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**Boundaries of Rule, Ties of Dependency:
Jamaican Planters, Local Society and the Metropole,
1800 – 1834**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History**

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This work is dedicated to my Mum and Dad, because their love and support were vital - every step of the way.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that it includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution. At the time of submission, no work within this thesis has been published.

Abstract

This thesis examines the planter class in Jamaica in the period before the end of slavery in 1834 and considers the relations of the planters with local free society and the metropole. In spite of the large body of scholarly work on Jamaica during the slavery period, we lack a modern study of the planters. Based on archival research conducted in Britain and Jamaica, this research tackles the related issues of how locally resident planters sustained slavery in Jamaica and sought to control local society, how they related to other local groups and to the metropole, and how they identified themselves as British slaveholders in an age in which slavery was coming under increasing criticism in Britain. The study looks at the composition of the planter class and at the relations between the planter elite, non-elite white men, free non-whites and enslaved people. It also examines the way that the planters and their allies responded to criticisms directed against them and their local practices.

The main conclusions of the thesis are that, to maintain the creole institution of slavery, the planters depended heavily on the support of other white men, who enjoyed a range of privileges and opportunities. This assuaged class tensions within white society and led to a distinctively local social order based on ideas of racial difference. However, in the period before emancipation, the rising population of free coloureds and free blacks, along with the increased influence of non-conformist missionaries, meant that the planters struggled to sustain local support across free society. Furthermore, their cultural and practical reliance on the metropole weakened their position as anti-slavery came to dominate British public opinion. Therefore, shifting circumstances in both Jamaica and Britain helped to make the planters' continued defence of slavery impractical and contributed to the emancipation of enslaved people in the 1830s.

A Note on Terminology and Style

Problems of definition arise when writing about 'racial' groups. Throughout this thesis, the terms 'white' and 'black' have been used to refer to people of complete European and African ancestry respectively. In keeping with the terminology used in early nineteenth-century Jamaica, the term 'coloured' refers to individuals of mixed African and European ancestry. The term 'non-white' has been used advisedly to refer to all those in Jamaican society who were of complete or partial African ancestry. The terms 'freedpeople' and 'free non-whites' have been used to refer to all free people of complete or partial African ancestry during the period before emancipation. During slavery, free coloureds and free blacks generally enjoyed the same legal rights and are therefore often treated as one group in this study. However, the terms 'free coloureds' and 'free blacks' have been used when discussing these as separate groups.

Sharing recent ethical concerns amongst scholars of slavery, I have made an effort to refer to people held in slavery not as 'slaves', but as 'enslaved people' or 'those enslaved'. However, for the sake of clarity, the term 'slave' has at times also been used.

Capitalisation in quotes derived from manuscript sources, such as wills, inventories and letters, has been corrected and punctuation added where necessary. Quotes derived from printed sources have been left unaltered.

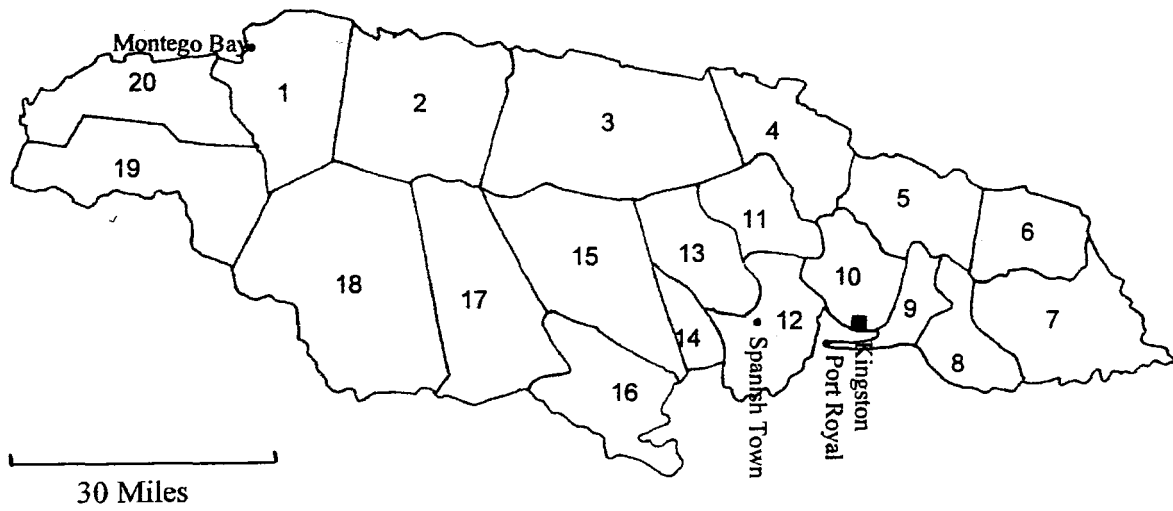
Unless otherwise stated, all money values are given in Jamaican currency.¹

¹ £1.4 Jamaican currency was equal to £1 sterling throughout the period. See B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica: 1807 – 1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. vii.

Abbreviations

Add. MSS	Additional Manuscript
BL	British Library, London, England
CO	Colonial Office Records, Public Record Office, Kew, London, England
IRO	Island Record Office, Twickenham Park, St Catherine, Jamaica
JA	Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, St Catherine, Jamaica
LOS	Libres Old Series
ML	Mormon Library, South Kensington, London, England
NL	National Library of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica
T 71	Treasury Records, Returns of Registrations of Slaves, Public Record Office, Kew, London, England
UWI	West India Collection, University of the West Indies Library, Mona, Jamaica

Jamaica c. 1820



Parishes

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 St James | 8 St David | 15 Clarendon |
| 2 Trelawny | 9 Port Royal | 16 Vere |
| 3 St Ann | 10 St Andrew | 17 Manchester |
| 4 St Mary | 11 St Thomas-in-the-Vale | 18 St Elizabeth |
| 5 St George | 12 St Catherine | 19 Westmoreland |
| 6 Portland | 13 St John | 20 Hanover |
| 7 St Thomas-in-the-East | 14 St Dorothy | |

Introduction

In the early nineteenth century, plantation owners in Jamaica faced a range of problems. In Jamaica, their social and political power was increasingly undermined by enslaved people, missionaries and free non-whites, whilst British liberals criticised slavery, the defining feature of the economic and social system of the island. By 1834, in spite of resistance from white colonists, opponents of the planters had secured emancipation, religious toleration and equal civil rights for free coloureds and free blacks. Sugar producers also experienced worsening economic decline during this period when increasing numbers of them chose to reside as absentees in Britain. This thesis is primarily concerned with those planters who remained residents on the island during this period of crisis and will focus on their relations with other social groups in Jamaica and on their ties with Britain, the colonial metropole.

Before 1800, the fortunes of Jamaican planters were in the ascendancy. The precariousness of their privileged position at the top of local society in Jamaica was more than compensated by the fact that their slave-run sugar plantations made the island a vital British possession. In 1774, Edward Long, who had spent much of his life as a resident sugar planter in Jamaica, published *The History of Jamaica*, stating that he would feel that his work was a success if met ‘with approbation from those worthy men’ who having fixed themselves upon Jamaican soil ‘dispense happiness to thousands in Britain.’¹ Long wrote his *History* at a time when

¹ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island*, 3 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1774] 1970), vol. 1, p. 8. Throughout the notes and bibliography, [1774] is the date of original publication and 1970 the edition being cited.

Jamaican sugar, produced by enslaved Africans and their descendants, made the island one of the richest commercial assets in the whole British Empire. He charted the rapid development of this New World enterprise and explicitly linked its growth to the increased wealth of the metropole, writing that it seemed ‘that since our plantations first became thriving and profitable, the national opulence has every way augmented.’ He went on to highlight the leading role of Jamaica in this remarkable economic advancement, arguing that the island could ‘claim no small share of the merit’ for the current ‘flourishing condition of the mother country’.² Planters faced the physical dangers of disease and slave uprisings. Running a sugar plantation was also economically risky. However, the promise of making a fortune helped to make these risks seem acceptable.

In 1828, George Wilson Bridges, another supporter of the planter class, presented an utterly different picture of the state of Jamaica to that provided by Long some fifty-four years earlier. Bridges had also written a history of the colony, but his story charted its fortunes ‘from the first blush of that morning which dawned upon the long night of transatlantic oblivion, to the present evening of its decayed and feeble existence.’³ By the time that Bridges published his *Annals of Jamaica*, the island remained the most important British possession in the Western Hemisphere, but Britain’s imperial ambitions had shifted, focussing more on the East and India, and the Jamaican sugar industry was in a state of economic decline. Furthermore, as the abolitionist lobby became more popular and influential, the Jamaican planters’ increased political weakness matched their diminished

² Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 1, p. 509.

³ George Wilson Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, 2 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1828] 1968), vol. 1, p. v.

economic status.⁴ The value of the colony to the mother country had therefore quickly fallen, and the planters in Jamaica, along with their supporters, saw the threatened emancipation of the slaves as stark evidence of their abandonment by the metropole. Additionally, the island itself was the site of social turmoil as enslaved people, missionaries and the large free black and free coloured population all increasingly challenged and undermined the rule of the once all-powerful sugar planters. This pronounced and rapid decline, from being a prized British possession to a problematic colony of peripheral economic significance within the empire, is therefore crucial to understanding the resident planter class of the island in this period.

The 1830s were years of crisis across the British Caribbean. Nowhere was this crisis more pronounced than in Jamaica, where continued economic decline, tension between planters and missionaries and local white resentment at the anti-slavery stance of the British government were followed by a large slave rebellion, its bloody aftermath and emancipation. The planters blamed their problems on the abolitionists, claiming that calls for immediate abolition undermined investment in Jamaican property. However, as Kathleen Mary Butler argues, debt and the declining price of sugar from the 1790s also precipitated the decline of the Jamaican economy.⁵ Furthermore, both Barry Higman and Seymour Drescher have identified the abolition of the slave trade as a main cause of the planters' economic

⁴ On the development of anti-slavery in Britain, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770 – 1823* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1975); David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984); Thomas Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992).

⁵ Kathleen Mary Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823 – 1843* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. xv, 7, 16 – 17.

difficulties.⁶ Strong connections between Jamaica and the metropole linked these factors to local social tension and exacerbated the crisis.⁷ Therefore, by 1834, a combination of pressures originating both within and outside Jamaica had conspired against the local planters and destroyed the system of slavery, the defining feature of Jamaican society, and weakened the sugar economy. Despite negotiating £20,000,000 sterling in compensation for former slaveholders, emancipation represented a defeat for the resident planters of Jamaica and their allies.⁸

Scholars who have studied other groups in Jamaican society, or who have taken a relatively broad approach to the topic of emancipation in the colony, have provided a useful overview of the character and influence of the local planter class before and after emancipation. What emerges is a picture of a group committed to a social order based on ideas of racial inequality, determined to protect their own position of economic and social privilege and compromising over abolition only under great pressure exerted by local opposition and from Britain.⁹ Nevertheless, a more tightly focussed study of the local planters will improve our understanding of

⁶ Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807 – 1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 231.

⁷ Enslaved people were aware of the abolitionist movement in Britain, which helped to inspire the rebels during the Baptist War. Connections between the abolitionists and local missionaries were also crucial in bringing about abolition, as were lines of loyalty and alliance between the British Government and free coloured politicians. For examples, see Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), pp. 148 – 149; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 – 1867*, (Cambridge, Polity, 2002), pp. 107 – 115; Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 83 – 96.

⁸ On the negotiation for compensation, see Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation*, pp. 7 – 24.

⁹ For example, see Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830 – 1865* (New York, Atheneum, [1955] 1970); H. P. Jacobs, *Sixty Years of Change, 1806 – 1866: Progress and Reaction in Kingston and the Countryside* (Kingston, Institute of Jamaica, 1973); Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica: 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971); Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832 – 1938* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*; Heuman, *Between Black and White*; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

Jamaican slave society and of the ending of slavery in the colony. This thesis will build upon existing scholarship by examining the composition of the planter class, how planters in Jamaica lived and how they exercised their authority through local institutions such as the Assembly, the courts, the parish vestries and militia. It will also analyse local planters' reactions to the metropolitan debates over slavery and abolition and seek to examine the circumstances that framed local planters' responses to the problems and crises of the pre-emancipation period. It will examine the ways in which these planters related to local society on the island and look at their ambivalent relationship with the metropole. In so doing, the thesis will address the related questions of how the planters sought to maintain their control locally and how they conceived of and managed their close relationship with Britain.

By concentrating on local social, political and economic activity, it is possible to see how the planters and other white men profited, socially as well as economically, from the institution of slavery and from the inequalities that characterised slave society in Jamaica. Slavery and the social relations that supported it were defining features of a distinctively local, or creole, society in which ideas, people and products from Europe and Africa were brought together in a New World setting and mobilised in ways that altered social and economic conditions in all three of these parts of the Atlantic world. When slavery came under attack from critics in Britain, white men combined to defend the distinctive local system that benefited them so greatly. However, local whites also maintained close ties with the metropole. Commercial, family and cultural ties, combined with the fact that settlers required the presence of British troops to protect them from their own slaves, meant that the planters and their allies were always dependent on

British support. They resented outside attempts to reform their local practices, but their various close ties with the British Isles influenced how they responded to the crises of the early nineteenth century. Self-interest dictated that most white colonists were conservatives, but other factors helped to ensure that this was a period of reform, which concluded with the freeing of over 300,000 enslaved people.

This thesis will argue that the planters and their local allies were conservative creoles, who sought to maintain a distinctive and iniquitous social and economic system based on ideas of racial difference. It will also contend that personal, cultural, economic and military concerns meant that planters were dependent on the metropole and continued to see themselves as British subjects, which had a profound effect on the way that they defended their local way of life and meant that they were eventually forced to compromise over the issue of emancipation. Nevertheless, throughout this period and afterwards, they continued to develop a conservative creole outlook, which meant that they remained committed to racial segregation and inequality, the exploitation of black labourers and the disenfranchisement of women and non-white people.

Despite recent advances in scholarship, a stereotyped image of Jamaican whites during the slavery period has persisted. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both anti-slavery and pro-slavery accounts of Jamaica, as well as concentrating on the lives and conditions of enslaved people, included discussions of the lifestyles, habits and types of behaviour of local whites. Whether damning or complimentary, all such accounts judged the planters and other colonists according to British standards of behaviour, frequently in a negative light. Traditional

stereotypes of the planters have their roots in these discourses on the British West Indies, and whilst not wholly inaccurate, they lack subtlety and limit our understanding of nineteenth-century Jamaican society.

In his canonical *History of Jamaica*, Edward Long described Jamaican proprietors and their institutions in detail and wrote that there were ‘no people in the world that exceed the gentlemen of this island in a noble and disinterested munificence.’ Whilst the image that Long offered of the planters was a relatively flattering one, he also highlighted the ways that their behaviour differed and failed to match metropolitan norms. For example, he remarked that they were ‘possessed of a degree of supineness and indolence in their affairs, which renders them bad œconomists, and too frequently hurts their fortune and family.’¹⁰ Robert Renny, a Scottish born author who published a pro-planter history of Jamaica in 1807, shared many of Long’s sentiments and wrote that whilst white Jamaicans were ‘frank, open-hearted, and unsuspecting’, behaving ‘with great humanity’ towards their slaves, they were also imprudent and tended to gratify their baser instincts.¹¹ In 1823, J. Stewart, another ex-Jamaican resident and author, associated the errant behaviour of the white colonists with the influence of slavery. He also explicitly linked a change in white mores to a closer relationship with the metropole, explaining that ‘primitive creole customs and manners are fast disappearing, being superseded by the more polished manners of European life’.¹²

Few abolitionist authors believed that improvements to the moral fabric of society were possible while slavery still existed and called for immediate abolition.

¹⁰ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, pp. 263, 265.

¹¹ Robert Renny, *An History of Jamaica* (London, 1807), pp. 193 – 94, 212 – 13.

¹² J. Stewart *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (New York, Negro Universities Press, [1823] 1969), p. 168. Brathwaite notes that it is unclear whether the author of *A View of Jamaica* was named John or James. Therefore, throughout the thesis, the author of this work will be referred to as J. Stewart. See Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 93.

Writing about his experiences in the Jamaican town of Montego Bay at the hands of a white mob, Baptist Missionary, Thomas Burchell, described how ‘the most furious and savage spirit was manifested by some of (what were called) the most respectable white inhabitants, that ever could have been discovered amongst civilised society’. He exclaimed that had he ‘never been to Montego Bay before, I must have supposed myself among cannibals, or in the midst of the savage hordes of Siberia, or the uncultivated and uncivilised tribes of central Africa’.¹³ Burchell therefore perceived white Jamaican colonists purely as primitive creoles and had little to say about their supposedly ‘polished manners’. Similarly, another influential Baptist missionary, James Mursell Phillippo, described how, during the period of slavery, white Jamaican men and women were ‘alike the victims of pride, avarice, and prejudice’. He noted their cruelty towards ‘their inferiors’ and proclaimed these traits ‘perfectly inexplicable, but for the influence of slavery.’ Phillippo claimed that isolated reforms to men’s moral and social habits had occurred since abolition, but maintained ‘that drunkenness, profane swearing, concubinage, and licentiousness, with every other kind and degree of wickedness, still prevails to an awful extent, although less unblushingly than formerly.’¹⁴

Texts as diverse as those of Long and Phillippo served to provide a composite image of white society in Jamaica for their largely metropolitan audience. Regardless of whether readers sympathised with pro-planter or anti-slavery discourses, they were presented with an image of white West Indians as somehow different to English men and women. By the nineteenth century, even those sympathetic to their cause presented the planters as failing to live up to the

¹³ Quoted in Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 112 – 13.

¹⁴ James Mursell Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (Westport, Negro Universities Press, [1843] 1970), pp. 121 – 22, 136.

standards of behaviour observed in the metropole. Colonists were seen to have been tainted by their distance from Britain, by the tropical environment, by their daily contact with people of African descent and, most significantly, by involvement with the institution of slavery. The evidence from the literature on Jamaica suggests that, by the 1820s, there was a popular metropolitan image of Jamaican whites as drunken, supine, despotic, cruel, lascivious and bad at managing money. Authors on both sides of the slavery debate claimed that only the influence of British culture, in such forms as evangelical Christianity or a liberal education, could improve moral standards in white Jamaican society. Most saw slavery as a serious impediment to any improvement that, sooner or later, would have to go.

This view of the planter class remained intact. In 1928, Lowell Ragatz published *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*.¹⁵ This influential work set the parameters for historical debates over slavery and abolition for the next fifty years, most notably by informing the work of the Trinidadian historian, Eric Williams.¹⁶ Ragatz's argument, picked up by Williams, was that economic decline and agrarian distress, rather than metropolitan political intervention, were the primary causes of the 'overthrow of the tropical labour regime' by 1834. Whilst rich with insights into the economic and political aspects of the planters' decline, Ragatz's work had little new to say on the structure and functioning of society in the West Indies. In describing eighteenth-century Caribbean life, he fell back on a series of stereotypes dating back from the beginnings of the debates over slavery. Plantation life in the British West Indies was, he argued, characterised by 'an

¹⁵ Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763 – 1833: A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York, Octagon Books, [1928] 1963).

¹⁶ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

openness of life, hospitality, a tendency to view financial obligations lightly, an intense individualism and lack of public spirit, conservatism, and a striking measure of ostentation.’¹⁷

There is a firm factual basis for this traditional caricature of the plantocracy. The Jamaican elite valued hospitality, and the pastimes of eating, drinking, and making social visits were important to them. Debt was another central feature of the lives of the plantocracy, especially by the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, the exploitation and coercion of people of African descent was the basis on which the planters built their lavish lifestyles. Slavery was the defining factor in West Indian society, and planters and their employees were frequently guilty of committing acts of barbarism against enslaved people. Nevertheless, as Ann Laura Stoler has suggested, caricatures might ‘effectively capture certain features of colonials but are analytically limiting.’¹⁸ Therefore, our present composite picture of white Jamaican settlers does have a ring of truth to it, but it is necessary to go beyond such a simplified sketch if we are to gain a more detailed understanding of the role, influence and importance of this group.

Since the late 1970’s, scholars such as Seymour Drescher and J. R. Ward have questioned Williams’ and Ragatz’s theses, arguing that the planters did attempt to reform their ‘antiquated methods’ of agriculture and that metropolitan political intervention had a central role in the economic decline of the Caribbean colonies and abolition of slavery.¹⁹ Recently, some scholars have also begun to

¹⁷ Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), p. 155.

¹⁹ Drescher, *Econocide*; J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750 – 1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1988).

investigate further the traditional, uncomplicated, composite picture of white West Indian society passed down from the nineteenth century.

However, the study of colonising groups has not always been the centre of scholarly attention. Following political decolonisation in the Caribbean, there was a necessary and overdue drive among historians to focus upon the lives and experiences of the black majority of the region. Over the last three decades, historians have followed the lead of scholars such as Orlando Patterson who, in *The Sociology of Slavery*, published in 1968, set out to focus his study on the black majority in Jamaica, whose histories had hitherto to been ignored.²⁰ The resulting decolonisation of the study of Jamaica's past has made great and important gains in positioning the experiences of Afro-Jamaicans at the centre of works on Jamaican history.

The work of the Barbadian-born scholar and poet, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, emphasises the importance to the Caribbean of making a break with the colonial past. However, he has also expressed a belief in the necessity of an approach to the history of slavery that incorporates the white ruling class. In his 1968 review of *The Sociology of Slavery*, Brathwaite wrote that by 'largely ignoring the white group of masters', Patterson 'takes little account of the sources of power and change within Jamaican slave society'.²¹ Brathwaite did not deny the capacity of enslaved people to exert an influence on society and effect social changes. However, he recognised that our understanding of slave society is richer if we consider the impact of all social groups, including the largely negative impact of the white planters.

²⁰ Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of the Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London, Associated University Press, [1967] 1975), p. 11.

²¹ Edward Brathwaite, 'Jamaican Slave Society, A Review', *Race*, 9/3 (1968), p. 336.

Despite constituting a small minority in Jamaican society, the planters were an influential, powerful group, deserving of scholarly attention. As Kathleen Mary Butler has expressed, both ‘planters and slaves played important parts in the emancipation drama’.²² It therefore seems relevant that we should explore the historical realities behind the somewhat simplistic view that we currently have of white Jamaican colonists. Such an endeavour will not only provide a clearer picture of the lives and culture of the planters and other white settlers but, through a reconsideration of the role of the planters, will help to develop a fuller understanding of the whole of Jamaican slave society in the years before emancipation.²³

The study of white elites, of course, raises political and ethical dilemmas. Nicholas Thomas has rightly drawn attention to some such dilemmas and to potential criticisms of approaches that seek to re-evaluate colonising groups such as the planters, pointing out that ‘it may appear that an appeal for a more nuanced analysis is likely to rehabilitate projects that were fundamentally invasive and destructive.’ However, such rehabilitation is not the intention of this thesis. Rather, in common with Thomas’ own work, one of its principal aims is to draw attention to the ‘specificity of the intrusions that colonised populations had to resist or accommodate.’²⁴ In other words, to assess what it was that the slaves had to face.

Patterson did not entirely ignore the white minority in his analysis of slave society. However, he concentrated on the institution of the plantation, following the perspective pioneered by Ragatz and Williams, who viewed the British West Indies

²² Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation*, p. xvii.

²³ As Trevor Burnard has recently argued, ‘our current concentration on black life in the Caribbean, while not misfocussed, may obscure important realities largely shaped by white values.’ See Trevor Burnard, ‘Family Continuity and Female Independence in Jamaica, 1665 - 1734’, *Continuity and Change*, 7/2 (1992), p. 195.

²⁴ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge, Polity, 1994), p. 17.

in this period primarily as ‘exploitation colonies’ characterised by absenteeism.²⁵ Patterson described the ‘completely materialistic basis’ of the plantation system, which rendered Jamaica into ‘a monstrous distortion of human society’. He recognised the existence of class divisions within white society, but saw slave society as consisting principally of two strictly separated classes of black and white: the exploited and the exploiters.²⁶

In many respects, Patterson’s description was accurate. Plantations, exploitation, absenteeism, coercion and crude racial prejudice have been defining factors in Jamaican history. However, in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, Brathwaite presented a more dynamic and positive approach.²⁷ Published in 1971, this interpretation of the period between 1770 and 1820 emphasised not just plantations and profit, but the development of institutions and of a distinctive Jamaican culture in the period of slavery. In concentrating on these institutional and cultural developments, Brathwaite presented a theory of ‘creolisation’, which sought to explain the process of cultural change that was brought about by the meeting of Europeans and Africans in a New World environment. As O. Nigel Bolland states, the Creole-society model ‘acknowledges the existence of internal cleavages and conflicts in the slave society, but also stresses the process of interaction and mutual adjustment between the major cultural traditions of Europe and Africa.’²⁸

²⁵ Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, p. 3.

²⁶ Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery*, pp. 9, 48 – 51.

