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Pepper and bones: the secessionist impulse in Nevis

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the often twinned issues of "globalization" and "nationalization" in ethnographic discourse obscures, with new terminology, the fact that for some anthropologists these processes have been central to their work for a considerable period of time. For those whose academic interest has focused on the Caribbean region and who attempt some sense of the historical determinants of these social formations, the current "discovery" of the importance of global forces in the lives of ordinary folks in locales removed from centers of industry, commerce, and intellectual production may be somewhat puzzling. There is a certain temptation to respond to this flurry of interest with the question, "so what's new?" Likewise, in a region whose history is one of subjugated identities, repeated instances of resistance on the part of the powerless, and in many cases, only recent attempts at charting directions involving national sovereignty, issues of identity, community, peoplehood, and nationality have routinely received much attention.

The reception that has been accorded Benedict Anderson's book, *Imagined Communities* (1991), has animated much inquiry into the nature of national sentiments and the direction of nationalist impulses. In this enterprise, Anderson's book has stimulated much useful analysis. It is, however, a work whose arguments I find often nebulous and premised on certain assumptions about the nature of what determines the direction and content.

1. The title of this paper refers to a statement allegedly made by the late premier of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Robert L. Bradshaw. Addressing Anguillans' rejection of his party in successive elections, Bradshaw vowed to put "pepper in their soup and bones in their rice" (Westlake 1977:129). Although the statement is reported to be with reference to Anguilla, it is popularly believed to be addressed to Nevisians, as well. See the excerpt from a letter from Simeon Daniel to Bradshaw on page 56.

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of nationalist sentiments, assumptions that do not seem to apply to the cases with which I am most familiar.

To illustrate my problems with the tone and direction of much of anthropologists’ work premised on the ideas set out in *Imagined Communities*, I examine the case of Nevis, a small island in the eastern Caribbean. Nevis is a singularly appropriate site for such inquiry because of its colonial and post-colonial historical subjugation and because it has evinced, for the past forty years, a strong tendency toward political separation, if not independence. In this paper I suggest that Nevisian predilection for separation from its sister island in the two-island state of St. Kitts-Nevis is born less of some collective identity formation and more of a growing intolerance of what Nevisians regard as continued bondage in an unworkable state structure. Thus, the argument is that Nevisians are not imagining “community” leading to some nationalist impetus, but rather imagine a release from something they do not want to be, but without a necessary conception of what they might become.

To address this issue I examine at length the modern political history of the St. Kitts-Nevis state, and particularly Nevis’ place within that entity. This examination involves a comprehensive and extensive chronicling of the period especially between 1952 and the present. The detail is necessary in that my argument is that Nevisian identity is primarily one of political affiliation and is conceived in terms of opposition to St. Kitts, or more explicitly, to membership in what Nevisians recognize as a Kittitian-dominated state. The detailing of the events of that period illustrate how this opposition has developed and how, in particular, it has focused on the St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party as an anathema. This is a period that has significant antecedents, which, as we shall see, may not speak to the imaginings of Nevisians. That is, Nevisians and Kittitians, although they share much of a common history and are linked by actual kinship and other mutualities, evaluate certain aspects of their histories in quite different ways.

Finally, because the issue was brought to a decisive point in 1998, I examine the question of nationalism and national identity. In a global context this is a topic that has occasioned much recent discussion (Eriksen 1993; Hannerz 1993; Smith 1995, 1998). It has also been the focus of a paper by Olwig (1993a) with respect to Nevis. Faced with the prospect of becoming a nation-state apart from their historical political connection to St. Kitts, Nevisians were perhaps obliged to confront possibilities that their imaginings had not encompassed. This issue must also be examined in light of the occasion of the creation of the St. Kitts-Nevis nation-state and the circumstances and sentiments that attended it.
COLONIAL LEGACY: UNIFICATION AND LABOUR STRUGGLE

For Nevisians, difficulties with St. Kitts date from the decision taken by the British government in 1882 to reunite their island with St. Kitts and Anguilla for administrative purposes. From Nevis' earliest European settlement in 1628 by a party that set off from the new British colony of St. Kitts, the two islands have been linked. For the first century and a half of their colonial history, the islands were at times administered separately and at times jointly. During much of the seventeenth century, Nevis enjoyed considerable prosperity, escaping the British-French warfare that engulfed St. Kitts, serving as the entrepôt for the slave trade into the Leeward Islands, and boasting the largest European population in the Leewards.

Toward the end of the century, in 1680, however, the first of a series of disasters visited the island in the form of a devastating earthquake. During the century that followed, one violent occurrence after another: hurricanes, warfare, and epidemic disease contributed to the erosion of Nevis' early prosperity. During the same period, St. Kitts was transformed into one of the most successful of Britain's Caribbean sugar colonies. Despite this reversal of fortunes, the Nevisian colony continued to be administered apart from its larger neighbor and to enjoy the limited autonomy afforded under a colonial regime.

In the late nineteenth century, the realities of colonial administration resulted in a new arrangement for the islands. Crown Colony government was instituted in the 1860s, and moves to consolidate the islands' separate legislative bodies were undertaken during the next decade. In 1871 the Federal Colony of the Leeward Islands was established, comprising the presidencies of Antigua, Dominica, Nevis, St. Kitts, Anguilla, and the (British) Virgin Islands. The next step in consolidation was the establishment of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla as a single presidency with the seat of government, in the form of an administrator, in Basseterre, St. Kitts.

This last act continues to rankle, both in St. Kitts and Nevis, but the event evokes more feeling in the latter. The expressions relating to the 1882 consolidation constitute charters for political identity and ideology in both islands, resting on very different interpretations of the significance of the event. Consider the following two versions of the implications of the union of St. Kitts and Nevis (and Anguilla).

In an outline of Nevisian political history written in 1992, the author, a member of the Nevis Reformation Party, whose platform was secessionist at the time, includes this note after the entry of the 1882 event:

Following this union Nevis as it was became a colony of St. Kitts and despite that it continued to have representatives on the Presidency they had very little authority. As a result the quality of life in Nevis as well as its economy went into a great decline. (Murrain 1993:6)
This is the universal theme played in Nevis with reference to the yoking of the island to St. Kitts – that the prosperity of the island, unimpeded to that time, declined from 1882.

The Kittitian view differs markedly from that above in addressing the implications for St. Kitts of having to take on the burdens of Nevis and Anguilla. An example of this version is from the account of a Kittitian writer, a governor of the state during the 1970s. After detailing the rising prosperity of St. Kitts as a sugar producer and difficulties experienced by the industry in the late nineteenth century, he describes the plight of the island:

The troubled one-crop economy of St. Kitts was simply not able to generate enough revenue to meet the long-standing needs of Nevis and Anguilla, in addition to her own pressing requirements. (Inniss 1983:45)

The impression is left that St. Kitts was obliged, in 1882-88, to take on a Nevisian basket case that has proved to be a burden ever since.

