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Continuity Not Change: The Incidence of Unrest Among Ex-Slaves in the British West Indies, 1838-1876

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The observation that ruling classes tend to sustain their hegemony by shifts that are merely superficial, and the contention that oppressed classes will always resist their oppression, are ideally tested by focusing attention on the plight and political behaviour of the ex-slaves of the British West Indian colonies in the period after slave emancipation, particularly between 1838 and 1876.¹

At the imperial level, the adoption of 'liberal' social and economic policies gave British slaves their nominal freedom while allowing freer trade with areas outside the formal empire where profits were greater and chattel slavery continued for a further fifty years. At the colonial level, plantocracies continued to dominate. No colony with its own Assembly lost its power of self-legislation before 1866, and in all colonies — including Crown Colonies directly ruled from London — the ex-slaves were cleverly kept in their place. Education was minimal, the franchise restricted, and law and order maintained by a scarcely reformed and even more impersonal magistracy and police force, and by the translation from Britain to the colonies of allegedly liberal but in fact class-regulating masters and servants, vagrancy, police and poor laws.

Most ex-slaves aimed to be peasant proprietors, yet they were denied cheap land by the application of Wakefieldian principles, and kept from squatting by the increased efficiency of government surveyors and lawyers insisting on proper title. In colonies with little spare land they were forced to compete with each other for the limited wage employment available, but elsewhere the planters' 'labour problem' was solved by the importation of cheap and reliable 'coolie' labourers from India. As a result, British West Indian ex-slaves were less a free peasantry than a wage-slave proletariat, employed only when needed on their former owners' terms, and competing with each other and with new immigrants of different ethnicities.

A closer look than has previously been given shows that the ex-slaves were far more restless and

resistant than has been suggested by imperialistic writers or those who considered that emancipation was an end in itself. Unrest in the earliest years of nominal freedom stemmed from problems of adjustment, from official opposition to a return to traditional ways, especially in religion, from tensions occasioned by questions of rents, wages and the availability of land, and from conflict with new immigrants, government surveyors and the police. These incidents multiplied and spread in times of economic slump such as the late 1840s, early 1860s and mid-1870s, or in times of natural disaster, such as drought, flood or cholera epidemic.

In Jamaica, for example, recent research has shown that there were dozens of riots hitherto unpublicized between 1838 and 1865; localized for the most part, but approaching islandwide revolts in 1848 and 1859.² This paper, though, concentrates on the three most serious outbreaks in the British West Indies as a whole; the 'Angel Gabriel' Riots in Guyana in 1856, the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, and the Federation Riots in Barbados in 1876. It argues that the fact that these happened in the same colonies in which the chief of the late slave rebellions occurred (Barbados in 1816, Guyana in 1823, and Jamaica in 1831-2) was not coincidental, pointing up the telling parallels between slave and ex-slave grievances, the tactics, aims and expectations of rebels and rioters, and the savage responses of the white colonial plantocrats.³

In Guyana by 1856 the slave revolt of 1823 was a long closed entry in official ledgers but still a potent folk memory, for attitudes, issues and conditions had not changed fundamentally. In August 1823 the slaves on the East Coast of Demerara had come out in their thousands to demand freedom, or at least far better conditions of labour and more time to work their own provision grounds, from which they supplemented their meagre diet and made some money at informal local markets. For the most part they were convinced that they had

already been granted concessions by the imperial government which were being withheld by the oligarchy of planters and Georgetown merchants. Many of them recently Christianized, the slaves did not wilfully damage the estates and offered little violence to the whites, calculating that the imperial troops (some of them black) would not be used against them except in retribution. In fact, the rebels were dragooned by the regular troops, white militia and Amerindian auxiliaries at the behest of a governor who was himself a soldier-planter, and as many as 250 slaves lost their lives.⁴

With emancipation in 1838 the ex-slaves had moved to achieve their aspirations, but with very limited success. As many as could left the estates, some to settle in the colonial capital, Georgetown, but more to find land for themselves and form 'free villages'. Yet these ex-slaves villages were free only in the senses of being unregulated and neglected by the plantocratic regime, emancipation having chiefly freed the planters from their previous legal and moral responsibilities. In a country where the only fertile land was near the coast and rivers, and extensive drainage works were necessary, suitable land was scarce and expensive. Though they often co-operated to buy land, the ex-slaves were unable to grow export staples and were restricted even in marketing local produce. Increasing cash needs (exacerbated by a growing population) could only be met by continuing to work for wages on plantations on terms compatible with peasant proprietorship, at a time when increased mechanization and economies of scale meant that ordinary labour was ever more cruelly seasonal. Planters, however, complained that negro labour was spasmodic, unreliable and insufficient — arguments used to justify the importation of Madeiran, Chinese and Indian labourers from 1835 onwards.⁵

The cultural gap between whites and blacks remained as wide as the socio-economic. In Georgetown, considerable numbers of both races lived close together, with resulting tensions. Yet over the rest of the colony only two small categories of whites lived in permanent contact with the Afro-Guyanese, both of them acting in an intermediate role between ruling whites and peasant-proletarian blacks. The few non-conformist missionaries willingly accepted the function of bringing 'under a more efficient moral culture'⁶ a people whom Governor Wodehouse referred to as being 'a good measure beyond the reach of the law, and who lead a life little less savage than that of the beasts of the fields'.⁷ Such missionaries admired the religious fervour of the black congregations, but no more understood what Christianity meant to them in terms of solace and inspiration than had Rev. John Smith 'The Demerara Martyr' in 1823.⁸

The Madeiran Portuguese were in an even more uncomfortable position, being not only foreign and Catholic, but having been encouraged by the white merchants and planters to move from mere labouring into the local retail trade, at a time when credit was almost entirely denied to those of black complexion. 'The negro was envious', wrote the negro-phobic local historian James Rodway in 1894, 'but not ashamed of his own laziness or want of thrift. Instead therefore of blaming himself for his poverty he ascribed it to cheating and overreaching on the part of his competitor, and unfortunately the Madeiran gave some slight cause for this'.⁹ In a situation where blacks were very easily indebted to the retailers and the truck system was not unknown, some would place much less equivocal blame on the Portuguese, but a fairer assessment might see them as the unfortunate catspaws of, and scapegoats for, an extremely exploitative ruling class.

Guyana was ignited in February 1856 by an apocalyptic coloured preacher called John Sayers Orr, who had recently returned from a stormy itinerary of 'sixteen of the United States, the Canadas, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, . . . Scotland, England and the Protestant part of Ireland'. A sort of proto-Paisley, who announced his meeting with a blast on a trumpet and was nicknamed 'The Angel Gabriel', he purveyed an inflammable mixture of Protestant zeal, populist radicalism, racism and appeals to patriotism, along the lines of the doggerel on one of his American posters:

Scorn be on those who rob us of our rights
Purgatory for Popery and the Pope
Freedom to man be he black or white
Rule Britannia!¹⁰

In his native Georgetown Orr was at first received kindly by the Governor, but 'immediately after he commenced walking about the town and its vicinity, carrying a flag, wearing a badge, and blowing a horn occasionally at the corners of the streets, followed by small groups of the rabble of the place'.¹¹ His preaching at the market place on Sundays attracted huge crowds of town and country blacks, in Wodehouse's words, 'blending together skillfully and amazingly . . . political and religious subjects in a manner calculated to arouse the passions of the Black and Coloured Population against the Portuguese Immigrants'.¹² Rioting began on Saturday and Sunday, 16–17 February 1856, after Orr was summoned for unlawful assembly, and spread like wildfire throughout the colony once he was committed to prison on Monday, 18 February. 'In the afternoon the town may be said to have been in open insurrection, and the

true character of the disturbances was at once revealed', wrote Wodehouse.

