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THE NEGRO DUTCH OF THE DANISH ANTILLES

The only full-blown creole Dutch dialect was formed, side by side with an English dialect which finally supplanted it, not under the Netherlands flag but in the Danish Virgin Islands, St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix.¹ For its study we have what is unquestionably the best historical monograph on a creole tongue, D. C. Kesseling's *Met Negerhollands der Deense Antillen*. This work suffers from one important defect: its author had not himself heard the creole Dutch spoken. But the texts recorded a few years later by J. P. B. de Jonselin de Jong excellently furnish the necessary supplementation. This section rests chiefly upon the work of these two writers.

The Virgin Islands were cleared of their aboriginal population before the Europeans settled there. St. Thomas was settled by the Danes in 1672; St. John was settled from St. Thomas in 1717; and St. Croix, which had been held for a time by the French but was wholly abandoned when the Danish flag was hoisted, was settled in 1735 from the other two islands. Though the islands are small (132.4 square miles),² they were a typical West Indian plantation colony, raising sugar cane, cotton, and food crops with Negro slave labor. The proportion of Negroes to whites steadily increased: on St. Thomas there were 1.3 Negroes to every white in 1688, but 9.1 to one in 1754; on St. John the proportion rose from 5.5 to one in 1728 to 6.8 to one in 1739; and on St. Croix, which was settled after the plantation system had become well established, the proportion was about 6.5 to one in 1742 and 11.5 to one in 1754.³ The Negroes were of many tribes.

Oldendorp gives words from twenty-six languages which he found spoken by slaves on St. Thomas.⁴ Many of the slaves were imported by way of Curaçao,⁵ and most were carried in Danish Zealand ships.⁶ Between 1687 and 1754 we have records of the importation of about 15,751 slaves, or 231 per annum,⁷ which is, however, only about four per cent of the total number of Negroes at any one time. Not until 1782 was the African slave trade prohibited.⁸

Contact of the Negroes with their owners and other whites varied according to time and place. Four members of the Heiliger family in 1753 owned 670 slaves. On such plantations as theirs it is no wonder that "in many instances the supervision of the slaves was left to negro drivers."⁹ On the whole, contacts between the two races must have been rather frequent, for the average plantation was small, carrying only twenty slaves even on St. Croix, the most highly developed of the islands.

While all the Lesser Antilles were heterogeneous in their white population, the Danish Virgin Islands were particularly distinguished for their heterogeneity. From the beginning the majority of the settlers on St. Thomas were Dutch, so "Dutch became the prevailing language from the beginning."¹⁰ The planting population of St. Thomas in 1688 comprised 148 adults, distributed thus: 66 Dutch and 4 Flemings, 31 English, 17 Danes and Norwegians, 17 French, 4 Irish, 3 Germans, 3 Swedes, and one each of Scotch, Brazilians, and Portuguese.¹¹ Nearly a century later,

The planters . . . were a curiously cosmopolitan lot. On St. Thomas and St. John the most persistent element in the population in 1765 . . . was the Dutch, of which about four-fifths was of Zealand and Holland origin. The Danes came next in point of numbers, with probably less than half the

strength of the Dutch. The remaining less numerous nationalities, given about in the order of their strength, were the French, Germans, English (from the islands), and Irish. St. Croix from the beginning had a much larger proportion of English settlers than the other two islands.¹³

That the Dutch language was in general use among the planters of St. Thomas and St. John appears from a few incidental notices in the histories, as well as from the present geographical names.¹⁴ It appears also from the creation of a creole Dutch dialect, which the Moravian missionaries found in use upon their arrival in 1732. Wrote Hesselting of this "Negerbollands":

Undoubtedly this slaves' language originated at the beginning of the Danish colonization -- perhaps it existed even before the Danes settled in the Antilles [i.e., among the slaves of the Dutch planters]. But we have certain proof of the existence of the Negerbollands only from the year 1732, when the first missionaries came to the island [St. Croix] from the community of the Moravian Brethren or Herrnhutters. They started to learn the "Bastaardhollands" from the slaves in order to convey Christianity to them in their own language.

The arrival of these missionaries marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the creole Dutch; and our first extensive description of the linguistic situation of the islands was written by a Moravian, Oldendorp, in 1777; but for the moment we must pass over the work of the Herrnhutters to trace the general history of the Dutch language in the Virgin Islands. For,

If Dutch was suppressed by another language, Negro Dutch was equally bound to change; it was doomed to disappear, even though the process might be a gradual one.¹⁵

"So long as the Danish Antilles carried on a limited trade and agriculture was predominant," writes Hesselting, "there was little danger of our language losing its dominance."¹⁷ The first blow to the hegemony of the Dutch tongue was the opening of the

harbor of St. Thomas as a free port in 1724; this led to little change, however, until the English in 1781 destroyed the commerce of the Dutch island of St. Eustatius, which had been the emporium of the Antilles.

For St. Thomas the fall of St. Eustatius was the beginning of a period of great prosperity. . . . The neutral island profited from the wars of the European powers, for it became an entrepôt and a safe resort for shipping and trade. Between 1792 and 1801 not less than 1569 foreigners were registered as citizens. In 1799 the capital counted 7000 people. . . . Dollars, they said, were conveyed by the wheelbarrow-full.¹⁸

This trade was temporarily interrupted by English occupation in 1801 and again in 1807-1815. Concerning the linguistic effect of the latter occupation Hesselting says:

The presence of a garrison of 1600 soldiers for so many years certainly would have promoted the spread of the English language among all classes and colors of the inhabitants.¹⁹

After the end of the Napoleonic wars trade flourished again, but it was ruined in the middle of the nineteenth century by the introduction of steam navigation, which made such a haven no longer necessary. At the same time the plantations were almost ruined by the abolition of slavery in 1848. ²⁰ The population of the islands, especially the white population, declined greatly. ²¹

The commercial prosperity of St. Thomas had two results very important to linguistic history: the center of population shifted from the plantations to the towns, and the commercial class, served and imitated by the blacks, became more polyglot than ever, with the English language predominating.