St. Kitts has not been able to satisfy Nevis needs in the past one hundred years of union. St. Kitts will be even less likely to be able to do so in the future. Nevis’ demands are likely to escalate because of the mistaken notion that St. Kitts owes her reparations for past neglect. The apparent harmony between the two islands will last for a time – as long as each party is getting what it wants out of an arrangement that is based solely on expediency. (Inniss 1983:74)

The question is raised here as to what were the fortunes of Nevis following its yoking with St. Kitts. The portrait presented in the first quotation and subscribed to by Nevisians is that the island suffered greatly precisely because of its subordinate position in the colony. It is certainly the case that commercial agriculture waned in Nevis even as St. Kitts maintained its position as a viable sugar producer. Although the decline indicated by the demise of sugar and cotton continued through most of the first half of the twentieth century, the Nevisian version ascribes the proximate causes not only to Kittitian dominance of the state, but more especially to the ascent of the St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party. Olwig (1993b:141) states, “Nevisians believed that it [the Labour Party] ignored the economic and social problems of the small farmers on Nevis by, for example, neglecting to build up, or even to maintain, an adequate infrastructure there.”

With regard to Nevisian agriculture the Moyne Commission, which undertook a comprehensive survey of economic and social conditions in the British West Indies in 1938-39, had some conclusions and recommendations for Nevis. The commission’s agricultural report noted that Nevisian commercial agriculture was undercapitalized to the extent that much cultivation
was done by sharecroppers, a situation that they found undesirable, stating that, "inquiry into many cases of sharing has produced convincing evidence that the system is bad in every way." They argued that sharecropping had detrimental effects on husbandry, in general, because "neither owner nor share-tenant has knowledge of the systematic agriculture by which alone use of the land could be permanently improved." Elsewhere it was suggested that Nevis, when compared to St. Kitts, had real disadvantages in soils and slope conditions, making agriculture a risky proposition. Despite these apparent disincentives, the commission in its main report proposed a scheme for instituting a small sugar factory in Nevis to process Nevisian-grown cane, and also proposed the phasing out of sharecropping in favor of a government-instituted land settlement scheme for small farmers. While making a case for certain innovations, the report presented a clear picture of the decline of Nevisian agriculture.

While Nevisian economic decline during this period is evident, the complete picture may be somewhat obscured. As a result of an economic survey done in the early 1950s, Nora Siffleet noted that Nevisian production, especially of vegetables, was hidden because figures could not be disaggregated from those for the colony as a whole. Thus, for Kittitians the impression could persist that "Nevis is a drain on the revenues of the Presidency" (Siffleet 1953:131), although "it is obvious that the provisions which are sent from Nevis to St. Christopher have an importance to the economy beyond that of their current market value" (Siffleet 1953:133). Notwithstanding, the picture of Nevis as economically destitute serves the production of both myths of Nevis and its relationship to St. Kitts.

The modern political era in St. Kitts was ushered in during the 1930s with the rise of the labor movement. The global capitalist depression struck particularly hard on the small, plantation-based economies in the Caribbean. A producer of primary commodities like St. Kitts experienced severe hardships, hardships that were largely passed on to the laboring population. Declining wages and a lack of social provision affected most severely the lives of the agroproletariat that composed the bulk of St. Kitts' rural population. Demographic indicators like a rising infant mortality rate point to a

6. Figures on agricultural production in the presidency are not disaggregated in the annual reports produced for 1948 and for 1949-50.
stressed working class. It should, therefore, have been no surprise that these conditions generated a general uprising in the colony’s larger island.

In the 1930s many of the British West Indian colonies experienced serious labor risings. In St. Kitts the spark point occurred on January 28, 1935, when a wildcat strike of sugar workers set off two days of unrest and confrontations with police throughout the island. The most serious clash took place at Buckley’s Estate near Basseterre. An estate manager fired on a large crowd, and the situation portended great violence. A state of emergency was declared; the defense force was called out; the riot act was read; and when the crowd failed to disperse, they were fired upon, with resulting fatalities. In the aftermath thirty-nine men were brought up on charges and six were ultimately convicted and sentenced to prison terms of varying lengths.

In St. Kitts, the Workers League had been formed in 1932 to represent the cause of workers and small businessmen. In the wake of the 1935 events the League took on a more activist role, one which would be a precursor to the formation of the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla Trades and Labour Union at the end of the decade and, eventually, the St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party. The League sought representation for the accused laborers and became the voice of the working class in St. Kitts.7

Similar activity did not occur in Nevis. Much has been made of the differences between the twentieth-century social formations of the two islands. The proletarian base of the rural Kittitian population was quite unlike that which had emerged in Nevis after the decline of sugar and plantation agriculture on the island. Nevis had become much more a society of smallholders growing vegetables and fruits for the local two-island market, so that during the Depression the condition of the island’s rural workers was less desperate than that of their Kittitian neighbors. Thus, the signal event in the labor movement in St. Kitts had no counterpart in Nevis. The trade union movement there remained dormant and the organization of rural labor unattended.

In St. Kitts the rise of the union was attended by a corresponding development of political interest. By 1937, after constitutional changes, the League was able to elect two candidates to the Legislative Council, and it supported two others who were successful, even though most Kittitians were still not eligible to vote under the restricted franchise of the period. In subsequent elections in the 1940s, League candidates were similarly successful. One of these was a young employee at the central sugar factory, Robert L. Bradshaw, who by 1950 had become president of the union and the popular hero of Kittitian politics. With the 1951 constitutional changes in the colony ushering in universal adult suffrage, Bradshaw became the leading figure in

7. Joseph France, long-time secretary of the union and editor of the Labour Spokesman, chronicled these events in a series that ran in the newspaper in the 1970s.
the Legislative Council, and the course of his political destiny, as well as that of the three islands that made up the colony, was set.

**THE LATE COLONIAL PERIOD: 1951-67**

In the first years of the colony after the 1951 constitutional changes the issue of Nevisian separation and autonomy was not prominent in political discourse. The first election under universal adult franchise resulted in a complete victory for the Workers League (later to be the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla Labour Party). League candidates won seven seats and supported the candidacy of the lone independent victor in Nevis. The seven victorious League candidates captured more than 80 percent of the valid votes cast in the colony and over 90 percent in St. Kitts, the base of the union’s strength.

In the years between the 1952 triumph and the next general election in 1957, support for the Labour Party in Nevis and Anguilla declined precipitously. R.J. Gordon and J.W. Liburd, elected with Workers League backing in 1952, withdrew their support of the party during the 1952-57 period. A growing impression in Nevis was that the affairs of their island were given little consideration by the Kittitian-dominated Legislative Council. A letter to the *Nevis Reporter*, under the heading “Nevis Enslaved,” complained that “the present agricultural policy [is] to starve the people of Nevis.”