The Pope, the Bishop, the Nuns were clean forgotten — Nothing remained in the minds of the actors but the long subsisting hatred and jealousy of the Portuguese Immigrants from Madeira and the love of plunder, aggravated by the gross and brutal character of the female population, who have throughout the Colony taken a most active part in the Riots, and who are of course the most difficult to punish.¹³

Long before the forces of law and order could be fully mobilized the riots had spread throughout Demerara and into the nearer parts of Essequibo and Berbice, and within four days virtually every Portuguese shop had been ransacked and plundered with the few local policemen who tried to intervene being pelted with broken bottles and brickbats. It was reported that 'men, women and children all joined in, and in some parts of the country every Creole of the lower orders seems to have been one of the mob'.¹⁴ So unexpected, sudden and general were the disturbances that the Governor at first presumed a deep conspiracy. The most likely conspirators, he suggested, were the members of a black mutual aid society wishing to invest their funds in a trading transaction, who, disappointed by the way in which previous efforts had failed because 'either the Members were defrauded by their own leaders, or the shops from mismanagement gradually dwindled away', had used the coming of Orr to foment a plot to destroy the opposition and promote 'the establishment of Creole Shops upon its ruins'. In this imaginative scenario the agents of the black syndicate went rapidly through the country districts, not waiting for the actual riots but sowing the seeds by showing fictitious orders from the government not to kill the Portuguese but to seize all their property and give it to the people.¹⁵ Certainly such wish-fulfilling rumours of benevolent actions by the imperial government did circulate in 1856, as they had in 1823 and all the late slave rebellions, though their origins were never ascertained and none of the members of the mutual aid society were actually implicated in the riots. Wodehouse himself found it incredible that anyone would be so ignorant as to believe that the government supported the plunder of the Portuguese, though he could not 'quite assert that they altogether disbelieved a statement which harmonized so agreeably with their own inclinations'.¹⁶ The more plausible alternative that the riots stemmed from a universal socio-economic malaise only gradually dawned on the Governor, and he never publicly drew the most obvious conclusion from the fact that it was mostly food which the mobs plundered from the Portuguese shops.¹⁷

Governor Wodehouse, whom even the Colonial Office called 'an energetic officer with no disinclination to the old planter system, and with many of his advisors no doubt attached to it',¹⁸ quickly disabused the rioters of the notion that the government was on the people's side and acted as forthrightly as had Governor Murray, his predecessor in 1823. Martial law was not declared, probably because the garrison consisted almost entirely of the black troops of the Second West India Regiment. But the troops were rapidly deployed, reinforcements called for from Barbados and offers of assistance from warships stationed in the neighbouring Dutch and French colonies gratefully accepted. Hundreds of whites and 'respectable' coloureds were sworn in as special constables and the old militia regulations, in abeyance since 1839, reintroduced.¹⁹

Loss of life was minimal, but so many rioters were arrested that the jails overflowed and a special penal settlement was set up. At the trials, more than 100 'ringleaders' were sentenced by the plantocratic judges to terms of one to three years at hard labour, in addition to fines or floggings. John Sayers Orr, despite being the only prisoner defended by counsel, was sentenced to three years at hard labour, with sureties of £600 to keep the peace on his release.²⁰ Another 600 prisoners were treated in what Wodehouse regarded as an ingenious and magnanimous way but which nonetheless betrayed his plantocratic bias; they were given a conditional pardon, dependent on the satisfactory conclusion of contract labour on designated estates, at a rate of six months' work for each month's sentence. Such an unprecedented measure Wodehouse defended by declaring 'that a Negro requires to be under a necessity to do right. As long as that necessity exists, he not only obeys but appears to have no wish to avoid. Remove the necessity, and the spirit of licence comes into operation at once'. He went on to state his belief:

that the people of England are no longer under the delusion that these people can be controlled by precisely the same forms of law as prove sufficient in highly civilized communities; and that they no longer wish freedom from slavery to mean anything less than freedom from all legal control . . . The late events have shown beyond the possibility of doubt that the mass of the population are in no degree able to govern themselves than they were at the time of the Emancipation — some will say even less so.²¹

Subsequent actions by the Guyanese regime reflected Wodehouse's dire assessment, and were endorsed by the Colonial Office because they were cleverly consonant with contemporary trends towards socio-political efficiency and *laissez-faire*

principles, particularly the belief that colonies should be as self-supporting financially as was possible. A flurry of ordinances passed by the Court of Policy reformed and extended the police force and system of local courts and tightened the code against petty offenders (including, incidentally, a ban on the use of 'horn or other instrument to call people together'). An ordinance against vagrancy virtually defined as 'idle and disorderly persons', 'rogues and vagabonds' or 'incorrigible rogues' any persons who chose not to work for the estates and were found far from their settlements without visible means of support, at the same time as masters and servants legislation put all the onus of observing labour contracts on the labourers.²²

The most controversial legislation, though, involved the payment of compensation to the Portuguese. Claims for damages amounted to some £59,000, of which no less than £53,000, or 91%, was allowed by a local tribunal — not so much because of representations made by the Portuguese Government to the Foreign Secretary Lord Wodehouse (a relative of the Governor), as through the determination of the Guyanese regime to rescue and restore the retail system, and its superstructure of Georgetown merchants. The compensation, more than the entire annual budget for the colony, was to be paid over five years and financed ostensibly out of the general revenue, but in fact through a novel poll tax. A special registration ordinance was promulgated on the pretext of facilitating the payment of compensation claims in this and possible future cases, but with two other quite different purposes; to arrive at an accurate census of population and property for taxation purposes and to facilitate the control of the free villages.²³ These purposes were transparent to the persons upon whom the new taxation pressed most heavily, at a time of special economic hardship. It was opposed in England by the Anti-Slavery Society, which made a deputation to the Colonial Secretary, and condemned in a petition from the ordinary people of the colony carrying 18,000 signatures.²⁴ When Governor Wodehouse left Georgetown on vacation in August 1857, he was pelted with stones, cane stalks and offal at the dock, and when he finally left the colony in May 1861 without ceremony and at dead of night, it was suggested that it was 'to avoid a salute of dead cats and dogs'.²⁵

In Jamaica, the great slave rebellion at Christmas 1831 and the Morant Bay Rebellion in October 1865 occurred at opposite ends of the island, but in both cases they were merely the conflagration of islandwide tinder. Besides, the combustible material remained unchanged in many respects between 1831 and 1865, despite emancipation in 1838.

By 1831 the creolized slaves of Jamaica had become intolerably frustrated, while at the same time seeing a glimmer of hope that by concerted action they might enforce improved conditions or even speed their own emancipation. Over the previous fifty years, slaves had come to regard the working of provision grounds as a customary right and had established an effective informal market network; yet the more recent decline of the plantation economy and the ending of the slave trade in 1808 had led many masters to extract more work, while expecting the slaves to be more self-supporting. Likewise, the spread of Christianity — originally through the agency of black preachers from America and only later through white missionaries from England — had given slaves opportunities for organization and self-expression, as well as a message with apocalyptic overtones; yet the slaves' sense of self-justification through religion was frustrated, or at least challenged, by planocratic opposition, to the point of martyrdom. Meanwhile, liberal reform — economic, political and social — was gathering momentum in the metropolis, and the planters' reactions to the threats of free trade, political interference and enforced emancipation occurred in dangerous conjunction with the slaves' growing realization that they had allies, of a sort, in England.²⁶

Certainly, the slaves' most implacable enemies were the local whites, but rumours circulated by the elite slaves among their humbler brethren exaggerated the case for external support, claiming, for example, that emancipation had already been granted by the King and withheld by the Assembly, and that Governor, military and missionaries alike would support them if they rose to assert their freedom. In fact, all whites, including missionaries, had a horror of social unrest, particularly when it involved 'uncivilized' blacks. They ignored the clear evidence that a majority of dissidents simply planned a stoppage of work without harming any persons or even damaging the estates, and concentrated their paranoid fears on that minority of realist slaves who knew that the regime would never surrender without a fight and consequently drilled black guerrilla 'regiments'.

The revolt centred on the Great River valley in western Jamaica, far from the centre of government and the colonial armed forces, in ideal peasant farming (and guerrilla) country — a traditional area of maroon resistance. It was also the part of Jamaica where the native Baptists had made their most, and most fervent, converts; indeed, so many of the participants in the rebellion were Baptist church members and so many of their leaders Baptist deacons, that it became popularly known as 'The Baptist War'. Over 200 estates were involved,

on which lived some 60,000 slaves. For a week the rebels controlled a fifth of the island, and it was six weeks — after thousands of troops, militia and maroons were deployed, using terror tactics — before the last embers were extinguished. Though no more than a dozen whites were killed in all, about 200 slaves perished during the campaign and no less than 340 were executed after court martial or civil trial.

The Jamaican Assembly assessed damages as well over a million pounds, and the planters received compensation from the imperial government despite the fact that the largest item was the value of the 540 slaves 'lost' in the rebellion. In the wake of the suppression, white Anglican vigilantes torched nearly all the non-conformist chapels in western Jamaica, and it was this and the maltreatment of white missionaries, rather than the death of the 540 slaves, which convinced waverers in Britain of the need to enforce emancipation upon the West Indian slaveholders. The parliamentary select committee to consider the means to effect emancipation 'at the earliest period compatible with the safety of all Classes in the Colonies' was convened just one week after the execution of Sam Sharpe, the noble chief of the Jamaican rebels.²⁷ Pretty soon the debate centred entirely on the questions of how much compensation the slaveholders should receive for their emancipated property and the means by which the ex-slaves could be compelled to work for their former owners as 'free' wage labourers.