Of the 14,000 inhabitants of the island only 2,500, of whom more than nine-tenths were slaves, gained their living from the plantations. In 1839, there were forty-one large im-

porting houses on the islands. Of these, thirteen were English, eleven French, six German, four Italian and Spanish, four American, and only three Danish or Dutch West Indian. This situation had not seriously changed by 1850. The population was nearly as cosmopolitan in St. Thomas at that date as in the mining camps then opening in California.

The missionary Oldendorp in 1777 sketched the linguistic situation in the islands just before the great upsurge of prosperity began.

In these islands are spoken English, German, Danish, Dutch, French, Spanish, and Creole. English and High German are the languages with which one can get along anywhere. The Negroes speak Creole, as does anyone who has to deal with them. Therefore most of the white inhabitants of the country, especially those born there, understand this language. Danes, Hollanders, and Frenchmen speak their own languages among themselves. The trade with the Spaniards who come to the islands makes it needful to learn their tongue. . . . This great number of languages is the occasion of many persons' mixing them together; they speak a great many, but none intact and well. The English language is especially necessary in the towns. White children are attended by Negroes and grow up among the Negro children; thus they learn first the Creole or Negro tongue, and sometimes they never learn any other correctly. This language is, however, spoken with more refinement by the white Creoles than by the Negroes. The English on the contrary for the most part learn no Creole, and their slaves must conform to their habit. For this reason the Negroes over large parts of St. Croix speak nothing but English.²³

Other records of the same period bear out Oldendorp's picture.

In a Danish book published in 1770, . . . ~~the following~~ dialects in the language spoken among the most prominent inhabitants of the island, people who send their children to school at Copenhagen and who evidently enjoy great wealth. . . . Creole had become the conversational language of these prominent Danes.²⁴

Even in the early part of the nineteenth century the traveler De Jong found Dutch to be the leading language.²⁵

But when De Jong wrote the tables were being turned. Dutch- and Creole-speaking whites and Creole-speaking Negroes must have

found it to their pecuniary advantage, if not absolutely necessary, to let their mother tongue fall into disuse and adopt the English and other languages spoken by the many foreigners of recent arrival. Especially must the Creoles of Dutch descent have lost touch with the Netherlands and its language. The Reverend G. B. Bosch, who was on St. Thomas in 1827, explains why a Dutch Reformed minister was fetched from New York instead of from the Netherlands:

. . . The Dutch language is hardly ever spoken here any more. The oldest of the congregation do still understand it well, but the generation now growing up express themselves in English.²⁶

The same writer mentions that all business transactions were carried on in English and that the local Courant was issued in English.²⁷ By 1850 the Netherlands Dutch language must have been virtually extinct.²⁸

"The Creole," wrote Hesseling, "has long survived the Dutch. Originating on the plantations, it remained in use there through the whole of the nineteenth century, although obviously its use gradually declined."²⁹ This is largely because a considerable part of the Negroes remained culturally and geographically isolated despite the small size of the islands and the attraction of the towns. It is in part due also to the exertions of the missionaries who used the Creole dialect as a medium of religious instruction.

The German Moravian Brothers arrived in 1732 and in the face of great opposition from the planters, who feared that any sort of education would spoil the docility of their slaves, began to inculcate the rudiments of Christianity and literacy among the

That the Lutheran Danes shared the linguistic views of the Moravian Germans appears in a statement made by the Reverend J. M. Mogens, translator of the New Testament, himself a Creole educated in Denmark:

The Creole speech is understood everywhere, but one does not wish to use the common words . . . which are used in daily conversation.³⁴

In the preface to his Grammatica over det Creolske Sprog he showed how the Creole had been Hollandized.

. . . If, he says, one wishes to form an idea of the Creole from the pronunciation of the Negroes, one would be very much mistaken, because they can not pronounce the "Litteras Gutturales" and mostly omit them; also they can not pronounce a cluster of two consonants. In order not to make his work "irregular" and "interminable," he has adopted the pronunciation of the white inhabitants, hoping that all people of sound judgment will agree that this is the best manner for formulating rules for a dialect service-able on all three islands.³⁵

Essentially, the kanseltaal of the two religious bodies was the same. That of the Lutherans was, however, somewhat nearer the speech of the Negro folk. Mogens avoided the Dutch passive introduced by the Moravians. "In addition," writes Hesseling,

I can cite the Danish periphrase *vier die no sal yt as op-posed to the Herrnhutters' expression eeuwig vuur. The Danes speak of Donker, Kop, Aderkinders, etc., where the Herrnhutters write Nacht, Hoofd, Aderen-Geslacht. The Creole plural formed with sender is the rule³⁶ with the Danes, the exception with the Herrnhutters.*

Hesseling thus explains the differences between the two forms:

1. The Danes brought more Danish and the Germans more German idioms into the text and for that matter into the conversation of the Negroes with whom they came into contact.
2. Probably both Mogens and the author of the German grammar took as norm the speech of a few persons or of a particular household. Considering the variety of the Negro population and that the newcomers still used their African

Negroes. The Lutheran clergy joined in the opposition, but found themselves forced by the Moravians' example to join (in 1756) in the missionary work. Both denominations naturally adopted the Creole Dutch as the only medium through which the majority of the slaves could be reached.³⁰ Both groups also considered it unfitted as it stood to bear the weight of discourse concerning spiritual matters, and proceeded to create for their religious publications a dialect "in great measure artificial"³¹ -- a dialect characterized as "a spiritual or pulpit idiom, which should be fittingly understood by Christians."³² The spirit in which they set about this task is illustrated by a statement by Oldendorp:

