

## Kalinago-European Alliances in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean: Wavering Between Empire and Decolonization

Stephane Martin Demers 2T1

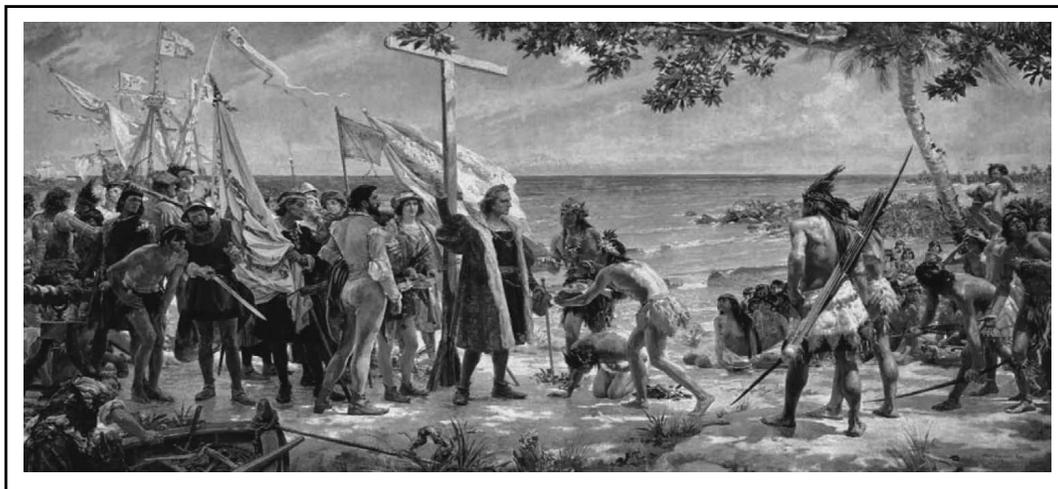
York University

Osgoode Hall Law School

### ABSTRACT

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Thomas ‘Indian’ Warner is described as a figure who brokered peace between the Kalinago and the Europeans. However, the influence of Warner’s actions when compared to retaliatory measures taken by Europeans against him and the Kalinagos, and the longevity of alliances suggests that the intermediary role often attributed to him is exaggerated. Examining Warner’s voluntary and involuntary association with his Kalinago roots, and his resistance and peace efforts with the Europeans improves our understanding of the nature of Warner’s personal alliance with the Kalinago as well as the Kalinago’s broader alliance with the Europeans. This research examines these complexities to highlight how his presence and absence in the turbulent seventeenth century of Caribbean history influenced his alliances and broader connections.



*Keywords: Kalinago, English, French, alliances, seventeenth-century*

### BIO

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Stephane recently graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Music and a Minor in History. Stephane is currently pursuing his Juris Doctor at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University where he intends to combine his interests in music and law to create a more equitable and just law school environment and legal profession.

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Thomas ‘Indian’ Warner’s alliances with the Kalinago, English, and French shifted frequently. In Hulme and Whitehead’s document reader, *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day*, William Dampier describes Warner as a figure who mediated conflict between the Kalinago and the Europeans.<sup>1</sup> However, the influence of Warner’s actions when compared to retaliatory measures taken by Europeans against him and the Kalinagos, and the longevity of alliances indicates that he was not as neutral an intermediary as Dampier’s description suggests. Warner’s alliance with the Kalinago, the Kalinago’s alliances with the Europeans, and the English Crown’s short-lived alliance with the Kalinago can be better understood through an analysis of the intricacies of Warner’s mixed-race heritage and his involvement in resistive and peaceful Kalinago-European relations.

Born in the English island of Antigua to Sir Thomas Warner, the Governor of St. Kitts,<sup>2</sup> and a Kalinago woman,<sup>3</sup> Warner was considered an ‘Indian’. In Antigua, he endured inhumane treatment at the hands of Madame Warner, his English stepmother.<sup>4</sup> Desperate to escape these unfavorable conditions, he fled to St. Lucia and subsequently became one of

the captains of the Kalinago in Dominica.<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, the English Crown appointed him Governor of Dominica. Though his principal task as Governor was to negotiate the Kalinago’s status as subjects of the English Crown, it may be argued that the resentment towards the English, which was likely held as a result of his previous experiences in Antigua, compelled him to ally with the Kalinago.

But Warner’s decision to form an alliance with the Kalinago was not entirely voluntary. Due to European stereotypes about the Kalinago’s behavior, he was labeled an ‘Indian’ without concern for his ideal personal identifiers. Generally, the Europeans saw the Kalinago as their “common enemy.”<sup>6</sup> The English viewed the Kalinago as “potential traitors.”<sup>7</sup> The French described them as “careless” and “exceedingly vindictive people.”<sup>8</sup> By virtue of Warner’s close contact with the Kalinago, he too was considered an enemy of the Europeans regardless of his mixed heritage. Ostracized from European circles of power, Warner used the Kalinago to combat notions of inferiority and weakness.

The threat that Warner’s race posed to the “neat bifurcations of colonial understanding” (Whitehead 2005, 228) also indirectly

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1. Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead (eds.), *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day: an Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 92.