The 1957 general election took place in an altered political context. The final stages of the formation of the West Indies Federation had been completed, and the new state, comprising ten island units of the Commonwealth Caribbean, was to come into existence in 1958. A federal election would follow the general election closely in St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. By 1957 the Labour Party had lost support in Nevis to the point that they apparently could not find a candidate for the Charlestown seat. Liburd did not contest the election, and Gordon stood unsuccessfully as a candidate for the short-lived Nevis People’s Party. The Nevis winners were Eugene Walwyn and W.B. Nicholls, both contesting as independents. The candidacy of Walwyn, in particular, proved an irritant for the Labour Party. During the campaign he was described by supporters as “not afraid of ten Bradshaws.” In Anguilla the party’s incumbent, David Lloyd, was defeated, finishing fourth out of six candidates with less than 20 percent of the vote. In St. Kitts, the Labour Party captured all seats and over 80 percent of the votes cast. Despite their overwhelming victory in St. Kitts, the Labour Party leadership felt the sting of rejection by voters in Nevis and Anguilla. A *Labour Spokesman* editorial

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8. October 20, 1956.
chastised, "we have no doubt that all and sundry in Nevis and Anguilla will realize the blunder they have made by allowing themselves to be misled."  

The federal election, following the 1957 general election by less than five months, provides the most dramatic indication of voter disaffection with Labour in Nevis and Anguilla. The Labour Party, affiliated with the West Indian Federal Labour Party, put up its leader, Robert Bradshaw and the recently defeated Lloyd. They were opposed by B.E. Samuel from Sandy Point Village and W.G. Hodge, a perennial also-ran from Anguilla. The tone of the election in Nevis was foreshadowed when Lord Hailes, the new governor of the federation, visited the colony. Signs went up in Nevis proclaiming "Nevis neglected," "Nevis oppressed," and "Nevis needs local government." The extent of the emerging insular division is illustrated in the results of the election (Table 1). From this time the Labour Party would never be able to mount an effective campaign in Nevis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Island</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Kitts</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevis</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anguilla</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1957-61 term of government underlines a widening breach between St. Kitts and her sister islands in the colony. In March 1958, just before the federal balloting, Walwyn was expelled from the Executive Council for his failure to support in the Legislative Council a measure that the Executive had passed. The expulsion was greeted with outrage in Nevis as another high-handed act by Labour Party politicians. Walwyn, in high dudgeon, personalized the issue, castigating Bradshaw, who had moved his expulsion, "for Nevisians this is one of the greatest insults that has been cast on them by the Hon. R.L. Bradshaw. We are all aware that Mr. Bradshaw has repeatedly disregarded the voice of the people of Nevis with dictatorial contempt." When Administrator Howard reinstated Walwyn in May, it was the Kittitians' turn to rage. The *Labour Spokesman* ran a front-page advertisement for 111 days calling for the administrator's removal. When Howard's action was finally

13. The issue was a proposed increase in the export duty on cotton shipped out of Nevis and Anguilla. Walwyn opposed this in Executive Council and abstained from the vote in the Legislative Council.
upheld by Alan Lennox-Boyd, secretary of state for the colonies, the resentful Kittitian Labourites were not placated.

When in 1958 the Nevisians' *bête noire* of Labour politicians, Robert Bradshaw, was elected to the federal parliament and served as minister of finance, he departed from the colony's political arena, but the deep rift between the two islands did not close with his absence. In 1960 Walwyn and others founded a specifically Nevis-based party, the United National Movement (UNM), reflecting their lack of faith in any aggregation that might emerge from the Kittitian milieu. In the 1961 general election the UNM won both Nevisian seats, with Walwyn unopposed (Table 2).

Table 2. General Elections Nevis 1961-71; E. Walwyn and the UNM¹⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UNM</th>
<th>PAM*</th>
<th>Ind.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>candidates</td>
<td>elected</td>
<td>votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UNM</th>
<th>PAM</th>
<th>NRP**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>candidates</td>
<td>elected</td>
<td>votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* People's Action Movement, formed in 1965.
** Nevis Reformation Party, formed in 1970.

The 1961 poll was taken at a time when other events were occurring that would have a profound effect on the political future of the colony. In a June 1961 special referendum, the Jamaican electorate had voted to secede from the West Indies Federation. The federation had incorporated St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla as a single unit despite the advice of the Standing Closer Association Committee, which had recommended their inclusion as separate units.¹⁶ All of the units that comprised multi-island groupings under colonial rule retained this structure as federal units. However, the possible demise of the Federation generated new imaginings about what might constitute appropriate or desirable groupings or representation in any subsequent structures. Nevis representatives began pushing for secession and eventually resigned from the Legislative Council in July 1966, four months before the next general election.

In May 1962, the West Indies Federation was officially dissolved, following the withdrawal of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The consideration of a new grouping of the remaining islands into some kind of federal arrange-

ment, dubbed the "Little 8," gave rise to discussion among Nevisian politicians of the kind of participation Nevis might countenance. Robert Bradshaw had returned to St. Kitts after the demise of the Federation and, in a by-election held in August 1962, was elected once again to the Legislative Council. With his reintegration into the Kittitian scene and his probable elevation to chief minister after the next general election, the UNM declared their opposition to entry of Nevis into the Eastern Caribbean Federation as part of a St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla unit.

As the 1966 general elections approached, two important developments were to influence subsequent political directions. In early 1965, following demonstrations in St. Kitts over new electricity rates, the People's Action Movement was formed. Although PAM was initially vilified by Labour politicians as representative of the planter elites, the new party was able to pose a credible opposition in St. Kitts for the first time. More importantly, they also mounted a strong challenge to the UNM in Nevis. The UNM, and especially their leader, Eugene Walwyn, had lost some credibility with the Nevisian electorate.

When plans for an Eastern Caribbean Federation were abandoned in 1964 after Barbados opted out, the British government set about devising new constitutional arrangements for the remaining territories. This took the form of a new status, Statehood in Association, which would be conferred on each of the island units separately. It involved a considerable enhancement of local autonomy, especially with respect to finance and control of the police, and contained a provision for the state to move unilaterally to constitutional independence. At the London talks on constitutional reform in June 1966, Nevis was represented by Walwyn, who initially signaled an opposition to the entry of a St. Kitts-yoked Nevis into this new status. However, to the surprise of his constituents, he signed the document of agreement at the end of the conference.

A month later general elections were held in the colony. In St. Kitts the Labour Party again won all seven seats with 65 percent of the vote, and Bradshaw became chief minister. Although they fared poorly in St. Kitts, PAM did well in the other two islands, winning Anguilla and one of the Nevis seats. Walwyn, damaged by his acquiescence with the Labour politicians in London, was returned by a narrow margin. A few months later, his actions at the constitutional conference were brought into perspective. Following the implementation of the new constitution he affiliated the UNM with the Labour Party and was named the first local attorney general of the new Associated State.

During the ensuing three months a measure of turmoil afflicted the state. A rebellion in Anguilla expelled the Kittitian policemen stationed on the island, and the instigators refused to make any accommodation with the new government. Although its secession from the state would not be decided
finally for another two years, Anguilla was effectively separated from St. Kitts by May 1967. In St. Kitts the trouble surfaced on June 10 when an assault on police headquarters in Basseterre led to a declaration of a state of emergency.