It was, indeed, the attempted enforcement of local adjustments by the plantocracy that provoked much of the tension in the first phase after emancipation. Even in the initial period of optimism, when land seemed plentiful and the prices of peasant produce remained satisfactory, localized disturbances occurred between employers and employed over the trimming of wages and attempts to tie the labourers by charging rents for houses and provision grounds, and between planters and missionaries over the establishment of church-related free villages. With the economic collapse of the later 1840s and in subsequent slumps brought on by drought, hurricane, epidemic or worldwide depression, tension heightened. By 1865 Jamaica enjoyed only a fraction of its former prosperity, but the decline of the richest of all British plantation colonies did not mean that the ex-slaves were left to enjoy the life of free, if impoverished, peasants; rather the reverse. Sporadic conflict occurred over the more efficient application of the laws governing labour contracts, vagrancy and petty offenses, through a magistracy that remained essentially plantocratic and a more officious police force, following a policy of stationing officers in

parishes other than their own. Conflict also broke out with more obvious strangers; the new Africans, Indians and few poor whites cynically introduced by the legislature to provide a more reliable plantation labour force while driving down wages through labour competition.²⁸

Meanwhile, land for peasant farming grew scarcer; not so much because of a rapid growth of population as the tightening of rules about formal title and the payment of a 'sufficient price' for Crown lands. The situation was particularly anomalous in the light of the steady decline of sugar plantations — so many of the decayed estates being bought up for conversion into inefficient cattle 'pens' by middle-class Jamaicans (coloured as well as white) that one writer has referred to the creation of a 'penocracy' to reinforce the traditional plantocracy.²⁹ Fights flared between government surveyors and peasant farmers and over the eviction of squatters, and the police were kept constantly busy over cases of praedial larceny, fence breaking, and the rustling and maiming of stock.

The Jamaican countrymen remained a deeply religious people, and the normally high level of observance was periodically raised by waves of frenzied revivalism, particularly during the 1850s and early 1860s. Yet even the people's preoccupation with revivalist religion heightened rather than lowered tensions. Missionaries deplored the way in which the revivalists reverted to spontaneous and unsupervised worship (much of it akin to traditional African 'myal'), and the local whites, as usual, treated what they could neither understand nor control with a mixture of contempt and fear, complaining at the same time that episodes of religious fanaticism kept labourers from the estates and even led to a shortage of peasant-grown ground provisions.³⁰

Localized disturbances became general during the depressed mid-1860s, and erupted into a major revolt in St. Thomas-in-the-East in October 1865. A few months before, a Baptist missionary, Edward Underhill, had written a forceful letter to the Colonial Office calling attention to the desperate plight of the Jamaican blacks, particularly now that provisions were scarce because of drought and prices of imports high because of the American Civil War. At the same time, some peasants of St. Ann's parish sent a petition for relief to Queen Victoria herself. The Underhill letter was debated throughout Jamaica, but the only official response was the so-called Queen's Advice to the St. Ann's petitioners callously enjoining hard work and thrift as the only solutions to the hardships.³¹

The Queen's Advice was inspired by the recently-appointed Governor, an obstinate mediocrity and ardent Anglican named Edward Eyre

who, on the basis of experience with Australian and New Zealand natives and Indian 'coolies' in Trinidad and St. Vincent, believed that West Indian blacks should be ruled with an iron rod.³² Eyre's most formidable opponent in the Jamaican Assembly was George William Gordon, an upwardly mobile coloured planter, businessman and independent Baptist church leader, who made himself the people's champion in a personal quest for political status. The real rebel leader in 1865, though, was the equally remarkable Paul Bogle, one of Gordon's black deacons, a peasant smallholder of Stony Gut in St. Thomas, a parish backed by the traditional maroon fastness of the Blue Mountains, with many decayed estates owned by absentees and thousands of land-hungry former slaves and recently freed indentured African labourers.

Events accelerated after Gordon was sacked as a St. Thomas Vestryman and JP for criticizing the operation of justice and a lack of social services in the parish, blaming by implication the Anglican Rector and the Custos (who, rather absurdly, was a German baron, Von Ketelhodt). In August 1865, Gordon allegedly told an audience of St. Thomas blacks 'You have been ground down too long already . . . Prepare for your duty. Remember the destitution in the midst of your families, and your forlorn condition', and went to say of the Queen's Advice, 'it is a lie; it does not come from the Queen'.³³ Shortly afterwards, Governor Eyre refused even to see petitioners, including Bogle, who had walked the 45 miles from St. Thomas's into Spanish Town. Unknown to Gordon, oaths were taken and drilling began in Stony Gut, based on Deacon Bogle's chapel.³⁴

On Saturday, 7 October, a market day, a band of Bogle's men rescued a black whom the police were trying to arrest for a breach of the peace at Morant Bay courthouse, a commotion that immediately preceded a case involving eviction for non-payment of rent (in which the plea was 'on the ground that the land was free, and the estate belonged to the Queen').³⁵ Three days later, police sent from Morant Bay to arrest Bogle were driven back the seven miles from Stony Gut. Von Ketelhodt called out the volunteers and sent to Spanish Town for troops, while at the same time Bogle and 19 others signed a letter to the Governor asking the 'due protection', which, if refused, would compel them 'to put our shoulders to the wheel, as we have been imposed upon for a period of 27 years with due observance to the laws of our Queen and country'.³⁶

Before any response could come from Governor Eyre, on Wednesday, 11 October hundreds of crudely armed men marched, to the sound of drum, cow horn and conch shell, upon Morant Bay,

where the hated Vestry was in session. Fired on by the volunteers, who killed seven in their only volley, Bogle's forces burned down the Courthouse, released 50 prisoners, looted the town and estate provision grounds, and in all killed 20 whites, including Custos Ketelhodt and several unpopular estate managers. Back at Stony Gut, Bogle held a prayer meeting, allegedly declaring, 'It is now time for us to help ourselves. War is at us; black-skin war is at hand'. Within three days, insurrection had spread from Monkland in the west to Elmwood in the north-east, a distance of 75 miles.³⁷

Retribution, though, was swift and terrible. Martial law was immediately declared in the County of Surrey, the eastern third of the island. Two naval vessels were sent from Port Royal to Morant Bay and the troops at Kingston and Newcastle were force-marched through the mountains. The Moore Town maroons crossed the Blue Mountain ridge and fell on the rebels, and even the Hayfield maroons, whom Bogle thought were behind him, sided with the government. More than 430 men and women were shot down or put to death after trial — scarcely fewer than in 1832 — with 600 publicly flogged and more than 1,000 houses burned. Paul Bogle, caught by maroons in a cane-piece, was hanged from the burned-out Courthouse. George William Gordon, carried by ship from Kingston to Morant Bay so that he could be tried by court martial, was hanged within three days, on 23 October.³⁸

In keeping with better established methods of parliamentary inquiry, a more realistic effort was made by the imperial government to arrive at the causes of the revolt and the details of its suppression than in 1832. Over a three-month period, a three-man commission took evidence from 730 witnesses in 60 separate sittings, including some in the actual locations of the revolt. Yet some of the difficulties and prejudices of the commissioners can be gauged from remarks at the beginning of their 1,200 page report:

As regards the negroes, it is enough to recall the fact that they are for the most part uneducated peasants, speaking in accents strange to the ear, often in a phraseology of their own, with vague conceptions of number and time, unaccustomed to definiteness or accuracy of speech, and, in many cases, still smarting under a sense of injuries sustained.³⁹

In their conclusions, the commissioners found that the revolt was at least partly fuelled by racial animosity and constituted 'planned resistance to lawful authority'. Governor Eyre was praised for his 'skill, promptitude and vigour', and it was stated that though there was no evidence directly

implicating Gordon, had there been in fact a long-plotted conspiracy he must have known of it. Yet the commissioners also ascertained that the rebels were 'for the most part what are called free settlers, occupying and cultivating small patches of land', whose 'great desire was to obtain, free from the payment of rent, what are called the "back lands"', and added that 'disputes between employers and labourers, and questions relating to the occupation of land, which are decided in the first instance at Petty Sessions, are adjudicated upon by those whose interests and feelings are supposed to be hostile to the labourer and the occupier'. Particularly in St. Thomas-in-the-East the existing bench of magistrates was unfit to dispense justice in the cases that most commonly came before it, and Jamaica as a whole was in sore need of 'a good Master and Servant Act', arrived at and administered by an independent and impartial tribunal. In their most damning passage of all, the commissioners concluded that in the suppression of the revolt martial law had been kept on far longer than was necessary, that punishments by death were 'unnecessarily frequent', that the floggings were 'reckless' and sometimes 'barbarous', and that the burning of 1,000 houses was 'wanton and cruel'.⁴⁰