For eloquent utterance, especially on religious matters, this tongue is not rich, not cultivated enough; one must be content if one can express what is necessary in a sufficiently clear manner. Its poverty appears particularly in the translation of the Holy Scriptures and German songs. Since the religion of Jesus had never been expounded in this language, the missionaries found in the beginning a great want of the necessary expressions, which they first introduced from the Dutch and German languages. And since the imperfect Creole way of conjugating led to many ambiguities in translation, they decided to form a passive voice just as in German or Dutch, and thus remedy that defect. As the language of a nation necessarily bears a relation to its knowledge, and the latter can not progress beyond the former; so along with the widening and improvement of their knowledge the speech of the Negroes must also necessarily improve. And since it is a foreign tongue to them, at least to the bussals [African-born Negroes], it is not hard for them to better themselves therein. But the Creoles too learn very gladly from the missionaries, because they find important the matters to which this language has been adapted in poetry and good translations. It is therefore not only richer in expression, but also more flexible. The former quality is secured through the introduction of foreign words in accordance with the origins of the language and its present usage; while the most important step in securing the latter has been the introduction of a fixed scheme of conjugation.³³

mother tongue in varying degrees, this was certainly the only manner in which to complete such a task. The writer of the German grammar says further that, even if one could speak Negro Dutch well, he would nevertheless in some cases be unable to understand the Negroes, since they "often squeeze the sounds out of their throats. Many pronounce the Creole according to their Guinea dialect, or mix more Guinea words than usual in it, or speak with such extraordinary rapidity that they quite fail to pronounce many letters." Finally (5), the German grammar was compiled approximately 30 years later than the Danish, and new variations could be produced in this period through rapid changes in circumstances, especially through the introduction of new slaves.³⁹

Nevertheless,

The cardinal point in which the Danish translation differs from the German actually consists in this: that the latter was done by foreigners and the former by a man [Mogens] born on the island.³⁸

One must also allow for the apparent differences caused by the use of the Danish and Dutch spellings (the latter with some German trimmings) -- differences which must have been troublesome to the semi-literate Negro.

Despite the fact that the Danes worked among the Negroes about the capital and the Germans among the plantation Negroes, there were no true dialects of the Dutch Creole speech.³⁹

The literature produced by the missionaries was scanty and covers but a brief period. Hesselting has described it at length. Of the Danes, J. C. Kingo in 1770 published a Creole A B book; the same year appeared J. M. Mogens's Grammatica, containing a number of dialogs in "refined" Creole speech. In 1781 a fine edition of Mogens's translation of the New Testament was printed; a second edition in cheaper format appeared in 1818. J. J. Praetorius in 1827 issued Dr. Marten Luther sie klein Katechismus ka

set over na die Creol Taal and an Evangellie Kristelikk Leerling-Buk tot Gebruyk na die Onderwies van die Katechesen sonder na die Deen Mission in Amerika. The Moravian contribution consists of the following: 1) a liturgy, with the ritual for baptism and communion, and some songs (1761); 2) Gebeden en Liederen voor die swart Broedergemeenten van St. Thomas (1765); 3) Psalmboek voor die Negergemeenten van St. Thomas, St. Croix, en St. Jan (1774), reissued in 1784; the second edition was the high point of "high," Hollandized Creole; 4) a translation of the New Testament (1802); 5) Die Hoofd-Inhoud van die Leerling van Jesus Christus (1785); 6) an A.R.C. Boekje voor die Negerkinderen na St. Thomas, St. Croix en St. Jan (1800). A Grammatick der Creol-Sprache in West-Indiën, written about 1802, was never printed.

Even as the later titles of this little literature were appearing, the dialect in which they were written was becoming useless to the missionaries. We have already seen that the English tongue was driving out the Creole Dutch in St. Croix by the middle of the eighteenth century. The author of the Moravian Grammatik refers to the "verdorben Englisch" spoken in the western part of St. Croix about 1800.⁴⁰ By 1831 a visitor found that on St. Croix "the inhabitants are almost all of English extraction, and only broken English is spoken." On St. Thomas, however, "The inhabitants here, as on St. Jean, are of Dutch extraction, and the Creole Dutch language prevails here."⁴¹ (This probably was true only of the rural districts of St. Thomas.) In 1830 the American preacher J. J. Gurney observed that the Moravian brothers did not exert the influence which they should, because of "their practice of preach-

ing and teaching in the Negro-Dutch, a barbarous jargon now but little spoken by the people," and contrasts this condition with their success on Antigua, where they were "impeded by no Negro-Dutch."⁴²

About the same time (1838) Sylvester Hovey, another visitor, reported that the Moravians were accomplishing little because they did not know the language -- referring probably to the English language.⁴³ James Smith, in 1840, wrote: "Although

St. Croix is a Danish island, yet the English language is universally spoken. Even the slaves speak a sort of creole English."⁴⁴

In 1843 an anonymous author thought it worthy of interest to print a letter in the broken English of the Virgin Islands, but did not

illustrate the broken Dutch.⁴⁵ Finally, "The death knell of the Negro Dutch was sounded when, on the 4th July, 1848, the slaves . . . were emancipated."⁴⁶

"From that time," says Taylor, "St. Thomas ceased to be an agricultural community. The town and its temptations were too strong for the labouring population and it was not long before some of the best estates were turned out for want of sufficient hands to till them. . . ." The existence of the Negro Dutch was entirely dependent upon plantation life. It was never a language of trade or the harbor, and now that everything was concentrated in the center of business, the disappearance of the plantation language was a mere matter of time.⁴⁷

When Van Name wrote twenty-one years later (drawing his information from a young man who had once lived on St. Thomas), he stated that:

Until within a few years the Moravian missionaries have preached in this language to the blacks, but they have now abandoned it for a broken English.⁴⁸

How this came about we may read in an article by Dr. E. Pontoppidan, a Danish resident of St. Thomas, who wrote in 1881:

The divine service in the Lutheran church was held in Creole for the colored congregation until thirty years ago; but, as this tongue was more and more forgotten and, for example, the young people had first to learn the Creole as a foreign language in order to be prepared for confirmation, it was given up and English substituted.⁴⁹

The High Creole of the religious writings, adds Pontoppidan,

was often quite unintelligible to a person at home in the common idiom, especially if he had not learned something of it in the lessons preparatory to confirmation.