Although the political climate was stormy in Anguilla and St. Kitts during the first half of 1967, Nevis was relatively quiet. In February the Legislative Council passed a local government ordinance that would set up in Nevis and Anguilla local councils with elected majorities. Thus, although they were to have limited powers, bodies that did not owe their existence to Basseterre appointments had some decision-making power. In the first Nevis local council election, PAM candidates won five of the six seats, with a lone UNM victor.

As 1967 drew to a close, then, the political climate in the two-island state was one of intense divisions. Within St. Kitts, Labour and PAM were implacable enemies, especially following the May events and trials of PAM supporters that followed the state of emergency. For the Labour government the perfidy of Nevisians was exemplified in their support of PAM candidates and rejection of the Labour-affiliated UNM.

EMERGING AUTONOMY: A TWO-ISLAND ASSOCIATED STATE

In the years following the 1967 troubles, the Labour Party focused its political energies on combating PAM and the partisan struggles within St. Kitts. Nevis, represented by one parliamentarian (Walwyn) who had made an accommodation with the enemy (Labour), and a lone opposition member of a party (PAM) seen as traitorous by the government leadership, was given little attention by Basseterre. This dismissal served only to heighten Nevisian disaffection with the Labour government and with the arrangement that now bound them, apparently inextricably, to the larger island.

If Nevisians were at the back of beyond in the view of Labour politicians, they did not accept that relegation gladly. A signal event occurred in 1970 that galvanized a redirected opposition in Nevis. The Christena, a ferry operated by the government to transport goods and passengers daily across the narrow channel between the two islands, sank on its way from St. Kitts to Nevis. The ferry was seriously overloaded with passengers returning from August holiday outings in St. Kitts, and 227 perished. The tragedy struck nearly every family in Nevis, and the government was blamed for an abrogation of responsibility for the safety of the vessel. Two months later the Nevis

17. The formal reinstatement of Anguilla as a colony was not effected until December 1980 as a consequence of lengthy independence talks during the late 1970s and the defeat of the Labour Party in 1980.
Reformation Party (NRP) was formed, and it organized and led protests of the handling of the *Christena* case.

From its inception the NRP articulated a secessionist position, a stance that eschewed any continuing involvement of Nevis in the two-island state. In the general election in May 1971 the NRP made its first foray into electoral politics, winning one Nevis seat and nearly 40 percent of the island’s vote (Table 2). Walwyn’s duplicity (in Nevisian eyes) was rewarded when he lost his seat, and the UNM-Labour coalition was dead. The NRP continued their strong appeal to Nevisian voters in local elections in December, when it captured six of the nine seats.

PAM, following a dispiriting loss in the general election in which it made no inroads into Labour strength, opted out of the local Nevisian political scene and sponsored no candidates for the local elections. Thus, by 1972 Nevis was effectively outside the ambit of Kittitian partisan politics. Their local council was dominated by the NRP, and when Fred Parris, Nevis’ one representative elected as a PAM candidate in 1971, crossed the floor to side with the Labour government in 1973, the NRP was the only game in town; secession, the only political position.

In 1974 the demand for separation from St. Kitts accelerated. In March, the local council passed a resolution demanding secession and in April, Ivor Stevens, the NRP parliamentarian in the House of Assembly, introduced a similar resolution in that body and followed with a four-day oration supporting the measure. When the House was dissolved before a vote could be taken on Stevens’s resolution, it set off an uproar in Nevis. On June 2 a demonstration that included most of the population of the island marched in Charlestown in support of secession.

Before the 1975 general election, the NRP issued a manifesto (see Appendix on page 69) that was about secession and nothing else. The Labour Party manifesto placed three issues before the electorate, the third of which was “whether the island of Nevis should be allowed to secede from the state of St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla.” (Murrain 1993:15). Voters were encouraged that a vote for Labour would constitute a “no” answer to this question. Labour, for the first time, slated two candidates in Nevis. In straight contests with the NRP, the Labour candidates, including Fred Parris, were badly defeated, receiving only 19 percent of the total Nevis vote (Table 3). Nevisians had cast their ballots unequivocally for separation from St. Kitts. In the local election, due a week later, only NRP candidates were nominated and were declared elected without ballot.

18. Despite the de facto separation of Anguilla from the state, the Labour Party leadership never countenanced the dissolution of the three-island unit. Anguilla continued to be present in all official documents issued by the government, and candidates for the Anguillian seat appeared on general election ballots up to and including the 1980 poll, although no votes were cast or recorded.
Table 3. General Elections Nevis 1975-84; NRP Dominance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NRP</th>
<th>LP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One NRP candidate was unopposed in 1984.
** People's Democratic Party.

Because the statehood constitutions contained provisions for the islands to move to independence, this possibility became an issue in eastern Caribbean election campaigns in the 1970s. When Grenada attained independence in 1974, it was a blow to any lingering hopes for regional political integration, at least in the near future. Another question put before voters in the 1975 general election was "whether the State of St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla should seek independence alone or in partnership with one or more Caribbean States" (Murrain 1993:15). In the absence of any possible multistate arrangements, the vote for the Labour majority was taken by them as a mandate to move to independence.

This appeared to be the final straw for Nevis and the NRP. The first of a series of independence talks were held in London in March 1976; a subsequent round in April was attended by a delegation that included Simeon Daniel, the Nevisian Leader of the opposition in the House of Assembly. During these talks, which stretched into 1977, exchanges between Daniel and Bradshaw disclose an increasingly acerbic relationship between the leading political figures of the two islands. The correspondence contains numerous *ad hominem* attacks besides the airing of a multitude of grievances.

The March 1977 talks also made clear to the Nevisian political leader the limits to British patience with the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla situation. Daniel expressed the reluctance of Nevis to enter into independence with St. Kitts, proposing separation, reversion to colonial status - a course of action that was in preparation for the Anguillan case. British government representatives made clear their position that there would be no new colonies, that separation would mean Nevis would have to go it alone, and they urged the Kittitian and Nevisian leaders to continue to seek a common solution.

In January 1976 the Nevis Council had passed a resolution that read:

Be it resolved that the people of Nevis through the Nevis Local Council call upon the Central Government of the State to introduce the necessary Legislation in order to give to the island of Nevis its own Legislative Council as expressed by the people of Nevis at the recent elections.

(Murrain 1993:57)

Simeon Daniel followed this with another resolution introduced to the House of Assembly that called for Nevisian autonomy and legislation leading to the secession of Nevis from the state. Finally, following unsuccessful attempts at island, state, and colonial levels to achieve this separation, the NRP organized a “referendum” in Nevis on secession. On August 18, 1977, Nevisian voters gave their verdict: 4,193 for secession, 14 against. Bradshaw declared the exercise null and void.