²⁷ In fact, Brathwaite appears to have formed his vision of Jamaican social history largely in opposition to that of Patterson. He criticised Patterson’s ‘disintegrationist concept of society’ in a review of *The Sociology of Slavery* and went on to develop his ideas in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*. See Brathwaite, ‘Jamaican Slave Society’; Brathwaite, *Creole Society*. For a discussion of the divergent opinions of Brathwaite and Patterson, see O. Nigel Bolland, ‘Creolisation and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History’, in Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (eds), *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002), pp. 23 – 24.

²⁸ Bolland, ‘Creolisation and Creole Societies’, p. 23.

Brathwaite emphasised the development of local institutions such as parish vestries, the Assembly, the island's press and schools and, whilst observing the importance of sugar plantations, recognised that the Jamaican economy was diverse during this period.²⁹ Barry Higman also draws attention to this diversity, demonstrating that, with only half of the enslaved population engaged in the production of sugar, there was greater variety of production in Jamaican slave society than elsewhere in the British Caribbean.³⁰ Accordingly, Brathwaite focussed on the variety that characterised free society, describing the social and economic position of non-sugar-producing landowners, smallholders, poor whites and freedpeople.³¹ This thesis, whilst focussing on the owners of sugar plantations, will consider the complex relations between the planters and these other groups within free Jamaican society as well as with those enslaved on the island.

Brathwaite pioneered this type of approach, taking a holistic view of the history of Jamaican slave society and accepting the crucial role of the resident sugar planters in that society. Several scholars have since followed his lead and provided studies of social and economic groups that fall outside of the traditional sugar plantation paradigm. Gad Heuman has studied the free coloured population, demonstrating their rising social and political significance during the nineteenth century.³² Verene Shepherd's studies of livestock rearing pens and penkeepers have widened our understanding of the local economy and society, as has work by Kathleen Monteith and Simon Smith on coffee planters.³³

²⁹ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 9 – 59, 266 – 95.

³⁰ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 14, 34.

³¹ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 135 – 50, 167 – 77.

³² Heuman, *Between Black and White*.

³³ Verene A. Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status: Non-sugar producers in Jamaica in slavery and Freedom', in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.), *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002); Verene A. Shepherd, 'Livestock Farmers and Marginality in Jamaica's Sugar-Plantation Society: A Tentative Analysis', in Verene A. Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (eds), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A*

Whilst relatively little detailed published work exists on the social relations between planters and these other groups in free society, the sugar planters of Jamaica have by no means been neglected by scholars. Richard Dunn's 1972 work, comparing Jamaican and Barbadian elites between 1624 and 1713, provides a useful introduction to the history of the planter class in the British West Indies. Dunn describes a group living a precarious life in colonies that were essentially 'business ventures' settled by unsophisticated 'men of action'.³⁴ Recently, Trevor Burnard has worked on the white elite of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, making innovative use of probate sources, such as wills and household inventories. Burnard's recent research on the eighteenth-century Jamaican slaveholder, Thomas Thistlewood, also provides vital insights into white creole society in the eighteenth century.³⁵

By describing previous generations of settlers, the work of both Dunn and Burnard supplies an important background to a history of the planters of the early nineteenth century as well as suggesting useful methodological approaches. For example, Burnard notes the ways in which slaveholding and ideas about race helped to distinguish local whites from British people in the metropole. Other scholars, such as M. J. Steele, Jack Greene, Andrew O'Shaughnessy and Michael Craton, have also offered insightful interpretations of aspects of the planters'

Student Reader (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2000); Verene A. Shepherd, 'Questioning Creole: Domestic Producers and Jamaica's Plantation Economy', in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.) *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002); Verene A. Shepherd and K. E. A. Monteith, 'Non-sugar Proprietors in a Sugar Plantation Society', *Plantation Society in the Americas*, 2/3 (Fall 1998); Simon D. Smith, 'Coffee and the "Poorer Sort of People" in Jamaica during the Period of Slavery', *Plantation Society in the Americas*, 2/3 (Fall 1998).

³⁴ Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies* (New York, Norton, [1972] 1973), pp. 24 – 25.

³⁵ Trevor Burnard, "'A Matron in Rank, A Prostitute in Manners": The Manning Divorce of 1741 and Class, Gender, Race and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica', in Shepherd, *Working Slavery*; Burnard, 'Family Continuity'; Trevor Burnard, 'Thomas Thistlewood Becomes a Creole' in Bruce Clayton and John Salmond (eds), *Varieties of Southern History: New Essays on a Region and Its People* (Westport, Greenwood, 1996).

world-view, focussing generally on the eighteenth century.³⁶ However, as this study will demonstrate, Jamaican society changed between the eighteenth century and the period immediately before emancipation. The demographic increase in the free coloured population, British opposition to slavery and the increased numbers of evangelical missionaries from Britain led to new social tensions. Most whites in the colony remained committed to making a profit, but were not content for metropolitan observers to present them as being out of step with British culture and modern ideas. Influenced by British reformist and humanitarian ideas, planters' pro-slavery arguments therefore altered during this period.

The work of several scholars has proved useful in analysing the ways in which local planters accommodated and resisted the new situations with which they were faced. In her study of the impact of non-conformist missionaries on the lives of enslaved people, Mary Turner supplies a valuable analysis of tensions between the planters, missionaries and enslaved Christian converts.³⁷ Kathleen Mary Butler and J. R. Ward have provided detailed and important analyses of managerial and financial problems faced by the planters during the period of amelioration and emancipation.³⁸ Additionally, James Walvin, Michael Craton and Barry Higman have charted the histories of individual plantations over relatively long periods, providing descriptions and accounts of the owners and managers.³⁹ Such studies

³⁶ M. J. Steele, 'A Philosophy of Fear: The World View of the Jamaican Plantocracy in a Comparative Perspective', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 27/1 (1993); Jack P. Greene, 'Liberty, Slavery, and the Transformation of British Identity in the Eighteenth-Century West Indies', *Slavery and Abolition*, 21/1 (April 2000); Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

³⁷ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*.

³⁸ Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation*; J. R. Ward, 'Emancipation and the Planters', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 22/1 – 2 (1988); Ward, *West Indian Slavery*.

³⁹ Michael Craton and James Walvin, *A Jamaican Plantation: A History of Worthy Park, 1670 – 1970* (London, W. H. Allen, 1970); Michael Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man: Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (London, Harvard University Press, 1978); B. W. Higman, *Montpelier*,

have all helped to inform and direct this social and cultural history of the Jamaican planters in the decades before emancipation.

This thesis also draws upon the suggestions and insights of a wider range of scholars. For example, in beginning to examine the relations of the planters with other groups in free society, and particularly with other white men, important insights have been gained from the work of historians of the US South. In this respect, Stephanie McCurry's and Michele Gillespie's analyses of the intimate bonds of subordination and mutual reliance that existed between planters and groups of non-elite white men in the southern states of the United States have proved vital.⁴⁰ The large slave majority on the island meant that Jamaican planters relied heavily on British military support and could not rely solely on white male solidarity to control slave society. Nevertheless, like their counterparts in the US South, they sought to rally the support of other white men through various group rituals, such as militia musters and post election feasts.

The treatment of colonists' relations to the transatlantic cultural and economic nexus in this thesis has also benefited from the research of several scholars. The theoretical work of Paul Gilroy, not least his suggestion that 'historians could take the Atlantic as one single unit of analysis', has proved particularly useful.⁴¹ Jeffrey Robert Young's study of how the planters of South Carolina and Georgia in the US South 'immersed themselves in transatlantic

Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739 – 1912 (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, 1998).

⁴⁰ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995). Michele Gillespie has also demonstrated the important political role played by artisans in antebellum Georgia. See Michele Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia 1789 – 1860* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, Verso, 1993) (quote on p. 15); Paul Gilroy, 'Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism', in Lawrence Grossberg, Carey Nelson and Paul Treicher, *Cultural Studies* (London, Routledge, 1992).

intellectual currents' and the work of Joyce Chaplin on the world view of the planters of South Carolina have also helped to provide examples of how the arguments and identities of other slaveholding groups have developed.⁴² The pro-slavery arguments of Jamaican planters always differed from those in the US South. However, as this thesis will show, ideas that circulated throughout the Atlantic world helped to shape the outlook of planters in both locations.

As ideas and people crisscrossed the Atlantic, new cultural identities were formed. This process has frequently been referred to as creolisation, and much of this thesis is concerned with building upon and adapting Brathwaite's ideas about creolisation and colonialism with regard to the planters. In this thesis, the term 'creole' will be used to refer to practices distinctively local to Jamaica or the British Caribbean more generally and which helped to define that locale and its inhabitants as being distinct from people and practices in the Old World. It will also be used to describe people born in Jamaica or strongly associated with the island by virtue of a lengthy residence there. Locally resident planters, free coloureds, enslaved people, the institution of slavery itself and other local institutions, such as the militia and Assembly, are therefore all described as having been 'creole'. Brathwaite saw colonial ties as retarding the development of a viable and self-sufficient local creole society. However, white settlers adapted to local circumstances and became creoles whilst retaining strong bonds with the metropole. In demonstrating how colonists evinced an outlook that was at once colonial and creole, O. Nigel Bolland's criticism of creolisation theory has

⁴² Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670 – 1837* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 233; Joyce E. Chaplin, 'Slavery and the Principle of Humanity: A Modern Idea in the Early Lower South', *Journal of Social History*, 24 (Winter 1990).

provided useful insights.⁴³ So too has the work of Ann Laura Stoler, Frederick Cooper and Catherine Hall, all of whom have stressed the ‘imperative of placing colony and metropole in one analytic frame’.⁴⁴

The link between Jamaica and Britain was a crucial element in the creation of many of the sources used in this study. For example, the Returns of Registrations of slaves, which provide valuable insights into patterns of slaveholding in the colony, were produced in response to abolitionist pressure. Pro-slavery tracts by men such as George Wilson Bridges were another feature of the transatlantic debate over slavery. Missionaries, Governors and other travellers between metropole and colony also intervened in the debate over slavery and produced documents which cast light on aspects of life in Jamaica. Letters between Jamaican plantation managers and absentee proprietors passed freely between Britain and the Caribbean and provide important information on the activities and outlook of local planters. Other locally produced sources include the journals of the local legislative Assembly, court records, vestry minutes, tax records, deeds, wills and probate inventories.

Although this study takes the enforcement of the Emancipation Bill in 1834 as its closing point, it is important to recognise that many of the features of Jamaican society during the slavery period continued after the slaves were freed. As Emilia da Costa remarks in her study of the 1823 Demerara slave rebellion, ‘the slaves’ struggle for freedom and dignity continued to be re-enacted under new guises and new scripts long after “emancipation.”’⁴⁵ In Jamaica too, freedpeople

⁴³ Bolland, ‘Creolisation and Creole Societies’, p. 37.

⁴⁴ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper. ‘Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda’, in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997); Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. xix.

continued to have to fight to secure freedom, equality and justice even when slavery was abolished. Planters and other whites continued to try to maintain the racialised boundaries of rule that had underpinned slave society.⁴⁶ The close relationship between colony and metropole also meant that the pro-slavery arguments of the planters could re-emerge in the metropole in the years after emancipation.⁴⁷ Originally formulated by slaveholders to reinforce and protect the institution of racialised slavery in Caribbean colonies, ideas about deep differences between people of European and African descent persisted. They still persist, making a study of Jamaican planters in the pre-emancipation period as relevant now as it has ever been.

⁴⁶ On these aspects of the post-emancipation period in Jamaica, see Heuman, *Between Black and White*; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*; Mimi Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (London, Macmillan, 2000).

⁴⁷ See Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 338 – 79.

Sugar, Slavery and Boundaries of Rule: **The Planters and Jamaican Society**

Jamaica, which is about 140 miles long, east to west, and about 50 miles wide at its widest point, was the largest and most topographically diverse island in the British West Indies. The British divided the island into three counties: Surrey, in the east; Middlesex, covering the central parts of the island; and Cornwall in the west. By 1834, there were twenty parishes, which were much larger than their English equivalents. In the eastern-most part of the island and traversing the inland parts of the county of Surrey, the Blue Mountains rise to over 2,000 metres. Most of the interior of the island is hilly and forested. In the west, covering the interior parts of the parishes of St James, St Elizabeth and Trelawny, is the Cockpit Country, a densely wooded and pitted landscape. These interior districts provided ideal places of refuge for groups of Maroons, people who had formerly escaped from enslavement and who had formed semiautonomous communities in the mountainous and less accessible parts of the island. However, the majority of the population of Jamaica settled on the coastal plains around the periphery of the island. These flat and fertile areas proved well suited to sugar production, and most of the sugar plantations on the island were located near to the coast or on flat lowland river valleys.¹

¹ See Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), pp. 248 – 51; Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623 – 1775* (Kingston, Canoe Press, [1974] 1994), p. 209.

The expansion of sugar and slavery

By the early eighteenth century, sugar plantations began to dominate the economy of the colony, becoming widespread in the south and east of the island. Fortune seekers also began to search for uncultivated areas to establish sugar estates elsewhere on the island. After the 1740s, encouraged by acts of the Assembly designed to promote settlement and development, increasing numbers of settlers began to clear areas of land in northside parishes in order to set up sugar plantations.²

Richard Sheridan has shown that, in 1739, there were 419 sugar estates in Jamaica. By 1772, there were 775, and the average size of sugar plantations had grown dramatically. This represented a massive economic expansion, and the number of estates continued to increase. In 1786, there were 1,061 sugar estates operating on the island and, in 1821, there were still over 1,000 such properties.³ The rapid development of the sugar industry in the eighteenth century shaped the economy of the island during the period of this study. Furthermore, by the early eighteenth century, planters considered the labour of enslaved Africans to be crucial to the production of sugar. This meant that the expansion of the sugar industry also entailed the expansion of slavery, and throughout the eighteenth century and until emancipation, slavery was the defining feature of Jamaican society.

By 1832, there were 313,000 enslaved people living and working in Jamaica. All but a tiny minority worked on agricultural units. Sugar was Jamaica's

² Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island*, 3 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1774] 1970), vol. 1, p. 429.

³ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 223, 229 – 32; Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 121.

most important export, and about 155,000 enslaved people, almost half of the entire population, lived and worked on sugar plantations.⁴ However, compared to other island colonies in the British Caribbean, the Jamaican economy was diverse, and whilst the sugar industry predominated, settlers using enslaved labour engaged in a variety of other forms of agricultural pursuits.

From the end of the eighteenth century, coffee was the second most important Jamaican export crop, and by 1832, there were approximately 45,000 enslaved people settled on coffee producing properties, most of which were in mountainous districts in the east of the island.⁵ Livestock pens were also a significant feature of the economy, and in 1832, an estimated 40,000 enslaved people lived and worked on such properties. The owners of these pens generally raised livestock for the sugar estates.⁶ Pens varied widely in size, but enslaved workforces of a hundred or more people operated some of the largest of them. Large pens were often independently owned, but sugar planters occasionally also owned livestock pens, so that they could provide oxen for their own plantations.⁷ Pens existed throughout the island, although large pens were most prevalent in the parishes of St Elizabeth, St Ann and St Catherine.⁸ Roughly fifteen per cent of

⁴ B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807 – 1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 16.

⁵ Simon D. Smith, 'Sugar's Poor Relation: Coffee Planting in the British West Indies, 1720 – 1833', *Slavery and Abolition*, 19/3 (Dec 1998), p. 73; Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 16.

⁶ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 16; B. W. Higman, 'The Internal Economy of Jamaican Pens, 1760 – 1890', *Social and Economic Studies*, 30/1 (1989); Verene A. Shepherd, 'Livestock Farmers and Marginality in Jamaica's Sugar Plantation Society: A Tentative Analysis', in Verene A. Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (eds), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2000), pp. 615 – 16. Whilst mainly organised for rearing livestock, pens could also be relatively diversified units that were involved in other forms of production. See Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 25 – 26, 31. See also the example of Thomas Thistlewood's diversified pen, described in Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750 – 86* (Kingston, University of the West Indies Press, [1989] 1999), pp. 148 – 215.

⁷ Verene A. Shepherd, 'Livestock and Sugar: Aspects of Jamaica's Agricultural Development from the late Seventeenth Century to the early Nineteenth Century', in Shepherd and Beckles, *Caribbean Slavery*, pp. 261 – 62.

⁸ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 25 - 26, 31.

those enslaved in Jamaica worked in other sectors of the rural economy. Some raised minor staple crops such as pimento. Others lived on relatively small, diversified holdings and their owners often hired them out to work on the sugar estates or on projects such as road building or repair.⁹ Additionally, about 25,000 enslaved people worked or lived in towns, with the most significant concentration in Kingston, the largest town on the island and the main port.¹⁰

Despite the diversity of the Jamaican economy, it is impossible to deny the prime importance of sugar production. Sugar was the most lucrative crop and demand for it in Britain meant that those who could afford the high cost of setting up a sugar plantation stood to become extremely wealthy. The estates were therefore central to the Jamaican economy and their owners were some of the richest and most powerful men in society. The logistics of sugar production meant that sugar estates were large holdings. Each estate usually had hundreds of acres planted in sugar cane and large expanses of land on which to graze animals and grow wood or provisions. They were generally located on flat coastal plains or fertile and flat river valleys and were both agricultural and industrial operations. Cane was not only grown and harvested on them, but also partly processed at the works, which were buildings located near the middle of each property. At the mill, juice was extracted from the canes. It was then boiled to make partially refined sugar before being packed into hogsheads ready for export to Britain. In Jamaica, mills were often powered by oxen or windmills, but many used running water as a source of power and so tended to be situated on or near to rivers.¹¹ The need for

⁹ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, 16, 41 – 42; BL Add. MS 12435, Long Manuscript. For more on jobbers and their relations with the planters see chapters 3 and 4 below.

¹⁰ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 16, 58.

¹¹ Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols (New York, Arno Press, [1793] 1972), vol. 2, pp. 238 – 44; James Robertson, *Map of the County of Cornwall, in the island of Jamaica* (London, 1804); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves:*

vast expanses of fertile and flat land and for a suitable power supply meant that some areas of the island were more suited to sugar production than others. This led to a concentration of sugar estates in some districts. There were comparatively few estates in the hilly parishes of Port Royal or St Andrew. Sugar plantations dominated the flat coastal plains and river valleys of parishes such as St James, Westmoreland, Hanover, Trelawny and St Thomas in the East. There were also sugar plantations in St Ann and St Elizabeth, although the economies of these areas were relatively diverse.¹²

The development of Jamaican society: 1661 - 1834

West Indian planters, realising what large profits they could make from sugar, sought a readily available source of labour to perform the arduous tasks involved in growing and harvesting their crops. Enslaved Africans provided a convenient and reliable source of labour, and from the mid-seventeenth century, planters imported increasing numbers of Africans into American plantation colonies.¹³ During the eighteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade increased dramatically, and hundreds of thousands of people were transported across the Atlantic in appalling conditions to be forced to labour on New World plantations.

Therefore, the main brunt of economic expansion in Jamaica was borne by enslaved Africans and their descendants, who came to be by far the largest social group on the island. In 1661, six years after the English invasion, there were just a

The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624 – 1713 (New York, Norton, [1972] 1973), pp. 192 – 94; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 107 – 18.

¹² Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 32 – 33.

¹³ For discussions of the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400 – 1800* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, [1992] 1998), pp. 43 – 125; John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, [1995] 2002), pp. 127 – 58.

few hundred enslaved people in Jamaica and about 3,000 white settlers. Twelve years later, in 1673, a census revealed that there were 7,768 whites and 9,504 enslaved people.¹⁴ From this point the gap between the number of whites in the colony and the number of blacks widened quickly, as the enslaved population of the island increased along with the expansion of the sugar industry.¹⁵ The sustained importation of labourers from Africa meant that there were about 350,000 enslaved people on the island in 1807, when the slave trade ended, outnumbering whites by about seventeen to one.¹⁶ This meant that by emancipation in 1834, people of complete or partial African ancestry comprised some ninety-five percent of the population of the colony.¹⁷

The rapid expansion of the enslaved population ended with the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807. The enslaved population had not been self-reproducing, and planters had relied on the slave trade to maintain and increase their workforce, which meant that the enslaved population declined once planters were prevented from obtaining new labourers from Africa.¹⁸ This simple demographic fact reveals a great deal about the appalling conditions on Jamaican plantations, conditions that were similar in other plantation colonies across the New

¹⁴ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 210 – 11.

¹⁵ Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 7; J. Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (New York, Negro Universities Press, [1823] 1969), pp. 23 – 24.

¹⁶ Using the Returns of Registration of slaves, Higman calculated that the enslaved population numbered about 345,000 in 1817. Since the population was declining, following the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, this estimation of 350,000 in 1807 seems reasonable. I have assumed a white population of about 20,000 in 1807 (see p. 27 below). See Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 256.

¹⁷ Population figures cited by Gad Heuman have been used to arrive at this percentage, but it has been assumed that the white population was about 18,000 in 1834. Heuman based his estimation of the white population upon the one offered by Higman, which appears too low (see p. 27 below). See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 7; Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 144.

¹⁸ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 231.

World. Enslaved Africans were overworked, poorly fed and exposed to a ravaging disease environment.¹⁹

In terms of their numbers, Europeans in Jamaica were far less significant than Africans. However, many settlers did arrive in Jamaica from the British Isles. Locally-born people and animals were usually described as 'creole', and the creole-born children of white settlers further augmented the free white population. The white population grew from 7,644 in 1734 to about 18,000 in 1789.²⁰ Barry Higman has estimated that the white population numbered about 16,750 in 1832, but it is likely that this figure is too low.²¹ In the absence of a full census, it is impossible to come to an accurate estimation, though it is likely that the white population was at about 20,000 in 1807 and began to decrease slowly from at least the 1820s, to number about 18,000 in 1832.²²

¹⁹ On labour regimes, disease environments and demography in Jamaica, see Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 99 – 138. On the effects of harsh labour regimes on women, see Lucille Mathurin Mair, 'Women Field Workers in Jamaica During Slavery', in Shepherd and Beckles, *Caribbean Slavery*. For a more general discussion of the conditions endured by enslaved people in the English speaking Americas, see James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London, Routledge, 1996).

²⁰ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 7; Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 105; Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 24.

²¹ Higman's estimation is linked to the Jamaican census of 1844, which enumerated some 15,800 whites in Jamaica. He estimated the number of rural whites by speculating that there would be an average of one white person on small slaveholdings (1 – 20 slaves), 1.5 on medium holdings (21 – 100 slaves) and 2 on large holdings (100 or more slaves). Using this method, Higman estimated about 8,250 whites in 'rural quarters' and added this to his estimation of 8,500 urban whites to come to 16,750. He claimed that this 'approximates to the 1844 total and thus justifies the method of calculating the distribution of the rural whites.' Unfortunately, this approximation means very little, since it is possible that the white population was much higher in 1832 than it was in 1844. Furthermore, Higman's estimations of the numbers of whites per slave-holding are probably too low. Evidence from St James in 1774 and Westmoreland in 1802 suggests that there were usually more whites on rural holdings than Higman estimated. Planters generally employed several white staff on large holdings, and it is also possible that Higman's estimation failed to take white women into account, as they might not always have shown up on tax returns concerned with the deficiency laws. See Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 144; JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Roll of the Poll, Road and Parish Tax, 1804; BL Add. MSS 12435.

²² This estimate assumes that the white population continued to grow from about 18,000 in 1789 in accordance with the growth of the slave population and the continued expansion of the sugar economy and then began to decline with the contraction of the slave population and economic crisis of the 1820s and 1830s.

Wealthy planters comprised only a small minority of whites on the island, but young white men arrived there in the hope that they could better their situation and rise into the ranks of the planter class. This prospect of wealth was the main driving force of white immigration, since the island was not otherwise an attractive place to live.²³ A contemporary author described how, before crossing the Atlantic, young men were ‘alarmed by exaggerated accounts of the intolerable heat of the climate, the unwholesomeness of the atmosphere, the fatal ravages of the yellow fever, the savage and treacherous disposition of the negroes, and the *huge serpents and other venomous reptiles*’. However, accounts ‘of the riches with which it abounds’ and the ‘facility with which these may be acquired’ compelled young British men to go to the colony.²⁴ Very few of these immigrants ever rose to the ranks of the planter class, though the success of a few helped to keep alive the dream of getting rich quickly in the Caribbean. A great many of the white people who arrived in Jamaica hoped to accumulate wealth and then return home to the British Isles. Most did not achieve their aim, but many kept up close links with friends and relatives across the Atlantic and sent their children home to Britain to either live or be educated in the metropole.²⁵

The lack of an island-wide survey of the white population before 1844 means that it is difficult to assess the age structure and gender ratio of this part of the population or determine what proportion of them were creole born. However, men far outnumbered women in white society, a fact borne out by records from St James in 1774, which reveal that there were 613 adult white men in the parish and

²³ See Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 6 – 10; chapter 4 below.

²⁴ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 192.

