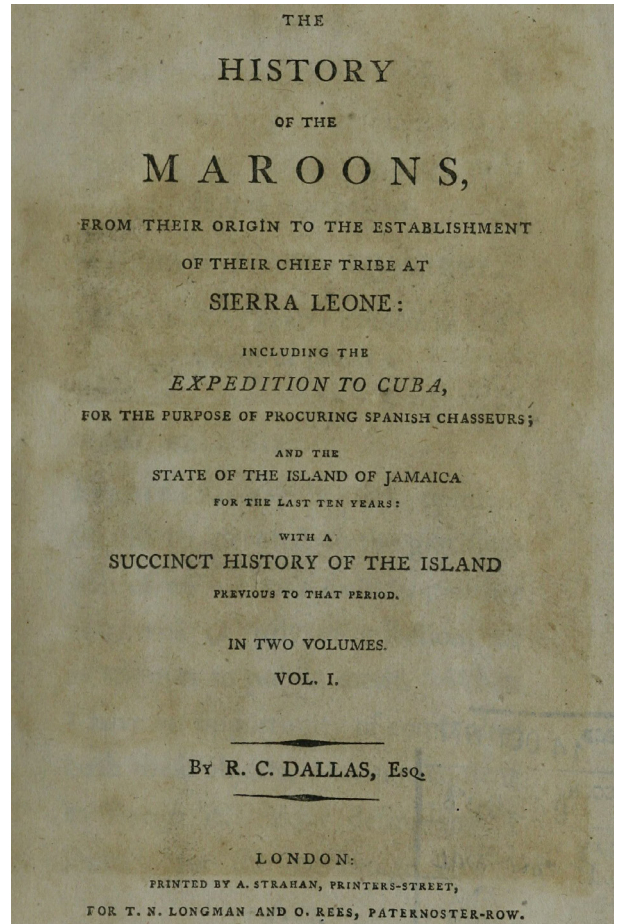


## From the Library

### The History of the Maroons

[This two-volume work](#), published in 1803, recounts the history of one of the unique cultures produced by the Caribbean, the Maroons of Jamaica. The Maroons had their origins as escaped slaves that fled to the mountains and established their own society and communities, intermarrying with the few remaining native Caribs/Taino that remained on Jamaica. They would frequently clash with Jamaican colonial society, until treaties were signed with both the Leeward and Windward Communities of Maroons and their respective leaders, Cudjoe and Queen Nanny.

This history provides the history of the Maroon people from the earliest times, but focuses on the Second Maroon war in the 1790s, and the exile of a large number of Maroons from Jamaica to Sierra Leone and Halifax, Nova Scotia. The Maroons continue to live in Jamaica today, with their own laws and leaders, traditionally referred to as Colonels.



# THE WEST INDIA COMMITTEE

The West India Committee is a UK registered charity that works to improve the welfare of the people of the Caribbean and the societies in which they live and work, both domestically and globally. Please complete this form by hand and post it to The West India Committee, c/o The Remembrance Trust, Lord Warden House, Lord Warden Square, Dover, Kent, CT17 9EQ

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