These findings provoked scandal among conservative imperialists and, as Bernard Semmel and Gertrude Himmelfarb have shown, the controversy that raged in England in the later 1860s over the conduct of Governor Eyre polarized attitudes and helped to crystallize imperial policy.⁴¹ Yet even the 'liberal' position in the debate went no further than the principle 'that if British rule was to prevail (as prevail it should), it should be just'.⁴² For the ordinary black Jamaicans the only obvious change was the self-dissolution of the Jamaican Assembly and the substitution of Crown colony government in 1866, but this was far from a benefit to them. The voluntary change was motivated by a fear, inspired by the career of George William Gordon, that popular radical elements might in due course take charge of an elective Assembly, and by the thought that the plantocracy might more easily sustain itself through Councils nominated by 'right-thinking' Governors. Events after 1866 proved the Jamaican ruling class largely correct. Though an extremely limited franchise was gradually reinstated after 1884, land policy, laws and magistracy were not substantially changed in the nineteenth century, and what V.S. Reid called Jamaica's 'New Day' — democratic self-government — did not dawn until 1957, 119 years after slave emancipation.⁴³

An even more repressive scenario characterized Barbados, where the widespread revolts of 1816, 1876 and 1937 punctuated, at remarkably even intervals, a largely unchanging tale of plantocratic

dominance. The revolt in 1816 that was to take its popular name from its chief slave leader, Bussa, came as an immense shock to the Barbadian whites, whose slaves had not even been detected in a plot for over 100 years. With the threat of invasion removed by the ending of the French wars, the whites were preoccupied by the effects of reduced economic protection on sugar prices, and almost up in arms about plans by the imperial government to impose a slave registration bill with or without the consent of the Barbadian Assembly — loosely talking in terms of revolution and secession much like the Americans in 1775. Over 95% of the Barbadian slaves were island-born, regarding themselves as much Barbadians as the whites. They grew much of their own food on their tiny plots and even made money selling surpluses, including ginger for export.⁴⁴

Yet the Barbadian slaves were far from content, particularly in the southeast of the island, the area with the highest density of slaves, the driest soils, the harshest working conditions and a tradition of resistance that went back to marronage in the early seventeenth century. Groups of elite slaves in St. Philip parish, in conjunction with a few disgruntled free coloureds who had more slave than free kin, plotted at weekend dances. They believed, on the evidence of newspaper reports and loose talk overheard, that the imperial government was in favour of slave emancipation, and calculated that if they closed down the mills and drove the whites into Bridgetown, the plantocracy would be forced to come to terms. The majority convinced themselves that if they refrained from violence the Governor and imperial troops would be on their side; only a few believed that their only option was to follow the lead of the 'Mingo' slaves (that is, the Haitian rebels of 1791–1804).⁴⁵

The revolt erupted on Easter Sunday, 14 April 1816, with the firing of trash houses as beacons. Within hours the rebels controlled a third of the island, over 100 estates. Bussa's followers seized the armoury of the St. Philip's militia and marched towards town under the captured standard, as if they were now the effective parochial militia.⁴⁶ Not a single white was killed at this stage and very few injured, though hundreds were at the slaves' mercy.

The regime, however, showed no mercy at all. Martial law was declared, and the army commander confidently sent forward the black regular troops with orders to shoot when necessary and unleashed the undisciplined white militia, who shot on sight and wantonly burned slave huts and grounds. Two whites died in all, but 50 slaves were shot in the fighting and another 70 summarily executed in the field. Later, a further 144 were exe-

cuted (including three of the four free coloureds charged) and 132 deported. The bodies of dead rebels — sometimes just their heads — were displayed on their home estates, and security measures were tightened up in all respects. Yet an official local report published in 1818 insisted that the Barbadian slaves had no grounds for discontent, putting the blame firmly on meddling by the imperial government.⁴⁷

Unequivocally, 1816 was a lasting victory for the Barbadian white oligarchy of planters and Bridgetown merchants. Alone of the older sugar colonies Barbados was able actually to increase production after slavery ended through the planter's complete monopoly of fertile land and control of the former slaves, who had virtually no chance of owning farmland and no alternatives to labour on the estates on the planters' terms.⁴⁸ The increase in production tapered off in the 1870s with declining world prices, and many planters and even merchants were threatened with bankruptcy. But their socio-economic dominance was not seriously eroded. The few middle-class coloureds and blacks with money were denied the chance of competing as sugar producers by a united front of white planters and their merchant bankers, and the minority of blacks who owned parcels of freehold land were denied the capital and favourable legislation necessary to cooperate and become more efficient producers even of non-sugar crops.⁴⁹

The lot of the black majority, crowded into Bridgetown or tied to agricultural labour, was bleakest of all. Though the population increased by more than 50% between 1838 and 1876 despite serious cholera epidemics, emigration was positively discouraged,⁵⁰ at least until 1870. In a community which the whites — like those of the American South — claimed was uniquely civilized, eight out of ten blacks were technically illegitimate, a majority of the children of school age received no schooling whatever, there was no free medicine and no medical facilities at all outside Bridgetown, the poor law system brought practical relief only to poor whites, and the Bridgetown jail and workhouse were accurately described as dungeons. In 1876 the only efficient institutions were the Assembly, the Anglican church, the police force and the magistracy.⁵¹

The linchpin of the planters' dominance was the oppressive Masters and Servants Act of 1840.⁵² By this, every agricultural labourer was required to be located on a plantation, his tenancy of a minute house and plot requiring him to work when called, five days of nine hours' work per week. If he failed to turn out, he was liable to the forfeit of a month's wages and/or 14 days in jail, with or without hard labour. If no work were offered, the labourer, the-

oretically, could go to court to sue for five days' wages, but was then liable to eviction at one month's notice. In fact labourers never went to court for wages due, and worked on the average far less than 45 hours a week while at the same time having to pay rent for houses and plots which, by another law, was deducted by owner/employer before wages were paid. Many planters also trimmed wage-bills by selling ground provisions to their labourers which the labourers could not grow for themselves.

The consequences were inexorable. At the best times wages were close to subsistence, and in times of depression or drought destitution was common and starvation not unknown. For example, in 1870 an inquest was held at Clifden in St. Philip on a labourer named Samuel Dottin, aged 55, who was found dead in his hut while his wife was away at The Crane scavenging sea urchins for food. It was testified that Dottin had been receiving 10 pence a day as a contract labourer, but that most weeks he worked only three days and some weeks not at all. Even the estate manager admitted that Dottin 'tottered as he walked', and the coroner decided that he had suffered 'from no disease but starvation'.⁵³

Yet the Barbadian proletariat was not so long-suffering and complaint, or the whites so calm and confident, as the plantocracy pretended. At the day-to-day level, by far the most common cases that came before the local magistrates involved canefield arson and other forms of malicious damage, trespass and, especially in times of hardship, stealing of food. For example, in the month before the 1876 riots, no less than 152 persons were charged with food stealing, compared with a total of 75 charged with all other offences.⁵⁴ As to more serious and general manifestations of resistance, there had been riots in St. Philip in 1863 which Governor Walker confidentially attributed to insufficient wages,

although the planters are very angry with me when I say so. They aver that there has been little or no reduction of wages, but whatever it may have arisen from, whether from the inability of the planters to give the same quantity of work, or from the difficulty with which the labourer can, on account of the hardness of the soil, accomplish his ordinary task, or from the task having been increased, the labourer is undoubtedly not earning the same amount of money which he has been accustomed to do.⁵⁵

A few years later, a disillusioned Anglican curate leaving for England wrote:

One predominating characteristic of the white people of Barbados is their abject fear of the Negroes. Whether, on the principle that 'conscience doth make cowards of us

all,' this feeling be only the natural offspring of past tyranny and present scant or unwillingly rendered justice, or has any more solid foundation, I am unable to say.⁵⁶

Governor Pope Hennessey, who quoted the anonymous curate in 1876, added that even in comparatively good years when food was cheap and the people apparently worked cheerfully, 'panics sometimes spring up among the white people that are quite inexplicable', quoting Colonel Clements, the Inspector General of Police, as saying that he hardly knew an easter over the previous 18 years (that is, the anniversary of Bussa's Revolt) 'to pass without some leading white people talking of an insurrection amongst the labourers'.⁵⁷