²⁵ See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 3. For more on links between whites in the British Caribbean and the metropole, and on the number of Jamaicans in British schools and universities, see O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, pp. 3 – 33.

just 387 white women and children.²⁶ An unbalanced sex ratio remained a constant feature of the white population, which was otherwise constantly changing. Large numbers of whites arrived in the colony, but partly because of the disproportionately high number of male immigrants, the population did not grow by natural increase. Disease also kept the European population in check. Jamaica was notorious as ‘the grave of Europeans’, and many whites died in the colony from illnesses such as yellow fever and malaria, especially when they first arrived.²⁷ New arrivals from Europe hoped that they would survive a period of ‘seasoning’ during the early years of their stay, as conventional wisdom held that those who had lived longer in a tropical environment remained healthier.²⁸

The lack of white women helped to provide an impetus for white men of all social groups to take non-white mistresses. Referred to euphemistically as ‘housekeepers’, these concubines were often enslaved women. Since legal status in the colony was inherited from one’s mother, the children of these enslaved mistresses and sexual partners were born into slavery regardless of the legal status of their father. Indeed, Higman has estimated that between 1829 and 1832, white men fathered more than nine per cent of all registered newly-born slaves.²⁹ Concubinage often involved cohabitation and, as Barbara Bush has stated, ‘was regarded as an integral part of plantation life, inextricably woven into the social fabric.’³⁰ The liaisons that occurred between white men and free and enslaved non-

²⁶ BL Add. MSS 12435. On the gender imbalance in white society see Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 – 1867* (Cambridge, Polity, 2002), p. 72.

²⁷ Quote from Anon, *Marly; or, A Planter’s Life in Jamaica* (Glasgow, 1828), p. 5. On the effects of disease on white immigrants to the British Caribbean, see O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, pp. 6 – 10.

²⁸ See O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, pp. 7 – 8.

²⁹ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 139.

³⁰ Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650 – 1838* (Oxford, James Currey, 1990), p. 111.

white women never occurred between individuals of equal social status and power. Thomas Thistlewood, a white slave owner living in the parish of Westmoreland, had a long-term and apparently caring relationship with an enslaved woman, though his diary entries also reveal him to have been a serial rapist.³¹ Liaisons between white men and non-white women could therefore be reciprocal and long-term, but less consensual sexual interaction was far more commonplace on Jamaican properties.

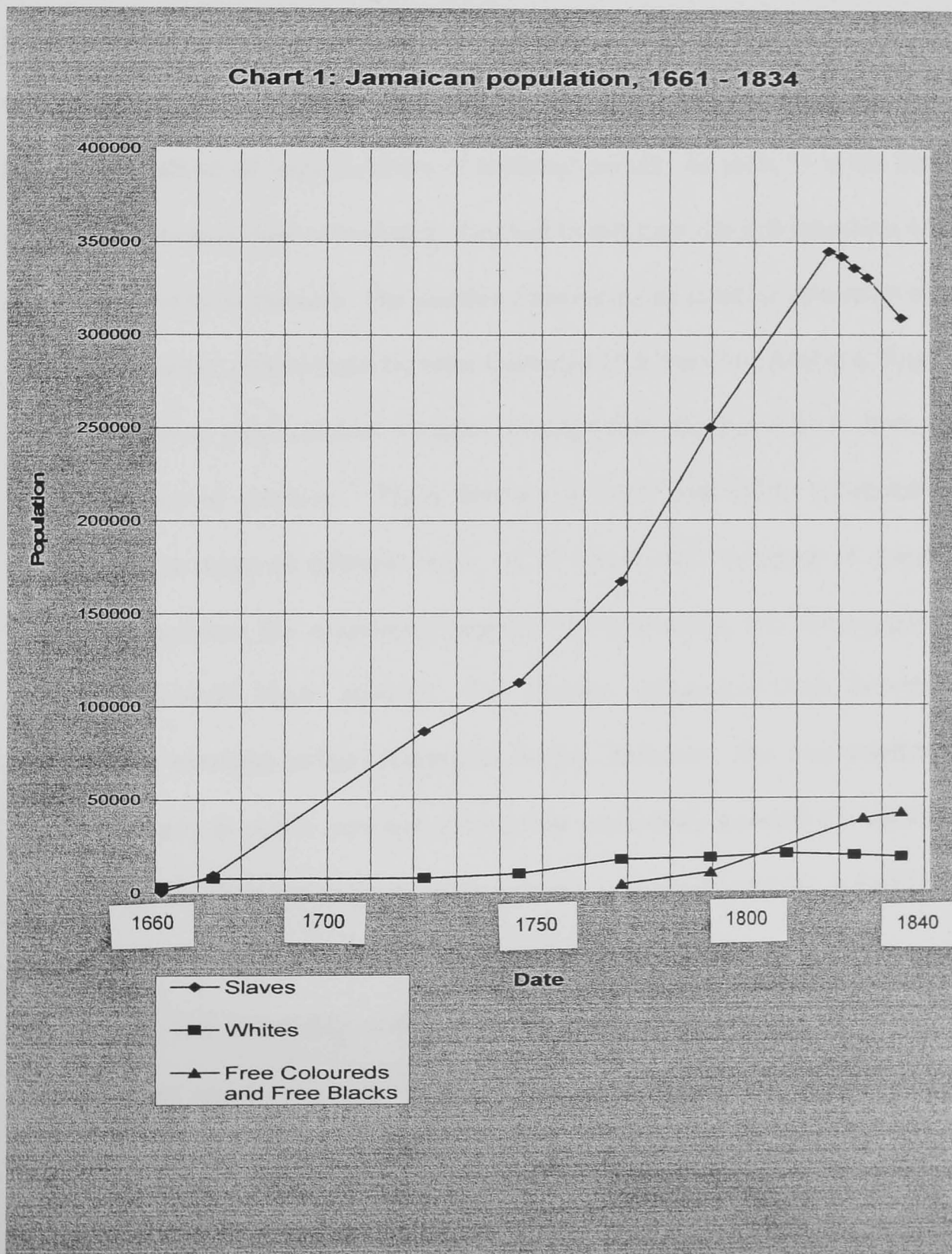
Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whites frequently freed their enslaved partners and children. They also manumitted other enslaved people, often as a reward for faithful service. The resulting free black and free coloured population constituted another element of free society. In St James in 1774, there were 262 'Free Mulattoes, Indians and Negroes' registered in the parish, of whom 200 were women and children.³² In 1825, John Campbell, a free coloured man from St James, estimated that of about 28,800 free coloureds throughout Jamaica, about two thirds of the adults were women. This gender imbalance could be explained by the fact that planters and other white men were most likely to manumit women who had been their mistresses. White men also frequently manumitted their coloured children by enslaved women, which helps to explain Campbell's estimation that about half of the free coloured population of the island were children.³³ The free non-white population therefore consisted of more women than men and was very young. It was also almost exclusively creole born and increased rapidly, from around 3,700 in 1768 to about 42,000 in 1834. This increase, which was partly the result of new manumissions throughout this period,

³¹ Hall, *In Miserable Slavery*.

³² BL Add. MSS 12435.

³³ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 8.

meant that the free black and free coloured population grew to become larger than the white population during the early nineteenth century. By 1830, this group outnumbered whites on the island by approximately two to one (see chart 1).³⁴



Sources for chart 1: J. Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 23 - 24; Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 256; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 7; Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 210 - 11. See also p. 24 above.

³⁴ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 7.

Boundaries of rule

As a small elite, and as a part of a small white minority, the planters were constantly worried about the preservation of their rule. Their wealth and privileged social position formed the basis of their control over Jamaican society, and their wealth was itself predicated on profits from their vast sugar-producing estates and the coerced labour of large numbers of enslaved people. As such, in order for the planters to maintain their ascendancy, they had to maintain the subordination of the enslaved majority in Jamaica. The planters constructed an intricate system to effect this subordination, underpinned by what Catherine Hall has described as a 'logic of rule' which, as in other colonial societies, distinguished colonisers from those who they attempted to colonise.³⁵ These distinctions were continually reiterated and preserved in a range of different ways, all of which were designed to construct boundaries between the supposedly superior white minority and the supposedly inferior, colonised black majority. The planters delineated these boundaries formally, for example, in laws relating to slavery. However, they also constructed them informally in public acts and writing that continually stressed the suitability of Africans and their descendants to be servants and slaves and the suitability of white men to be masters. The emergence of a liminal group of free non-whites complicated and eventually undermined the dichotomy that the planters drew between these social categories. However, throughout the period of this study, the boundaries of rule in Jamaican slave society were always based, above all else, on colour and European ideas of racial difference.

³⁵ Catherine Hall, 'Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire', in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 7.

As Theodore Allen has demonstrated, similar methods of social control developed throughout the plantation colonies of British America.³⁶ In these colonies, the institution of slavery was formally defined in legal codes. In Jamaica, the Assembly copied the slave laws for the island from the those drawn up by the planters of Barbados and periodically made minor adaptations to this template to satisfy their own requirements. The original act, in which these laws were set out, was instituted by the Barbados Assembly in 1661 ‘for the better ordering and governing of Negroes’ and the Jamaica act, introduced to the Assembly in 1664, was entitled an ‘[a]ct for the better ordering and governing of Negro Slaves’.³⁷ The titles of both acts show how, as was to happen across the region, ‘Negroes’ (meaning blacks) and ‘slaves’ became synonymous with one another. Although, in the early years of English colonisation in the Caribbean, whites worked as indentured labourers, the slave codes ensured that only Africans and their descendants experienced chattel slavery. Blackness denoted slavery, whereas whiteness symbolised freedom.

The law attempted to strip enslaved people of their humanity by defining them as chattels that could be bought and sold like any other piece of personal estate. In the eyes of the law, enslaved people were therefore literally the property of their owner. There were some rules limiting the power of slaveholders, but slavery, as defined by the law, meant that there were few formal limitations of the authority of owners over those enslaved. Enslaved people were also prevented from giving evidence against whites in court and enslaved status was hereditary, passed down by a child’s mother. Freedom was also a hereditary legal status, passed down

³⁶ Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London, Verso, 1997).

³⁷ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 239 – 44.

by women, which meant that white women were, as Cecily Jones has observed, 'reproducers of the human state of freedom'.³⁸ Being legally free, whites experienced a range of legal rights and privileges that were denied to enslaved people. For example, they could hold property and testify in court. Furthermore, white men held further privileges and could potentially hold public office and vote in elections. In these ways, the law drew stark racialised boundaries between enslaved blacks and free whites that disempowered blacks, making slaves of Africans and their descendants whilst empowering whites.

One of the main uses of the slave laws was that they rendered enslaved people as flexible units of labour in the hands of their owners. As far as the planters were concerned, enslaved people were primarily units of production and they inventoried and divided them accordingly, just as they did with the livestock that they kept on their properties.³⁹ Nevertheless, one of the central contradictions of slavery was that, whilst dehumanising Africans and their descendants and reducing them to the status of mere commodities and units of labour, the law had to acknowledge the humanity of those whom it enslaved. For example, by outlining punishments for offences such as running away or theft, the law acknowledged that enslaved people were autonomous individuals capable as human beings of making decisions and facing the often grisly consequences of their actions.⁴⁰

Jamaican whites continually reiterated and reinforced ideas of the differences between blacks and whites. Edward Long, who lived in Jamaica before retiring to England, provided some of the most notorious examples of this racist

³⁸ Cecily Forde-Jones, 'Mapping Racial Boundaries: Gender, Race, and Poor Relief in Barbadian Plantation Society', *Journal of Women's History*, 10/3 (Autumn 1998), p. 9.

³⁹ See Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Robin Blackburn notes that colonial legislatures recognised slaves and their children as property and left further questions, such as the ability of slaves to resist orders, to be tackled in an 'empirical manner'. See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492 – 1800* (London, Verso, 1997), pp. 235 – 36.

ideology in his *History of Jamaica*. By likening Africans to animals, he sought to stress their inferiority to whites and their suitability for enslavement. He was also at pains to stress the 'general uniformity' which he claimed 'runs through all these various regions of people' and asserted that 'Creole Negroes', 'in consequence of their frequent intermixture with the native Africans', differed from them 'but little'.⁴¹ According to Long, people of African descent were a common 'type', defined by their inferiority to white people and their suitability for enslavement. Such ideas were common in Jamaica. The general opinion among local whites was that 'whenever you see a black face, you see a thief', and George Wilson Bridges, the rector of the parish of St Ann, wrote that 'from the *adult* objects of negro slavery, kindness and indulgence have never yet been able to eradicate the generic character of deceit, ingratitude and cruelty.'⁴² Both Long and Bridges mobilised ideas of racial difference and black inferiority to defend slavery from outside criticism. However, by continually reiterating such ideas of essential racial difference, local whites were also able to reinforce the racial boundaries of slave society in Jamaica itself.

Clearly, it was white men who gained the most from this social system, experiencing the widest range of benefits. In Jamaica, these advantages extended to all white men, including those who worked for small salaries on the sugar plantations. The material remuneration that white men received was bolstered by what W. E. B. DuBois, in discussing racism in the US, labelled a 'public and psychological wage', which provided all white men with a privileged legal status

⁴¹ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, pp. 353, 356 – 78, 407.

⁴² Anon, *Marly*, pp. 34 - 36; George Wilson Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, 2 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1828] 1868), vol. 2, p. 479.

and an elevated social status.⁴³ In 1793, Bryan Edwards described the privileges enjoyed by whites of all social groups, explaining how the ‘poorest White person seems to consider himself nearly on a level with the richest’. Edwards, who had lived in Jamaica as a plantation owner and held a seat in the Assembly, noted that poor white men exhibited a ‘freedom’ in their relationships with their employers, which he contrasted with the situation in Europe, where such freedom was ‘seldom displayed by men in the lower orders of life towards their superiors’. He was quick to identify the cause of these apparently egalitarian social relations. They arose, he argued, ‘from the pre-eminence and distinction which are necessarily attached even to the complexion of a White Man, in a country where the complexion, generally speaking, distinguishes freedom from slavery.’⁴⁴

The huge enslaved workforce that provided the planters with their wealth, privilege and status also posed a very real physical threat to the white community. In Jamaica, enslaved non-whites vastly outnumbered whites, and this vulnerability was a major reason for the solidarity that existed between white men. As Edwards commented, fear of a slave uprising was a perpetual concern amongst Jamaican whites and engendered a sense of ‘reciprocal dependance [*sic*] and respect’. This led white men to support each other to promote a ‘sense of common safety’.⁴⁵ Fear and the need for white solidarity therefore helped to bind white male society and ensured that the elite did not allow divisions of class to supersede lines of racial division. Furthermore, in a society where elite concerns dictated that white men should close ranks and keep potentially rebellious blacks in submission, white dominance had to be continually reiterated. Therefore, whites made persistent

⁴³ Quoted in David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, Verso, [1991] 2002), p. 12.

⁴⁴ Edwards, *History*, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Edwards, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 8 – 9.

efforts to reinscribe the social boundaries between themselves and the enslaved majority, often in apparently minor ways. For example, enslaved people were not allowed to own horses. Consequently, white men, including plantation employees, made efforts to make a literal show of their elevated social status and always rode on horseback, 'no disgrace being considered so great in the island as that of a white man being seen walking on foot away from his home.'⁴⁶

In spite of this situation, there were considerable social economic distinctions that divided white men. For example, before 1830, only white men could play a part in official political life in Jamaica, but not all of them were treated equally. According to a law passed by the Assembly in 1780, to 'entitle them to vote for representatives in assembly', freeholders had to 'be possessed of a house worth 10*l.* a year; or of a pen (with a house) of ten acres at least...or of a plantation'. They also had to possess 'negroes of their own'.⁴⁷ Land and slaves were therefore such important commodities in Jamaican slave society that the elite deemed ownership of both a necessary prerequisite for voters. In this way, white men were differentiated by their wealth represented by the ownership of land and slaves.

However, although the planters dominated ownership of land and slaves, they by no means enjoyed a monopoly over them. Ownership of these vital assets permeated Jamaican free society and even some of the poorest in that society could own slaves. Of course, it was not necessary for a white man to own slaves to enjoy the privileges associated with being white and male in Jamaica. Slavery and racial separation meant that white men, simply by their gender and the colour of their skin, were marked as being socially superior to the vast majority of the population.

⁴⁶ Anon, *Marly*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ *Abridged Laws of Jamaica 1680 – 1793*, p. 82 (21 *Geo.* III. xv. 2).

However, as Verene Shepherd argues, whilst plantation society in Jamaica ‘developed and sustained its own characteristic and highly stratified system of class, colour, race and gender relations’, social status also derived from owning large acreages of land, large numbers of slaves and ‘the cultivation and export of sugar.’⁴⁸ Racial and legal status were therefore vital factors used by the planter class to define the boundaries of rule that divided Jamaican society, but the ownership of land and slaves was also a major factor in differentiating between members of free society.

Furthermore, as Shepherd suggests, gender was a crucial element in defining the social order of Jamaican slave societies. Indeed, in slave societies, racial distinctions were always intricately linked with gender concerns, because, as Ann Laura Stoler has observed, ‘control over sexuality and reproduction were at the core of defining colonial privileges and boundaries.’⁴⁹ In Jamaica, the role of reproduction in defining these privileges and boundaries was written explicitly into the legal code of the colony. Since children inherited free or enslaved legal status from their mothers, control over women’s sexuality was central to the concerns of the planter elite. These laws meant that interracial relationships between white men and enslaved women did not pose an immediate threat to the order of things in the colony, because the coloured children of enslaved women were absorbed into the enslaved workforce. As such, the elite did not seek to disallow such relationships. However, relations between white women and enslaved men were potentially far

⁴⁸ Verene A. Shepherd, ‘Land, Labour and Social Status: Non-Sugar Producers in Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom’, in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.), *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (Kingston, Jamaica, Ian Randle, 2002), p. 155.

⁴⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31/1 (1989), p. 154.

more disruptive, and the elite were therefore particularly concerned to regulate the sexual behaviour of white women.

Trevor Burnard has sought to analyse this concern, arguing that by the nineteenth century, white women in Jamaica had become ‘icons of domesticity and maternity rather than sexual beings’ and were important to the white male elite ‘only as the vehicles for the reproduction of free people’.⁵⁰ He cites the opinions of George Wilson Bridges, who saw white women as ‘paragons of virtue, domesticity and respectability’.⁵¹ Furthermore, as Cecily Jones has demonstrated, the white elite in Barbados were particularly concerned to control the sexuality of poor white women, in order ‘to keep the boundaries of whiteness from becoming blurred through white women forming sexual relationships with blacks.’⁵² When white women formed such relationships, the white elite lost the ability to control admission to the ranks of the free population because the progeny of all white women were born free. The planter elite therefore went to great lengths to prevent such relationships from forming.

The opinions of George Wilson Bridges reveal yet further connections between ideas about slavery, race, sex and gender among the white elite of early nineteenth-century Jamaica. For example, in his two-volume apology for the slave system, *The Annals of Jamaica*, Bridges described the ‘fond attachment’ and ‘the original servitude of the weaker sex’. He argued that the ‘fate of the mother naturally governed that of her offspring, over whom the father acquired the same propriety, with even increased power’ and that from this ‘conceded submission,

⁵⁰ Trevor Burnard, ‘“A Matron in Rank, A Prostitute in Manners”: The Manning Divorce of 1741 and Class, Gender, Race and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica’, in Shepherd, *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom*, pp. 148 – 149.

⁵¹ Burnard, ‘The Manning Divorce’, p. 147.

⁵² Forde-Jones, ‘Mapping Racial Boundaries’, pp. 9 – 11.

naturally sprang a mild and tender species of servitude'.⁵³ In other words, he argued that all women were as much natural servants as were blacks and the power of a father, or patriarch, extended over both his partner and his child. Clearly, for a man like Bridges, enslaved black men taking white female partners would have the potential to completely upset the boundaries of authority and power defined by the patriarchal white elite. A white woman giving birth, and with that freedom, to a non-white child would be exacerbated by the fact that a supposedly inferior, enslaved black man could claim 'propriety' over a child of white parentage. This scenario would mean that the ability to manage and regulate racial boundaries was outside white male control.

However, the law, combined with contemporary ideas about gender relations, meant that relations between white men and non-white women were far more easily tolerated. In fact, they were continually encouraged, albeit often tacitly, and played a large part in shaping Jamaican society and social relations in the period before emancipation. Such relations were, as we have seen, commonplace on Jamaican plantations, partly because of the few white women in Jamaica. However, demographic pressures can only partially explain the tendency for white men to take black and coloured mistresses. In fact, the white elite actually discouraged poor white men, such as the bookkeepers and overseers on the plantations, from taking wives as it was considered 'highly imprudent and impolitic for a young adventurer just bearing a part in the busy farce of life to enter into the bonds of *matrimony*'.⁵⁴ Elite commentators such as J. Stewart argued that poor white plantation staff could not afford to keep a white wife because an overseer or

⁵³ Bridges, *Annals*, vol. 2, p. 457.

⁵⁴ *The Columbian Magazine; or Monthly Miscellany*, vol. 1, August 1796, p. 162. In talking about wives for white men, elite commentators were implicitly discussing white women, as marriage to black or coloured women was a socially unacceptable for white men.

bookkeeper 'while still dependent' would 'run the risk of bringing difficulty and want on his wife and children'. Few planters would be prepared to employ a married man, seeing wives as an encumbrance, but employers did not consider brown concubines, even with children, to be objectionable.⁵⁵

These restrictions were informed by the interests of the white elite, who were concerned with the continual reinscription of the divisions between whites and blacks.⁵⁶ These ideas underpinned the opinions voiced in a letter written in 1796 and published in a Jamaican periodical. The writer suggested that a bachelor 'may require and receive those services from a *coloured* woman, which, in this country, it would be unusual, degrading, and perhaps cruel to look for from a wife.' This was because a poor white married couple would have been unable to afford a slave to perform domestic duties. The elite believed that household chores were degrading to any white women and associated these chores with servitude, just as they associated heavy manual labour with enslaved people. Therefore, the limited role allowed to white women in Jamaica meant that they were seen solely as the bearers of free children, whilst only a coloured or black woman could perform the combined 'duties of washer, maker, mender, cook, nurse, consoler, and comforter'.⁵⁷

Furthermore, concubinage might have received encouragement from the elite out of their desire to keep white women away from *any* potential sexual contact with black men. If allowed onto the plantations, poor white women and their female children would be free to interact regularly with enslaved people, and

⁵⁵ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 190 – 91.

⁵⁶ The marriage restrictions on Jamaican sugar plantations bear resemblance with those described by Ann Laura Stoler on the properties in Sumatra's plantation belt. My interpretation of the Jamaican context owes much to her analysis. See Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories', pp. 143 – 146 and *passim*.

⁵⁷ *The Columbian Magazine*, vol. 1, August 1796, pp. 163 – 64.

this had the potential to blur the lines of racial separation and undermine the planters' carefully constructed boundaries of rule.

An analysis of the planters' racial and gender concerns in Jamaica demonstrates that the white elite did not see all interracial sex as being, in itself, a problem. On the contrary, many elite white men appear to have believed that interracial sex between poor white men and enslaved women could even help to protect and preserve racial boundaries. This analysis bears out Ann Laura Stoler's theory that in colonial contexts, it was not the presence of mixed race children that was problematic 'but the possibility that they might be recognised as heirs to a European inheritance.'⁵⁸ In Jamaica, the most prized European inheritance was that of freedom, passed down by white women, which ensured that the planter elite rigorously regulated white female sexuality.

However, whilst the planters and other white men were determined not to allow freedom to pass to the non-white children of white mothers, they were prepared to grant freedom to some non-whites as a privilege. Whites periodically manumitted enslaved people both in their wills and during their lifetime.⁵⁹ The subjects of manumission were usually concubines or 'housekeepers'; the owners' own 'reputed mulatto children'; or privileged enslaved people, otherwise known as 'Confidentials', a group who, as John Campbell observes, had secured 'enhanced status within slave society either by birth, skill or through outstanding service to the white community'.⁶⁰ What made manumission very different in the eyes of the white male elite to the inheritance of free status through a white mother was that it was almost always granted by white men, who thereby retained their close control

⁵⁸ Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories', p. 154.

⁵⁹ For examples, see IRO, Wills LOS, vols 76 – 115; JA 1B/11/6, Manumissions.

⁶⁰ John Campbell, 'Reassessing the Consciousness of Labour and the Role of the "Confidentials" in Slave Society: Jamaica 1750 – 1834', *The Jamaican Historical Review*, 21 (2001), p. 23.

over exactly who was admitted into free society. Manumission did not allow non-whites to claim freedom as a right but it did allow white men to grant freedom as a privilege and a gift. In this way, it reaffirmed white male power, control and superiority.

Not all white men approved of this system, and one of the fears voiced by some among the elite was that the rising number of free coloureds would challenge and undermine their prestige and control in the colony. For example, Edward Long beseeched white men in Jamaica to avoid the ‘goatish embraces’ of their black and coloured mistresses and ‘perform the duty incumbent on every good citizen [*sic*], by raising in honourable wedlock a race of unadulterated beings’. This, he believed, would prevent Jamaica from falling from white control into the hands of ‘Negroes and Mulattos’.⁶¹ However, the concerns of men such as Long appear not to have been heeded, as by the early nineteenth century, manumission had contributed to the creation of such a large free coloured and free black population that the social structure of Jamaican society stood permanently altered.

