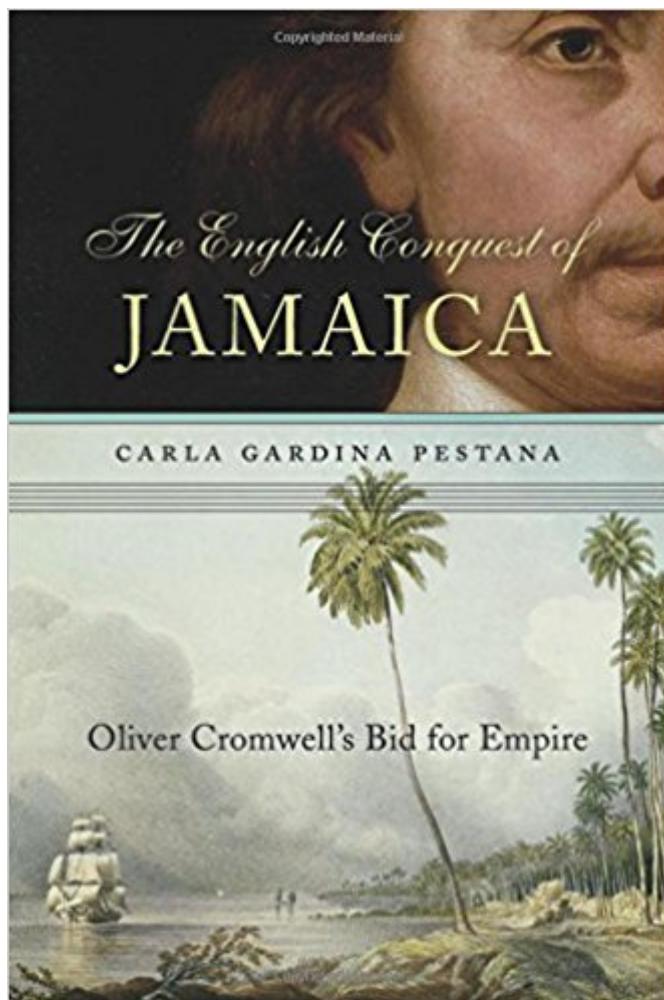


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# The English Conquest Of Jamaica: Oliver Cromwell's Bid For Empire



## Synopsis

In 1654, England's Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell conceived a plan of breathtaking ambition: the conquest of Spain's vast American empire. As the first phase of his Western Design, a large expedition sailed to the West Indies, under secret orders to take Spanish colonies. The English Conquest of Jamaica presents entrenched imperial fantasies confronting Caribbean realities. It captures the moment when the revolutionary English state first became a major player in the Atlantic arena. Although capturing Jamaica was supposed to be only the first step in Cromwell's scheme, even that relatively modest acquisition proved difficult. The English badly underestimated the myriad challenges they faced, starting with the unexpectedly fierce resistance offered by the Spanish and other residents who tenaciously defended their island. After sixteen long years Spain surrendered Jamaica and acceded to an English presence in the Americas in the 1670 Treaty of Madrid. But by then, other goals—including profit through commerce rather than further conquest—had superseded the vision behind the Western Design. Carla Gardina Pestana situates Cromwell's imperial project in the context of an emerging Atlantic empire as well as the religious strife and civil wars that defined seventeenth-century England. Though falling short of its goal, Cromwell's plan nevertheless reshaped England's Atlantic endeavors and the Caribbean region as a whole. Long before sugar and slaves made Jamaica Britain's most valuable colony, its acquisition sparked conflicts with other European powers, opened vast tropical spaces to exploitation by the purportedly industrious English, and altered England's engagement with the wider world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The English Conquest of Jamaica vividly demonstrates the huge investment of money, men and ships that went into Cromwell's plan to enlarge and rationalize the English presence in America. This field-transforming book shows that the Western Design actually set the stage for the Restoration government's aspirations to build and control the empire. (Karen Ordahl Kupperman, author of *The Jamestown Project*) In a bold and well-argued book, Pestana contends that Cromwell's Western Design was a major shift in English imperial thinking, with much greater consequences than have hitherto been realized. Jamaica's rather inglorious first five years as an English colony are thus not an irrelevant oddity in Atlantic history but signal the beginning of a new phase in British American empire. This engaging book is greatly to be welcomed. (Trevor Burnard, author of *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*) Meticulously researched and convincingly argued, Pestana's book contains a trove of information on the Cromwellian empire, the growing professionalism of the English army and navy, and England's relations with other European powers. It is a must-read for historians of Britain and its seventeenth-century empire. (Eliga H. Gould, author of *Among the Powers of the Earth*) Compared with his role in winning the civil wars of the 1640s, subduing Ireland and ruling England as a republic, Cromwell's Western Design is barely remembered. But his plan to expand England's presence in the Americas by dismantling the Spanish empire did much to shape the course of British imperial history. Pestana's richly detailed narrative takes this little-known story to another level. (Tony Barber *Financial Times* 2017-06-23)

Carla Gardina Pestana is Professor and Joyce Appleby Endowed Chair of America and the World at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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