The frustration of Nevisians and the animosity that characterized the relationship between Daniel and Bradshaw may be indicated in this passage of a letter in which the former invokes a prominent piece of Nevisian lore:

The people of Nevis have grown accustomed to the neglect, spite and disregard for their political, social and economic welfare meted out to them over a quarter of [a] century at the hands of your Government. You must see to it that your promise of “Bones in our rice, pepper in our soup” is fulfilled during your lifetime, but we will not be beaten into submission.²⁰

On May 23, 1978 Robert Bradshaw died after a prolonged illness and was succeeded by Paul Southwell. Further talks were delayed ten months until a new round began in London in March 1979, but no resolution was forthcoming. Southwell died suddenly in May 1979 and was succeeded by Lee Moore. Moore’s attempts to reach an accommodation with the NRP leadership were unsuccessful. Even though the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office reiterated its position that Nevis apart from St. Kitts would not be reincorporated as a colony, nor become a grant-aided territory, the Nevisians held firm to their resolve not to be included in a St. Kitts-Nevis independent state. Their recalcitrance finally led the British to impose a solution involving a Nevis referendum after independence, which was set for early 1980. More than three years of wrangling appeared to be over, but not to the satisfaction of Nevisians. The eventual solution, however, took a very different turn.

The impasse of the previous four years of acerbic negotiation was broken by an election. In February 1979 a by-election for the seat vacated as a result of Robert Bradshaw’s death was won by Kennedy Simmonds, the PAM leader. Simmonds thus became the first non-Labour elected parliamen-

²⁰. Dated December 1, 1977, this is contained in a collection of documents in Simeon Daniel’s file housed in the NRP headquarters in Charlestown.
tarian in St. Kitts since the advent of universal suffrage. This appeared to be the chink in Labour's armor. When the next general election was held in February 1980, Labour could win only four of the seven Kittitian seats. With PAM capturing the other three and NRP winning both Nevis seats, the possibility for ending over thirty years of Labour Party dominance was at hand. When PAM and NRP leaders agreed to form a coalition government, Labour was relegated to the role of parliamentary opposition. Kennedy Simmonds became premier and Simeon Daniel, minister of finance.

INDEPENDENCE: UNEASY TRUCE

During the first two-and-one-half years of the coalition government there was little mention of independence. Both parties in the coalition had campaigned in 1980 on anti-independence platforms. Immediately following the 1980 election Daniel had reaffirmed his party's secessionist orientation (Bryant 1983:44), but in subsequent months the issue was rarely mentioned. Nonetheless, it was clear that the NRP, holding the political balance, was in a position to negotiate policy in a manner never before afforded Nevisian politicians, and that in any future independence talks their voice would be heard. In May 1982 discussions were renewed, and preparation of a constitution document begun. With the presentation in July 1982 of a government “white paper” outlining constitutional proposals, citizens of the two-island state had their first indication of the leverage exerted by the NRP politicians (Jones-Hendrickson 1984:759-70). Among other items, the paper for the proposed “Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis” called for a Nevis Island Assembly, an additional Nevis seat in the National Assembly, greatly expanded Nevisian autonomy, and the right, exclusive to Nevis, to withdraw from the federation (Bryant 1983:27-28).

Publication of the white paper occasioned strident criticism from the opposition Labour Party. Within days they had issued a “green paper” addressing what they felt to be features of the proposed constitution unacceptable to Kittitians (Jones-Hendrickson 1984:770-75). The green paper also proposed an alternate path toward independence that would allow considerable autonomy for both islands, in effect creating the most minimal political affiliation. At the London conference in December 1982 the Labour Party delegation eventually withdrew, and the British officials and PAM/NRP representatives reached agreement. After the British House of Commons approved the order in May, the Federation of St. Christopher and Nevis became independent on September 19, 1983.

The PAM/NRP coalition, born of convenience, continued through its first term of office until the next election in November 1984. By then, the PAM/NRP government had embarked on initiatives to neutralize their common...
political foe, the Labour Party, through an attack on its trade union base. After 1980, the assaults on the union by the PAM/NRP government took the form of disabling legislation, lawsuits, and collusion with management. With its trade-union wing in disarray and the recent demise of its two longtime leaders, the Labour Party faced the 1984 elections with diminished prospects. An additional obstacle arose in July 1983 when the PAM/NRP government expanded the House of Assembly by two seats, one each in St. Kitts and Nevis. Both new seats could be expected to go to the coalition, the Nevisian seat because of the unchallenged strength of the NRP, and the Kittitian seat carved out of the Sandy Point area, traditionally hostile to Labour (Midgett 1985).

The results confirmed this expectation when PAM won six of the eight Kittitian seats, capturing over 53 percent of the Kittitian vote, and the NRP swept Nevis, one seat unopposed (Table 3). From this point the unity of the coalition would depend on the willingness of the PAM majority to continue meaningful involvement of NRP representatives in federation political decision-making and influence. Almost immediately this cooperative atmosphere was disturbed. Simeon Daniel was replaced as minister of finance and shifted to the newly created Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. For Nevisians this act tended to confirm their suspicion of alliances with Kittitian politicians. Their misgivings now shifted to PAM and their plans for Nevis.

As part of the government coalition, the NRP in 1984 could hardly have run on a secessionist platform, abandoning that tactic for the first time since their original declaration of separatist intentions in 1970. Their relegation in the 1984-89 government placed them in a difficult position with their constituents, and in 1987 they were opposed in the Nevis Assembly elections by three other parties, including the recently formed Concerned Citizens Movement (CCM), led by one of the island's sports heroes, Vance Amory. The CCM lost four of the five seats to the NRP, but won a respectable 38 percent of the vote. Just over a year later, in March 1989, Amory was elected to one of the three Nevisian seats in the general election (Table 4). The NRP retained two seats, and PAM repeated their 1984 defeat of Labour, holding six seats and a parliamentary majority. Following the general election, a cabinet reshuffle left Simeon Daniel without a ministerial post, a further step in the exclusion of the NRP from participation in the inner workings of the federal government. After his relegation to a minor ministry in 1984, Daniel

21. This is detailed in an examination of anti-union practice in Antigua and St. Kitts (Midgett 1989).
22. Griffin (1994:230) has argued that the PAM/NRP coalition "helped to transform the political system in St. Kitts & Nevis from a low consensus regime to one that reflects a significantly higher degree of consensus." This contention is not borne out by events following the 1984 election.
had stopped going to cabinet meetings. Now he skipped the swearing in of the new government and ceased attending House of Assembly meetings. In May, Daniel announced that Nevis would secede from the federation on October 26, 1990, his and his party’s first mention of secession since 1980.

Table 4. General Elections Nevis 1989-95; NRP versus CCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>candidates</th>
<th>NRP</th>
<th>CCMM</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>candidates</th>
<th>NRP</th>
<th>CCMM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,948</td>
<td>1993*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,641</td>
<td>1995*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In both 1993 and 1995 there was one independent candidate, each of whom received less than 1 percent of the votes.

In 1989 there was considerable labor unrest in Nevis with strikes at the electricity and water departments and in public works. 1989 also saw progress in the construction of a large Four Seasons golf and hotel complex at Pinney’s Beach on the island’s west side. Four Seasons, completed and opened in 1990, proved a significant boost to the Nevisian economy. The only AAA five-diamond property in the Caribbean region, the hotel could accommodate 550 guests fully booked, and it initially employed 700 Nevisian staff workers. The realization of the hotel construction was made possible by the autonomy the 1983 constitution granted the Nevis Assembly and premier to negotiate and conclude agreements with foreign business and financial interests.


