

Centering Spanish Jamaica: Regional Competition, Informal Trade, and the English Invasion,
1620–60

By Casey Schmitt

Scholars have long asked how an English invasion force conquered the Spanish island of Jamaica in 1655, but the more revealing historical question might be why Spain failed to take the colony back. Approaching this question by centering Spanish Jamaica's role in regional networks of informal trade and the commerce in enslaved Africans before and during the English invasion raises larger issues about the nature of empire in the seventeenth-century Caribbean. This approach reveals the fragmented and competitive nature of Spanish territories in the Caribbean as well as the ambivalent loyalties of the northern European merchants and mariners who made their profits on the fringes of legal trade. Studying the English invasion of Jamaica through a Spanish Caribbean lens illuminates how seventeenth-century imperial rivalries did not extend, unchanged, into colonial spaces but were refracted by regional history, geography, and traditions of trade and competition.