At present [wrote Pontoppidan] the Creole has almost completely disappeared from St. Croix, although on St. Thomas one finds sporadically a few old women fluent in it. Yet in the more remote places in the country, such as the missions of the Moravian Brothers at "Heu-Herhut" and "Niesky," and on the island of St. Jan, small, decayed, and half run to waste, it has maintained itself better. It is the mother tongue and vernacular of the older generation, who speak English badly and with difficulty, but Low Creole with fluency. Young people, however, have adopted English, and one can say with assurance that the Creole will very soon be a dead language; in a generation one will hardly be able to find a person who can speak it.⁵¹

Pontoppidan thought that the influence of the printed Creole word, such as it may have been, had almost completely passed.

The oral sources still at our disposal are all from the lowest stratum of society. They are mostly old rural Negroes, whose ideas are confined to a very narrow circle and whose vocabulary is correspondingly limited. Naturally they can not spell the words, and one encounters in local and even individual differences and variations in their speech. Also it is often doubtful whether, for example, a word is English or Creole, etc.⁵²

Pontoppidan, as the material gathered forty-two years later by De Jonselein de Jong shows, was somewhat premature in describing the decay of the "Negerhollands."⁵³

Nevertheless, by 1900 the Creole speech must have passed out of general use even among the old people. Taylor, writing in 1888 after a residence of twenty-two years on St. Thomas, says of St. John: "The population,

which now numbers about 900, speaks English."⁵⁴ Two popular Danish writers in 1900 had this to say about the language of the islands:

English is the common language on St. Thomas, as it is generally in the Danish West Indies. Meanwhile the English of the Negro people is a terrible gibberish, intermixed with words and phrases from every other possible language. It has its own grammar and is very ugly. This jargon has also left definite traces in the language of the Europeans, so that the best English is not generally heard in our islands.⁵⁵

Since this account does not agree with what is known of the English of that period, one suspects that the writers had in mind the remains of the "Negerhollands." A correspondent of Hesselings's, writing in 1904, reported:

The language in its purity is now spoken by a very few old people, principally those living in the country districts. The younger generation speak a mixed dialect that is called Creole, but it contains very many English words. . . . Our people [the Negroes] speak a comparatively pure English and there is no patois like in the French or Dutch islands. In fact, if any one wished to study the language ⁵⁶ it now is spoken, it would be best to do it immediately.

The same correspondent furnished a few sentences in this debased Creole; but the vocabulary and structure appear to be still Dutch Creole -- not broken English. The "Negerhollands" recorded some years later by De Josselin de Jong is not much mixed. One wonders, therefore, whether a mixed Creole dialect was actually prevalent to any extent among the young adults at the turn of the century, and, if there was, whether it was used only in addressing the old people or also among themselves. This is the one really obscure spot in the history of the language: exact information is almost always hardest to secure concerning the phenomena of transition.

The ease with which one can underestimate the vitality of a dying language is shown by the fact that De Josselin de Jong was able in 1923 to gather a large number of folktales in the Creole. He found that the "story-dances" at the celebration of births and deaths, as well as children's songs, had kept something of the "Negerhollands" current. His informants, however, had been born between 1840 and 1863. It is so exceptional to find a description of the social aspects of a waning creole tongue that the account of De Josselin de Jong is quoted here despite its great length.

Finally a few more remarks in connection with the Negro Dutch language community. I doubt if there would be a single person among the white inhabitants who would agree that any such thing exists. And truly that is not surprising. . . . the nine black people who have been my instructors . . . the youngest was sixty years old, and I have had enough contact with the people to venture the statement, that the younger generation indeed knows little more about the language than a few words and expressions used in a mocking way. For these younger people, Negro Dutch is little more than a more or less secret language with which the oldest generation likes to boast, but which is really out of date, superfluous, and thus ridiculous. This attitude toward a language which for more than a century was the mother tongue of the whole community, and actually was such for more than one of the present generation a quarter of a century back, is not simply a result of the necessity of being able to speak English; it is only one of the symptoms of the rapidly advancing Americanization, which here as elsewhere in the West Indies estranges the younger generation from their own culture and language. In fact also the oldest are forced to speak principally English, which they do with great ease. But in addition they remain true to their vernacular as to an honored tradition, inseparably attached to all this poor and mutilated culture, which remained with them through all the adversity of the period of slavery, and to which they now seem to cling with greater stubbornness proportionately as they feel the threat of this their most valuable possession being confined through untelligibility and lack of interest to their own narrow circle. In the beginning I was somewhat surprised at this attachment to an historic past. I had expected a more complex mental attitude in regard to a tradition and a language

which, although continuing a cultural community of centuries past, must have been closely associated in the folk mind with the terror of slavery. It is however unnecessary to associate with these Negroes for a long time to discover that the image of such a terror does not exist with them. Much stronger than the realization of what their ancestors must have suffered is the recollection of all that kept alive in those days their sense of community; the old rituals, dances and songs, the nights of religious consecration and jubilant festivity that followed the days of bitter humiliation and banality. In their relation to the whites the recollection of slavery as such -- as far as I could discern -- does not play any significant rôle. . . . I have -- perhaps unjustly -- gained the impression from their historical reflections that they tend to see in the period of transition [following emancipation] merely a break with their "good old times," which the Americans have now ended for all time.

Such conceptions and feelings are found mainly, perhaps entirely, among the oldest generation, thus among that small minority of the community which feels in the Negro Dutch the least sign of life of a dying tradition, the last link between a mourned past and a present which is rapidly changing for the worse.