Conditions were desperate by 1876, but what triggered an explosion, as in 1816, was not the whites' fears of the blacks so much as of imperial interference, coupled with the blacks' reaction to white paranoia and their own miserable servitude. In this case, the immediate issue was the imperial government's campaign to create a Windward Islands Federation including Barbados.⁵⁸ The Barbadian blacks saw no practical advantage in a federation, but instinctively felt that if the planters and merchants were so adamantly against it, it must be good, especially since it was strongly espoused by a Governor, John Pope Hennessey, who was clearly on the side of the ordinary blacks.⁵⁹ From his arrival in Barbados late in 1875 Hennessey went on personal missions of inquiry into local conditions, being accused by the planters of holding court for disgruntled blacks at his country retreat, what is now called Sam Lord's Castle, in St. Philip.⁶⁰ In speeches before the Council and Assembly the Governor not only promoted federation but condemned the levels of wages, the burden of taxation on ordinary people, the lack of social services and the appalling state of the Bridgetown jail. On one occasion his carriage was dragged by exultant black townfolk from the legislative building back to Government House.⁶¹

As so often in the past, exaggerated rumours spread through the rural areas, to gain additional force when relayed to the master class. For example, the fervently plantocratic *Agricultural Reporter* claimed on 4 April 1876 that pro-federation agents:

have been going about the country with Federation petitions for people to sign, have invariably employed as their great argument, a promise to the labourers, not only of higher wages, but of 20 acres of land in some neighbouring el dorado, where they would become gentlefolks, and be elevated from the position of labourers to that of landed proprietors in their own right . . . [and] have not scrupled to impose upon their illiterate dupes the lying impression that the land of estates in Barbados

is to be freely apportioned to them, that they are to drive in their carriages, and indulge in other luxuries. The consequence is that the labourers are already heard selecting the spots of land for which they have a preference, and otherwise manifesting the results of the evil influences which are thus brought to bear upon their impressionable and excitable natures.⁶²

An even more authoritative statement was made in a document signed by all the Anglican clergy from the Bishop downwards, sent to the Governor on May 26 after the riots subsided:

there was a general impression made upon the minds of the labourers that the ground provisions of the planters and their live stock were given to the labourers by the consent of the Governor . . . The belief is still very general that the land and other property of the white, coloured, and respectable black owners, is wrongfully held back from the blacks, to whom at the Governor's insistence it had been awarded by the Queen.⁶³

However, it was anti- not pro-Federation agents who provoked the first bloodshed. On 28 March 1876, a group of white members of the Barbados Defence Association attempting to hold a meeting at Mount Prospect, St. Peter's, was stoned by the audience and in the resulting fracas a black labourer, Moses Boyce, was shot.⁶⁴ Far worse was to follow as the true issues came to the fore, beginning, significantly, on Byde Mill estate, at the junction of St. Philip's, St. John's and St. George's, on Easter Tuesday, 18 April 1876 — almost exactly the sixtieth anniversary of Bussa's Revolt.⁶⁵

Labour conditions at Byde Mill, under a hated manager called Reece, were notorious even by general Barbadian standards. In 1870 there had been a case of a labourer's child dying of starvation, and earlier in 1876 a female labourer, Emily Howell, had been served with notice of eviction after ten years' residence for complaining of wages of sixpence for a full week's work. On Easter Sunday, most of the labourers had received from 2 to 8½ pence for the week, the estate's attorney later telling the Governor 'he supposed the wind had been slack and there had not been full work for them all', while calmly adding as justification that these were net wages, Reece having duly deducted all rents due.⁶⁶

On Easter Tuesday the labourers went to Reece's house, told him they were starving and asked for potatoes. When he refused, a mob of several hundred ransacked the estate's provision grounds. They were led by two brothers called Dottin, said to be relatives of the man starved to death at Clifden in 1870, the one blowing a conch shell, the other carrying a red flag.⁶⁷ From Blyde Mill, semi-organized bands of labourers fanned out

in all directions, to plunder provision grounds on 50 estates. Local constables and armed and mounted whites were defied with sticks and stones, but no lives were threatened and very few buildings damaged. At Welch's, for instance,

The cellars, pantrys, potato store, pigsties, rabbit hutches etc. had been completely rifled, and in some cases pulled down, but the mob seemed to have been under control of some leaders with a system of their own, for no glass had been damaged in the dwelling house proper, nor had it been entered, although there were marks of bill hooks on the doors and other woodwork.⁶⁸

In this manner, it seems, the labourers intended mainly to bring attention to their miserable condition, making the points that they intended no destruction of the plantation system, wanting merely a living wage, along, perhaps, with more land of their own from which to feed themselves and their families.

Neither white nor black Barbadians expected that Governor Pope Hennessey would act forthrightly, but he surprised all by the degree to which he emulated earlier governors. He resisted demands by panicked whites who fled into Bridgetown that he declare martial law, issue guns to the police and permit the public flogging of prisoners, but he immediately mobilized the troops, formed a column of irregulars from the ships at anchor and authorized the JPs to swear in hundreds of special constables. These last, needless to say, were exclusively whites and avowed anti-federationists, and pursued the rioters with traditional venom. There were skirmishes at Halton, Applethwaite's and elsewhere, but within a week the riots had been suppressed, with eight blacks killed, at least 36 wounded, and 450 taken prisoner.⁶⁹

When they were eventually brought to trial in October 1876, before a judge specially imported from Natal, the prisoners were treated with comparative magnanimity — only 47 being given further terms in jail.⁷⁰ But the Barbadian regime successfully used the Federation Riots as a pretext to retain and reinforce its socio-economic system, finally to defeat the Windward Islands Federation proposal and to pursue the vendetta against Governor Pope Hennessey. Alone with Bermuda and The Bahamas — the other two colonies in the region with sizeable white minorities — Barbados never lost its right of self-legislation, though in the 1870s the franchise was exercised by only 1,300 out of 162,000, and no more than one in 20 adults ever voted before 1945. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, made only a token effort to support Pope Hennessey's actions, the Federation project was quietly shelved and the Governor himself

transferred to Hong Kong before the end of 1876.⁷¹ In one of their last petitions calling for Pope Hennessey's removal, the arrogant whites of the Barbados Defence Association had almost the last word, consigning the black majority of Barbadian back into the apolitical limbo from which they were not to emerge for another 70 years:

our society [that is, the B.D.A.] consists of persons belonging to every class, colour, and condition in life, representing the owners of property in contra-distinction to those not possessed of any property . . . This class of people being possessed of no real property whatever, never had shown the slightest disposition to take any interest in political questions, politics having all along been confined to people possessed of property without regard to colour or class.⁷²

Elsewhere, I have tried to show how all three of the chief late slave rebellions in the British West Indies not only followed traditional patterns of slave resistance but also foreshadowed the will of the slaves to become free peasants.⁷³ This paper attempts to show the degree to which the major outbreaks in the same three colonies in the 40 years after emancipation not only demonstrated the frustration of would-be free peasants forced to continue to toil for former owners, but also harked back to the mass outbursts of slave resistance, on the part of rebels and masters alike. Of course, there were differences between the colonies affected and changes over time, but these, it is felt, were outweighed by fundamental similarities and continuities. Over an even longer period, if there were any important changes at all they were regressive.

There were substantial differences between the colonies in respect of racial composition, population density and the intensity of plantation agriculture, yet these resulted in socio-economic differences that were quantitative rather than qualitative. Jamaica had proportionally less land suitable for efficient sugar production than either Barbados or the settled part of British Guiana, and Barbados had far less land available for peasant farming than either British Guiana or Jamaica — as well as having a proportion of white inhabitants some five times as high as either. Yet these differences were reflected, if at all, in the form and intensity of the plantation system rather than in the relative strength and weakness of the planter and peasant classes.

Jamaica, it is true, steadily declined as a sugar producer, falling behind Barbados around 1860, while British Guiana went ahead of Barbados around 1850 and by 1875 produced twice as much as Barbados and three times as much as Jamaica.

By then, British Guiana obtained its 100,000 tons of sugar a year from only 70,000 acres of canes, processed through a mere 70 factories — nearly all steam powered — but needed 90,000 sugar workers. This system was almost as labour intensive as Jamaica's, which required 40,000 workers to produce 33,000 tons from 30,000 acres, with over 150 factories. Barbados' 50,000 tons a year, on the other hand, were produced by only 42,000 workers, but most inefficiently, from about 75,000 acres of canes through no less than 440 factories, only a fifth of them powered by steam.⁷⁴ Had labourers been willing or able to migrate from one major British West Indian sugar colony to another they could have found few differences, and certainly no improvements in respect of the balance of wages received, work required and social conditions.