2. Hulme and Whitehead, 90.

3. Hulme and Whitehead, 89.

4. Hulme and Whitehead, 91.

5. Hulme and Whitehead, 90.

6. Hulme and Whitehead, 89.

7. Hillary McD. Beckles, “Kalinago (Carib) Resistance to European Colonisation of the Caribbean,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2008): 81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40654700>.

8. Beckles, 89.

consolidated his alliances with the Kalinago by provoking rivalries between the French and English.<sup>9</sup> The central dispute was whether Thomas Warner was the legitimate son of Sir Thomas Warner. The French General Antoine Lefèbvre de la Barre believed that Warner's 'Caribbee' status, which he inherited from his mother, nullified any claim to Sir Thomas Warner's legal parentage over him. On the other hand, the English Lord William Willoughby believed that Warner was in fact his legitimate son."<sup>10</sup> Warner and his Kalinago troops capitalized on the Europeans' time spent disputing this fact by attacking their settlements in the Leeward Islands and preventing them from seizing Kalinago land. Ironically, Warner's exclusion from the Europeans' acceptable categories of race allowed him to lead the Kalinago more effectively in their fight against European colonization.

Examining Warner's role in helping the Kalinago resist European colonization is essential in understanding the nature of his alliance with the Kalinago. Warner and Kalinago leaders allied with interisland Kalinago and African runaway slaves to 'delimit' European land expansion and halt European colonization.<sup>11</sup> However, some point to

Warner's short dialogue with Monsieur de Malassis, a French officer, while imprisoned to suggest that he was not allied with the Kalinago and was instead more sympathetic to the Europeans. While imprisoned, Warner states: "These people are beasts, a rabble, & wretches unworthy of me; & I am not involved with them."<sup>12</sup> These comments must be understood in the context of his arrest, and it is unlikely that he was genuinely disdainful of the Kalinago. Instead, to avoid being persecuted by the French, it was in Warner's best interest to show them that he was not allied with the Kalinago.

Although Kalinago-European relations were mostly adversarial, with Warner at their side, the Kalinago negotiated treaties and exchanged goods with the Europeans. A treaty signed on 31 March 1660 by the Kalinago and Europeans stipulated that in exchange for granting the Kalinago dominion over Dominica and St. Vincent, the Europeans would acquire Guadeloupe, Martinique, and the Leeward Islands.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, at Prince Rupert's Bay in Dominica, the Kalinago traded tobacco and cassava bread for European knives, hatchets,<sup>14</sup> and other iron tools which were used for canoe construction.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the notion of the Kalinago's total resistance

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9. Neil L. Whitehead, "Black Read as Red: Ethnic Transgression and Hybridity in Northeastern South America and the Caribbean," in *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 228.

10. Hulme and Whitehead, *Wild Majesty*, 98.

11. Tessa Murphy, "Kalinago Colonizers: Indigenous People and the Settlement of the Lesser Antilles," in *The Torrid Zone: Caribbean Colonization and Cultural Interaction in the Long Seventeenth Century*, ed. L. H. Roper (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 28, doi:10.2307/j.ctv6sj7vv.5.

12. Hulme and Whitehead, *Wild Majesty*, 94.

13. Tessa Murphy, "Kalinago Colonizers," 24.

14. Lennox Honychurch, "Crossroads in the Caribbean: A Site of Encounter and Exchange on Dominica," *World Archaeology* 28, no. 3 (1997): 296, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.1997.9980349>.

15. Honychurch, 297.

against the Europeans is mistaken. The Kalinago struck a fine balance between fighting for their independence and brokering peace with the Europeans.

However, the Europeans sometimes outright broke the peace with the Kalinago. In June 1675, Philip Warner, Thomas' half-brother, murdered Thomas.<sup>16</sup> Knowing that the Kalinago would rebel against the English without Thomas to control them, the English Crown pledged to punish the person who committed this act.<sup>17</sup> In presenting this façade of peace, the English were provided with an opening to invade the Kalinago when they were least expecting it. Though the King's public declaration to punish the offender was seemingly noble, this was merely a tactic to disguise his insatiable desire to acquire land through the destruction of the Kalinago. The English Crown capitalized on the murder of Thomas Warner by feigning peaceful relations with the Kalinago and in turn furthering imperial goals.

Alliances between Thomas 'Indian' Warner, the Kalinago, the English, and the French were complex. Examining Warner's voluntary and involuntary association with his Kalinago roots, and his resistance and peace efforts with the Europeans can improve our understanding of the nature of Warner's alliance with the Kalinago and the Kalinago's alliance with the Europeans. Furthermore, Thomas' murder provides a window into the English Crown's

disingenuous motivations to forge alliances with the Kalinago. With more information on Thomas Warner's life and the period in which he lived, historians may be better able understand how his presence and absence in the turbulent seventeenth century of Caribbean history influenced the broader dynamics of the early colonial Caribbean.

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<sup>16</sup> Hulme and Whitehead, *Wild Majesty*, 102-103.

<sup>17</sup> Hulme and Whitehead, 102.

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