24. The prominence of Nevis as an offshore investment locale following the provisions of the 1983 constitution is attested to by the numerous website promotions by various consulting firms advertising their expertise in facilitating financial transactions. On one website the island is described as having “an official attitude of hearty welcome to foreign offshore corporations and asset protection trusts” (www.cyberhaven.com).
dissension within the NRP over this course of action, and ultimately little came of his declaration. October 1990 came and went with no serious steps toward invoking the constitutional provision for separating Nevis from St. Kitts. Nonetheless, the possibilities for a continuing collaborative relationship between PAM and NRP were poor.

In June 1992 the NRP narrowly lost control of the Nevis Assembly in local elections. Although they outpolled the CCM, the NRP captured only two of the five seats, and Vance Amory assumed the premiership. This placed the NRP in the curious position of being part of the ruling coalition in the federal government while relegated to minority party opposition in the Nevis Assembly. Following the election, Daniel retired as leader of the NRP although he continued to serve in the parliaments. Thus, a political career founded on the principle of Nevisian secession came to an end as leadership of the party was transferred to Joseph Parry, who had been named minister for trade and industry.

The outcome of the 1992 Nevis Assembly election had other portents as the 1993 general election approached. The Labour Party was enjoying a resurgence with new leadership. Lee Moore, last in the line of direct political descendants of Bradshaw, had retired and been replaced as party leader by Dr. Denzil Douglas, a physician whose entry into politics was not clouded by an early association with the old Labour Party leadership. In Nevis the success of CCM in the 1992 local elections suggested that they could win at least two of the three Nevis seats in the House of Assembly. Were that to have happened, the party would have had to decide upon a course of action relative to participation in the federal government, especially if their votes turned out to be the balance, a situation the NRP had faced in 1980. The CCM position in their manifesto and campaign statements stressed nonalignment with any Kittitian party. Nothing specific was said about secession, but it seemed that the CCM, if successful, would be absenting itself from any meaningful role in the federal government.

The election produced exactly the kind of stalemate the CCM might have envisioned. In St. Kitts, Labour and PAM split the eight seats, although Labour won a substantial majority of the popular vote. In Nevis the CCM won two seats, the NRP, one (Table 4). The governor was faced with a situation where neither Kittitian party could persuade Amory to back away from his party’s campaign position – even where the prize allegedly would have been a prime ministership for himself. Governor Arrindell then took a precipitous decision to offer to the old PAM/NRP coalition the opportunity to form a minority government, a solution as unpopular as it was unworkable.

The stalemated parliamentary situation led eventually to a new election, called for November 15, 1995. In that contest Labour won an overwhelming victory in St. Kitts, taking seven seats to PAM’s one, while the Nevis outcome repeated CCM’s 1993 victory (Table 4). Labour was now the majority
party in the state, and the Nevisian politicians found themselves in the familiar position of minority representatives in a Labour-led government. Given the prevailing CCM position of nonalignment, the prospects for meaningful Nevisian participation in state affairs were remote.

An issue of long-standing concern was the 1983 constitution. The document was generally regarded as a deeply flawed instrument for governance, and in June 1996 discussion began between Amory and Parry regarding constitutional review. Shortly after these initial steps, however, Amory reversed himself and invoked the secessionist provision of the constitution (Griffin 1998). An election for the Nevis Assembly in February 1997 returned the CCM majority, and Amory declared it to be a “mandate to lead Nevis to independence from St. Kitts.”

Since 1996 the story of Nevisian politics has been a renewed movement toward secession. The 1983 constitution provides for separation of Nevis from St. Kitts by first taking a vote within the Nevis Assembly. That vote must be a two-thirds majority for the issue to then be presented to the general electorate after a minimum of six months. A two-thirds vote by the electorate in favor of separation is required for what would amount to Nevisian independence. In June 1996 the secession bill was given its first reading in the Nevis Assembly, with all five members of both parties speaking in favor. By 1996, however, the issue of Nevisian secession had come to interest a much larger constituency than the small, thirty-nine-square-mile island.

CARICOM concern over the prospect of Nevis’s imminent move had grown acute. The specter of secession haunts a number of multi-island Caribbean states, most of which have endured their own separatist tendencies. In 1997 Sir Shridath Ramphal, chancellor of the University of the West Indies and former secretary general of the Commonwealth, and Alister McIntyre, his vice chancellor, were enlisted by the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Lester Bird, in an effort to mediate the Nevisian situation. Bird had been mandated to be the CARICOM point man to negotiate a solution to the impasse, one that would head off Nevisian secession and negotiate an accommodation between St. Kitts and Nevis, presumably involving constitutional reform. His efforts failed, and the Nevis Assembly meeting to vote on the issue was scheduled for November 13, 1996. The vote failed to take place when the two NRP representatives boycotted the meeting, thus frustrating the requirement for a two-thirds majority vote. The NRP reversal did not indicate a change of mind, but rather, that a local election was in the offing, one the NRP felt they might win.

After their 1997 loss there was little left for the NRP representatives but to vote in favor of secession. The CCM had made the issue a pledge of their 1997 campaign, and the results seemed to confirm Nevisian intentions to

proceed with the political separation from St. Kitts. On October 13, 1997, a unanimous vote of the Nevis Assembly set in motion the process that would end with the Nevisian electorate deciding in 1998 whether or not to opt out of their long association with St. Kitts. Continued pressure and lobbying of the electorate from regional interests were apparently having little effect up to the date of the vote on the referendum. And then, on August 10, 1998, unaccountably and to the surprise of nearly all observers, Nevisians failed to give the secession proposal the two-thirds vote it required for enactment (Table 5). The decisive moment for Nevisians to give meaningful expression to a sentiment seemingly held by a large majority for nearly thirty years had come and gone, and the issue of Nevisian secession had been retired, at least for the present.

IDENTITY, SEPARATION, SECESSION

In the aftermath of the August 1998 referendum the question repeatedly has been raised: what happened? Why had the Nevisian secessionist movement, which had for so long apparently animated the political imaginations of the island’s people, failed to muster the two-thirds majority of votes required to realize their political separation from St. Kitts? In attempting an answer to this question we need to separate some notions that are frequently conflated or discussed without much precision. Accordingly I take note of “identity,” “separation,” and “secession.”

Table 5. 1998 Secession Referendum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid voters*</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>% votes</th>
<th>% total voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,925</td>
<td>61.83</td>
<td>57.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td>2,427</td>
<td>61.83</td>
<td>35.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>38.17</td>
<td>22.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* There were 10 rejected ballots. The total number of voters was 6,785.