Even today the Creole linguistic community is not quite extinct. Nelson, in 1936, secured from two or three old people on St. Thomas a considerable vocabulary and two short texts.⁵⁸

The presence of a "broken English" among the slaves on the plantations owned by Britons during the eighteenth century has been noticed. From early times there must have been many bilingual Negroes, some speaking Creole Dutch with a strong English accent, and others tinging their English with Dutch. The present English dialect of the Virgin Islands still bears some marks of the "Negerhollands." However, the speech of the Negroes in 1936 impressed Nelson chiefly by its archaisms and its Irish idioms and intonation; for the managers and overseers early in the nineteenth century, when the Negroes of St. Thomas and St. John were making the change to English, were mostly Irishmen.⁵⁹ The only published account of the English dialect of the islands is a

brief and very inaccurate one by Whitehead, prefacing a monolog in the English idiom of about 1890, as handed down by tradition.⁶⁰

From this monolog, which may not accurately reflect the actual Negro dialect of that time, the speech of the Danish Negro was much the same as that of the Negro in the other English-speaking Antilles. According to Whitehead -- whose statements are recorded without an attempt to evaluate them -- the common speech of the Virgin Island blacks is marked by the following characteristics:

- 1) The inclusion of some West African terms (only three given);
- 2) a Danish (surely Creole Dutch) accent, with a tendency to stress the last syllable of a word, as in gu marnin (good morning);
- 3) the inclusion of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and occasionally Danish words; 4) "a general basis of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century English, which is, traditionally, the language of trade and of the buccaneers throughout most of the West India islands"; 5) "a tendency toward proverbial utterances."⁶¹ The present writer sees nothing that can be attributed to Dutch influence, or much different from the Negro English of other islands. In the dialect as set down by Parsons and Gimenez.

The quality of the English spoken in the three islands must have risen steadily throughout most of the past century. The educated and moneyed classes must have become increasingly conversant with good English at the same time they were dropping the use of Creole Dutch with their servants. At the same time they spoke Danish little or not at all (Danish was the language of administration only). Their example must have affected the laboring class. Compulsory education appears to have been a

very important factor. The Moravians had already made a considerable beginning toward making the Negroes literate (in Creole Dutch, to be sure). In 1853, five years after the abolition of slavery, education was made nominally compulsory for all children between their sixth and thirteenth years. In 1876 the English language was made a compulsory subject of instruction, and most of the teaching, if not all, was in fact done in English.⁶² The quality of English used by the children today does not appear as a very great problem to educators in the islands.⁶³ The census taken upon annexation to America in 1917 gives a partial picture of the efficiency of education under the Danes. Of the population between 5 and 9 years of age, 71.1% were in school; between 10 and 14 years, 78.1%; between 15 and 20 years, 4.5%. Illiteracy was rather high: 24.9% for the total population, 11.3% for the whites, 29.7% for the Negroes, 9.6% for the mixed; in the cities it was only 18.2% but in the rural districts 34.6%. Only 164 persons were returned as unable to speak English, of whom 108 were French-speaking poor whites, the "Cha-chas" from St. Barthelemy.⁶⁴ During 1935-1936 there was a very large immigration of Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, especially into St. Croix, but what effect this may have on the English dialect remains to be seen.

While nearly all authorities are agreed that Creole Dutch and to some extent English were the common tongues of the Negroes, one writer (Boesch), who was at St. Thomas in 1877, stated:

The Curaçaoish vernacular is the dominant language among the black and colored population. This language I enjoy

more than any other. I heard it in the streets and markets because at home in Curaçao I had for so many years been accustomed to it. . . . The Curaçaoish language is not only used by the black and colored on the Danish islands, but one hears it on other islands as well, especially in Cuba.⁶⁵

Boesch undoubtedly exaggerated a very great deal. The Reverend E. C. Greider, bishop of the Moravians on St. Thomas, wrote to Boesch regarding the Papiamentu, or Spanish of Curaçao:

I do not think it is either spoken or understood here now. In the early part of the 19th century, there was much more communication between Curaçao and St. Thomas than now, and the majority of the Jewish families have come from that island. This fact of closer and more frequent intercourse may explain the use of the Spanish Creole at that time.⁶⁶

In any case it was no doubt the language (or one of the languages) of the Negroes held by masters of Curaçao extraction, or who had themselves been imported from Curaçao. When Boesch visited St. Thomas, many languages could be heard in the port, Creole Spanish among them, but the few traces which it has left on the "Negerhollands" shows that the latter dialect was the prevalent one.

Van Name, writing in 1869, stated that Creole French was spoken by "a considerable portion of the city population in St. Thomas," and gives a few examples of the St. Thomas usage, obtained from his informant Frederico Antonio Camps.⁶⁷

To sum up the linguistic history of the Danish (now the American) Virgin Islands: The islands have, down to the present time, been celebrated for the polyglot character of their planting and commercial population. As many of the early slaveholders were Netherlanders, a Creole Dutch speedily took form among the slaves and became the folk-language of St. Thomas and St. John.

The white Creole population also spoke it in a somewhat refined form. This was adopted as the basis for a small religious literature by the Danish and German missionaries, who (especially the latter) further refined it to meet what they conceived to be the needs of elevated religious discourse. They did not, however, affect the folk speech very much by their literature. Meanwhile the island of St. Croix was settled largely by English-speaking slaveholders, and a Creole English dialect arose there, which spread to the other islands. The commercial prosperity of the islands attracted many foreigners and made English the language of commerce, thus displacing Dutch at first among the white and later among the colored Creoles. The urbanization of the Negroes completed the process. Consequently the "Negerhollands" went out of general use about the middle of the nineteenth century, though a few old persons speak it today. The English dialect has been considerably refined, largely through the influence of the schools, although it still retains many features common to the Negro English of the British Antilles and also some traces of Creole Dutch influence. For a while during the nineteenth century some of the urban population spoke Papiamentu and Creole French. Only a few whites knew the official language, Danish, which the Government never tried to force upon the people.

Structure of Negro Dutch

The "Negerhollands" was first described by Mogens in 1770; then by Oldendorp in 1777 and the Moravian author of the unpublished Grammatik about 1802. They were followed by Van Name, using both texts and an informant, in 1869, and by Pontoppidan

in 1881. Finally, on the basis of all material then available, Hesseling published his thorough study in 1905, which was supplemented by De Josselin de Jong in 1924 and 1928. A second edition of Hesseling, incorporating the information to be had from De Josselin de Jong's collection of folk Creole texts, would be desirable.