The Assembly tried to ensure that this population of free non-whites did not encroach too far upon the racialised barriers that they relied upon to maintain their slave system. Therefore, whilst legally free, freedpeople faced restrictive laws, passed by the Assembly to limit their privileges. Laws passed by the Assembly in 1715 worked to exclude freedpeople from gaining employment on the plantations, thereby limiting their economic opportunities. Laws also ensured that free blacks and free coloureds could not participate in politics or hold public office, and legislation enacted in 1733 meant that non-white men lost the right to vote. Nevertheless, it was possible for individual freedpeople to petition the Assembly

⁶¹ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, p. 327 – 28.

and gain substantial extensions to their privileges, which meant that some of the wealthiest freedmen were granted similar rights to those enjoyed by white men.⁶²

However, further restrictions to the social and economic opportunities available to freedpeople came in 1761. The Assembly passed this legislation the year after the defeat of one of the largest slave rebellions to have occurred in Jamaica. These new restrictions therefore appear to reflect a heightened concern on the part of the white elite to maintain power and control by limiting opportunities available to non-whites in the aftermath of a significant challenge to their authority. The legislation limited the amount of property that freedpeople could inherit from white testators, and according to Gad Heuman, 'fewer and less generous' privileges were granted to those individual freedmen who petitioned for them after 1761.⁶³ These tightening restrictions on free coloureds represent an increased concern on the part of the elite over racial matters as slavery expanded and developed throughout the eighteenth century. The planters' changing attitudes show how racialised categories changed over time and how the need to regulate and control slave society meant that racialised social boundaries had become more entrenched and sharply defined by the early nineteenth century.⁶⁴

⁶² Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 5 – 6. The deficiency legislation of 1715 imposed fines upon planters who did not keep sufficient white men on their plantations in relation to the number of enslaved people. The law was intended to maintain the number of whites in proportion to blacks on the properties, thereby reducing the potential for a successful slave uprising. However, at least by the early nineteenth century, plantations repeatedly fell short of having the required numbers of whites, and the deficiency laws served simply as another source of revenue for the government. See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 5.

⁶³ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ This evidence appears to undermine Theodore Allen's claim that the economic and social elite in the British Caribbean attempted to maintain social control by building an alliance with free coloured people from the middle of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the elite's cultivation of solidarity between white men seems to have been more important to the structure and ordering of Jamaican slave society than Allen implies. See Allen, *White Race*, pp. 223 – 38.

However, as David Lambert has argued, the categories and boundaries that shaped Caribbean slave societies were always vulnerable to contestation.⁶⁵ The boundaries imposed by the elite could be both challenged and undermined. In Jamaica, the growing free coloured and free black population posed one of the greatest threats to the planters' system, and by the early nineteenth century, freedpeople were petitioning the Assembly for extensions to their privileges. In 1813, the legislature granted them the right to give evidence against whites in court cases as well as lifting the restrictions on inheritance. However, the Assembly reasserted its position that the 'free people of colour in this island have no right or claim whatever to political power'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, free non-whites maintained their pressure and, in 1830, the legislature granted them equal rights with whites, declaring that the free brown and black population of the island 'shall be entitled to have and enjoy all the rights, privileges, immunities, and advantages whatsoever, to which they would have been entitled if born to and descended from white ancestors.'⁶⁷

By 1830, the planters were an embattled minority facing outside criticism from Britain and social upheaval in Jamaica. Opposed from all quarters, it was no longer possible for the white elite to rely solely upon white male solidarity to exert control over Jamaican society. Some voiced concern that, by admitting freedpeople to the electorate, the Assembly risked throwing away white control. However, by 1830, the planters were so concerned to maintain slavery at all costs that many of them were willing to try to forge lines of alliance with non-white men. The decision

⁶⁵ Lambert has analysed the contested position of freedpeople and poor whites in Barbadian slave society. See David Lambert, 'Liminal Figures: Poor Whites, Freedmen, and Racial Reinscription in Colonial Barbados', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19 (2001).

⁶⁶ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ *Laws of Jamaica 1830 – 1837*, p. 35 (1 *Gul.* IV. xvii).

to try to induce non-whites into the pro-slavery cause was largely a failure, but the attempt to do this entailed a redrawing of the lines of privilege that divided free society.⁶⁸ For the first time, the planters were forced to overlook the logic of rule that had placed concerns about race and skin colour above all others. The legislation of 1830 therefore demonstrates the weak position of the white minority in Jamaica in the years before emancipation and marks the beginning of the breakdown of Jamaican slave society.

Conclusions

Using African and European trading networks to transport enslaved African labourers to New World plantations financed and controlled by Europeans, the slave system provided the brutal framework for the development of creole society in Jamaica. Expansion of the sugar industry in Jamaica was accompanied and made possible by a massive increase in the number of enslaved people of African descent on the island. In the eighteenth century, as planters looked entirely to slaves to release the profits that were possible through producing sugar and exporting it to Britain, a slave society developed in which enslaved people vastly outnumbered those who were free. Whites, most of whom were men, made up a small minority in Jamaica.

As elsewhere in the Americas, the slave-based plantation system in Jamaica relied upon the maintenance of gross inequalities between free and enslaved people. Notwithstanding the emergence of a large free coloured and free black population, European ideas of racial difference provided the main basis for dividing

⁶⁸ On the failure of the planters' measures, see Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 50 – 51, 83 – 96.

Jamaican society for most of the period before emancipation. Boundaries of rule that kept the vast majority of Africans and their descendants enslaved whilst guaranteeing freedom and a privileged social position for whites relied upon a discourse that reiterated ideas of black inferiority and white supremacy. This discourse of difference and separation was also heavily gendered. Legal status was passed down by a child's mother, which meant that the white elite, determined to control all access to free status, forbade sexual contact between white women and enslaved men whilst allowing white men to take non-white women as sexual partners.

Specifically tailored to control and order a unique form of New World society, in which the enslaved descendants of Africans comprehensively outnumbered the free descendants of Europeans, this system of oppression was itself a distinctively local, creole phenomenon. These boundaries of rule enabled the planters to retain their control over the labour of enslaved non-whites, thereby protecting their source of wealth. They also ensured that social and economic privileges devolved disproportionately upon white men, who tended to be a united social group because of their position as an embattled but advantaged minority in Jamaican slave society, in spite of the differences in social status that existed within white society. The planters therefore occupied a position of social and economic dominance whilst a range of limited privileges helped to ensure that many members of free society, especially white men, shared the elite's commitment to the slave system. As we will see, a commitment to defending slavery and the privileges that the system devolved on white men, along with adherence to ideas of deep racial difference, were key features of white settlers' creole outlook.

Proprietors and Property: Land, Slaves and the Ordering of Free Society

In early nineteenth-century Jamaica, from the perspective of the planters and other European settlers, land and slaves were the two most important items of property that they could possess. Even when the value of slaves declined rapidly in the 1820s, they still comprised over half of the value of many sugar planters' personal estates and often over two thirds.¹ Focussing mainly on the parish of St James, this chapter will show that during this period sugar planters owned the majority of the settled land and slaves. However, settlers with less land and fewer slaves outnumbered the planters. These settlers therefore had a large material stake in the institution of slavery and their support was crucial to the planters' efforts to maintain boundaries of rule within Jamaican society and retain control over the island.

As Verene Shepherd has noted, until recently, studies of proprietors other than sugar planters have been generally absent from historical works on Jamaica.² This oversight has occurred in spite of the fact that these proprietors outnumbered sugar planters in Jamaica's diverse economy. Some scholars have noted the presence and importance of this group. For example, Higman has argued that small,

¹ For examples, see JA 1B/11/3, Inventories, vol. 150, f. 77, James Vernon, 2 March 1833; JA 1B/11/3 vol. 150, f. 84, James Galloway, 24 December 1833.

² Verene A. Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status: Non-Sugar Producers in Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom', in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.), *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (Kingston, Jamaica, Ian Randle, 2002), p. 153.

strongly diversified agricultural units were common and widely dispersed, even if they did not dominate the economy or the enslaved population. In addition, Brathwaite has described smallholders and penkeepers as the most numerous and important group of ‘other’, or non-elite, whites in Jamaica, and asserted that they made a significant contribution to the society of the island.³ Since the 1970s, several scholars, including Shepherd, have made notable advances in the study of non-elite landowners and slaveholders in Jamaican slave society, laying important foundations for the further study of non-sugar-producing landowners.⁴ Nevertheless, we still have a limited understanding of the economic activity, aspirations, and social and political standing of this diverse social group.

In contrast to the historiography on Jamaica, numerous recent studies of non-elite whites have greatly enriched our understanding of slave society in the US South.⁵ For example, Stephanie McCurry has argued that, as landholding white men in a slave society, yeomen in South Carolina were ‘masters of small worlds’ with a large stake in slavery that ensured the local planters of their support. McCurry has therefore shown the central importance of this group to the planter class of the region.⁶ Shepherd has argued that, in the context of the Caribbean, ‘the

³ B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807 – 1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 14, 34; Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), p. 146.

⁴ For examples, see Simon D. Smith, ‘Coffee and the “Poorer Sort of People” in Jamaica during the Period of Slavery’, *Plantation Society in the Americas*, 2/3 (Fall 1998); Verene A. Shepherd and K. E. A. Monteith, ‘Non-sugar Proprietors in a Sugar Plantation Society’, *Plantation Society in the Americas*, 2/3 (Fall 1998); Verene A. Shepherd, ‘Livestock Farmers and Marginality in Jamaica’s Sugar-Plantation Society: A Tentative Analysis’, in Verene A. Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (eds), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2000); Douglas Hall, ‘Planters, Farmers and Gardeners in 18th Century Jamaica’, Elsa Govia Memorial Lecture, (Mona, Jamaica, University of the West Indies, 1987).

⁵ For examples, see Michele Gillespie, *Free Labour in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789 – 1860* (Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 2000); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995); Timothy J. Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750 – 1860* (Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 2000).

⁶ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, p. 304. and passim.

study of the sugar planter elite has been considered more socially significant than the study of other producers' and also draws attention to the 'more accessible documentation' available for the study of sugar producers.⁷ However, the neglect of non-elite landowners and slaveholders has served to hide their social significance. In fact it is difficult to account for the domination of the minority planter class in Jamaica without examining their unequal, yet mutually beneficial relations with non-sugar-producing land and slave owners.

St James parish

In order to provide a detailed analysis of economic and social relations between groups within free society during the period before emancipation, much of the analysis of this and subsequent chapters will be focussed on the parish of St James in the west of Jamaica. This is not because that parish was 'typical'; after all, economic variation existed across the island. However, as the main site of the Baptist War and a sugar-producing parish, St James provides an ideal point of focus for a study of the planter class and the events that led to emancipation in Jamaica.

By the nineteenth century, St James was a parish dominated by the sugar industry and this fact had a profound impact on the structure of society there. However, the dominance of sugar estates in the parish was at that time still a relatively recent occurrence. In 1735, there were 2,300 enslaved people settled in St

⁷ Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status', p. 154. Shepherd is correct to point out that it is more difficult to study other producers in Jamaican slave society than it is to study the planters themselves. However, her work stands as testimony to the fact that it is possible and that useful sources do exist. For examples, see Shepherd and Monteith, 'Non-sugar Proprietors in a Sugar Plantation Society'; Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status'.

James, and in 1739 the parish contained only eight sugar estates.⁸ However, the sugar industry in the area underwent a rapid expansion, and in 1774, there were nearly 17,000 enslaved people settled in the parish (see table 1).⁹ In the same year, Edward Long commented in amazement on the ‘rapid augmentation of settlements’ in St James, which he described as ‘the most thriving district in the island’.¹⁰

Table 1. The free and enslaved populations of the parish of St James, 1774

Where settled	Free Men	Free Women and Children	Total Free People	Percentage of Free Population	Slaves	Percentage of Enslaved Population	Stock
67 Sugar Estates	310	150	460	36.5 %	11,752	70.6 %	8,897
7 New Sugar Estates	22	5	27	2.1 %	805	4.8 %	567
63 'Second Degree' Settlements	90	112	202	16 %	3,044	18.3 %	1,000
91 'Third Degree' Settlements	71	90	161	12.8 %	1,055	6.3 %	252
Other White Inhabitants	120	30	150	11.9 %			
Other Free Blacks, Mulattos and Indians	62	200	262	20.8 %			
Totals	675	587	1,262	100	16,656	100	1,0716

Source: BL Add. MSS 12435, Long Manuscript.

Clearly, by the late eighteenth century, planters had established a prosperous sugar economy in St James and the pattern of slaveholding reflects the dominance of the industry. Smaller settlements far outnumbered the sugar estates, but the estates accounted for over three-quarters of the enslaved population of the parish (see table 1). By 1817, the sugar economy had expanded yet further, and the parish was home to over 25,000 slaves. Between this time and emancipation, St James had the fourth largest enslaved population of the twenty-one Jamaican

⁸ John Roby, *The History of the Parish of St James in Jamaica to the year 1740; with notes on the General History, Geneology, and Monumental Inscriptions of the Island* (Kingston, 1849), p. 165.

⁹ BL Add. MSS 12435, Long Manuscript.

¹⁰ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island*, 3 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1774] 1970), vol. 2, pp. 213, 216.

parishes.¹¹ No other parish matched the rapid rise of St James, which occurred along with the growth of Montego Bay, the principal port and town of the parish.¹² A close and reciprocal relationship developed between Montego Bay and its rural hinterland, and a varied economy developed, built around the booming sugar industry and the port town that provided the vital trading links to Africa and the metropolis, upon which that industry thrived.¹³

The rise and success of the parish of St James meant that, by the early nineteenth century, it was one of the most productive and populous parts of the island. Charting the economic decline of the parish is more difficult. However, it is possible to trace the relative monetary value that whites attached to enslaved people.¹⁴ The fact that slave labour and the manufacture of sugar were so closely linked means that these slave prices are a useful indicator of the fortunes of the sugar planters. In the years immediately following the abolition of the slave trade, slave prices in the parish rose gradually. This was probably because, after the supply of enslaved labourers from Africa had ended, relative scarcity ensured that their monetary value went up. However, these rising prices also indicate that those assessing the material value of enslaved people were still quite confident about the

¹¹ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, p. 256.

¹² In 1795, the formation of the Montego Bay Close Harbour Company, charged with the creation of a safer harbour, helped to ensure the mercantile significance of the town as the most lucrative Jamaican port other than Kingston. See H. P. Jacobs 'The History of Montego Bay & The Parish of St James', *The West Indian Review*, Montego Bay Souvenir edition (no date), p. 12; *Abridgement of the Third Volume of the Laws of Jamaica* (1788 – 93), pp. 58 – 59 (35 Geo. III. xxxiv).

¹³ The large majority of enslaved people arriving in Jamaica entered through Kingston. However, after Kingston, Montego Bay was the most popular first port of call for the traders. On direct imports from Africa, see David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson and Herbert S. Klein (eds), *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999). On the rapid growth of St James and Montego Bay, see Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, p. 216.

¹⁴ This is possible through extracting data from probate inventories for deceased people in the parish between 1807 and 1834. Two or more white men, charged by local magistrates with assessing the value of all the personal property of a deceased person, including enslaved people, created these documents. The figures in this analysis have been derived from a sample of 217 complete and partial inventories from the period. See JA 1B/11/3.

future of the sugar industry and the economic viability of purchasing and owning slaves. They still considered slaves to be a sound investment and prices remained relatively stable until the 1820s.¹⁵

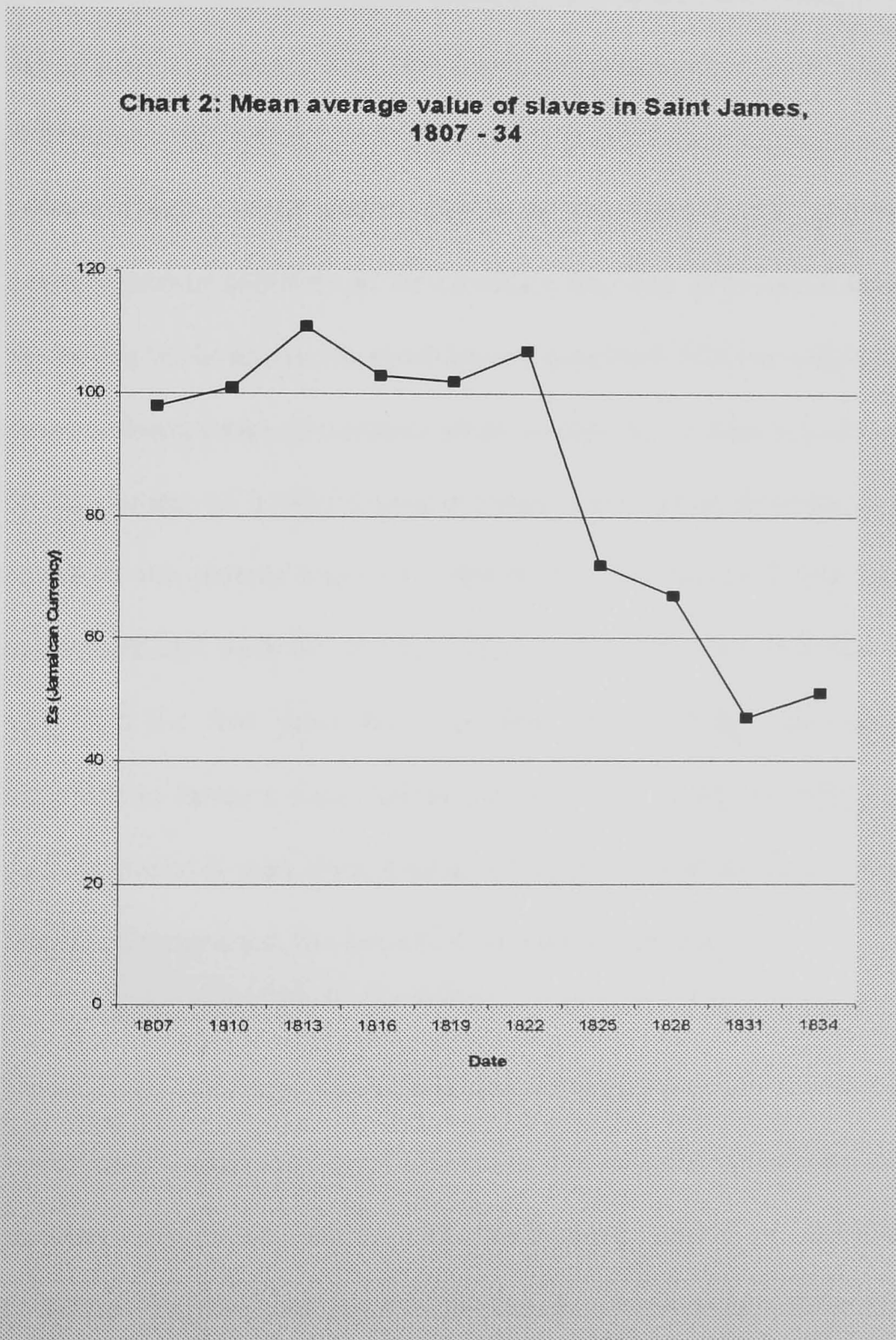
However at that point, the value attached to slaves in St James dropped dramatically. This precipitous drop coincided with the decision by the British Government in 1823 to commit to the eventual abolition of slavery. The potential threat of emancipation without compensation meant that slaveowners could stand to lose any money that they had invested in enslaved workers, although the fall in the monetary values attributed to enslaved workers might also have been connected to other factors, such as the falling price of sugar. Whatever the causes, slaves did not seem such a good investment in St James after the early 1820s. The average price of a slave dropped from £107 in 1822 to £47 in 1831. By 1834, slave prices had rallied slightly to an average of £51, perhaps in response to the news that emancipation would be accompanied by financial compensation to former owners for each slave freed (see chart 2).¹⁶

The declining monetary value attached to enslaved people may not be able to tell us much directly about the decline of the sugar industry in St James or the reasons for such a decline. However, it was a symptom of a wider crisis that affected slaveholders across the British Caribbean. In December 1831, this crisis became worse for the planter class, especially those in St James, when the Baptist War broke out in the parish, culminating in the destruction of over £1,000,000 of

¹⁵ This evidence appears to corroborate the arguments of J. R. Ward and Seymour Drescher, who both contend that the sugar economy in the West Indies continued to be profitable for some time after the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 before going into decline in the 1820s. See Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); J. R. Ward, 'The Profitability of Sugar Planting in the British West Indies, 1650 – 1834', in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds), *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1991), pp. 88 – 89.

¹⁶ JA 1B/11/3.

property.¹⁷ Therefore, although St James had expanded rapidly as a sugar-producing parish, immediately before emancipation in 1834, much of the once booming sugar industry lay figuratively, and in many cases literally, in ruins.



Source for chart 2: JA 1B/11/3

¹⁷ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, UWI Press, 1998), p. 148.

Land and slaves

In Jamaica, non-elite property owners outnumbered the owners of sugar plantations but, as we will see, they generally shared the planters' commitment to the system of slavery. This was partly because slaveholding and landownership were practically synonymous. This link is demonstrated by the wording of the land patents which granted settlers with land. The Government used these patents to devolve land to colonists on the condition that they paid annual taxes, fought with the militia in the event of a rebellion and complied with the deficiency laws, which required landowners to maintain white employees on their properties in proportion to the number of enslaved people settled there. Most significantly, however, the terms of the patents required colonists to open the land that they received to agriculture and maintain at least 'four negroes for every hundred acres upon the said land for five years from the time he shall begin the said settlement'.¹⁸ Colonists in Jamaica were therefore granted land on the condition that they settled and developed it with slave labour, which meant that as the rural development of the island progressed, the institution of slavery expanded.

As we have seen, in the 1770s, the majority of the enslaved population of St James lived on sugar plantations, but smaller holdings, possessed by non-elite whites and a small number of free coloureds, actually outnumbered the estates. Of the free population, nearly two thirds were settled on non-sugar-producing properties. Furthermore, most of the free people on sugar estates were poor white men employed as bookkeepers and overseers. We can therefore see that non-elite and poor whites vastly outnumbered the owners of sugar estates (see table 1).¹⁹

¹⁸ JA, Patents, vol. 36, f. 62, Jacob Graham, 19 December 1786.

¹⁹ BL Add. MSS 12435.

The Returns of Registrations of Slaves represent the best source for examining the distribution of slaves among slaveholders in the early nineteenth century and show a continuation of the pattern seen in St James in the 1770s. During the years leading up to emancipation, most enslaved people continued to live on sugar estates, whilst the free population was dominated demographically by non-sugar producers. The returns were compiled triennially after 1817 and required that every individual in Jamaica who owned or was responsible for slaves make a return of the number of slaves in their possession. The British government imposed this system upon the colony, influenced by the abolitionist lobby, who believed that slavery should have naturally ceased to exist following the abolition of the slave trade.²⁰

The returns reveal that, on 28 June 1817, there were 991 slave holdings in St James, and that there were about 25,800 enslaved people settled in the parish.²¹ Sugar production required a large workforce, and most of the holdings of a hundred or more enslaved people represented sugar plantations. Sugar estates usually required the labour of over one hundred slaves to operate, although in the 1790s Bryan Edwards estimated that at least 250 slaves were necessary for an estate to operate successfully.²² However, there were often fewer than 150 enslaved people settled on sugar estates in St James and neighbouring Westmoreland, and since planters had the option of hiring labourers for the busiest times of the year, holdings with fewer than 100 enslaved people actually settled on them could

²⁰ Abolitionists suspected that enslaved people were being smuggled into British colonies, artificially bolstering the system, and believed that regular registration was the best way to ensure the prevention of such illegal activity. The law made the parish vestry responsible for the collection of the returns, and those failing to make a full and accurate return faced strict financial penalties. See Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 45 – 51. On the colonists' acceptance of the registration scheme, see chapter 5 below.

²¹ T71/201 – 204.

²² Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols (New York, Arno Press, [1793] 1972), vol. 2, pp. 244 - 45.

produce harvests of sugar.²³ Banks Estate in St Ann, for example, was advertised for sale along with just '96 Negroes and 49 head of Stock'.²⁴

A comparison between the returns and lists of landowners compiled by the parish vestry for tax purposes, shows that there were around eighty sugar estates in St James in 1817.²⁵ Holdings of over 100 slaves accounted for just eight per cent of all of the 991 holdings registered in 1817. However, the importance of these relatively few sugar plantations is strongly underlined by the fact that nearly 17,000 enslaved people, sixty-six per cent of all enslaved people in the parish, lived on these holdings.²⁶ Therefore, most enslaved people in the parish lived on the estates. The fact that the few men who comprised the planter class owned the vast majority of the slaves in St James is evidence of economic dominance by this small social group. As we will see, they also owned the majority of the settled land in the region, and their huge share of the two most important resources in early nineteenth-century Jamaica underlines their position as a powerful and privileged elite.