Before moving to this discussion it is useful to raise the issue of nationalism as it pertains to the 1983 attainment of independence by St. Kitts-Nevis. It is a dubious proposition that this move was motivated by a strong nationalist impulse. Certainly we know that there had never been such an impulse that had united all residents of the state. At most one might argue that there were indications of what Eriksen (1993) has described for “informal nationalism.” If we view Kittitians and Nevisians separately, this sentiment was probably stronger among Nevisians, but directed toward a much different end. For

Kittitians it is not clear that any impulse to independent nationhood necessarily involved Nevis, except as it was expressed by the political leadership of the Labour Party. Finally, I suggest that Olwig’s verdict on the imaginings of Kittitians/Nevisians captures the essential aspects of the situation, that the move for independence was hardly characterized by the nationalistic zeal often associated with the declaration of political autonomy. In fact, nationalism, understood as the belief that political entities coincide with ethnic ones and that the total population share a common culture which is closely linked to the division of labor and mode of production of the society, was only minimally present except at the most formal level. (Olwig 1993b:1)

Elsewhere, referring to Benedict Anderson, she continues the theme: “The Afro-Caribbean population of St. Kitts-Nevis certainly did not constitute an ‘imagined political community,’ another definition of a nation” (Olwig 1993b:3).

Regarding Nevisian identity, let us examine aspects that Anderson (1991) posits in his discussion. In addressing the issues of community and identity he examines geography, census, cultural legacy – including language, and history. First, there seems little doubt that residents of the island maintain a separate and, for them, meaningful identity. That this may often be expressed in opposition to a corresponding identification of “Kittitian” is hardly remarkable. One aspect of ethnicity is always a structural element involving segmentary opposition: we are not only “we,” we are not “them,” and much of what “we” are may be presented in reference to the contrasted qualities, behaviors, appearances of “them.” When one gets beyond this oppositional factor, however, Nevisian identity becomes harder to grasp. For example, although O’Loughlin (1959:380) is certainly on track when she notes that “the natural boundary of the sea has tended to give each island a different history; (and) this, combined with differences in geographical and geological features, has led to the emergence of differences in social and economic patterns,” there are many born in Nevis who live on St. Kitts and continue to identify as Nevisians. Others have been born in St. Kitts of Nevisian parents. Moreover, many have mixed parentage, a completely expectable consequence of the centuries of traffic between the two islands. All of these facts of birthplace and parentage are frequently cited in assigning identities to individuals.

In terms of the 1960 census designations there were no “Nevisians” or “Kittitians,” only people resident in one island or the other. Therefore, one Nevisian-born but residing in St. Kitts is enumerated there without reference to his/her “ethnicity” or island “identity.” Moreover, in an election a “Nevisian” resident in a Kittitian constituency, and enumerated, there cannot

27. One’s place of birth is noted, however, and we may draw some conclusions from these patterns.
vote for an NRP or CCM candidate, who are not on the ballot in his area. The census constructions and categories are certainly colonial legacies, reflective of what the British considered to be significant classifications – race, color, “national” origins like Indian, Chinese, etc.

Are there perceptible cultural differences that mark Nevisians? Richardson (1983:169) suggests as much in his discussion of the political gulf between the islands, “cultural differences between the two islands will not be bridged easily. Further compromise will be necessary before St. Kitts and Nevis can achieve peaceful independence as a two-island state.” But elsewhere he seems to opt for an explanation that emphasizes resource competition, indicating that “probably more important in explaining insular rivalry is that it manifests jealous protection of island resources” (Richardson 1983:170). Ralph Premdas (1998, 1999), who has written extensively on the topic of ethnic nationalism, suggests that “primordial categories” have played a significant role in defining Nevisian identity and in the determination of the impulse toward separation. In quoting a long passage that is a laundry list of Nevisian cultural traits, he asserts that it “is pregnant with the riches of culture which define Nevisian sense of uniqueness and rootedness in their society” (Premdas 1999:453). This focus tends to reify “culture” and fails to recognize that ethnicity cannot be determined by cultural content, but is a structural feature, affirmed and sustained by cultural invention.28 Apart from differences in economy, other writers are hard pressed to locate cultural distinctions that mark off Nevis from St. Kitts. Olwig (1993a, 1993b) discusses Nevisian culture at length, but much of what she adduces would seem to apply generally to “marginalized people (who) have developed in those scattered niches within the colonial order where they have been able to interact relatively undisturbed” (Olwig 1993a:364), a characterization applicable to most West Indians.

Despite this apparent ambiguity as to cultural differences, there are some suggestive directions revealed in census data. In the 1960 census, a rather complete and usefully disaggregated source, and one that is representative of the period when some of the more dramatic political differences were surfacing, there are some telling indications. These are of two kinds: demographic indicators and figures from which we may confidently impute cultural/economic differences.

In the first case there are distinct differences in the propensity to migrate within the state. The St. Kitts population included 9.7 percent Nevisian-born, while Nevis had only 4.2 percent Kittitian-born. Because St. Kitts is much more populous, the Nevisian-born population living in the state out-

28. In Nevis the institution of Culturama, a festival celebrating Nevisian culture begun in 1974, is such an example of “invented tradition” (see Olwig 1993b:187-92). This is not to suggest that there is anything bogus about the celebration or its importance in defining Nevisian cultural identity.
side the island of their birth is even more striking. In 1960, 22.9 percent of all Nevisian-born residents were living in St. Kitts. Despite this, Nevisians display a greater propensity to remain in the districts of their birth, while Kittitians are more mobile, especially in a rural-to-urban direction, indicating the primacy of Basseterre, the capital.  

Culturally, we can also discern differences. The dependency ratio in St. Kitts was 0.97, in Nevis, 1.16, likely an artifact of greater out-migration from the latter. This is also suggested by sex ratios in the 15-64 age groups. For Nevis the figure is (m:f) 0.71; for St. Kitts, 0.85. More telling, however are indicators that point to economic pursuits and family structure. Nevisians were more likely to own land (29.9 percent) than rural Kittitians in the Windward (13.2 percent) or Leeward (18.1 percent) districts and to have larger holdings. Most Nevisians had 0.4-1.6 hectares; most Windward and Leeward residents had less than 0.4 hectares.

A commonplace assertion by Nevisians refers to an imputed superiority in terms of education and, presumably, awareness and refinements associated with educational levels. This is sustained by the figures comparing Nevisians with rural Kittitians. Only in Basseterre did the educational level approach that of Nevisians. In addition, Nevisian literacy exceeded that of rural Kittitians (Table 6).

Table 6. Educational Level (15+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>% primary or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leeward</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windward</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Kitts</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevis</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other respects indicating economic orientation and culture, the differences are even more striking. 1960 Nevisian rural patterns confirmed the image of them as small cultivators and fishermen, as opposed to rural Kittitians, who were landless estate employees (Table 7). Additionally the pattern of home

30. The dependency ratio is the ratio of non-working-age population (0-14 plus 65 and over) to the working-age population (15-64). It is usually seen as an indicator of underdevelopment and a young population. However, in the Nevisian case the migration pattern resulted in a large number of young and aged left behind on the island.
ownership and size of dwelling unit for Nevisians in 1960 was significantly different from the Kittitian rural population (Table 8).