The Dutch language, like the English, is simple enough in structure not to show the effects of creolization as strikingly to the superficial observer as do the Romance tongues. Nevertheless, the "Negerhollands" has the essentials of a creolized language. One form of the personal pronoun serves for all cases.

The noun has no case endings, and the article and adjective (except when used substantively, e.g. *die dooden*) are entirely without inflections either of number, gender, or case. The genitive when it follows the governing noun is connected with it by the preposition *va* (van); when it precedes, the possessive pronoun *sh* is inserted; thus, *die boek va Jan*, or *Jan sh* book. ^{John's book.} 168

However, both the Dutch plural endings, *en* and *s*, are preserved, although as a feature common to several Negro Creole languages, that of designating the plural by suffixing the third person plural pronoun, in this case *sende* or *sender* (*sellie* for persons), is.

"In Oldendorp's time," wrote Van Name, "both the comparative and superlative endings *er*, *st* were retained in a few adjectives, though *er* was compared by means of *meer*, *meest*. . . . But now only the superlative ending is preserved."⁷⁰ The verb is usually the verb stem "stripped of all terminations and frequently of a portion of the root in addition";⁷¹ it is conjugated by means of the auxiliaries *le* or *lo*, (*b/a*, *ka*, and *sa/l*), whose obscure derivation is discussed by Hesseling.⁷² The passive

voice of the Moravian New Testament is entirely artificial.

The Creole, however, makes limited use of a passive formed by means of kom or ka; thus, die hoës ka bouw 't he house is built.⁷³ Ellipsis is very common, as in other creole dialects. Take for example the proverb: Water kok so fes, fes no weët. "It Water kookt veer de vis, maar de vis weët het niet" (The water is boiling for the fish, but the fish doesn't know it).⁷⁴

The sounds of Creole and of southern Netherlands Dutch are on the whole the same. The Negroes have, however, clipped their speech of many sounds, especially final stops and final f, and have added vowels -- usually [u] or [o] -- at the end of syllables, as in many other Negro Creole dialects.⁷⁵

Changes in the structure of the "Negerhollands" from the time of Makens and Oldendorp can be traced, which are mostly due to the isolation from European Dutch influence and to the pressure of the English language, with which many of the Creole Dutch speakers were familiar. (The influence of the English in the lexical field is obvious.) Since its speakers had no opportunity of hearing standard or European Dutch spoken, the "Negerhollands" shows great phonetic decay from the forms used a hundred and fifty years ago, at least by the white Creoles of that time. De Josselin de Jong writes on this point:

It is possible to follow the whole process of decay from a few compound expressions which are frequently used, as the most important weakening phases are still used alongside each other. Thus the old fordetmaak (because) no longer occurs in this form but in the weaker forms foedetma, foedma, and foem. If the language might still exist for some time, we should most probably see develop as final phases in the weakening process the forms ma and a. A still more remarkable example of phonetic weakening, as well as accompanying

change of function is afforded by the compound verb which in the "classical" Negro Dutch was laatstahn, signifying achterlaten (leaving behind), overlaten (leaving over), achterwege laten (neglecting), and toestaan (granting, allowing). The less weakened form which still exists is lastaan. This form as well as the weaker stages lasta, lasta, and sta have pretty well retained the original meanings; but the form ta is also used in the present language, functioning primarily as an adhortative particle, e.g. ta ons lo, "laten wy gaan" (let us go).

The vocabulary of the Creole Dutch is mostly Dutch, particularly of Zeeland, of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; for the majority of the seamen and adventurers in the West Indies came from such centers as Middelburg, Veere, and Vlissingen. Some French words have entered by way of Zeeland Dutch; indeed, Hesselring holds that the direct French influence upon "Negerhollands" has been negligible.⁷⁶ A number of Danish words and some Low German expressions have come into the Creole Dutch. But most of these in the literature seem to be the result of the missionsaries giving Dutch words a German or a Danish form.⁷⁹ A number of English words were adopted in early times, and the proportion naturally increased as the English language won ground at the expense of the Dutch.⁸⁰ But so similar are many common Germanic words in their Dutch, Low German, Danish, and English forms, that one cannot be sure of the derivation of some words as they appear in their mutilated Creole Dutch form. That Spanish words were more numerous than English words in the Creole is at first glance surprising. The proximity of Puerto Rico has something to do with this, but the long and intimate contact with Curaçao was the chief cause.⁸¹ Hesselring was surprised at the small number

of unmistakably Portuguese words, in view of the presence of Portuguese-speaking Jews in the Virgin Islands. (Certain Portuguese words were also generally current from very early times in the slave trade.) Probably a number of Portuguese words were assimilated to their Spanish forms.⁸² A very few Indian names of plants are current.⁸³

The African element deserves special notice. The "salt-water" Negroes spoke the Creole as might be expected of foreigners in their disadvantageous position, as appears from an observation by Oldendorp:

Many Negroes speak this language [Creole] well, it is true, but very rapidly; and according to their Guinea dialect they pronounce the words very indistinctly, as if they half stuck in their mouths. It takes long practice, and even then sometimes an interpreter, to understand them correctly, especially when they mix in Guinea words.⁸⁴

But, a few decades since the importation of the last African slave, very few African words remained in the Creole vocabulary. Hesseling, however, believes that a few elements of the morphology and phonology show African influence.⁸⁵ In this he is supported by De Josselin de Jong.⁸⁶

Hesseling thus explains the speedy linguistic assimilation of the Africans:

It was to their interest to adopt the language of the whites and Creole blacks as soon as possible. In this they were successful primarily and to the greatest extent in respect to that part of the language in which they were most conscious of differing from the Europeans, namely, the vocabulary. This was not only to their own interest but was also a matter of pride with them. As elsewhere, the Negroes born in the West tended to look down with contempt upon their recently imported fellow slaves. They were stupid, contemptible creatures! An old Negro woman who had become a Christian expressed her condition of blindness before her conversion by saying that she was a "poor pauper, a 'salt head,' a black heathen."⁸⁷

It therefore behooved these "salt heads" to assimilate themselves as rapidly as might be to the Creoles, socially and linguistically.