Nevertheless, small holdings of slaves were far more numerous than the large holdings necessary for the cultivation and processing of sugar cane. Indeed, many slave holdings in St James consisted of just one or two enslaved people, and holdings of just one slave made up nearly 18 percent of all those registered (see table 2).²⁷ Over half of all slaveholdings in the parish were comprised of five slaves

²³ T71/201 – 204; JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland, Roll of the Land and Quit Rent Tax, 1804 and Westmoreland, Roll of the Poll, Road and Parish Tax, 1804. Estates' accounts show that 'jobbing' gangs of hired slaves frequently performed work on the estates. For example, see JA 1B/11/5, Accounts Current, vol. 23, f. 27.

²⁴ *Royal Gazette*, Saturday 8 to Saturday 15 June 1811.

²⁵ T71/201 – 204; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817. Though less complete or detailed than the Returns of Registrations, the vestry returns often referred to properties by name and identified them as sugar estates. Both sources include the names of the owners of properties, making it possible to use them together to obtain a clearer picture of patterns of slaveholding.

²⁶ T71/201 – 204.

²⁷ T71/201 – 204.

or less, and eighty per cent of all holdings comprised twenty or fewer slaves. The planters were therefore vastly outnumbered by other free settlers as well as by enslaved people. The sheer number of small holdings of slaves in St James and in other parishes is one of the most striking features of Jamaican society revealed by the returns.²⁸ As we will see, this demographic situation made it imperative for plantation owners to co-opt support from other social groups to protect both the institution of slavery and their own position at the top of Jamaican society.

The fact that even poor settlers could hold slaves is also demonstrated by probate inventories, which assessed the value of individuals' personal estates following their death. These show that even relatively poor white men who worked for salaries on the sugar estates owned slaves.²⁹ A letter from John Gale Vidal, who managed the Jamaican properties of William Mitchell, a wealthy absentee, provides an impression of what constituted poverty for a white man in Jamaica. In 1821, Vidal informed his employer that a 'poor man', Gilbert Caddell, had 'lately departed this life' and went on to state that 'his estate is a very poor one, consisting only of 4 or 5 Slaves and about three hundred pounds of this money.'³⁰ Caddell, had apparently been employed on Mitchell's Bushy-Park estate in the parish of St Dorothy. Vidal's comments about Caddell's economic status show that a personal estate valued at just a few hundred pounds did not represent a great amount of wealth. More importantly, Vidal's words demonstrate how in Jamaica it was possible for a white man to own slaves and still be considered 'poor'. Slaveholding

²⁸ On the sizes of slaveholdings in all parishes, see Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 274 – 75.

²⁹ For examples, see JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 138, Thomas McNairn, 16 June 1834; chapters 3 and 4 below.

³⁰ JA 1B/5/83/1, Attorney's Letter Book, f. 16, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, Moreland, 9 August 1821.

was therefore relatively ubiquitous and linked white men from across the social divide.

Table 2. Slave holdings in St James, 1817

Enslaved people per holding	No. of holdings	Percentage of total holdings	Cumulative percentage of total holdings	No of enslaved people	Percentage of enslaved population	Cumulative percentage of enslaved population
201 or more	36	4%	4%	10,831	42%	42%
151 to 200	19	2%	6%	3,342	13%	55%
101 to 150	22	2%	8%	2,725	11%	66%
51 to 100	27	3%	11%	1,989	8%	72%
41 to 50	16	2%	13%	737	3%	75%
31 to 40	34	3%	16%	1,182	5%	80%
21 to 30	38	4%	20%	932	4%	84%
11 to 20	101	10%	30%	1,462	6%	90%
6 to 10	168	17%	47%	1,285	5%	95%
1 to 5	530	53%	100%	1,307	5%	100%
Totals	991	100%		25,792	100%	

Source: T71 201 – 204.

Most slaveholders in St James were male. However, the evidence from the returns shows that women frequently owned slaves, but that they were likely to be possessed of a smaller than average holding. Furthermore, the records show some of those making returns to have been either free coloureds or free blacks. For example, Elizabeth Miller Lithead, a free-coloured woman, had fourteen slaves. Of all the slaveowners in the returns who were identified as having been black or coloured, she owned the most slaves, demonstrating that free blacks and free coloureds generally did not have large slave holdings and therefore did not operate large-scale agricultural concerns.³¹ However, there is evidence that the returns did not always identify slaveholders by their colour. For example, the returns state that John Manderson, a free coloured merchant from Montego Bay, owned twenty-

³¹ T71/201 – 204.

seven slaves in 1817, but make no reference to the fact that he was a free coloured man.³² This suggests that many more of the slaveowners in St James were freedpeople than is revealed by the Returns of Registrations.

The data available from the returns also suggest a very high level of resident ownership amongst the proprietors of small slave holdings. By contrast, the large number of professional planters, known as ‘attorneys’, who made returns for plantations with 100 slaves or more reveals that the owners of sugar plantations in St James were often absentees, who employed local managers to run their affairs in Jamaica (see table 3).³³

Table 3. Rates of resident slaveownership in St James, 1817

Enslaved people per holding	No. of holdings	Returns made by owners	Returns made by attorneys	Returns made by others
100 or more	77	14	50	13
51 to 100	27	14	7	6
11 to 50	189	141	19	29
1 to 10	698	511	40	147
Totals	991	680	116	195

Source: T71 201 – 204.

In spite of the large number of absentees among the owners of estates, there were some resident owners with large holdings of slaves. These resident planters constituted a local elite and many of them acted as attorneys for absent proprietors.³⁴ Nevertheless, by the early nineteenth century, there were some professional attorneys who did not own sugar plantations of their own, and who relied mainly on income derived from acting as managers to absentees. Such white

³² T71/201 – 204; Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 57 – 58.

³³ T71/201 – 204. In order to take over the affairs of an absentee, it was necessary to obtain a ‘power of attorney’, a legal document, confirming the right of the bearer to act on another’s behalf. This would appear to explain why these locally based managers were referred to as ‘attorneys’.

³⁴ T71/201 – 204.

men who owned real estate and slaves, but who were not actually estate owners, could benefit greatly from slavery by using the wealth and prestige gained from the management of sugar estates to obtain positions of political influence on the island.³⁵

Inventories listing personal property, the Returns of Registrations and annual reports to the parish vestries all provide extant sources with which to analyse patterns of slaveholding in early nineteenth-century Jamaica. However, far less listed information on the distribution of real estate during this period has survived. Tax records from Westmoreland, a sugar-producing parish adjacent to St James, are a rare and valuable exception.³⁶ There were many similarities between Westmoreland and St James. For example, before 1834, there were over 20,000 enslaved people in Westmoreland and, as in St James, the majority of them lived on large holdings likely to have been sugar estates.³⁷ Information on landholding patterns in Westmoreland, combined with that on slaveholding in St James, gives a clear impression of the distribution of both land and slaves in Jamaican free society.

According to Edwards, most sugar plantations comprised 900 or more acres. However, he added that the nature of the land in Jamaica meant that most plantations there were larger than this. He also conceded that some plantations might be much smaller, stating that, as long as there were three hundred acres available on which to plant sugar cane, sugar plantations could operate with just 600 acres.³⁸ In Westmoreland, most sugar estates appear to have been larger than

³⁵ An example of such a manager is John Gale Vidal, who did not own a plantation when he commenced work as an attorney. Vidal was attorney to the Mitchell family and had control over some of the largest properties in Jamaica. See JA 1B/5/83/1 – 2. See also chapters 3 and 4 below.

³⁶ JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804.

³⁷ Higman, *Slave Population and Economy*, pp. 256, 274.

³⁸ Edwards, *History*, vol. 2, p. 141.

1,000 acres, but estates in this part of the island could be much smaller. John Perry's Abingdon estate in Hanover covered as little as 466 acres.³⁹

By comparing the Westmoreland land tax data from 1804 with other tax records for the same parish and year, it is possible to see how many enslaved and white people lived on properties in the parish, along with the number of livestock held on each property. In Westmoreland, most of the 73 properties of 1,000 or more acres had enslaved populations of a hundred or more, and undoubtedly most of these properties were sugar estates. However, the large amount of livestock on a small number of these properties suggests that some were large livestock rearing pens.⁴⁰

Table 4. Distribution of settled land into holdings in the parish of Westmoreland, 1804

Size of Holdings in Acres	Number of holdings	Percentage of total holdings	Acres of land	Percentage of total settled land	Cumulative percentage of land
3001 +	12	6%	51,574	30%	30%
2501 – 3000	4	2%	10,605	6%	46%
2001 – 2500	10	5%	22,191	13%	49%
1501 – 2000	17	8%	29,451	17%	66%
1001 – 1500	18	9%	20,811	12%	82%
501 – 1000	29	14%	21,257	12.5%	90.5%
1 – 500	115	56%	16,242	9.5%	100%
Totals	205	100	172,131	100	

Source: JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804.

The Westmoreland tax data show that most of the settled land in the parish belonged to owners of sugar plantations. Holdings of over 1,000 acres accounted for over 80 per cent of settled land in the parish.⁴¹ Owners of these holdings made

³⁹ JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 81, f. 114, John Perry, 19 October 1806.

⁴⁰ JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804.

⁴¹ JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804.

up the landed elite and some owned more than one large property. However, in spite of the dominance of large landowners, there were many owners of smaller holdings, and the vast majority of properties under 1,000 acres had too few enslaved people on them to have been sugar plantations. Although settlers with holdings of fewer than 1,000 acres owned just a fifth of the settled land in Westmoreland, they outnumbered the planters by four to one in the parish. Indeed, most land holdings were smaller than 500 acres (see table 4).⁴² This reinforces evidence from St James, demonstrating that the planters were a very small minority, vastly outnumbered by other free settlers.

Another striking feature of the pattern of land holding in Westmoreland is the number of women who owned land and slaves. There were twenty-seven female landowners recorded in the parish in 1804. Only one, Mary Ann Blake, had sufficient holdings of land, slaves and livestock to have been a sugar plantation owner, and if her land holding was indeed a sugar plantation, at 350 acres it was a very small one.⁴³ In Westmoreland in 1804, twenty-four women were slaveholders, although most owned fewer than fifty slaves. Most owned at least some livestock. Interestingly, these returns, with the exception of that of Mary Ann Blake, record only one white person as having been resident on the properties belonging to these women, thereby suggesting that white women managed properties single-handedly.⁴⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, close contact between white women and black men was strongly discouraged by the elite white men who governed Jamaica. As such, the fact that single white women owned land and

⁴² JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804.

⁴³ JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804. According to these returns, Blake owned 112 slaves, 38 head of stock and 350 acres of land.

⁴⁴ JA 2/7/1/1, Westmoreland Tax Rolls, 1804. These records imply that these women were the only whites resident on their properties.

slaves seems remarkable and shows that, in practice, women were able acquire land and slaves and manage both, thereby overcoming the limitations set by the boundaries that elite men sought to impose on Jamaican society. The evidence from St James also shows that women frequently owned slaves and that some of these slaveholders were free coloured or free black women. Therefore, despite the restrictions that they faced, white and non-white free women could become land and slaveholders and thereby reap direct profits from the institution of slavery.

Nevertheless, the fact that in Westmoreland all women slaveholders lived on relatively small holdings, without the necessary resources to plant sugar demonstrates that the ownership of large plantations and large holdings of slaves was something almost exclusively reserved for men. The evidence from St James also shows that women generally made returns for relatively small holdings of slaves and that all of the largest holdings in the parish were controlled by men. It is therefore apparent that although women did have the opportunity to enter into the markets for land and slaves, they did so less frequently than men and were marginalised on account of their gender. Most owners of land and slaves were men, and although small settlements vastly outnumbered sugar plantations, the vast majority of land and slaves were in the hands of a small and privileged elite.

Conclusions

In Jamaica, the actual owners of sugar plantations made up a small group. Indeed, many plantation owners chose to leave the island and live in Britain, though a significant number remained. As well as managing their own properties, these resident proprietors often looked after the affairs of absentees. They were also

the most important section of the local elite. The phenomenon of planter domination and white male privilege was most evident in patterns of land and slave ownership. Most land and slaves were in the hands of the owners of sugar plantations. However, slaveholding was by no means restricted to this elite. A material investment in slaves permeated free society. The vast majority of these slaveholders were white men, though some among them were free non-whites and women. Such non-elite slaveowners, who often also owned smallholdings of land, easily outnumbered the planters, which meant that most of those with a strong personal interest in the preservation of slavery were in fact not sugar planters.

The ubiquity and importance of slavery in Jamaica meant that pro-slavery politics on the island was by no means limited to the planters. Indeed, as the future of slavery was pushed to the top of the political agenda in both Britain and Jamaica, a wide range of white colonists, and some free coloureds and free blacks, displayed a willingness to defend the institution in the face of metropolitan criticism. As we will see, plantation owners led local opposition to the anti-slavery stance of the British Government, abolitionists, and non-conformist missionaries, but other white men also played a vital role in attempting to defend slavery and the existing patterns of rule in Jamaican slave society.⁴⁵ These settlers had a large stake in slavery, and they offered staunch support to the planters' defence of the institution.

Other groups within free Jamaican society were politically silenced or had less interest in defending slavery. For example, female slaveowners were largely marginalised in public life and were rarely able to express political views. As such, the opinions of white women settlers are largely absent from the historical record,

⁴⁵ See chapters 5 – 8 below.

and the extant evidence shows that women were largely excluded from participating in public debates over slavery.

Free coloured and free black men did participate in these public contests, but were frequently divided, because whilst many owned slaves, the racialised boundaries of power that accompanied slavery also disempowered them. In this sense, the freedpeople were a liminal group, occupying a precarious position in Jamaican society between the privileged whites and the enslaved majority. They enjoyed some of the advantages of white colonists, notably freedom and the chance to own slaves. However, like those enslaved on the island, they faced discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, which made them second-class citizens within free society and curtailed their ability to pursue their economic, political and social ambitions.⁴⁶ Free coloured and free black people in Jamaica enjoyed different levels of wealth and social status and, as a result, they were divided in their political opinions, not least over the issue of slavery. This meant that in 1830, when the white elite attempted to redraw the boundaries of rule in Jamaica to encompass freedmen, their efforts to win the political support of this group were met with only very limited success.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Heuman, *Between Black and White*; chapter 4 below.

⁴⁷ These issues are discussed in detail in the following chapters. See also, Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 44 – 53.

Economic Dominance and Economic Dependence: The Sugar Estates and Free Society

In his *View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica*, published in 1823, J. Stewart devoted a chapter to ‘giving an account of the different classes and professions in this island’. In beginning this account of those involved in the economy of the island, he wrote: ‘it is proper to begin with the planters, or proprietors of estates, who are by far the most opulent and important, and without whom, indeed, there would be little employment for any other.’¹ Stewart thereby highlighted the fact that the planters were the most powerful and wealthy group in the colony, but he also made the point that the economy revolved around the sugar estates. As the last chapter emphasised, it is important to recognise that other free settlers and other slaveholders vastly outnumbered the owners of sugar estates and played a crucial social role. However, as Barry Higman points out, whilst small and diverse agricultural units were very common and widely dispersed, they did not dominate the Jamaican economy.² This domination, as Stewart argues, was the place of the sugar plantations. Other sectors of the economy, with the possible exceptions of coffee and pimento, were ancillary to sugar production, and in this way, other economic actors on the island were dependent on the sugar planters.

¹ J. Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (New York, Negro Universities Press, [1823] 1969), p. 183.

² B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica: 1807 – 1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, [1976] 1979), p. 34.

In *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, Brathwaite described how part of the response of Jamaican colonists to the cessation of imports of supplies and equipment from the American mainland after the American War of Independence was ‘local – creole – in character’. Under British rule, Jamaica had always had a diverse economy, but this was especially important from the late eighteenth century, as the break-up of the British American Empire meant that self-reliance became more important. However, Brathwaite argued that, in spite of this creole response, colonists failed to find effective local alternatives to the trade with America and remained dependent on outside support. According to Brathwaite, ‘there might have been greater efforts made to “creolize” the economy’, but the sugar planters of the island ‘remained conservative’ and ‘alternative sources of supply within the island, were never seriously explored.’ Instead, they received British imports, lobbied for the reinstatement and expansion of trading links with the US, and accepted imports of livestock from the Spanish Caribbean.³

Implicit in Brathwaite’s analysis is a presumption that it was possible to distinguish between a local, creole economy, geared towards maximum self-sufficiency, and a non-creole, or colonial economy, which was dependent on outside links for plantation inputs. He argued that the dependency fostered by outside links, especially to Britain, was brought about by the planters’ conservatism and was part of a process in the pre-emancipation period whereby the ‘creatively “creole” elements of the society were being rendered ineffective by the more reactionary “colonial”.’⁴ However, as Verene Shepherd has more recently

³ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica: 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), pp. 80 – 95; Verene A. Shepherd, ‘Questioning Creole: Domestic Producers in Jamaica’s Plantation Economy’, in Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (eds), *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002), pp. 173 – 177.

⁴ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 92 – 94, 100.

suggested, there are apparent ‘contradictions in the very notion of a “Creole economy” within a plantation system which was export-dependent’.⁵ In fact, as long as the Jamaican economy remained dependent on the export-focussed sugar estates, it is impossible to see the potential even for parts of that economy to be self-sufficient and independently ‘creole’ according to Brathwaite’s use of the term.

As this chapter will demonstrate, many free people, whether traders, landowners, jobbers, craftsmen or wage earners, were dependent in some way on the sugar industry for their income. Many of them were local producers and traded exclusively within the island and were therefore contributing to the local economy, but it would be analytically limiting to describe such activity as ‘creole’ and see it being somehow divorced from wider transatlantic, or colonial networks of production and exchange. In fact, the creole and colonial economy were intimately linked in Jamaica during this period, and plantations, as well as smaller diversified settlements, were tied in various ways to both the local and the wider world economy. As Higman argues in his detailed study of Montpelier in St James, the ‘history of the estate must be understood in terms of a series of larger regions, from the Great River Valley to the Atlantic Ocean.’⁶ In the same way, all properties and producers in Jamaica were somehow tied to wider economic networks, which meant that the Jamaican economy was both creole and colonial, local and transatlantic.

Despite the significance of enslaved producers and traders within the local economy of the island, this chapter is primarily concerned with the economic

⁵ Shepherd, ‘Questioning Creole’, p. 178.

⁶ B. W. Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739 – 1912* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, 1998), p. 296.

activity of free settlers.⁷ It will question how far economic dependency linked other free people in Jamaican society to the fortunes and aims of the planter elite, concluding that the central importance of the sugar plantations in the Jamaican economy was another vital factor that bound many free people to the planter class. It will also examine the limits of this economic dependency and argue that two groups, namely free non-whites and missionaries, were less affected than others by strong economic ties to the planters. These groups did not foresee a non-colonial future for Jamaica, but they did campaign for far-reaching reforms, notably the ending of slavery. The chapter will therefore conclude that differing economic interests in free society contributed towards the political and social tensions that preceded emancipation and helped to undermine the planters' position.

Probate inventories have provided much of the evidence for the following analysis of relations between sugar planters and other economic groups in Jamaica. Tax data and the Returns of Registrations of slaves can demonstrate the usage of land and the division of the enslaved population into holdings, but do not give precise details about the wealth of those taxed or making returns. However, by using a large sample of inventories from the parish of St James, it has been possible to assess the distribution of wealth in St James during the early nineteenth century. These inventories listed and evaluated the personal estates of deceased free people and were part of the process of dividing and disposing of property after a death. To create these documents, two local white men were appointed by magistrates and

⁷ Enslaved people played a vital role in the Jamaican economy. As Higman observes, Jamaica had the most highly developed provision ground system in the Caribbean, which meant that enslaved people were responsible for producing their own food and led to a local internal marketing system that involved labourers in trade for food, livestock and other articles. See Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 3 – 4, 191 – 257. On the economic activities of Jamaican slaves, see also Sidney W. Mintz, 'The Origins of the Jamaican Marketing System', in Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York, Columbia University Press, [1974] 1989); Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), pp. 45 – 47.

instructed to work with the executors or administrators of the estate to provide an 'inventory and appraisement of all and singular the goods and chattels rights and credits' of the deceased.⁸

Inventories can provide insights into the occupational structure in St James in the early nineteenth century, since they often referred to the deceased by their occupation. Furthermore, by detailing and evaluating the extent of a deceased person's personal estate, probate inventories can give accurate and useful information about that person's occupation by describing things such as the tools they used, commodities they sold and animals that they raised. In this way, the sample of 210 inventories from St James for the period between 1807 and 1834 can provide information on the social status and occupations of those free people who lived in the parish as well as simply shedding light on the distribution of wealth.

However, the inventories inevitably represent an imperfect source. Their most obvious flaw is that they were not required to contain details of real estate and are therefore generally limited to lists of personalty that had belonged to the deceased. Richard Sheridan notes that they are 'thought to have served as the basis for the assessment of a hereditaments tax', which suggests that the creation of inventories was compulsory, thereby increasing their usefulness as a source.⁹ However, the link to taxation might also have encouraged underassessment and underreporting, as the administrators and executors involved tried to keep down the cost of the whole process of evaluating and dividing the estate. For this reason, individuals may have begun to divide and dispose of their estates before they died. Equally, those left responsible for a deceased person's estate may well have sold or

⁸ See JA 1B/11/3, Inventories, vols 108 – 50.

⁹ Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623 – 1775* (Kingston, Canoe Press, [1974] 2000), p. 215.

given some of the property away before the creation of the inventory. The fact that assessors often compiled inventories several months after the person in question had died increases the likelihood that this sort of disposal of property occurred in the intervening period. These factors, along with the fact that the Island Secretary's Office levied a charge on each sheet used in the inventories, all tend to the conclusion that the extant inventories for the period are more likely to show an underestimation of the value and extent of personal estates.¹⁰

It also seems likely that the surviving documents are weighted towards the wealthy in society, as the expenses involved would have been harder to meet for those left in charge of smaller and less valuable estates, which would have been relatively easy to divide and liquidate informally without going through the official process of creating an inventory. These possible flaws in the source material therefore affect the following discussion. However, that analysis leads to the conclusion that the planters were a small minority with the greatest share of wealth in Jamaican society. Therefore, if a more complete data set were to include more inventories for the estates of poor and non-elite members of free society, it would still not undermine this basic conclusion.

The economic elite

In Jamaica, the predominance of the sugar industry helped to form the basis for the estate owners' economic, social and political domination of the colony. As Shepherd has pointed out, contemporary and modern writers have stressed the 'superordinate position' of the plantocracy within Caribbean slave societies

¹⁰ See JA 1B/11/3, vols 108 – 50.

dominated by the sugar plantation system.¹¹ However, in spite of the regularly reiterated fact of the planters' economic privilege, we lack a detailed understanding of how the planters' wealth compared with the wealth of others in free Jamaican society.

Table 5. Distribution of wealth in the parish of St James, 1807 – 1834

Value	Number of probated estates	Percentage of total inventories	Cumulative percentage of total inventories	Total value of estates	Mean value of estates	Percentage of total wealth	Cumulative percentage of total wealth
£1 - £5,000	168	80%	80%	£204,005	£1,214	13.5%	13.5%
£5,001 - £10,000	21	10%	90%	£147,116	£7,006	10%	23.5%
10,001 – 50,000	16	7.5%	97.5%	£389,551	£24,347	26%	49.5%
£50,001 - £200,000	5	2.5%	100%	£757,747	£151,549	50.5%	100%
Total	210	100%		£1,498,419		100%	

Source: JA 1B/11/3, Inventories, Vols 108 - 50.¹²

Of the 210 estates in the sample of inventories from St James, only those of five individuals amounted to over £50,000 Jamaican currency (see table 5). In terms of the distribution of wealth, this meant that over half of the personal wealth in the parish was in the hands of the richest 2.5 per cent of the free population. All of those five individuals, with the exception of John Fray, a very wealthy Montego-

¹¹ Verene A. Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status: Non-Sugar Producers in Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom', in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.), *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002), p. 153.

¹² Tables 1, 2 and 3 are based on a triennial sampling of the inventories from the Parish of St James. A complete sample of the inventories from the parish was made for the years 1807, 1810, 1813 and so on, up to and including 1834. For the purposes of creating this sample, inventories were dated according to the date that they were returned to the Island Secretary's office for enrolment. The inventories did list realty, but only rarely and inconsistently. Therefore, for the purposes of creating these tables, where inventories listed realty, its value was deducted from the total value of the inventoried estate.

