

Clear de Road



A Virgin Islands
History Textbook

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CHAPTER 12

Ready for Change

Contract Day

The laborers came to Frederiksted on October 1st in 1878 just as they had come every Contract Day since the Labor Act was passed. Some came to change their contracts, so they could work on different plantations. Some wanted to sail to St. Thomas or other islands. They hoped to find a better job and a better life. These laborers came to get passports. Some just came to spend a free day in town.

Four Serious Complaints

No matter what their reasons were for being in town, all these laborers had serious *complaints*. The first complaint was the low pay of the plantation workers compared with the higher pay of the Central Factory workers.

The second complaint was the Labor Act itself. Under the terms of the Labor Act, the workers could only change jobs on a certain date. If they missed that date, they would be forced to stay in the same old job for another year. This was too much like slavery.

The third complaint was also about the Labor Act. This law gave planters the right to subtract *finer* from the workers' pay. The workers had to pay fines for many different reasons. One

reason was lateness to work. Also, if a parent kept a child home from work, the parent would be fined. Sometimes the estate managers would fine the workers without any reason.

The fourth complaint was about passports. It was illegal to leave the island without a passport. On Contract Day in 1878, some people were worried that the police might stop giving out passports.

The laborers had serious complaints, but they also had high hopes for Contract Day, 1878. They hoped that the Labor Act would be repealed and that they would get a raise in pay.

Two More Incidents

When they realized that there would be no changes in the Labor Act on that day, they grew angry. Two

more *incidents* happened during the afternoon of October 1st that made the workers even angrier.

The story of the first incident was told many years later by an old woman who had been a young girl at the time of the Fireburn. This incident happened at the market. Most workers had small plots of land on



Certain provisions were not allowed to be sold at the market. In this picture, the police are removing the forbidden provisions.

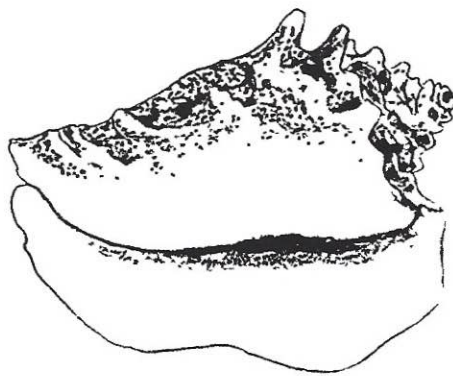
which they grew vegetables and ground provisions. They sold these provisions in the market. There were rules about what could be sold in the market. Some provisions could not be sold without a special pass from the estate managers.

On October 1st, some people in the market were selling avocado pears and oranges without permission. The police came and took all the pears and oranges away. The people were left with nothing. The workers were getting tired of all the Danish rules and laws.

The second incident happened at Prince Street and King Cross Street in Frederiksted. Here, a man named Henry Trotman was laying in the gutter. His foot was cut and bleeding. He was taken to the hospital. By this

time, the crowd was just east of town, near the well. A woman named Felicia James came running. She told the laborers that Henry Trotman had been beaten by the police and he was dead.

The crowd rushed to the hospital where the manager told them that Trotman wasn't dead, but only sleeping. The crowd didn't believe him. They ran to the Fort. This is where the St. Croix Labor Rebellion of 1878 really began.



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THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

- 1. Why did the laborers come to Frederiksted on Contract Day in 1878?**
 - 2. The laborers had complaints about the Labor Act. What were they?**
 - 3. Describe the two incidents that occurred on October 1, 1878.**
 - 4. Why do you think the crowd ran from the hospital to the Fort?**
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