Texts. The books printed in "Negerhollands" are very rare. Hesseling therefore devotes half his book to a chrestomathy, arranged from the less artificial to the more artificial examples of written Creole, together with such proverbs and dialogues as were then available. Schuchardt's article contains a long letter by an educated Creole, written in 1883. The extensive collection of De Josselin de Jong is the most valuable source, being a phonetic transcription of the actual speech of the folk.

Notes and References

1. These are the official names since the group became the Virgin Islands of the United States in 1917. The names appear in various spellings in different languages; in particular, St. Croix is often referred to as Santa Cruz.
2. St. Thomas, 18,080 acres, St. John, 12,780.8 acres, St. Croix, 53,913.6 acres.
3. The following tables, compiled from Westergaard, 318-319, show something of the early development of the islands and of the proportion of Negroes to whites and by plantations. In interpreting the figures, it must be remembered that, as the islands developed, owners hid the slaves at census time so as to avoid paying poll taxes on them. (Westergaard, 133.)

I. Population of St. Thomas

Date	1698	1691	1715	1720	1725	1733	1740	1745	1754
Whites	317	389	547	565	7324	7332	8249	8271	8228
Negroes	422	555	3042	4187	4490	3721	3133	2894	3481
Plantations	90	101	160	164	177	148	153	108	154
Neg. per Plant.	4.7	3.8	19.0	25.5	25.4	25.1	20.4	27.6	22.6
Neg. per White	1.3	1.4	5.6	7.4	13.8	11.2	12.5	11.0	15.7

Note: Figures marked # are numbers of adult whites only. Allowing three adults to two children, the figures marked * from 1725 to 1754, should be approximately 8.3, 6.7, 7.5, 6.7, and 9.1.

II. Population of St. John

Date	1720-1	1728*	1733	1739
Whites	125	677	208	208
Negroes	39	87	109	1414
Plantations	7.8	5.5	10.0	13.0
Neg. per White	5.5	3.2	6.8	

Note: Figures for 1728 are approximate.

III. Population of St. Croix (approximate)

Date	1742	1745	1754
Owners and Whites in Christianstad	c. 174	c. 225	c. 386
Negroes	1906	2878	7566
Plantations	264	263	375
Negroes per Plant.	7.3	11.0	20.1
Negroes per White	c. 6.5	c. 7.5	c. 11.5

The results of the 1773 census, reported by Hesseling (p. 22) from Georg Høst, *Kterretninger om den Sænt Thomas af dens Gouverneur, optegnede der den Landet fra 1759 indtil 1773*, p. 175, hardly agree with the figures of only nineteen years before. On St. Thomas were 39 sugar and 43 cotton plantations, with a white population of only 54, as against 2593 Negroes and 574 colored (a proportion of one white as against 58.6 negroid). In the capital were 282 whites as against 1031 black and colored, a proportion of one to 3.7. There were besides 336 free Negroes, who held 90 slaves. The total white population was therefore 336, the total colored population 4624, a proportion of one to 13.8. On St. John there were 27 sugar and 42 cotton plantations with a population of 104 whites and 2330 slaves (one to 22.4).

Hesseling observes that the increase of population in the capital and the decrease on the plantations was unfavorable to the Creole Dutch language.

4. Oldendorp, chapter on the Negroes and their languages.

5. Hesseling, 31-32, 68; "Papiaments en Negerhollands."

6. Westergaard, Appendix J, p. 151.

7. Westergaard, Idem.

8. Westergaard, 247.

9. Westergaard, 138, 226.

10. Westergaard, 38.

11. Westergaard, 121.

12. Westergaard, 247. In a footnote he continues: "In a separate list of sixty-eight of St. John's inhabitants, Martfeldt has 71 as having come from St. Thomas, 16 from St. John, six each from 'Sabbath' and Tortola, five from Denmark, four from St. Suetadius, three each from Ireland and St. Martin, and one apiece from Germany, Curacao, Montserrat and St. Kitts."

Such diversity was by no means confined to the Danish Antilles.

13. Hesseling, 19, 25; Westergaard, 224. Oldendorp (1742-233)

writes: "In St. Croix are more Danes and Britons; in St. Thomas and St. John more Dutchmen."

14. See Hesseling, 13 ff., for citations of Høst, Knox, and Lebat. Mcquire gives the geographical names.

15. Hesseling, 20.

16. Idem, 21.

17. Idem.

18. Idem, 25, 25, 26.

19. Idem, 26.

20. Idem, 26, 29-30.

21. This is shown by the Danish census figures: 1845 47,178 (26,691 on St. Croix, 14,222 on St. Thomas, 2475 on St. John)