Bay merchant, were sugar planters. Until the 1830s, when the declining price of slaves came to affect the valuation of plantation owners' estates, no planter's personal estate was valued at less than £10,000, yet 90 per cent of the free population had estates valued at £10,000 or less. Indeed, the vast majority of estates were valued at considerably less than £5,000, showing that the planters, whilst also dominating land and slave ownership, were indisputably a very small and materially privileged economic elite.¹³

Table 6. Distribution of wealth by status and occupation in the parish of St James, 1807 - 1834

Status/ Occupation	Number of Inventoried estates	Total inventoried wealth	Median estate's value	Mean average value of personal estates	Percentage of total wealth
Sugar Planter	15	£906,905	£29,895	£60,460	60.5%
'Merchant'	5	£191,294	£15,535	£38,259	12.8%
'Esquire'	45	£141,904	£2,233	£3,153	9.5%
Doctor	10	£35,195	£1,689	£3,520	2.4%
'Widow' / 'Spinster'	17	£68,462	£1,500	£4,027	4.6%
Store Keeper	4	£7,168	£1,052	£1,792	0.5%
Artisan	38	£79,115	£1,051	£2,082	5.3%
'Gentleman'	11	£9,549	£530	£868	0.6%
Free Person of Colour	8	£5,378	£391	£672	0.4%
'Planter'	50	£40,740	£259	£815	2.7%
Others	7	£12,709	N/A	N/A	0.9%
Totals	210	£1,498,419			100%

Source: JA 1B/11/3, Vols 108 - 50.

The information provided by the inventories makes it possible to get a clearer idea of the wealth of the planter class in relation to that of the remainder of St James free society (see table 6). Between 1807 and 1834, the planters were by far the wealthiest group in the parish. The personal estates of the fifteen planters in the sample of inventories accounted for over 60 per cent of all inventoried wealth.

¹³ See JA 1B/11/3, vols 108 - 50.

These planters' estates ranged in value from James Vernon's, assessed at £6,561 in 1834, to £196,084, the assessed value of John Cunningham's estate in 1812.¹⁴ The value of Vernon's estate was comparatively small for a sugar planter, but this was partly due to the falling valuation of slaves. In 1816, Jacob Graham's 157 slaves were valued at £16,850.¹⁵ Vernon had 150 slaves when he died in 1834, but those assessing his property valued these enslaved people at just £4,765.¹⁶ Plummeting slave prices therefore cut the value of planters' personal estates during the course of the early nineteenth century, but since other groups also had large investments in slavery, the planters' position at the top of St James wealth structure remained secure (see table 7).

The examples of John Cunningham and James Vernon illustrate the fact that there were vast differences in the wealth of individual planters. Cunningham owned several plantations and other properties in different parishes. By 1834, Vernon owned just one plantation, Stonehenge in Trelawny, though he had also previously inherited Mount-Vernon in St James.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Vernon lived a luxurious lifestyle. He appears to have travelled in comfort, owning eleven horses and a horse-drawn gig. He was also able to entertain in style, with a collection of mahogany furniture and silver tableware.¹⁸ In terms of comfort and luxury, his lifestyle appears to have surpassed those of the vast majority of free people in St James. Cunningham, on the other hand, could entertain in greater style at a variety of locations. His 'Hill House' near Montego Bay contained an array of ornate furniture, musical instruments, a 'large Turkey carpet' and plenty of wine and

¹⁴ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 77, James Vernon, 2 Mar 1833; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 58. John Cunningham, 28 Dec 1812.

¹⁵ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 128, f. 53, Jacob Graham, 9 Sep 1816.

¹⁶ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 77.

¹⁷ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 77; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; 'List of Properties Burned, With Proprietors' Names, and Number of Slaves' in *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832.

¹⁸ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 77.

liquor.¹⁹ Therefore, in terms of opulence and comfort, the lifestyle of the very richest planters such as Cunningham outstripped not only those of the majority of free people in St James but also those of most other estate owners.

Table 7. Personal wealth of sugar planters in St James, 1807 - 1834

Name	Date	No of Slaves	Value of Slaves	Value of Livestock	Other Possessions	Debts Due and Cash	Total
Handaside Edgar	1807	178	£17,335	£5,784	£4,694	£927	£28,740
John Largie	1807	133	£11,385	£2,010	£409	£309	£14,113
Thomas Dunn	1810	206	£19,124	£1,240	£7,443	£2,088	£29,895
John Hilton	1810	340	£30,320	£8,266	£1,835	£719	£41,140
John Perry ²⁰	1810	156	£17,660	£2,827	£4,475	£0	
	1810	13	£1,600	£1,087	£1,830	£64,221	£93,700
Isaac Lascelles Winn	1810	115	£13,290	£4,543	£800	£5,069	£23,702
John Cunningham	1813	1163.7	£129,291	£27,977	£12,418	£26,398	£196,084
Herbert Newton Jarrett	1813	912	£100,980	£14,543	£2,301	£47,600	£165,424
Jacob Graham	1816	157	£16,850	£1,472	£426	£0	£18,748
Dougald Campbell	1819	301	£28,490	£3,683	£1,977	£11,972	£46,122
William Allen ²¹	1825	354	£25,780	£8,717	£832	£7,561	
	1828		£0	£0	£70	£2,947	£45,907
Sir Simon Haughton Clarke	1834	2303	£125,100	£42,534	£3,520	£1,575	£172,729
James Galloway	1834	234	£8,930	£2,297	£1,288	£2,273	£14,789
William Reynolds	1834	119	£4,575	£1,089	£524	£2,500	£8,688
James Vernon	1834	150	£4,765	£1,398	£398	£0	£6,561

Source: JA 1B/11/3, Vols 108 – 50.

¹⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 58.

²⁰ There are two inventories relating to the estate of John Perry. One listed his personal estate in St James and the other listed the remainder of his personal estate in the neighbouring parish of Hanover. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 115, f. 163, John Perry, 12 June 1810; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 115, f. 166, John Perry, 1 March 1810.

²¹ William Allen's estate appears to have been recorded in two separate inventories. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 141, f. 156, William Allen, 5 December 1825; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 144, f. 190, William Allen, 3 April 1828.

Ownership of sugar plantations was not the only source of planters' wealth and standing in St James. As Stewart recognised, acting as an attorney and managing the properties of the increasing number of absentee plantation owners was a way of 'rapidly realising a great fortune'.²² Some estate owners, such as William Allen, took responsibility for a number of other local properties.²³ This could be extremely lucrative. Furthermore, attorneys had responsibility for all the enslaved people settled on the properties that they managed, and since social status in Jamaica depended so much on controlling land and slaves, acting as an attorney could improve a planter's social standing.

However, the ostentatious lifestyles of the planters and the immense wealth listed in their inventories often serve to hide the issue of debt. The inventories enable an assessment of the amount of money owed to the deceased, but it is impossible to tell how much the deceased owed to other parties. This therefore elides one of the defining features of the lives of many Jamaican planters. Planters could obtain credit from the British merchants with whom they traded their sugar crops, but they could also secure loans from local sources. As Sheridan notes, on each island in the British-colonised Caribbean, 'were well-to-do planters, merchants, factors, doctors, lawyers, and public officials who loaned money to needy planters.'²⁴ Kathleen Mary Butler states that by 1820, 'few West India planters owned unencumbered estates', claiming that the 'majority struggled in a complicated web of debts and multiple mortgages as they attempted to continue production.'²⁵ Therefore, whilst they appeared to be financially well off and were

²² Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 185.

²³ T71/201 – 204.

²⁴ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 262 – 305 (quote on p. 279).

²⁵ Kathleen Mary Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823 – 1843* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. xv.

able to afford all of the accoutrements of status, most Jamaican planters were anything but financially secure. The trappings of wealth described in their inventories were often simply evidence of an outward display, which served to hide indebtedness and financial insolvency.

Some sugar estate owners also had mercantile interests and these men were apparently often willing and able to extend credit to other planters. For example, John Cunningham extended credit in this way. Cunningham owned a wharf in St James and had joint ownership of two ships. The details of money owed to Cunningham, provided in his inventory, include a '[m]ortgage on Maxfield plantation in the parish of Trelawny', valued at £8,193 1s 6*d*, and show that Thomas Joseph Gray, owner of Easthams estate in St James, owed him £1,180. John Largie, a St James sugar planter who died in 1806, owed Cunningham nearly £10,400, a debt which by the time of Cunningham's own death in 1813 was considered to be 'bad'.²⁶ Other planters extended credit in a similar way. John Perry, owner of Abingdon estate in Hanover, was involved in transatlantic trade and lent vast sums of money both to local men and to English correspondents. Michael Barnes and John Winter owed him mortgages, and Barnes' plantations, Windsor Lodge and Paisley, owed unpaid open accounts of over £4,800 to Perry's estate. Additionally, English merchant houses appear to have owed Perry several thousand pounds.²⁷

Therefore, some planters were heavily in debt, but others were in a position to lend huge sums of money, which demonstrates some of the factors that divided the planter class. Presumably men such as John Perry and John Cunningham could

²⁶ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 58.

²⁷ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 81, f. 114. John Perry, 19 October 1806; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 115, f. 163; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 115, f. 166. Part of the residue of Perry's estate comprised of ships and their cargoes.

afford to advance loans and mortgages to neighbouring planters because they were financially secure, demonstrating that not all planters faced financial difficulties during this period. The credit advanced by such men to planters such as Thomas Joseph Gray shows that ties of inequality and dependence connected different estate owners as well as demonstrating that the planter class was by no means a homogenous and undifferentiated group. However, these financial differences do not appear to have been seriously divisive and, regardless of the state of their finances, the planters' land and slaves provided the basis for their status and enabled them to live lives of luxury that marked them apart from the vast majority of free society.

The planters were clearly the wealthiest group in the parish, but some St James merchants were similarly wealthy. For example, John Fray of Montego Bay, who died in 1820 aged 45, had a personal estate valued at nearly £130,000 and had therefore been richer than most planters in the parish. He had over £4,000 of merchandise in his Montego Bay store and owned twenty-two slaves, though the bulk of his estate was comprised of money owed to him. Fray's was an exceptional case, but other merchants also matched the wealth of the planters. The value of John Hamer's personal estate exceeded £30,000 and included four slaves and his share of the ownership of five different ships.²⁸

Merchants and planters were mutually dependent in a variety of ways, and one of the most important factors that linked the sugar planters to the mercantile elite was credit. The main portion of John Fray's estate consisted of money owed to him in 'bonds & notes & open accounts'. Money owed to John Hamer also

²⁸ Philip Wright (compiler), *Monumental Inscriptions of Jamaica* (London, Society of Genealogists, 1966), p. 224; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 135, John Fray, 8 January 1822; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 127, f. 197, John Hamer, 10 June 1816.

constituted the largest portion of his estate.²⁹ This shows the importance of credit in early nineteenth-century Jamaica and the significance of the merchants in providing it. Furthermore, the largest debtors were the planters. Samuel Jackson, owner of Catherine Hall estate near Montego Bay, had an open account with John Fray valued at £7,577.³⁰ Local sugar planter, Thomas Joseph Gray, had a similar account worth £5,324.³¹ These were huge sums and show John Fray to have been a major supplier of credit to the local plantocracy in St James as well as providing further evidence of the large debts of local sugar plantation owners such as Jackson and Gray.

Fray and Hamer both operated stores in Montego Bay, which presumably stocked imported goods from Britain and elsewhere for local customers.³² Few goods were manufactured in Jamaica, and planters relied upon merchants and their links with the metropole and the wider world for imports of plantation supplies, equipment and, before 1808, slaves. Merchants did not necessarily extend credit in the form of cash, and credit was as likely to have been in the form of imported goods such as plantation equipment, supplies or even slaves. Planters could also repay their debts in kind, often in crops of sugar.³³ Planters also mortgaged their plantations to merchants in Jamaica and in Britain, either to spread the cost of buying a new property or to raise funds.³⁴ The planters therefore relied on the merchants, who played a vital commercial role by supplying the plantations and

²⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 135; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 127, f. 197.

³⁰ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 135; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 100.

³¹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 135; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 99.

³² JA 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 135; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 127, f. 197. Shortly after his death, the store previously occupied by Hamer was advertised for rent. See *Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 13 January 1816.

³³ The planter, John Lawrence Bowen, repaid part of a debt that he owed to the St James merchant, John Gibzean, with 30 hogsheads of sugar, valued at £1,148 3s 10d. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 107, John Gibzean, 18 February 1813.

³⁴ See IRO, Deeds LOS, *passim*.

exporting sugar. However, most importantly, planters relied upon some wealthy merchants as a source of credit.

In turn, merchants were reliant on the planters, whose crops they exported for sale. Both groups therefore had a relationship that was generally mutually beneficial. The transatlantic trade allowed some merchants to become extremely wealthy and, though outnumbered by sugar estate owners, they made up an important element of the local social and economic elite that dominated public life in Jamaica. Fray, for example, served on the board of the Montego Bay Close Harbour Company, a privilege reserved for elite men.³⁵ Other merchants served as magistrates and as high-ranking officers in the island militia.³⁶ The continued wealth of both planters and merchants was also heavily dependent on the slave-run sugar economy, in which men from both groups had a large material stake.

The 'middling sort'

Aside from the few estate owners and wealthy merchants, free people in St James engaged in a wide range of economic activities, and there were stark differences in the levels of wealth within free society. The poorest in free society were the majority of free black and free coloured people, most of whom lived in the towns, and the white bookkeepers who worked on the sugar estates. However, between the elite and the poor were those who can be described as having comprised the 'middling sort'.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'middling sort' will be used to describe all of those in free society who were not the owners of sugar estates, but

³⁵ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

³⁶ See chapter 6 below.

who owned real estate and slaves and who derived the bulk of their income by independent means. In other words, those comprising this group were non-sugar-producing slaveholders, who were not dependent on wages from an employer for their livelihood. This group included non-sugar-producing landowners, jobbers, storekeepers, doctors, surveyors, a few overseers and some wealthy artisans. It was therefore a large and varied group, but those within this group shared much in common. They were not part of the elite, but they derived many social and economic benefits from being independent slaveholders in a slave society.

Some merchants fell into this category. Socially and economically, less wealthy merchants, along with shopkeepers, were positioned between the social elite and those who were very poor by comparison. For example, in 1819, the estate of David Butchart, a St James merchant, was valued at just over £5,000, which meant that he was moderately wealthy, though certainly not as materially well off as the merchant elite or the sugar planters of the parish. Butchart owned two slaves and, like many merchants, he owned a store.³⁷

Some storekeepers in St James appear to have enjoyed a similar level of wealth to merchants such as Butchart, and although most storekeepers were apparently not involved in overseas trade, there appears to have been some overlap between the activities of merchants and storekeepers. For example, in 1825, those evaluating the estate of the deceased St James storeowner, Daniel Wetzlar, judged his estate to be worth nearly £4,500. Like Butchart, Wetzlar died with a number of outstanding accounts and debts owed to him.³⁸ The stores in St James catered for the basic needs of local residents, and those who inventoried their stock in trade

³⁷ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 131, f. 100, David Butchart, 2 February 1819.

³⁸ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 140, f. 195, Daniel Wetzlar, 5 April 1825.

listed goods such as ‘dry goods’, ‘liquor’ and ‘provisions’.³⁹ Lists of merchandise also suggest a close link between the income of such storekeepers and the sugar economy. For example, David Butchart sold a variety of items in his store, including bills and hoes: tools used in the cultivation of sugar.⁴⁰ Men such as David Butchart and Daniel Wetzlar were therefore just as intimately connected to the sugar economy of the parish as members of the merchant elite.

Non-sugar-producing landowners, such as penkeepers and jobbers, also occupied a middling social and economic position in St James free society. They did not own enough land or slaves to match the wealth of the estate owners, which helped to ensure that their social standing in Jamaican free society fell below that of the planter class. However, they did own property and slaves and benefited from the social status associated with the independence and mastery that this entailed. They also provided vital services to the estates and often made relatively good profits, which allowed them to live more comfortably than the majority of free people in St James.

Such landowners, operating pens and other diversified holdings, made up an important social and economic group in St James. Those compiling inventories for deceased landowners generally described them as ‘Esquire’. However, according to those concerned with the its proper usage, only men serving the crown in the office of justice of the peace or higher could claim this title, although by the late eighteenth century observers in Jamaica were complaining that tradesmen and ‘mechanics of all descriptions’ conferred it upon each other.⁴¹ This was perhaps a symptom of the levelling effect of slavery on social relations between white men,

³⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 128, f. 49, John Ingram, 25 June 1816; vol. 148, f. 123 Thomas Gibson, 19 Jul 1831.

⁴⁰ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 131, f. 100.

⁴¹ *The Columbian Magazine; or Monthly Miscellany*, vol. 1, October 1796, pp. 316 – 18.

but it also means that it is very difficult to make accurate assumptions about the occupation or social status of those men described in this way.⁴²

However, among the land-owning 'Esquires' in the sample of inventories from St James were a number of wealthy non-sugar-producing landowners. For example, Walter Scott, owner of Reading and Plumb pens in St James, owned eighty-three slaves and a personal estate worth well over £9,000 when he died in 1833. Scott reared cows and sheep on his properties. However, he had been as rich as some of the sugar planters of the parish.⁴³ John Hilton, who died in 1831, was another St James pen keeper. He grazed horses and cattle on Comfort Hall pen in the parish, which was home to over fifty enslaved people. Hilton's personal estate amounted to nearly £3,900 and his household furniture and wearing apparel was worth over £200, showing that he too was able to afford a comfortable lifestyle.⁴⁴ Such men were therefore relatively wealthy and, as owners of both land and slaves, they had much in common with the owners of sugar estates, even if they did not always enjoy the same opulent lifestyles as the economic elite of the parish.

Diversity was often a major feature on smaller properties such as those of Hilton and Scott. Such variation certainly characterised the economic activities of Nathaniel Hine, who died in 1806 leaving a personal estate worth about £4,450. Hine had owned thirty-one slaves and his inventory suggests that he was involved in raising animals, growing coffee and producing lumber.⁴⁵ Such landowners were therefore engaged in both the local trade in wood and livestock and the transatlantic

⁴² In inventories from St James, sugar planters and other landowners were generally described using the term 'esquire'. However, some relatively poor men were also described in this way. See JA 1B/11/3, vols 108 – 50.

⁴³ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 76, Walter Scott, 9 November 1833; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 114, f. 3, Walter Scott, 13 June 1830; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, Returns of Givings in, 1831, p. 129.

⁴⁴ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 148, f. 139, John Hilton, August 1831; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, Returns of Givings in, 1831, p. 125.

⁴⁵ Hine's personal estate included: £60 of coffee and £20 of lumber as well as sheep and goats worth £20. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 108, f. 5, Nathaniel Hine, 22 September 1806.

trade in exported crops, in this case coffee. Indeed, the sugar estates themselves were also involved in the local economy as well as overseas trade. In 1816, a notice in *The Cornwall Chronicle* advertised ‘a few thousand weight of Negro Yams and Yam-heads, likewise Cedar Planks’ for sale at Mount-Vernon estate.⁴⁶ Such diversity meant that there was no clear dividing line between those involved in the local, or ‘creole’, economy and the export, or ‘colonial’, economy. The fact that so many people in Jamaica had strong links to both the local and the transatlantic economy clearly demonstrates why it is difficult and misleading for us to attempt to separate the two. Almost all traders, landowners, craftsmen and employees in St James were involved in a complex nexus of local and long-distance trade that was focused mainly on the sugar estates.

Following his death, Nathaniel Hine’s widow, Grace, inherited and continued to manage his property.⁴⁷ Men were therefore not the only landowners in St James, and women were able to take over the management of small properties. Grace Hine died in 1819, leaving a personal estate valued at just over £4,700. Just as her husband had done previously, Grace Hine maintained an enslaved workforce of just over thirty on the property, which was known as Retirement. The operation of the property therefore appears to have continued under her management as it had done before. She continued to keep a small amount of livestock. She also owned bills and hoes, which were tools associated with the cultivation of sugar, and at the time of her death, several local plantations owed her money. This suggests that

⁴⁶ *Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 2 March 1816.

⁴⁷ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 82, f. 49, Nathaniel Hine, 8 September 1793; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 96, f. 129, Grace Hine, 5 November 1808.

Hine, like her male counterparts, was rearing livestock whilst hiring out the labour of her slaves to local sugar estates.⁴⁸

The significance of jobbing makes the central importance of the estates to non-sugar-producing landowners particularly clear. Hiring out the labour of enslaved people was a major source of income for slaveholders in St James, and in the early nineteenth century, jobbing was another important form of diversification open to those with land and slaves. Like many slaveholders, William Roper of Rose-Mount in St James and John Edward Payne, proprietor of Thatchfield and Woodlands in the same parish, engaged in jobbing. These two men owned forty and sixty-eight slaves respectively and both reared livestock. However, in 1824, both of them made good returns through hiring their enslaved labourers to Hartfield, a local sugar estate.⁴⁹ Both men were therefore local producers, but they also relied on the custom of estates such as Hartfield in order to make further profits from the labour of their enslaved workers. In this way, they were economically dependent on the sugar estates and had close links to the export sector of the economy.

Verene Shepherd has contended that non-sugar producers in Jamaican slave society, particularly penkeepers, depended heavily on the sugar estates for their income.⁵⁰ The evidence from St James suggests that this was certainly true for non-sugar-producing free settlers in this district. Between them, Lethe and Leyden estates in St James owed over £400 to penkeeper, Walter Scott, at the time of his death, and some of the leading St James landowners also owed money to Scott.⁵¹

⁴⁸ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 131, f. 219, Grace Hine, 1 July 1819; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 100.

⁴⁹ JA 1B/11/5, Accounts Current, vol. 23, f. 27; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1824, Returns of Givings in, 1823, pp. 125 – 26.

⁵⁰ Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status'.

⁵¹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 76.

Since the sugar estates were the main consumers of the animals reared on Jamaican pens, it seems likely that these outstanding debts were for livestock that Scott had reared and sold to local properties. Furthermore, the estates were the main consumers of jobbing labour. This meant that as graziers and owners of jobbing gangs, many of the landowners of the middling sections of St James society were heavily reliant on the custom of the estates for their income and were economically dependent on the sugar estates of the area.

By the early nineteenth century, some of these proprietors were also taking on the management of sugar estates as attorneys, acting on the behalf of absentees who had retired to the British Isles. As local managers, attorneys took on all the privileges that would go with owning an estate. They were also able to reside in the mansions on the properties that they supervised, which helped them to lay claim to increased social status and provided them with a venue at which to hold the banquets and parties for which the planter class were well known.⁵² This meant that some of the wealthier non-sugar-producing landowners from the middling sections of white society were, in effect, playing the roles of sugar planters without actually owning a plantation and were able to use their generous income as planting attorneys to rival the estate-owning elite in terms of their opulence and wealth. In fact, by the 1820s, some of these attorneys in the district of St James had become an accepted part of the elite. The increased presence and importance of such attorneys therefore blurred the lines that separated the planters from the remainder of white society and provided opportunities for white men to join the social elite.⁵³

John Gale Vidal was one such non-sugar-producing landowner who undertook the management of sugar estates, and his letters to Britain provide clear

⁵² Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 184 – 87.

⁵³ See chapter 4 below.

examples of the many benefits that acting as an attorney could bring to local landowners. In 1821, Vidal owned a property in St Catherine called St Jago Savanna, on which twelve slaves were settled. He raised livestock on this land and had a property in the parish of St John, called Belle-air, along with four slaves.⁵⁴ Vidal described himself as a 'jobber', but he also managed the Jamaican properties of his uncle, the wealthy absentee landowner, William Mitchell, and lived on a pen that Mitchell had leased.⁵⁵ In 1821, Vidal persuaded Mitchell to ask Mr Sympson, the absentee owner of the property, to allow the lease to pass to him. In the course of these negotiations, he explained to Mitchell his reasons for wanting control of the pen, stating that it 'often happens that my negroes are out of a job and they could at all times when that is the case find employment here'. He also pointed out that it was 'likewise a convenient and comfortable house for myself'.⁵⁶ By 1822, Vidal had secured the lease to the property. He was therefore able to use his position as an attorney, along with his influential family contacts, to provide himself with a better house than he might otherwise have had and to secure control of a property where his jobbing gang of enslaved workers could be put to work profitably.

The improvement of Vidal's fortunes came about largely because of his close links with influential and wealthy family members in the United Kingdom. Having gained control of the pen, Vidal raised a loan from his cousins in Britain and purchased 'a small gang of Negroes, and some stock' which he placed on the property. In a letter to his creditors written in 1822, Vidal reflected that he was now

⁵⁴ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1823, 'Returns of Givings in', 1822, pp. 9, 17.

⁵⁵ JA 1B/5/83/1, Attorney's Letter Book, f. 49, John Gale Vidal to Messrs W., R. and S. Mitchell, 5 August 1822. Vidal explained that he got his 'Jobbing Accounts and other money matters paid once in the twelve months'. See JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 23, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 5 November 1821.

⁵⁶ JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 14, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 7 July 1821.

the owner of a 'well disposed and able gang of Negroes sixty in number with a small penn and about fifty head of stock'.⁵⁷ Therefore, although Vidal did not own a sugar estate of his own at this time, a number of factors linked him to a closely integrated transatlantic network of trade, finance and dependency.