How do we interpret these indications that seem to confirm widely held beliefs about the differences between Kittitians and Nevisians? While there is no disputing the objective criteria suggested here for distinguishing the two populations, these differences do not appear profound enough to explain the rupture that characterizes political culture in the state. More likely is the assertion of differences and stereotypical depictions of the “other” to sustain the argument that Nevisians cannot comfortably be a part of a political unit with St. Kitts. For example, in a discussion of Nevisian/Kittitian differences, a Nevisian politician points out features described above – smallholder versus estate laborer, home ownership versus renter, higher educational level of Nevisians – all contributing to a sense of pride and superiority. However, he continues with a litany of political and economic grievances:

They [the Labour Party government] didn't make use of their stewardship when they had it, and they didn't draw the people (of Nevis) to them... We were geared for a take-off [but] the powers that be didn't do anything to bring them [financial, credit institutions], and so we were vexed.34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7. Labor Categories35</th>
<th></th>
<th>Windward</th>
<th></th>
<th>Leeward</th>
<th>Nevis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no employees)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td>536</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm laborers</td>
<td>1,580</td>
<td>1,253</td>
<td></td>
<td>438</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no employees)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>386</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm laborers</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>982</td>
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<td>446</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Dwelling Ownership and Size36</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dwellings</th>
<th>% owner occupied</th>
<th>1 room</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2-4 rooms</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeward</td>
<td>2,738</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windward</td>
<td>3,030</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevis</td>
<td>3,050</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>2,195</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34. Interview with Fred Parris, October 7, 1985.
This is a pattern repeated in numerous letters and web postings by Nevisians supporting some form of separation from St. Kitts. The cultural differences are asserted, but the crux of their arguments rests on past – back to 1882 – political injustices, most significantly under Labour Party rule.

In this respect what seems uniquely Nevisian is a charter created by them from a reading of historical materials, one that speaks directly to their perceived political and economic plight. The elements of this charter have been noted throughout this paper, but to summarize, they are an interrupted autonomy in 1882 and a consequent long slide into degradation and penury; prolonged discrimination at the hands of a Basseterre-based government, especially as this was administered by the St. Kitts-Nevis Labour Party (the name itself is an affront, given the minimal Nevisian influence in the Party); and the idea, sustained for forty years, that respite from this situation could only be attained through political separation from St. Kitts.

How, then, does this identity translate into a political movement that might realize the goal of political separation? Here we examine the distinction made by Smith (1998:62-69) between “separation” and “secession.” Although he and many others who write about nationalism and secession focus on ethnic cleavages (see also Horowitz 1985; Kellas 1991), his discussion is apposite here. In discussing land and place Smith (1998:63) notes that these are vital to separatists “not simply for its economic and political uses” but equally for their “cultural and historical dimensions.” Both of these are addressed in the Nevisian charter. However, the economic and political have been the pivot of the present struggle. If, as Smith (1998:66) suggests, secession involves ideological opposition, this is hard to discern in the Nevisian case.

In an article on the tendency toward Caribbean insularity David Lowenthal (1984:112-13) locates Nevisian separatism within a general West Indian pattern of “particularism.” He notes that this “particularism is not in the main based on social and cultural differentiation ... but is a consequence ... of local hegemony against imperial control.” Nevisian separatism can thus be seen as an instance of a tendency that has been manifested in repeated failures of federal attempts, in insularity born of fear of competition and dependence, and in impulses in other small dependencies, like Barbuda, Anguilla, and Tobago, toward separation from their larger partners in state frameworks.

Can it be, then, that Nevisians may remain ardent separatists, desirous of removing the yoke of the perceived domination of Basseterre, but that many are not, in their final analysis, willing to take the political step of recreating themselves as a nation-state?37 This would seem to be the message of the 1998 referendum vote. The contrast with the plebiscite vote in 1977

37. One is reminded of the situation of the sister island of Montserrat (in pre-volcano times), where residents, faced with the decision about independence, repeatedly invoked a principle of “unripe time” to explain their ambivalence to a new status.
is instructive. The 1977 vote was little more than an opinion poll. Hopeful as they might have been of some kind of resolution of their plight after this dramatic evidence of Nevisian disaffection, NRP leaders had no realistic expectation that the British would acquiesce to the secession sentiment. In 1998, however, a positive vote on the referendum would have had direct and well-defined consequences. A two-thirds vote for the measure would have thrust Nevis into a new status, constitutionally separate from St. Kitts and independent of Great Britain. A substantial number of Nevisian voters could not take that step.\footnote{Another curious fact of the vote is the low turnout, given the significance of the issue. Voting turnouts have declined recently from a high in the 1993 election.}

A final note concerns Nevis in a global context. Olwig argues persuasively that the "external orientation" of Nevisians, an outcome of a long colonial history and subsequent emigration, has created a transnational community and field of action. She posits that Nevisian "sense of identity...is closely related to the global community, the most significant framework of the form of life of Nevisians" (Olwig 1993a:374). An irony of the secession attempt is that the economic underpinning of the proposed new nation is almost entirely attributable to developments that have followed from the 1983 constitutional arrangements and subsequent enabling legislation. The growth of tourism, largely as a result of the construction of an impressive facility owned by a transnational enterprise, and the rapid proliferation of offshore financial services have arguably made Nevisian independence viable. Hence, the grounding for this attempt at national sovereignty relies on the vastly expanded globalization of the Nevisian economy, quite a contrast from that earlier depiction of Nevis' plight, which emphasized its penury and forced isolation.

Since the referendum vote new proposals and discussions have centered on constitutional reform, a necessity on which all parties apparently agree. Should a new constitution be fashioned for the two-island state, however, it will not magically create a national identity to which Kittitians and Nevisians alike can subscribe. Instead, it will recognize the separate identities while seeking to ameliorate the grievances Nevisians have voiced for so long. Such an arrangement is likely to construct a governing apparatus where a unity state is only minimally manifest. For Nevisians that is likely to be quite enough.
APPENDIX

The Manifesto of the Nevis Reformation Party for General Elections 1st December, 1975

1. THE NEVIS REFORMATION PARTY will strive at all costs to gain secession for Nevis from St. Kitts - a privilege enjoyed by the Island of Nevis prior to 1882.

2. The present relationship between St. Kitts and Nevis makes Nevis a Colony or ward of St. Kitts. The people of Nevis oppose and detest the idea of Nevis going into Independence under a St. Kitts administration. The Nevis Reformation Party will strive at all costs to gain for the people of Nevis a new Council with similar powers and functions as the Council of Anguilla as provided in Section 109 of the St. Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla Constitution Order 1967.

3. The Nevis Reformation Party undertakes to hold Elections in Nevis as soon as the desired political status is achieved so that the people of Nevis will have a chance to vote for the Party or Candidate of their choice to look after their own affairs.

Dated, this 20th day of November, 1975.

S. Daniel, President of the Nevis Reformation Party
L. Morton, Secretary

REFERENCES


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