1841 40,956 1870 37,821

1846 39,588 1880 33,763

1850 39,614 1890 32,786

1855 37,231 1901 30,527

1860 39,231 1911 27,086

22. Westergaard, 252.
23. Oldendorp, 262-263.
24. Hesselting, 25. The title of the book is not given.
25. "The life of the people is essentially 'Hollands', which includes the symbolic connotation of the word, and although different languages are spoken, Danish and Dutch are the ones most frequently heard; the latter is the most general." De Jong, *Reize naar de Caraïbische Eilanden*, Haarlem, 1897, p. 287, quoted by Hesselting, 24.
26. G. B. Roach, *Reizen in West-Indië en door een gedeelte van Zuid- en Noord-Amerika, Utrecht, 1829-1836*, p. 385, quoted by Hesselting, 27. This minister was the first to preach in English, according to Knox, 143.
27. Hesselting, 28.
28. Idem.
29. Hesselting, 29.
30. This was not done without some linguistic difficulty on the part of the Moravians. Not until 1736 could they reach the Negroes effectively in Creole, and only in 1743 was Creole made the language of the mission colony. The Moravian plantations later became the strongholds of the Creole speech. (Hesselting, 42.)
31. Van Name, 160.
32. Hesselting, 42.
33. Oldendorp, 433-434.
34. Quoted by Hesselting, 35-36. The original Creole is: "Mie ka volg die Creolise Spreek-Manier overal, maer mie ne ha wil gebruyk die gemeene woorden. . . die sallie dog gebruyk in daezelig Omgang."
35. Hesselting, 36-37.
36. *Ibid.*, 38.
37. *Ibid.*, 40.
38. *Ibid.*, 43.
39. *Ibid.*, 48.
40. *Ibid.*, 45.
41. *Ibid.*, 29, quoting Meinecke, *Versuch einer Geschichte der Europäischen Colonien in West-Indien*, Weimar, 1891, p. 749.
42. Idem, quoting J. J. Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies*, 4th ed., London, 1841, pp. 32, 70.
43. Hovey, 30.
44. Smith, 113.
45. Letters from the Virgin Islands, 188.
46. Hesselting, 29.
47. Hesselting, 28-30; Taylor, 19.
48. Van Name, 159-160.
49. Pontoppidan, 130.
50. *Ibid.*, 131.
51. *Ibid.*, 130-131.
52. *Ibid.*, 131. Pontoppidan, by the way, had several defects as an observer: he had little idea of scientific linguistics; he was unable to go into the etymology of his texts; and he

- did not know Dutch well enough to distinguish the Dutch source of many of the idioms with which he dealt. (Hesselting, 40.) Schuchardt is severe with him; "Pontoppidan appears not to be fully trusted on the Creole. . . . Pontoppidan's writings hardly ever give the true utterance." (Schuchardt, 125-126.)
53. Two years after Pontoppidan wrote, a Mr. A. Mogens, a descendant of the translator of the Testament, wrote a long letter to Schuchardt in High Creole; see Schuchardt's article. Mogens probably was exceptional among the educated Creoles, because of his family tradition.
54. Taylor, 99.
55. Hesselting, 33, translating an article by F. Rørgesen and F. P. Uldall, "Vore Vestindiske Ber." appearing in Vol. 13 of the *Geografisk Tidsskrift*.
56. Hesselting, 33-34.
57. De Josselin de Jong, 15-17.
58. Mr. Nelson was on St. Thomas in June, 1846. In August he had a conversation with the present writer and lent him his notes, which include a vocabulary, several sentences, a translation of "Three Blind Mice," and a song sung by carousers on Christmas Eve.
59. Hovey, 28-30.
60. Whitehead in *American Speech*, 7:175-179.
61. Whitehead, 175. The quality of Whitehead's observations may be gauged by his reference to the "Danish" accent and by his speaking of "the Crucian (and St. Thoman) Creole," a lingua franca invented by the early Moravian missionaries to meet the requirements of plantation-slaves who combined the language of their European masters' families with their own African dialects."
62. Report of the Educational Survey of the Virgin Islands. Conversation in 1934 with Mr. A. K. Lindborg, formerly superintendent of schools in the Virgin Islands.
63. Census of the Virgin Islands of the United States: Aspinall, 191. The population returned in 1917 was divided thus: Total, 26,051; St. Croix, 14,901 (towns, 7,718); St. Thomas, 12,191 (7,747 in Charlotte Amalia); St. John, 959. White, 7.4%. Negro, 74.9%, mixed, 17.5%. By birthplace, 19,842 were born in the Virgin Islands; 4267 in the British West Indies -- and their linguistic influence must be great --; 809 in the other West Indies, nearly all being from the English-speaking Dutch islands; 603 in the United States; 277 in Denmark, 303 elsewhere.
64. Roach, *op. cit.*, quoted by Hesselting, 31.
65. Quoted by Hesselting, 32.
66. Van Name, 126-127; see also Hesselting, 31-33, 68, and article.
67. Van Name, 160.
68. Van Name, 160.
69. Van Name, 160; Hesselting, 93-94.
70. Van Name, 161.

71. Van Name, 162.
 72. Hesselting, 103-110.
 73. Hesselting, 130, from Pontoppidan.
 74. Van Name, 163.
 75. Hesselting, 76. De Josselin de Jong, p. 6, writes: "Negro-English does not in the least resemble English phonetically, whereas in Negro-Dutch on the contrary a remarkably large number of pure Dutch sounds may be heard."
 Hesselting, 74 ff.
 76. De Josselin de Jong, 3-4; see also p. 2, 4, 5.
 77. Hesselting, 61-67.
 78. Ibid., 65. "The grammar of the Herrnhutters, not that of the Danes, mentions the part played by the "Low Saxon" or "Low German" in the creation of the language, but no examples or references are given. It is very questionable whether the Herrnhutters could differentiate clearly between our language [Holland Dutch] and Low German. Words with an unmistakable German form do appear, but it can not be determined which of these are to be regarded as translator's errors, and which were actually used by the Creoles. The same is true of the Danish or Danishized words in the text. Most of these words are not found with both groups, which substantially warrants the supposition that in actual fact the majority of these are accidental Germanisms and Danishisms."
 80. Ibid., 67.
 81. Ibid., 68.
 82. Ibid., 70.
 83. Ibid., 70.
 84. Oidendorp, 433.
 85. Hesselting, 69-73, 74, 94.
 86. De Josselin de Jong mentions the probable Negro influence in several places. P. 12: "Now when we notice that all kinds of case-relations in Negro Dutch are, true to Sudanese usage, expressed by verbal combinations, it does not appear venture some to assume that in this case as replacing certain verbs, a verbal sense was actually felt. As indicating verbal substitution, na could easily become an actual preposition under the influence of Netherlands. . . ." Pp. 13-14: "I venture to voice the supposition that this le is in origin associated with the similarly sounding particle in ewe, and that the form re in Tahi similarly characterizes the durative present, and is in this respect, as well as its equivalent in most Sudanic languages, identical with the verb to be." Pp. 5-6: "Throughout the period of slavery the language has evidently been under the strong influence of the phonetic system which the Negroes brought along with them from Africa."
 Hesselting, 69; quotation from the Moravian Grammatik, 111.

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