Similar ties of dependency linked other groups from among the middling section of St James society to both the sugar estates and, by extension, wider economic networks. Barry Higman's study of Jamaican land surveyors reveals that they occupied such a position. Surveyors' work generally involved providing plans of sugar estates and other properties, and the majority of the surveyors described in Higman's study died with estates valued at less than £5,000.⁵⁸

Medical doctors were another important part of St James society and by serving the medical needs of the sugar estates, they could become wealthy in their own right. However, most doctors appear to have possessed moderate personal estates. The inventoried personal estates of doctors from St James are comprised largely of outstanding debts owed to their estates. The sugar estates of the area were liable for many of these demands, which further reveals the culture of credit in early nineteenth-century Jamaica and demonstrates that, as with penkeepers and the owners of jobbing gangs, medical doctors were largely dependent on the sugar estates for their income.⁵⁹

Most of the population of St James was somehow involved in the rural economy, but the parish was also the site of one of the largest towns in Jamaica. It is therefore unsurprising that some free people in the parish did not have strong or direct links to agriculture. This is illustrated by the occupations of Alexander

⁵⁷ JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 48, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 5 August 1822.

⁵⁸ B. W. Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Kingston, University of the West Indies Press, [1988] 2001), pp. 31 – 35.

⁵⁹ See for example JA 1B/11/3, vol. 144, f. 138, Charles E. Petgrave, 9 February 1828.

Riddock and Henry Shergold. In 1807, Alexander Riddock died owning ten slaves and a half share in a small sailing boat.⁶⁰ In addition, he had owned a 'sextant with an artificial horizon', suggesting that his income was derived from seafaring. His personal estate was worth a total of £2,730, so he was of moderate means and certainly not poor.⁶¹ Henry Shergold, who died a relatively wealthy man in 1827, had been a printer and had apparently printed the Montego-Bay newspaper, the *Cornwall Chronicle*.⁶²

Therefore, some middling white men were involved in non-agricultural pursuits, but that did not mean that they were entirely divorced from the sugar-based economy.⁶³ Those involved in seafaring performed a vital role for other colonists. Packet boats were an important part of the communication system of the island, ferrying mail, freight and passengers where land travel was often more difficult and time consuming than sea travel. Newspapers were also vital to communication in the colony, and the *Cornwall Chronicle* reflected and shaped the opinions and interests of the conservative planters of St James and the surrounding districts. Like other newspapers, it also enabled colonists to maintain a cultural and political awareness of the wider world through the articles and notices it contained. Therefore, whilst not involved in the rural economy, men such as Shergold and Riddock provided important services to the white colonists of Jamaica, most of whom, of course, lived in rural areas.

⁶⁰ The inventory records that Riddock owned 'half of a shallop called the Lane', worth £150. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 108, f. 124, Alexander Riddock, 23 March 1807.

⁶¹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 108, f. 124.

⁶² JA 1B/11/3, vol. 144, f. 163, Henry Shergold, 8 May 1828; *Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 13 January 1816, p. 1.

⁶³ Indeed, Henry Shergold appears to have owned Bloomsbury Hill, a property in St James. In 1817, there were eleven enslaved people and six head of stock on the property, indicating that although Shergold's principal occupation was as a printer, he may also have been involved in the rural economy. See *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 103.

It is clear that most of those white men from the middle ranks of free society depended heavily on the slave-run rural economy, which was dominated by the sugar industry. Those within this middling group were moderately wealthy, although they could not challenge the opulence of the elite planters and merchants. Most were slaveholders. These factors meant that those from this middle section of free society tended to have much in common with the plantation owners of the island and helped to ensure that most among them supported the continuation of slavery. Furthermore, their economic dependency on the sugar industry tied them to transatlantic networks of trade and helped to ensure that they supported the elite men who owned the sugar estates.

Artisans, plantation employees and 'gentlemen'

Artisans and craftsmen in St James were generally dependent on the sugar estates for their incomes. There was a great variation of wealth within this large economic group, which comprised both slave owners and non-slave owners. Many of them were relatively poor. However, a few were wealthy slaveholders, who can be counted as part of the middling section of free society. One such artisan was William Vernon, a millwright. When Vernon died in 1816, his personal estate was worth £13,850, meaning that his wealth surpassed that of some of the sugar planters of the parish.⁶⁴ He was therefore exceptionally wealthy for a craftsman. Few artisans could match Vernon's wealth, but others could be counted as part of the middling sort of St James free society. For example, Thomas Harding Petgrave, a mason, owned 21 slaves and his estate was valued at nearly £3,160.⁶⁵ However,

⁶⁴ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 128, f. 84, William Vernon, 31 August 1816.

⁶⁵ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 122, f. 187, Thomas Harding Petgrave, 14 September 1813.

most craftsmen were much poorer, and many died with estates valued at just a few hundred pounds and owning no slaves.⁶⁶

The large number of probate inventories from St James that listed the estates of artisans and craftsmen demonstrates what an important economic group they were. The most common craft was that of carpenter. There were also masons, blacksmiths, coopers and butchers. Other occupations included watchmaker, millwright, saddler, printer, and house builder.⁶⁷ Many Saint James artisans were dependent on the sugar estates of the parish for work. Estates in Saint James paid for the work of blacksmiths, masons and carpenters, and some craftsmen were permanent employees on estates. For example, in 1824, John Thomas received an annual salary of £121 4s 1d as a mason on Ironshore Estate, in northern Saint James.⁶⁸ Other artisans appear to have done work for various employers, keeping account books of money owed to them. At his death in 1824, four different sugar estates owed money to Saint James blacksmith, David Griffiths.⁶⁹ However, some artisans had alternative sources of income. For example, at his death in 1824, carpenter George Bond was owed over £438 for 'negro hire', showing that craftsmen and artisans also chose to make additional earnings through hiring out enslaved labourers.⁷⁰ Craftsmen and artisans were therefore closely connected to the rural economy, hiring out their services to sugar planters and at times also hiring out the labour of their enslaved workers to supplement their other sources of income.

⁶⁶ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 181, William Robertson, 12 September 1834; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 140, f. 160, David Griffiths, 5 February 1825; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 144, f. 200, Stuart Menzies, 9 June 1828.

⁶⁷ See JA 1B/11/3, vols 108 – 50.

⁶⁸ JA 1B/11/5 vol. 23, f. 27.

⁶⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 140, f. 160.

⁷⁰ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 140, f. 161, George Bond, 4 January 1825.

Although many people in free society had links to the rural economy of the island, some did not have a close connection with the sugar industry. For example, amongst the inventories, those bearing the ambiguous title of ‘Gentleman’ had no clear links with the estates. Since most economically privileged people in Jamaica took the title of ‘Esquire’, the title of ‘Gentleman’ was no marker of genteel status, and Jonathan Dalby has suggested that those bearing the title were part of a white lower-middle class of clerks and minor officials.⁷¹ However, evidence from the inventories suggests that the description of ‘gentlemen’ may simply have been used as a catch-all reference used to denote someone who did not easily fit into another category. Furthermore, as Dalby notes, the term ‘very possibly also included some blacks and coloureds.’ Whatever the occupations of those within this enigmatic group, they were generally poor and, like the majority of plantation employees and artisans, they experienced a relatively low standard of living.⁷²

According to the inventories, the poorest group of all the free people in the parish consisted of those whites who worked for a salary on the plantations. They were also the most numerous group in white society and, of all the groups in St James free society, they were the most obviously dependent upon the sugar estates. Described by contemporaries as ‘planters’, most of these men had come to Jamaica to learn the skills involved in sugar planting and began their careers in the colony as bookkeepers on the estates. Stewart likened bookkeepers to voluntary slaves, who condemned themselves ‘for a term of years, on a paltry salary’, which he claimed was barely sufficient to keep themselves clothed.⁷³ The inventories of

⁷¹ Jonathan Dalby, *Crime and Punishment in Jamaica: A Quantitative Analysis of the Assize Court Records, 1756 – 1856*, (Kingston, The Social History Project, Department of History, University of the West Indies, 2000), pp. 60 – 61.

⁷² Dalby, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 60 – 61.

⁷³ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 189.

white estate workers bear out Stewart's description. 'Planters' Kiel Clarke and John Mitchell both died in 1825. Those compiling inventories of the possessions of these men valued their estates at about £54 and £66 respectively. Each owned just animals and a few other possessions and, at the time of their deaths, local sugar estates owed them both salaries.⁷⁴ Poor as they were, men such as Clarke and Mitchell had a vital economic role to play, as they were responsible for the day-to-day management of work of the sugar plantations.

The majority of white estate workers were poor and most of them did not own slaves. However, there was a hierarchy among this group. Overseers, who had usually lived in Jamaica for a number of years, were often able to afford to buy a few slaves and hire them out. For example, George Plowright was an overseer on Grange estate, who before his death in 1809, had hired out his four enslaved labourers for additional income.⁷⁵ Estate employee Joseph Graham, who died in 1807, owned thirty-two slaves and Edward Tharp hired out some or all of his eleven slaves on the sugar estate where he worked. Tharp appears to have made as good an income from this jobbing as he did as an employee on the plantation.⁷⁶

By investing in slaves, such employees had therefore gained a degree of personal independence not enjoyed by most bookkeepers, gaining the benefit of an alternative income to the salaries paid to them by the estates. However, as jobbers, they remained dependent on the sugar economy. They had also made material investments in the institution of slavery by purchasing slaves and they were therefore dependent on the maintenance of slavery in order to reap the financial and

⁷⁴ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 141, f. 42, Kiel Clarke, 11 June 1825; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 141, f. 102. John Mitchell, 1 August 1825.

⁷⁵ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 115, f. 44. George Plowright, 2 March 1810.

⁷⁶ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 109, f. 150, Joseph Graham, 9 September 1807; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 109, f. 57, Edward Tharp, 13 June 1807.

other benefits of these outlays. Therefore, the interests of the white men who worked on the estates, like those of most free people working in the rural economy, were intimately connected to the concerns of the sugar planters. Despite vast differences of wealth, ties of economic dependency combined with an interest in slavery to ensure that almost all free people connected with the rural economy in Jamaica shared a commitment to slavery and the economic viability of the sugar industry.

Freedpeople and missionaries

Urban centres saw the greatest concentration of free coloureds and free blacks in this period. However, the sample of 210 inventories from St James includes just eight for the estates of individuals described as having been free non-whites. St James, with the large town of Montego Bay as its capital, would presumably have had more freedpeople living there than is suggested by this sample. Indeed, the presence of free non-whites in this part of the island was such that a free coloured newspaper, *The Struggler*, was published in Montego Bay.⁷⁷ It is therefore possible that free non-whites did not generally have inventories made. However, it is also likely that many artisans, and perhaps some shopkeepers whose inventoried estates are included in the sample were actually freedpeople, and that the compilers of inventories simply referred to free coloureds and free blacks as ‘Gentlemen’, ‘Gentlewomen’, or according to their occupation.

Free coloureds worked and resided in the towns largely because restrictions imposed on them by the law prevented them from taking an active part in the rural

⁷⁷ Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 58.

economy. Deficiency legislation meant that proprietors had to maintain white men on their properties in proportion to the number of enslaved people settled there. Since free non-whites could not 'save deficiency' in the same way as whites, they were effectively barred from working in the rural economy. Limits on the amount of property that they could receive in bequests also limited the chances of non-whites to become landed proprietors. The legislation passed by the planter-run Assembly therefore limited freedpeople's connection to the sugar industry.⁷⁸

With one exception, all of those freedpeople identified in the inventories were slaveholders. However, their wealth varied a great deal, from that of Mary Hall, who had owned two slaves and a personal estate valued at just £200, to Mary Taylor of Montego Bay, who had owned nineteen slaves and personalty valued at just under £2,000.⁷⁹ The example of Mary Taylor shows that some free coloured people could be quite wealthy and enjoy similar standards of living to those in the middling sections of the white community. Indeed, in 1823, Stewart claimed that some 'men of colour have been so elevated above their *caste* by the advantages of fortune and liberal education, as to be received into white society'.⁸⁰ By the 1830s, some could even aspire to join the local political elite. In 1817, John Manderson, a free coloured merchant from St James, owned twenty-seven slaves. By 1832, he owned thirty-nine and had been elected as a member of the Assembly for the parish, following the granting of full civil rights to free coloured men in 1830. He went on to become the first non-white chief magistrate on the island. Although Manderson helped to fund *The Struggler* and assisted the missionaries in 1832, he was generally associated with the conservative, pro-slavery attitudes of the white

⁷⁸ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 5 – 10.

⁷⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 116, Mary Hall, 13 July 1833; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 167, Mary Taylor, 31 May 1813.

⁸⁰ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 335.

population, showing that some free coloureds were wealthy slaveholders, capable of supporting the planter elite.⁸¹

There were more women than men in the free coloured population, and of the eight non-whites in the sample of inventories, six were women. It is unclear exactly what type of economic activity such women engaged in. However, according to Stewart, 'some of the females of colour' were 'possessed of considerable property, given them by their white parents, or amassed by their own industry', and the wills of wealthy proprietors from St James attest to the fact that their free coloured mistresses and children often inherited enough property to lead comfortable lives. For example, in his will, William Allen, who died in 1824, bequeathed an annuity of £150 sterling to Hannah Kennion, a free brown woman from St James, to be paid to her for the remainder of her life. He also declared that she should receive 'all the cash that may be in my dwelling house at the time of my death, together with my wearing apparel, plate, linen, furniture, horses, carriages, and liquors of every kind and description'. In addition, Allen willed that Kennion was to 'have full liberty to go to and occupy my apartments at Orange Cove', his sugar estate in Hanover, and was to 'be supplied with general provisions from my said estate as she may require them and...be allowed annually from my said estate a tierce of sugar and one puncheon of rum'.⁸²

Such bequests were not unusual. In his will, estate owner John Largie directed his executors to lay out £600 for 'the purchase of a place in the country' for his 'housekeeper', Mary Ann James, and his eight 'reputed children' by her. Largie's housekeeper was by no means poor before he died, as Largie's will makes

⁸¹ T71/201 – 204; T71/222 – 23; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 57 – 58.

⁸² Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 327; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 105, f. 88, William Allen, 24 August 1818; Wright, *Monumental Inscriptions*, p. 231; ML, Microfilm 122+328, Item 3, Baptisms, f. 49. The St James Baptism register describes Kennion as a 'Quadroon'.

it clear that he had owed her the sum of £500 for ‘some time’. She had therefore extended a loan to her financially troubled partner.⁸³ It is therefore clear that some free coloured women were wealthy enough to extend loans, showing that economic ties between white sugar planters and their coloured mistresses were not always a one dimensional affair.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the wills of men such as Allen and Largie shed light on how some women of colour could, as Stewart remarked, ‘emulate, and even strive to excel, the white ladies in splendour, taste, and expensiveness of dress, equipage, and entertainment.’⁸⁵

However, Stewart also stated that the most numerous group among the free coloureds were ‘the offspring of men who either have not the means or inclination to provide for them.’ Furthermore, according to John Campbell, a prominent free coloured man from St James, of about 28,800 free coloured people on the island in 1825, 22,900 were ‘absolutely poor’ and just 5,500 in ‘fair circumstances’. Gad Heuman has used this evidence to support his conclusion that most freedpeople were ‘at the lower end of the economic scale’. Some of the brown women residing in the towns and villages of the island made a living by keeping livestock, notably goats, and Heuman states than others of them managed lodging houses, whilst many were shopkeepers and traders.⁸⁶

Among the men, many were tradesmen and artisans.⁸⁷ This is illustrated by the wills of white men such as James Galloway, who died in 1833. Galloway

⁸³ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 76, f. 220, John Largie, 4 August 1806. Largie was also even more heavily in debt to the local planter and merchant John Cunningham. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 58.

⁸⁴ A well known example of a free coloured woman extending a loan to a white male sexual partner is that of Phibbah, who was involved in a lengthy relationship with Westmoreland landowner, Thomas Thistlewood, and who lent Thistlewood money. See Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750 – 86* (Kingston, University of the West Indies Press, [1989] 1999), p. 17.

⁸⁵ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 330.

⁸⁶ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 8 – 10; Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 97, 334.

⁸⁷ Heuman states that many free coloured men were ‘mechanics, artisans, or tradesmen.’ See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 9.

owned Unity Hall in St James and willed that after his death, his 'old servants Adam Webb and Henry Woozencroft, both of free condition', be given ten acres of land each and 'be continued to be paid and employed as carpenter and mason upon Unity Hall'. Of the two beneficiaries of this bequest, Webb had been enslaved before being freed by Galloway in 1828.⁸⁸ In 1806, estate employee and jobber, Edward Tharp directed that his 'reputed son', John, be educated out of the interest arising from his estate and be apprenticed 'to any trade he may choose'.⁸⁹ The evidence from these wills therefore shows that some free coloured men worked on the sugar estates, and that sugar planters and other white slaveholders often financed these men's apprenticeships.

The free coloured and free black communities in St James were therefore engaged in a variety of economic activities, and these communities were characterised by vast contrasts in wealth. Free non-whites in the parish certainly were a fractured group. However, most of them were not materially privileged, and many of them appear to have lived in Montego Bay, away from the sugar estates. Free coloureds and free blacks were therefore relatively cut off from the mainly white-run rural economy. Indeed, before 1830, legislation actually prevented them from participating in the sugar industry. Moreover, whilst some were clearly linked to the sugar estates by employment, many free coloured people, such as Adam Webb, had experienced enslavement. Such individuals therefore had ties to both the white and enslaved communities and, being in such a liminal position, were unlikely to display strong support for slavery and the preservation of the sugar industry.

⁸⁸ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 114, f. 14, James Galloway, 2 May 1833; JA 1B/11/6, Manumissions, vol. 63, f. 63, 6 May 1828, James Galloway to Adam Webb.

⁸⁹ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 78, f. 9, John Tharp, 1 November 1806.

Before and during the Baptist War, the privileged slaves on the plantations predominated among the leaders of the revolt.⁹⁰ During the insurrection, Galloway's mansion at Unity Hall was burned down.⁹¹ It is unclear how free coloured people, often not far removed from the enslaved communities on such properties, reacted to such events. Some, of course, would have opposed the rebels, and we can presume that men such as Adam Webb and Henry Woozencroft, who received substantial bequests in Galloway's will, would have remained loyal to the whites. However, a few free coloureds were identified as rebels, and we can also assume that having often come from the ranks of the privileged slaves or 'confidentials' on the estates, many free coloureds would have felt a degree of sympathy for the rebellion.⁹²

Such links helped to ensure that the conservative attitudes of wealthy free non-whites, such as John Manderson, were not representative of the views of most freedpeople. In fact, Stewart noted that many free coloured people, 'shut out from the general society of the whites, form a separate society of themselves'.⁹³ Members of this distinct portion of the free community did not necessarily have strong ties to the slave-run sugar economy and did not evince the commitment to sugar and slavery shown by most of the white settlers who were entirely dependent on the estates for their income and on slavery for their elevated social status.

Another factor that helped to alienate the free coloured and free black communities in Jamaica from the remainder of free society was their strong connection to the mission chapels. The principle aim of the missions, run by non-

⁹⁰ See chapter 8 below.

⁹¹ JA 4/45/55, Tweedie Papers, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, St Ann, 10 May 1832.

⁹² See chapter 8 below.

⁹³ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 329.

conformist white preachers from the British Isles, was to convert the enslaved population, but missionaries made frequent references to the numbers of free non-whites attending their services. Mr Box, a Methodist missionary based at Savannah-la-Mar, wrote to the *Methodist Magazine* in Britain informing them that ‘many of the most respectable coloured people regularly visit our chapel at the evening services’, and the Missionaries counted free people of colour as important political allies.⁹⁴ The number of missionaries on the island increased during the British abolitionist campaigns of the 1820s. However, the missionaries did not publicly express support for immediate abolition until the 1830s. Nevertheless, their belief in the equality of all men before God severely undermined the strictly hierarchical and unequal boundaries of rule which defined slave society and was almost certainly a crucial element in attracting so many free non-whites to the chapels in the years before emancipation.⁹⁵

Missionaries were a distinct element in white society, largely because, as Catherine Hall has stated, they ‘had the distinction of being the first white men on the island not primarily interested in making a fortune.’⁹⁶ Without a material stake in the economic networks of the Atlantic world, the missionaries were more concerned with establishing a Christian network of devout converts that would include black and white people on all sides of the Atlantic and beyond. However, in seeking to bring together an inclusive brotherhood of man, in which blacks and

⁹⁴ *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, April 1830, p. 279. In 1833, free non-white men were first able to vote in a general election, and missionaries hoped that this would lead to legislation from the Assembly that was more favourable to their interests. That year, Mr Bleby was pleased to report that ‘[s]everal coloured gentlemen, of liberal principles’ had been returned to the House. See *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, March 1833, p. 228, and September 1833, p. 667.

⁹⁵ See Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*.

⁹⁶ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge, Polity, 2002), p. 88.

whites were equal before God, the preachers provoked the resentment of the rest of the white community in Jamaica.⁹⁷

Whilst some planters were willing to allow missionaries to preach to enslaved people on the plantations, most white colonists resented them, seeing their activities as disruptive to the process of making profits from the labour of enslaved people. The preachers therefore never integrated into the existing white community on the island. As Mary Turner has shown, they were “renegade whites” serving the slaves in a society where white was master’.⁹⁸ When missionaries did gain permission to preach to enslaved people on the estates, owners and managers carefully restricted their time.⁹⁹ The main fear of the ruling class was that the missionaries would bring down the plantation system by facilitating the politicisation of the slaves. Missionaries were teaching enslaved congregations to read and instilling in them a sense of their own self worth, which was systematically denied by the existing system. These activities led the planters to predict that the missionaries would help to inspire a slave rebellion. The missionaries were also marked as outsiders to white society by the fact that they were more interested in winning heathen souls for Christianity than accumulating a personal fortune with slave labour. This meant that, unlike most free people in Jamaican society, they did not have a material interest in a local economy based on slavery and sugar.

⁹⁷ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 86 – 98.

⁹⁸ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 23 – 24.

Conclusions

In a recent critique, O. Nigel Bolland has argued that Brathwaite's differentiation between 'colonial' and 'creole' 'implies a dualism that obscures the true meaning of colonialism and, hence, of the "Creole society"'. According to Bolland, it would be more useful for us to 'think in terms of "Colonial *and* Creole"' when conceptualising the relations that shaped colonised societies in the Caribbean, because the process of creolisation, whereby social groups came together in the region to form dynamic new societies, was always framed by the inequalities of colonisation and dependency.¹⁰⁰ Bolland's main points of focus are social relations and cultural developments in the region, but his observations are also relevant for our understanding of the Jamaican economy in the period before emancipation. In that period, a vibrant local economy existed on the island, but most local activities were somehow connected to an export economy dominated by the sugar industry. In this sense, much of the local economic activity on the island was closely connected to the production of staple crops for the transatlantic trade with the metropole, which Jamaica was bound to engage in as a British colony. Indeed, local, or 'creole' economic activity, from the trading networks of those enslaved to the livestock rearing of local penkeepers, took place in a colony where all aspects of life were shaped by the export-focussed sugar industry and the defining local institution of slavery. In Jamaica, creole economic activity and the process of creolisation itself were therefore profoundly shaped by the colony's strong ties of dependency with the metropole.

¹⁰⁰ O. Nigel Bolland, 'Creolisation and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History', in Shepherd and Richards, *Questioning Creole*, pp. 36 – 39.

The majority of the population was coerced into this colonial economic system. The enslaved labourers on the sugar estates and other properties were forced to produce the crops that made the system viable and their involvement with the transatlantic economy was secured by violence and by the threat of violence. Furthermore, their continued labour, whatever their legal status, was vital to the continued operation and profitability of the system. To planters and other slaveholders, the most obvious way of securing the labour of these workers and maintaining their profits from their part of the transatlantic economy was to keep their labourers in a state of chattel slavery for as long as possible.

Those most committed to the continuation of slavery and the maintenance of the existing system of social and economic relations on the island were those with most to gain from the sugar industry. The owners of sugar estates therefore had a huge stake in the continuation of slavery, although the profitability of sugar production was much reduced by the 1820s, which made the offer of compensation for emancipation particularly appealing to some planters. The large debts that many of them had incurred in trying to maintain production on their estates and in keeping up their ostentatious lifestyles added to the appeal of such remuneration. In spite of this, most locally resident sugar planters argued against the calls for abolition that emanated from the metropole, accepting the British government's offer of emancipation with compensation only when negotiation and protest failed.¹⁰¹

Most other free settlers had economic connections to the sugar industry. Therefore, a large proportion of free society was economically dependent on the

¹⁰¹ See chapter 8 below.

sugar estates to the extent that their economic fates were tied to the dwindling fortunes of the planters. In 1823, Stewart summarised this situation, writing that,

[o]f all classes of persons holding [property in the West Indies, the sugar planter, in short, is by far the severest sufferer; but as the interests of many classes of persons intimately depend on his prosperity, distress would necessarily be spread among these classes by his ruin.¹⁰²

This dependency helped to tie merchants, shopkeepers, planting attorneys, livestock farmers, jobbers, craftsmen, doctors, overseers, bookkeepers and others to the planter class and helped to attach the support of individuals from all of these groups to the pro-slavery cause in the decades before emancipation. This helped to contribute to a sense of shared purpose among slaveholders and other whites in Jamaica, which will receive more attention in the following chapters.