Each of the colonies had a different constitution, and from time to time there were imperial moves for simplification and consolidation. Yet with an imperial government dedicated to the principles that colonies be efficiently self-sufficient and left as much as possible to their own devices, constitutional issues remained largely academic. British Guiana was a Crown Colony from the beginning and Jamaica became one in 1866, but both were almost as free of Colonial Office control and as plantocratic as Barbados, which remained self-legislating from beginning to end. Paradoxically, the meek endorsement of Governor Wodehouse's spate of 'liberal' ordinances by British Guiana's Court of Policy in 1856-7 and the Jamaican Assembly's 'surrender' of 1866, had much the same plantocratic purpose as the fervent opposition by the Barbados Defence Association to dictation from Westminster over the question of the Windward Islands Federation.

This pragmatic uniformity applied to the local administration of laws as well. Stipendiary Magistrates, intended to be impartial, were introduced into all colonies from the time of Apprenticeship (1834-38), but they were never numerous or independent enough and, as in Britain, unpaid JPs drawn from the propertied classes remained the backbone of the system of petty justice.⁷⁵ Backing this plantocratic magistracy were police forces which, in line with metropolitan reforms, were intended to be an impartial and efficient alternative to the traditional militias and military garrisons. Yet to the very degree that they impartially administered the law, the police were seen as the agents of a hated system. Moreover, financial stringencies continually hampered the ideal. Trained professional policemen were augmented in the country districts by untrained local constables who were not only unreliable in times of stress but actually heightened tensions by insensitive officiousness.⁷⁶

In times of widespread riot, police forces had to be augmented by special constables drawn from the 'respectable' classes who were realistically seen by blacks as little different from the old racist militias and, in extreme cases, by the regular armed forces, kept in reserve throughout the age of the *Pax Britannica* as in slavery days, as much against internal as external foes.

In each colony throughout the period the will of the planters effectively determined local policy and planters controlled the magistracy and forces of order, while the black majority of former slaves were kept tied to the plantation economy, depoliticized, denied education and other social services, yet disproportionately taxed. Though metropolitan interest in the British West Indies declined along with plantation profits, no-one, it seems, could conceive of an alternative to the plantation system, let alone encourage the West Indian blacks to determine their own socio-economic fate. Whatever help was given — such as the delay in the removal of protection, the passing of the Encumbered Estates Act or the authorization of 'coolie' immigration — was designed to shore up the plantation system, not improve the lot of the black majority.

As we have seen, there were special features of each of the three outbreaks of 1856-76 — especially from the metropolitan point of view. But each of these differences cloaked fundamental realities. In British Guiana the riots concentrated on the Portuguese shopkeepers, in Jamaica the disturbances were overshadowed by Governor Eyre's actions and the fate of George William Gordon, and in Barbados the ostensible issue was whether or not the island should become part of the Windward Islands Federation. But the real local issues were common; the way in which the blacks were denied land and forced to work on their masters' terms, competing with immigrants and each other with a local economy over which they had no control, subject to actual starvation when times were bad, and with no means of being heard save through violence or its threat.

Over the longer duration, significant major changes did occur but, like the switch from formal slavery to competitive wage labour, they were more apparent than real, or represented simply a deterioration of general conditions. The world economic order shifted so that old style sugar plantations within formal colonies became less profitable, but for the British West Indian labourer this simply meant working more for less in a system that became yearly more impersonally exploitative in the quest for economies of scale. The black population also grew steadily, pressing on the limited land available, increasing the competitive squeeze

on wages, and crowding poor people into towns woefully unprepared to receive them.⁷⁷

The planters themselves became ever more subject to outside economic forces, and merchants and bankers proportionately grew in power. Many whites, defeated, retreated to the metropolis, but at the island level, merchants and planters acted in unison in order to preserve the socio-economic system — refusing in Barbados, for example, to break up even bankrupt estates before the twentieth century.⁷⁸ Likewise, as the proportion of whites declined, the middle class was gradually reinforced by coloured or even black recruits, even in Barbados. Yet all this represented in a structural way was an extremely gradual shift away from the complex dialectic of race and class in slave society, to that simpler class structure in which Paul Bogle would spare even policemen who would join his cause but encourage the beating to death of the black man Price because 'he has a black skin but a white heart'.⁷⁹

Some white commentators have argued for the occurrence of a gradual change in imperial sensibilities, humanizing relations between races and classes as a continuation of the noble cause that created the Anti-Slavery Society and sent out missionaries to the benighted blacks.⁸⁰ From slavery days too blacks themselves were predisposed to imagine a sharp disjunction between their immediate oppressors and benevolent 'others'. Slaves expected help from distant authorities — an owner who was an absentee, the Governor in the colonial capital, 'Saint Wilberforce', or 'Big Massa', the English King — while, with remarkable unanimity, slave rebels and later black rioters alike believed in rumours that granted concessions were being withheld by the local regime, and that they would receive at least tacit assistance from imperial authorities if they acted positively in their own interests.

These were the cruellest delusions of all. In the event, governors invariably aligned themselves with plantocracies in the cause of law and order, and the imperial authorities automatically endorsed the activities of local regimes in suppressing disorder. Even the most ardent philanthropists, seeing riots as evidence of setbacks in the 'civilizing' process to which they were dedicated, found it far easier to condemn barbarities committed in the maintenance of law and order than actually to condone civil unrest. Bloodshed may have been rather less in 1856 and 1876 than it might have been 50 years earlier, but the suppression of the Morant Bay Rebellion was quite as savage and cynical as that of the late slave rebellions, and missionaries were just as much concerned to dissociate themselves from the unrest in 1856-76 in 1816-32.

Theoretically, control by the Colonial Office over the colonies was facilitated by improved communications, particularly the extension of the submarine cable to the West Indies in the 1870s. Formal Royal Commissions certainly became more frequent, efficient and voluminous after 1847, and the volume of printed materials on colonial affairs available for circulation also increased hugely with the introduction of the Command Paper system in the 1860s.⁸¹ Yet faster mailboats and the telegraph made it easier to control and frustrate governors than to curb colonial regimes — as Governor Pope Hennessey found in contrast to Governors Eyre and Wodehouse — while the outpouring of Command Papers was more an index of the vastly increased efficiency of British printing than of greater metropolitan interest, and the reports of the Royal Commissions remained little more than 'maps of oblivion'. In each of the major inquiries into the British West Indies at least one commissioner noted with amazement, if not shame, that nothing had been changed since the last report.⁸²

Yet, from the present perspective, the most remarkable of all continuities was the steadfast behaviour of the black majority; to endure when they had to, to resist however and whenever they could. In the period 1856-76, as in slavery days, the plantocratic regimes, with at least the tacit support of the imperial government, were everywhere able to localize and stamp out unrest. It was not until a hundred years after emancipation that concurrent unrest occurred throughout the British West Indies and major changes became inevitable. Even then similarities prevailed. For example, the scrupulous historian of the Federation Riots, writing in 1959 (in a book actually published by the Colonial Office), noted with surprise the remarkable parallels between 1876 and the 1937 Barbados riots he had witnessed for himself, in respect of the aims and methods of the rioters and the forces of law and order alike.⁸³ Moreover, though the wave of unrest throughout the British West Indies between 1935 and 1938 shook the imperial fabric in a way that the outbursts of 1856, 1865 and 1876 had not, an increasing number of commentators now feel that even the sweeping changes that occurred after the catalytic delay of the Second World War were by no means as revolutionary as they were once thought to have been.⁸⁴

Notes

1. This paper is a substantial extension of a section in the Epilogue of *Testing the Chains; Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 323-30.
2. Lorna E. Simmonds, 'Riots and Disturbances in Jamaica, 1838-1865', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of

