

ABSTRACT

A History of the Rum Enterprise in Barbados, 1640-1815

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This dissertation examines the history of the rum enterprise in Barbados from about 1640 to 1815. It contends that the origins and development of the rum business were inextricably linked to the sugar industry, of which it remained a by-product throughout the period of slavery. The growing overseas demand for rum in the last quarter of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century enabled the enterprise to become a valuable revenue earner in the sugar-dominated economy.

However, this growth was checked by the American Revolutionary War and the subsequent trade restrictions imposed on the British West Indian/US trade. Such circumstances, as well as the inability of the Barbadian planter-distillers to increase the export of rum to British and British North American markets, initiated the decline of the rum enterprise in Barbados. By 1815 it was kept afloat principally because of the existence of a domestic market.

Therefore, using the traditional economic approach to historical enquiry, the thesis examines and analyses

several aspects of the rum enterprise, including production, the technical aspects of manufacture, exports, prices, competition and domestic consumption.

This study, therefore isolates to some extent the by-product from the main industry for treatment and in so doing allows for a systematic examination of the significance of rum. In addition, because of sugar's dominance in the literature such a study fills a crucial gap within Barbadian economic historiography.