- Waterloo, 1982. See also Swithin Wilmot, 'Emancipation in Action: Workers and Wage Conflicts in Jamaica 1838-1848', paper presented at Sixteenth Annual Conference of Caribbean Historians, Barbados, 1984.
3. The Guyana, Jamaica and Barbados episodes, however, were simply the most outstanding and best documented examples. Comparable outbreaks occurred at least in Dominica (1844, 1884, 1893), St. Lucia (1849), Tortola (1853, 1885), Antigua (1856), St. Vincent (1862), and Tobago (1876). Parallels are doubtless awaiting rediscovery in almost every colony and even some of the above await detailed analysis. However, see the following fine articles: Russell E. Chace Jr., 'Protest in Post-Emancipation Dominica: The "Guerre Nègre" of 1844', paper presented at Fifteenth Conference of Caribbean Historians, Jamaica, 1983; 'Religion, Taxes, and Popular Protest in Tortola: The Road Town "Riots" of 1853', paper presented to the South-South Conference, Montreal, May 1984; Woodville Marshall, "'Vox Populi": The St. Vincent Riots and Disturbances of 1862', in B.W. Higman (ed.) *Trade, Government and Society in Caribbean History: Essays Presented to Douglas Hall* (Kingston, Heinemann Caribbean, 1983), pp. 85-115; Bridget Brereton, 'Post-Emancipation Protest in the Caribbean: The "Belmana Riots" in Tobago, 1876', *Caribbean Quarterly*, V, 30, 1984, pp. 110-23. For the general question of the formation of Caribbean peasantries and peasant responses to post-emancipation conditions, see Sidney W. Mintz, 'Slavery and the Rise of Peasantries', and the subsequent Commentary by Woodville Marshall in Michael Craton (ed.), *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies* (Toronto, Pergamon Press, 1979), pp. 213-248; O. Nigel Bolland, 'Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies after 1838', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, 4, October 1981, pp. 591-619; Russell E. Chace Jr., 'The Emergence and Development of an Estate-Based Peasantry in Dominica', unpublished ms., 1986.
 4. Craton, *Testing the Chains*, Chapter 21. The fullest contemporary account was Joshua Bryant, *Account of an Insurrection of the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Demerara*, Georgetown, *Guiana Chronicle*, 1824. See also Edwin A. Wallbridge, *The Demerara Martyr, Memoirs of the Rev. John Smith, Missionary to Demerara* (London, 1848); James Rodway, *The History of British Guiana*, 3 vols., (Georgetown, 1891-4), II, pp. 75-81; Cecil Northcott, *Slavery's Martyr; John Smith of Demerara and the Emancipation Movement, 1817-1824* (London, Epworth Press, 1976).
 5. For the post-emancipation condition of Guyana see Alan H. Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves; The Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972); Jay R. Mandle, *The Plantation Economy; Population and Economic Change in Guyana, 1838-1960* (Philadelphia, 1973); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).
 6. The phrase is from a report by Rev. William Woodson, General Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions in British Guiana, dated 7 March 1856, enclosed in Governor Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 10 March 1856, Public Record Office, London, C.O. 111/310. Woodson, who referred to 'the large number of Vile and abandoned Women in these Riots and I regret to add of wild, rude, and half savage children', specifically advocated 'putting villagers more firmly under Government', and compulsory work for three days, 'whether on their own provision grounds or on the Estates', as well as three days' schooling for all 'wild children'.
 7. Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 10 March 1856, *ibid.*
 8. See the transcript of Smith's journal, 1817-1823, C.O. 111/46.
 9. Rodway, *British Guiana*, III, p. 114.
 10. C.O. 111/309. Orr's rhetoric still has power. In one memorable phrase he referred to the militiamen come to arrest him as 'Glazed hatted dogs of war'. *Ibid.*
 11. Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 24 Feb. 1856; C.O. 111/309.
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 10 March 1856; C.O. 111/309.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 25 March 1856; C.O. 111/309.
 18. Annotation by Permanent Under Secretary H.M. Taylor following Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 24 Feb. 1856; C.O. 111/309.
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 9 May 1856; C.O. 111/311.
 21. Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 10 March 1858; C.O. 111/310.
 22. Local Ordinances were initiated by the Governor in Council, endorsed by the Court of Policy and approved, or disapproved, in due course, by the Colonial Office. In practical terms they could therefore be even more arbitrary than Acts passed by Assemblies in self-legislating colonies. The key Ordinances here were Numbers 20 and 21 of 1856, enclosed in Wodehouse to Colonial Secretary, 24 Feb. 1856; C.O. 111/309.
 23. Ordinances Numbers 28 and 29 of 1856; C.O. 111/312, 313.
 24. Rodway, *British Guiana*, III, p. 130.
 25. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6. One of the most interesting coincidences between 1856 and 1923 was that John Sayers Orr and the ordinary black Guyanese were defended in the local press by Rev. Edmund Wallbridge, a Nonconformist missionary who had written the biography of Rev. John Smith, 'The Demerara Martyr', in 1848. For his pains, Wallbridge earned an outpouring of obloquy from the planters and praise from British Nonconformists to rival that accorded his hero 33 years before, and was forced to leave the colony. *Ibid.*
 26. Craton, *Testing the Chains*, Chapter 22. The most detailed of the many contemporary accounts, from opposite sides, were Bernard Martin, Sr., *Jamaica, As it was, as it is, and as it may be* (London, 1835), and Rev. Henry Bleby, *The Death Struggles of Slavery* (London, 1853). For modern analyses see Mary Reckord, 'The Jamaican Slave Rebellion of 1831', *Past & Present*, 40, July 1968, pp. 108-125; Stiv Jakobsson, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother? British Missions and the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in West Africa and the West Indies, 1786-1838* (Uppsala, Gleerup, 1972); Philip Wright, *Knibb 'The Notorious,' Slaves' Missionary, 1803-1845* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973), pp. 56-133. Edward K. Braithwaite, *Wars of Respect* (Kingston, Savacou, 1979); Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaica Slave Society 1787-1834* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1982).
 27. Committee appointed, 30 May 1832; evidence taken, 8 June - 11 Aug. 1832; report ordered to be printed, 11 Aug. 1832. Samuel Sharpe was hanged on 23 May 1832. The first Emancipation Act was passed on 31 July 1833.
 28. For the condition of Jamaica between 1834 and 1865 see Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1955); Douglas G. Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838-1865: An*

- Economic History* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959); Mavis C. Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society: A Sociopolitical History of the Free Coloureds of Jamaica, 1800-1865* (Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976); Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Westport, Greenwood, 1981).
29. Professor Douglas G. Hall at Association of Caribbean Historians Conference, Guadeloupe, 1981.
 30. Monica Schuler, *Alas, Alas, Kongo: A Social History of Liberated African Immigration into Jamaica, 1841-1865* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
 31. Edward Cardwell to Governor Eyre, 14 June 1865; C.O. 137/391.
 32. For Governor Edward Eyre, see Sydney H. Olivier, *The Myth of Governor Eyre* (London, Hogarth Press, 1933); Geoffrey Dutton, *The Hero as Murderer: The Life of Edward John Eyre, Australian Explorer and Governor of Jamaica, 1815-1901* (London, Collins, 1967).
 33. Poster by Gordon to people of St. Thomas-in-the-East, 11 Aug. 1865, quoted in *Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission, Part I, British Sessional Papers, Reports 1866, XXX*, pp. 489-531.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *Ibid.* The letter was delivered to Governor Eyre in Spanish Town on the morning of 11 Oct. 1865, when the revolt was already irreversibly under way.
 37. *Ibid.* Geoffrey Dutton quotes a similar letter signed by Bogle and four others and allegedly found at Stony Gut: 'Blow your shells! Roule your drums! house to house; take out every man; march them down to Stony Gut; any that you find take them in the way; take them down with their arms; war is at my black skin, war is at hand... Every black man must turn out at once, for the oppression is too great'; Dutton, *Hero as Murderer*, p. 275.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
 39. *Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission (1866), Part I, B.S.P., Reports, 1866, XXX*, p. 490.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 529.
 41. Bernard Semmel, *Jamaican Blood and Victorian Conscience* (Cambridge, Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill* (New York, 1974).
 42. Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (New York, Doubleday, 1974), p. 315, quoting Frederic Harrison: 'The precise issue we raise is this, that through our empire the British rule shall be the rule of law; that every British citizen, white, brown, or black in skin, shall be subject to definite, and not to indefinite powers...'
 43. Victor S. Reid, *New Day* (London, 1973 [1955]); Sydney H. Olivier, *Jamaica the Blessed Island* (London, Faber & Faber, 1936); Samuel J. Hurwitz and Edith Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* (London, 1971).
 44. Craton, *Testing the Chains*, Chapter 20. The fullest contemporary account, though heavily biased was *The Report from a Select Committee of the House of Assembly appointed to inquire into the Origin, Causes, and Progress of the Late Insurrection* (Barbados, 1818). But see also, Sir Robert Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* (London, Longman, 1847); Karl Watson, *The Civilised Island: Barbados, A Social History, 1750-1816* (Barbados, 1979); Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838* (Barbados, Carib Research and Publications Inc., 1987).
 45. *Report from a Select Committee*, pp. 25-34.
 46. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
 47. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-57; Governor Leith to Lord Bathurst, 21 Sept. 1816, C.O. 28/85; Spooner to Bathurst, 4 Feb. 1817, C.O. 28/86.
 48. Claude Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism: Barbados and the West Indies, 1833-1876* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1980).
 49. See, for example, the petition of black freeholders of Carriington's Village, St. Thomas parish, dated 7 Aug. 1876; C.O. 321/10, pp. 473 sqq. The petitioners, who claimed to have held land since 1838, chiefly blamed absentee proprietors and the financial depression in general for crippling 'the emergence of our skilled and industrious peasantry', but pointed out that the island's great increase in sugar production had been achieved by labourers drawn from their own class, who were yet paid wages 'no more than affords the necessaries of life notwithstanding that food and the articles in general consumption are, at this time, plentiful and cheap'. They stated that many of them would have emigrated but for their attachment to their land and the fact that conditions in other islands were even worse, and begged the Government to put up capital for small producers as had the Danish Government in St. Croix, where estates were 'not even paying expenses'.
 50. The population at the time of Emancipation had been 101,000, of whom 82,000 had been slaves. In 1874 the total population was 162,000, of whom 66.4% were blacks, 24.4% coloureds and 10.2% whites. The 'agricultural population' totalled 42,000. There were said to be 27,000 'seamstresses, laundresses and domestics', 29,500 school children and 40,000 unemployed, the latter being 'nearly all children under the age of 15'. Of the 42,000 agricultural labourers, 36,500 were over 15 years of age, 16,000 males and 20,500 females. Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 134, 80-83, 101, 135.
 51. The essential evidence is to be found in the three relevant Command Papers, C. 1539 and C. 1559 of 1876, and C. 1679 and C. 1687 of 1877; B.S.P., Accounts & Papers 1876, LIII, and 1877, LXI.
 52. This was succinctly described in Governor Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 3 May 1876 in C. 1559 of 1876, and memorably criticized by Samuel Jackson Prescod the black editor and Assemblyman in *The Liberal* newspaper of 25 Sept. 1858 — enclosed in Governor Hincks to Colonial Secretary, 25 Sept. 1858.
 53. Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 16 May 1876, C.O. 321/9.
 54. Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 11 July 1876, C.O. 321/10. Cane-field arson had also steadily increased in recent years. In a speech in March 1876, the Governor quoted the following figures: 1873, 68 fires; 1874, 116; 1875, 141; *Barbados People*, 23 March 1876, enclosed in Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 28 March 1876; C.O. 321/9.
 55. Despatch of 25 Jan. 1863, quoted by Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 1 May 1876, C. 1559.
 56. Unpublished manuscript quoted by Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 8 May 1876, C.O. 321/9. The anonymous parson was probably a Rev. Chester.
 57. *Ibid.* In the same despatch, Pope Hennessey quoted Governor Rawson (1869-75) as saying that the Barbadian whites would rather have had no troops at all than to have the black West India Regiment in garrison, and the Rev. Chester to the effect that the whites believed that if all white troops were removed the West India Regiment soldiers would fraternize with the 'creole negroes' and a general massacre of whites ensue. This was 25 years after Emancipation.
 58. Bruce Hamilton, *Barbados and the Confederation Question, 1871-1885* (London, Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations, 1956). But see also Levy, op. cit.
 59. James Pope Hennessey, *Verandah: Some Episodes in the Crown Colonies, 1867-1889* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1964). Also Hamilton, Levy, op. cit.

60. Then called Long Bay Castle. Governor Pope Hennessey also spent some time at Blackman's in St. Joseph's parish. After a disorderly meeting on the Federation question in St. John's on 23 March 1876, the plantocratic Barbados *Times* claimed that the trouble had been caused by 'some liberated persons and some of the dwellers near Long Bay Castle in St. Philip', and noted that, 'by looking at the Map, we find St. John comes between the two last places where Mr. Hennessey has been residing, at Long Bay Castle and Blackman's'; *Times*, 25 March 1876, enclosed in Governor Hennessey to Colonial Office, 28 March 1876, C.O. 321/9.
61. This was after Pope Hennessey's outspoken speech to both houses of the legislature on 3 March 1876; Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, pp. 54-7.
62. Quoted in C. 1559 of 1876, p. 67.
63. Enclosed in Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 30 May 1876, *ibid.*, pp. 168-9. The Rev. T. Clarke was also quoted as having heard of a black countryman saying: 'De gubnor say de Queen gib de rest of Gubnor's money fou help we, but dey no gib we. He gwine gib we, and gib we land too'; Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, p. 64.
64. Fullest details enclosed in Pope Hennessey to Colonial Office, 7 April 1876. C.O. 321/9; Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, pp. 65-6.
65. Voluminous details in Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 16 May 1876, C.O. 321/9 and in C. 1539 and C. 1559 of 1876; Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, pp. 71-4.
66. Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 1, 14 May 1876, C. 1559.
67. Pope Hennessey to Colonial Secretary, 16 May 1876, C.O. 321/9; Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, p. 71.
68. Major Tatton Brown to C.C. Sargent, 28 April 1876, C. 1559.
69. C. 1559, pp. 190 sqq.
70. There was an excellent full account of the trials, including the humane summing up by Judge Lushington Phillips in the *London Times*, 15 Nov. 1876, a copy of which was interleaved in C.O. 321/11.
71. Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, pp. 93-5; Pope Hennessey, *Verandah*, pp. 180-2.
72. Barbados Defence Association to Colonial Secretary, 9 Aug. 1876, C. 1687.
73. Michael Craton, 'Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies, 1816-1832', *Past & Present*, 85, Nov. 1979, pp. 199-125; 'The Passion to Exist; Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies, 1650-1832', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 13 (Summer 1980), pp. 1-20; *Testing the Chains*, Chapters 19-22, pp. 239-321.
74. Noel Deer, *The History of Sugar*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949, 1950), II, pp. 194-203; Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (London, Deutsch, 1970), pp. 39-40, 366-73; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 57, 93, 107.
75. W. L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London, Cape, 1937); Woodville Marshall (ed.), *The Colthurst Journal, 1835-1845* (Barbados, Caribbean Universities Press, 1979).
76. In each of the major outbursts, whites reported cases where the local constables stood on the sidelines or actually sided with the rioters.
77. There is not yet the work needed to relate the West Indies to the process of modernization in general, along the lines of Immanuel Wallerstein's study of the whole world in an earlier period, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York and London, Academic Press, 1974), or Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, Bogle L'Overture Publications, 1972). Perhaps the closest so far is George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972).
78. See, for example, Cecilia Karch, 'The Role of the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society during the International Sugar Crisis of the Late Nineteenth Century', paper presented at the Twelfth Annual Conference of Caribbean Historians; Trinidad 1980. For the slight relaxation that came in the early twentieth century, see Woodville Marshall et al., 'The Establishment of a Peasantry in Barbados, 1840-1920', paper presented at the Sixth Annual Conference of Caribbean Historians, Puerto Rico, 1974.
79. Report of Jamaica Royal Commission, B.S.P., *Reports*, 1866, XXX, p. 495.
80. This philanthropic/liberal stance, culminating in Reginald Coupland's *Wilberforce* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923), W. L. Mathieson's *British Slave Emancipation, 1838-1849* (London, Longmans, 1932), and G.R. Mellor's *British Imperial Trusteeship, 1783-1850*, was notably pilloried by Eric Williams in *British Historians and the West Indies* (London, Deutsch, 1966). Echoes of the older 'imperialist' tradition linger in William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976), which sparked off a memorable exchange between Green and Nigel Bolland: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, 1 (Jan. 1984).
81. The series prefixed simply 'C.' began in 1861. When it reached 10,000 in 1900 it was superseded by the 'Cd.' series. The 'Cmd.' series began in 1930, 'Cmnd.' in 1950.
82. *Report of the West Indies Royal Commission, 1898*, C. 8655 (Norman Commission); *Report of the Hon. E.F.L. Wood M.P. on his visit to the West Indies and British Guiana, 1922*, Cd. 1679; *Report of the West Indies Sugar Commission, 1930*, Cmd. 3517 (Olivier-Semple Report); *Report on Labour Conditions in the West Indies, 1939*, Cmd. 6070 (Orde Browne Report); *Report of the West Indies Royal Commission, 1945*, Cmd. 6607 (Moynne Commission). See also Margaret Olivier (ed.), *Sydney Olivier: Letters and Selected Writings* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1948), pp. 181-2.
83. Hamilton, *Confederation Question*, Appendix A. 141.
84. The original position was that of Eric Williams' *From Columbus to Castro*. The present view is that of the numerous West Indian critics of Williams. See, for example, Gordon Rohlehr, 'History as Absurdity', in Orde Coombs (ed.), *Massa Day Dead* (New York, Doubleday Anchor, 1974), pp. 69-108.