However, others in free society either gained very little from the sugar-based economy or simply did not wish to make material gains on the island. Free coloured and free black people had long faced exclusion from participating fully in the rural economy and this meant that most of them chose to live in the towns. Some, of course, were wealthy and many were slaveholders. The free coloured mistresses of well-to-do white men were often materially privileged, as were some free non-white merchants and landowners. However, most freedpeople were relatively poor and occupied a liminal social position between whites and the enslaved majority. Therefore, compared to the whites, the expanding free non-white section of Jamaican society had weaker links to the slave-run sugar industry and was less likely to support it and the labour regime upon which it was based.

¹⁰² Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 113.

Indeed, free coloureds and free blacks frequently lent their support to the non-conformist missionaries, another expanding group who occupied a liminal position in Jamaican society. These preachers had strong attachments to the enslaved communities to whom they preached and, not being motivated by a desire for profit, had no material link to the local economy. Though they did depend on the planters as mission patrons, who could allow them access to enslaved labourers, they were not economically beholden to them and they saw those enslaved as people, not as units of labour. This meant that the small but influential group of missionaries in Jamaica had no self-interested desire to see the perpetuation of slavery and that, after the violent white backlash to the Baptist War, they came out in favour of abolition, playing a crucial role in the transition from slavery to freedom.¹⁰³

The local economy in Jamaica therefore revolved around the sugar estates and was closely linked to transatlantic trade. In this way, many in free society were dependent on the dominant sugar planters of the island. However, by the early nineteenth century, there were increasing numbers of free coloured and free black people without firm commitments to slavery and the sugar planters. Missionaries also lacked such commitments, and these elements of free society that fell largely outside of the planters' slave-run economic system played leading parts in bringing it down.

¹⁰³ See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*. pp. 86 – 139.

‘The Best Poor Man’s Country in the World’?
Mobility, Aspiration and the Boundaries of Rule

In May 1832, Hamilton Brown, a sugar planter from St Ann, wrote to George French in England, whose sugar plantations he managed as an attorney. Brown wrote to inform French about matters of business relating to Jamaican properties belonging to the latter and to keep his employer abreast of events in the House of Assembly and occurrences connected to the recent rebellion. He also explained that ‘Mr Hill, who arrived safe in the Juno’, delivered the last letter he had received from French. Brown wrote that Hill ‘dined with me, &...wishes to become a planter’ and told French that ‘as I shall in a few days have an opening on my own estate, a healthy situation, I shall place him there under a respectable overseer, who will house him well & keep him to his duty’, before going on to add that ‘I shall always be happy to render him any service he may merit’.¹ Brown’s letters to French highlight aspects of a transatlantic system that linked local planters to the metropole through complex and interrelated networks of trade, business, culture, politics, family and friendship. This particular letter also sheds light on one specific and crucial aspect of those networks: the practice of young men arriving in Jamaica from the metropole with a view to making their fortunes in the colony, often with prearranged contacts on the island.

¹ JA 4/45/55, Tweedie Papers, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, St Ann. 10 May 1832.

Carrying a letter from French, a wealthy absentee proprietor, Hill clearly had a friendly relationship with a powerful man in the metropole, which stood him in good stead with Brown, who was French's representative in Jamaica and an influential man on the island. These relationships would be useful to him in attempting to make the difficult transition from a bookkeeper on one of Brown's properties to owning or managing a sugar-producing property of his own. Difficult as such advancement was, Hamilton Brown himself stood as an example of its possibility. Having arrived in Jamaica without land or slaves, he had rapidly acquired both to become one of the leading sugar planters and political figures in the north of the island by the 1830s.² Hill's ambition and Brown's advancement therefore exemplify the significance of aspiration and mobility, two of the most important phenomena that shaped free society and determined the course of the struggle over slavery in Jamaica.

Verene Shepherd has drawn our attention to the possibility of economic and social mobility in Jamaica during the period of slavery, pointing out that some free people could achieve upward social mobility by investing the profits generated by penkeeping in the purchase of sugar or coffee plantations.³ Significantly, she has also argued that such landowners shared no common goals other than their 'similar aspirations to the socio-economic status of the sugar barons.' In this way, Shepherd has suggested that ambitions to improve their situation and join the ranks of the planter class militated against the formation of a group consciousness among non-sugar-producing landholders.⁴ In other words, it seems that individual ambition and

² See below, pp. 122 – 24.

³ Verene A. Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status: Non-Sugar Producers in Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom', in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.) *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002), p. 159.

⁴ Verene A. Shepherd, 'Questioning Creole: Domestic Producers in Jamaica's Plantation Economy', in Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (eds), *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2002), p. 178.

the possibility for other whites to become proprietors of estates meant that they were unlikely to group together in opposition to the planters.

However, in spite of such suggestions, little research has yet been done on the occurrence of mobility and the significance of ambition in Jamaican free society during this period.⁵ Nevertheless, contemporary commentators provide vital evidence that many white men considered the island to be a land of opportunity. Moreover, as this chapter will show, opportunities for economic and social advancement did exist there. This concurs with the contemporary image of the West Indies as a place where traditional European constraints were suspended and where it was possible for men to quickly make a fortune. However, in some regards, it diverges from another traditional view of the slaveowning Caribbean, which cast the region as a place of despair and thwarted ambition. Brathwaite, for example, quotes J. B. Moreton, who, in 1790, wrote that most bookkeepers were ‘fed and inflamed by sickly Hope’s delusive dreams’.⁶ Indeed, Brathwaite’s own account of free society on the island makes little mention of mobility, and presents a stratified social order where planters and merchants presided over ‘other whites’ and free people of colour.⁷

In fact, the reality lay somewhere between the two poles presented by these conflicting stereotypes. Social mobility was a very real possibility and gradual ascension into the sugar planting elite was not impossible for a young man arriving on the island. However, such mobility was difficult, especially by the early

⁵ Indeed, it is questionable as to how possible it is to fully investigate the influence of as illusive a concept as ‘ambition’ given the paucity of qualitative sources.

⁶ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), p. 144.

⁷ See Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 105 – 75.

nineteenth century, and most hopeful adventurers failed to fully complete their quests for riches.

Whilst it has not been a major focus for scholars of the early nineteenth-century Caribbean, the topic of economic and social mobility has recently attracted the interest of scholars of the US south. For example, Michele Gillespie has taken issue with the a static vision of free society in the slaveholding state of Georgia and argued that self-made men were a crucial part of a dynamic and complex social system in that area.⁸ The rise to prominence of men such as Hamilton Brown suggest that Jamaican free society was similarly dynamic and complex, and Gillespie's description of Georgian artisans as 'planters in the making', appears to be applicable to a large number of the white men in Jamaica who were not owners of sugar estates.⁹

An appreciation of the significance of these hopes for economic advancement can help to build on assessments of Jamaican free society that have focussed on its hierarchy and on the political and economic marginalisation of non-sugar producers. Shepherd, for example, has argued that penkeepers' subordinate economic relations with the sugar estates contributed to their social and political marginality.¹⁰ The previous two chapters have supported the assertion that most free people could not match the wealth of the planters and did not fully share the privileges enjoyed by the sugar-planting elite. However, whilst marginalised, many of these free people, and especially white men, accepted the planters' political voice as their own because of their economic dependency on the sugar industry and

⁸ Michele Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789 – 1860* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2000), pp. xv – xvi.

⁹ Gillespie, *Free Labor in an Unfree World*, pp. 1 – 35.

¹⁰ Verene A. Shepherd, 'Livestock Farmers and Marginality in Jamaica's Sugar-Plantation Society: A Tentative Analysis', in Verene A. Shepherd and Hilary McD Beckles (eds), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2000), pp. 613 – 617.

their strong commitment to the continuation of slavery. The main argument of this chapter is that the possibility of advancement within the structures existing on the island played another crucial part in guaranteeing the support of many free people for the planters. Whilst accepting that Jamaican free society was hierarchical and fragmented, it will argue that for some, namely white men, this did not present an insurmountable obstacle to their ambitions. The potential for them to become estate owners thereby helped to ensure their support for the existing system.

Others, of course, did not share these advantages. Free non-whites did not enjoy the same potential for economic or social advancement and missionaries were concerned with neither. Unlike most white men in Jamaica, missionaries did not hope to become rich through the exploitation of enslaved people. Free non-whites and missionaries also had weaker ties to the sugar economy than most white men. The fact that these growing liminal groups did not share the ambitions and motivations of most white men helped to foster the growth of local opposition to the planters' pro-slavery campaign.

From bookkeeper to estate owner

As discussed in chapter 1, the majority of white men arriving in Jamaica in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries came with the intention of becoming rich, and the fact that property and slaves were both crucial sources of wealth and status led to an ambition to own both. During a tour of the island in 1802, Maria Nugent remarked that '[i]n this country it appears as if everything were bought and sold', before stating that colonists seemed 'solicitous to make money, and no one

seems to regard the mode of acquiring it'.¹¹ In 1823, J. Stewart reiterated this view, remarking that the 'Europeans who are settled in Jamaica' arrived there with one aim in mind: 'that of making or mending their fortunes.' According to Stewart, they hoped to 'return to their native country with a fortune, or competency.'¹² Achieving a competency implied ownership of land, as it entailed living independently and having a guaranteed unearned income. It was therefore not possible to achieve this by earning a salary, or even by working independently for others in exchange for cash. The only way that men in Jamaica could gain such a competency was by becoming a landowner and living off the labour of dependent enslaved labourers, and since the local economy revolved around the sugar industry, the only way to achieve full independence was by owning a sugar estate.

However, before attaining the elusive and desired status of an estate owner, non-elite white men had to begin from the lowly position of a bookkeeper on a sugar estate. Stewart described the job of bookkeeper as 'perhaps the least enviable' position available to free people on the island, and most bookkeepers hoped to serve out a few years working on the plantations before improving their position.¹³ Bookkeepers were, without any apparent exceptions, all white men, due to legislation that restricted the opportunities available to free coloureds and free blacks in the rural economy.¹⁴ As discussed in chapter 3, they were responsible for overseeing day-to-day activities on the sugar estates and represented the lowest strata of the white management structure on these properties.¹⁵

¹¹ Frank Cundall (ed.), *Lady Nugent's Journal* (London, West India Committee, 1934), p. 131.

¹² J. Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (New York, Negro Universities Press, [1823] 1969), p. 179.

¹³ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 189.

¹⁴ See Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 5.

¹⁵ See also B. W. Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739 – 1912* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, 1998), pp. 40 – 41, 78 – 79.

The working lives of such men were hard, as illustrated in *Marly*, an anonymously authored novella, published in 1828. This fictional account illustrates some of the main hopes, worries and trials faced by new arrivals in Jamaica from the British Isles. In the story, a white colonist tells Marly, the young protagonist of the story, that he ‘will not relish the life of a planter, or, as it is called in this country, a book-keeper.’¹⁶ Furthermore, the narrator stresses the threat of illness, which affected all new arrivals hoping to become planters. These newcomers had to face the fact that they could be struck down and killed by a tropical disease long before they had the chance to become a landowner in the colony.¹⁷ However, Marly was also told that Jamaica is ‘the best poor man’s country in the world, for with industry and economy, every man may here prosper’, and the author describes the Marly’s excitement, tempered by trepidation, at the prospect of making a fortune through sugar.¹⁸

Stewart also commented on the hopeful anticipation of young men embarking on careers on the plantations, who contemplated ‘the prospect of realising in a few years, in this land of promise, the fortune of a nabob.’¹⁹ However, as Stewart notes, this initial sense of expectation was often short-lived in newly arrived bookkeepers, a phenomena also reflected in *Marly*, when Marly’s friend, Mr Campbell, laments: ‘[b]y what I have learned since I came to the island, I find, that all who die here do not die so very rich, as their friends in Britain maintain’.²⁰ In 1812, the *Jamaica Magazine* printed a letter from ‘Juvenis’, who wrote that he had arrived on the island believing that he could find wealth and success, but now

¹⁶ Anon, *Marly; or, A Planter’s Life in Jamaica* (Glasgow, 1828), p. 10. The novel appears to have been written by a former estate employee, as the author describes himself as a ‘slave driver’ who has laid down the whip in favour of the pen (p. 1).

¹⁷ Anon, *Marley*, p. 5. See also Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 179.

¹⁸ Anon, *Marley*, pp. 5 – 7.

¹⁹ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 192.

²⁰ Anon, *Marley*, p. 107.

realised that he had been mistaken, finding that he disliked his job as a bookkeeper and his companions, who treated him with ‘scorn and contempt’. In reply, a writer from the *Magazine* prescribed stoicism on the part of the correspondent, who was far from alone in his predicament.²¹

In 1833, attorney, John Gale Vidal, wrote from Jamaica to John Mitchell, his British-based employer, explaining that a young man, newly arrived on the island, had handed him a letter of introduction signed by Mitchell. It is impossible to identify the unfortunate bearer of this letter of introduction, but Vidal reported that the newcomer was ‘quite dissatisfied with his situation’ and characterised the young man as ‘a very nice youth but quite unfit for the lie of life for which he was sent out’. According to Vidal, the new arrival had refused to work and had shut himself away from the other bookkeepers on the property where he had found employment, which led Vidal to recommend that the young man should return home to Britain.²² Clearly, for some, hopes of getting rich quick in Jamaica were soon dashed.

However, evidence suggests that most white men on the island viewed the successful execution of the duties of a bookkeeper as something of a rite of passage. For example, Stewart wrote that ‘a young man, following the profession of a planter’ had to ‘pass through the probationary situation of a *book-keeper*’ in order to become an estate overseer, in charge of the day-to-day running of a plantation.²³ White male colonists therefore viewed bookkeeping as temporary employment that ought to lead to better things, which explains why more

²¹ *The Jamaica Magazine*, vol. 2, June 1812, pp. 5 – 8.

²² JA 1B/5/83/2, Attorney’s letter book, f. 54, John Gale Vidal to John Mitchell, Spanish Town, 23 March 1833.

²³ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 189.

experienced and senior men could advise stoicism on the part of those who complained about their experiences in this job.

This situation can help to explain the regular movement of bookkeepers from property to property that occurred on the island. Such migratory behaviour is illustrated by Barry Higman's description of the constant turnover of white staff on the Montpelier estates in St James and by the fact that, at the time of their deaths, some estate staff from St James were owed salaries by more than one plantation.²⁴ This quick turnover was probably symptomatic of bookkeepers' constant search for jobs with better future prospects. Despite the harsh conditions that they endured, there is no evidence of serious tensions between poor white estate staff and the white elite during this period. We can speculate that one reason that the bookkeepers did their menial jobs without evincing deep-seated opposition to their employers was that they viewed their current positions as temporary appointments that would, if they were successful and lucky, lead to greater things.

Contacts on the island were vital to such advancement. As Stewart wrote, much of a newcomers' success depended 'on the interests and assistance of an able friend or friends, without whom a man of merit may toil for many years to very little purpose.'²⁵ As we have seen, both Hamilton Brown and John Gale Vidal offered this sort of assistance to young men who arrived in Jamaica from the metropole. A letter from Vidal to John Mitchell in Britain, written in April 1821, reveals the complex nature of these arrangements. Vidal wrote that when he heard that a Mr R. P. Firth had arrived in Jamaica he would 'see that he is in every respect paid proper attention to and put under the charge of an overseer that will

²⁴ Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 40; JA 1B/11/3, Inventories, vol. 141, f. 17, John Brackenridge, 20 April 1825; f. 42, Keil Clarke, 11 June 1825; f. 96, Richard Herring, 6 August 1825; vol. 145, f. 106, William Callie, 26 July 1828.

²⁵ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 180.

take care of him and learn him his business'. Vidal went on to tell Mitchell that 'in doing this I only attempt to fulfil a part of my duty to you and all your family and which, when I can repeat [it], will afford me the most healthful pleasure upon all occasions.'²⁶ Vidal's dependent position as an employee of the Mitchell family, who engaged him as their representative in Jamaica, can help to explain his willingness to assist young men such as Firth whom the family sent to Jamaica to become planters. Moreover, Vidal was related to the Mitchells and was himself in a position to receive assistance from them.²⁷ We can therefore see that the help that men such as Vidal offered to newcomers such as Firth was a part of a complicated and extensive transatlantic network of business, friendship and mutual assistance.

Seven weeks after writing to confirm Firth's arrival in Jamaica, Vidal wrote to inform John Mitchell that Mr Firth had been placed on the Mitchells' Moreland Estate. However, Vidal revealed that Firth did 'not seem to be by any means pleased with the profession of a planter', though he also explained to his employer that 'this is an aversion that takes place very often with people of his time of life at the first'.²⁸ Vidal therefore monitored the progress of the young men sent to Jamaica by his employers, and his reports suggest that some of the men who came to work on the family's properties made an easier transition to life on the island than others. For example, later in 1821, Vidal informed the Mitchells that the 'young man Joshua Cockburn that you enquire after has been living on Bushy Park ever since he came to the island and has behaved and conducted himself in a becoming manner.'²⁹ These examples demonstrate the significance of metropolitan

²⁶ JA 1B/5/83/1, Attorney's letter book, f. 6, John Gale Vidal to John Mitchell, 21 April 1821.

²⁷ For example, William Mitchell negotiated with the absentee landowner, Mr Sympton, to allow Vidal to lease Sympton's pen in Jamaica. See chapter 3 above.

²⁸ JA 1B/11/83/1, f. 12, John Gale Vidal to John Mitchell, 10 June 1821.

²⁹ JA 1B/11/83/1, f. 20, John Gale Vidal to Messrs W R & S Mitchell, 8 October 1821.

and local contacts and show how such contacts did not ensure success, but could facilitate an introduction to local society and help newcomers to the colony to start a career in the sugar industry.

Family connections were also often of paramount importance to young men seeking their fortune in Jamaica. This point is illustrated in a codicil to the will of the resident sugar planter and attorney, William Allen, who died in 1825. Allen bequeathed £50 to his nephew, Charles Allen, and recommended him to ‘the particular attention of my friends Walter Murray, William King and William Gordon’, stating that he wished him ‘to be under the care of my said friend William Gordon and brought up in the planting line.’³⁰ William Allen, a successful planter himself, therefore tried to ensure that his nephew would be supervised and cared for by influential local figures, who would also assist his nephew to become a sugar planter.³¹

Beginning their careers as bookkeepers, the most common immediate goal of would-be sugar planters was to graduate to the position of overseer, which would see them in overall charge of the daily operation of an estate and answerable only to the manager or owner of the property. Overseers generally enjoyed a better material existence than their white subordinates. At New Montpelier estate, in St James, the bookkeepers lived in shared barracks, whereas the overseer had access to a two storied house that, whilst not comparable to a sugar planters’ mansion, provided the occupant with a comfortable dwelling place.³² Many overseers also owned slaves and hired them out for profit, and as Trevor Burnard has argued, in

³⁰ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 105, f. 88, William Allen, 24 August 1818 (Codicil).

³¹ Allen was a particularly wealthy planter. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 141, f. 156, William Allen, 5 December 1825. Walter Murray and William Gordon were both sugar planters and magistrates for St James. See *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript: *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1817, p. 99.

³² Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 100 – 101, 111 – 14.

Jamaica, 'the first step toward becoming a landowner was to become a slaveholder.'³³ Indeed, according to Stewart, it was possible for such a plantation employee to acquire a gang of forty or more slaves, retire from the planting line and devote 'his attentions to his slaves, whom he hires out to perform work on the plantations.'³⁴ Most white men therefore did not aspire to remain as employees, dependent on the sugar plantations for their income, and aimed to graduate from bookkeeper to overseer before becoming a landed proprietor and, if possible, a sugar planter.

This process of advancement was difficult and, inevitably, large numbers of hopeful men never made it to become fully independent landowners. In 1801, Maria Nugent described meeting the overseer of Hope estate in St Andrew, describing the man as a 'vulgar, ugly, Scotch Sultan, who is about fifty, clumsy, ill made, and dirty.' From Nugent's report, it would appear that it was not lack of ability that had caused this man to remain an overseer until so late in his life, as she wrote that other Scottish colonists in the area had told her that 'he is a good overseer'. This man had, like many white male plantation employees, taken a non-white mistress, and had apparently established strong links to the plantation that he managed, since his mistress showed Nugent her 'three yellow children, and said, with some ostentation, she should soon have another.'³⁵ This instance of an overseer living out his days on a sugar estate was by no means isolated. For example, Hamilton Brown wrote to George French to tell the latter of the death of Mr William Brown Boyd, explaining that Boyd 'was overseer for many years on

³³ Trevor Burnard, 'Thomas Thistlewood Becomes a Creole' in Bruce Clayton and John Salmond (eds), *Varieties of Southern History: New Essays on a Region and Its People* (Westport, Greenwood, 1996), p. 115.

³⁴ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 200 – 201.

³⁵ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 39 – 40.

Queen Hithe &, as such, died in 1819'. In his will, Boyd had requested that 'his natural son, a mulatto named Thomas, by a slave on Queen Hithe' be freed.³⁶ Clearly therefore, many overseers either through choice or the influence of other circumstances did not become independent proprietors, but instead became tied, often by links to the enslaved community, to the plantations that they helped to run.

Some, however, did progress from being employees on sugar estates to being independent proprietors. A well known example of an overseer making the switch to becoming a landowner is that of the Westmoreland proprietor, Thomas Thistlewood. Having come to Jamaica from England in 1750, aged 29, Thistlewood worked as an overseer on sugar estates before purchasing his own property, Breadnut Island Pen, in 1767. This holding contained nearly 150 acres. Thistlewood kept livestock there and he also grew vegetables for sale and sold wildfowl and fish that he or one of his thirty or so slaves had killed. He also sold eggs, domestic fowl and grass, and he made money from the sale of sewing done by his enslaved mistress, Phibbah. His slaves took this produce to market for sale. However, one of the most important sources of Thistlewood's income was jobbing.³⁷

It appears that, for white men in Jamaica, working a smaller lot of land with a few slaves and hiring out jobbing labour was a way to accumulate enough capital to be able to afford the expense of setting themselves up as a sugar planter. It was, as such, an important step on the way to owning an estate. Brief biographies of two men who came to Jamaica and became the proprietors of sugar estates will serve to

³⁶ JA 4/45/62, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 4 October 1832.

³⁷ Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750 – 86* (Kingston, University of the West Indies Press, 1999).

illustrate that, for those with good fortune, it was possible to rise through the ranks of society and acquire plots of land before becoming a wealthy planter.

Jacob Graham was born in 1726. He arrived in Jamaica from Cumberland in England at the age of twenty and, between his arrival on the island and 1768, he does not appear to have owned land. It is impossible to tell exactly what Graham did during these years. However, when he did enter the land market, aged forty-two, the official deeds record him as a 'planter', the generic term for a white plantation employee. Graham bought 100 acres of land in St James in 1768 and continued to build up his holdings of land in an area near to the mouth of the Great River over the next twenty years. In his will, made in 1816, Graham described this land, which he referred to as Fustic Grove, as 'pen land'. Graham's holdings in this area never exceeded four hundred acres and, at the time of his death, he appears to have held thirty enslaved people at Fustic Grove.³⁸

It appears that Graham used this land much as Thistlewood used his at Breadnut Island.³⁹ In 1774, information compiled by the vestry of St James shows that Graham owned fifty slaves and seven head of stock. In this list of landowners, Graham fell into the category of settlers 'next in degree to Sugar Planters' and was described as a 'Jobber'. Furthermore, like Thistlewood, Graham was apparently the only white man on his property, but enjoyed sexual relations with enslaved women,

³⁸ Philip Wright (Compiler), *Monumental Inscriptions of Jamaica* (London, Society of Genealogists, 1966), p. 237; IRO, Deeds LOS, vol. 228, f. 125; vol. 240, f. 99; vol. 246, f. 218; vol. 251, f. 69; vol. 252, f. 30; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177, Jacob Graham, 24 March 1816; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 128, f. 53, Jacob Graham, 9 September 1816; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1816, 'Returns of Givings in', 1816, p. 94.

³⁹ Indeed, Graham's transition from bookkeeper to landowner and his relationships with enslaved mistresses underline the similarities between him and Thistlewood, bearing out Michael Craton's assertion that 'the Thistlewood case... was almost certainly far more common in Jamaica than has previously been recognised'. See Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 356.

fathering at least seven 'reputed natural children' by enslaved mothers.⁴⁰ However, unlike Thistlewood, Graham made the transition from being a jobbing landowner to being the proprietor of a sugar estate.

In 1787, having been a landowner for nearly twenty years, and at the relatively advanced age of sixty-one, Graham bought Lapland plantation, in the St James interior. When he acquired it, the property covered 1,200 acres of land and was the site of an old coffee works.⁴¹ The inventory of Graham's personal estate, made after his death in 1816, reveals that he had stores of coffee and rum and that John Graham Clarke of England owed him money for 'several years crops of sugar and coffee'. Graham therefore became a planter, involved in the production of sugar and coffee for export to the UK, perhaps producing both crops on his Lapland plantation. When Graham died there were 127 enslaved people living on Lapland, which strongly suggests that he used this, his largest property, to produce sugar.⁴²

Jacob Graham was not an extremely wealthy planter. When he died, his personal estate was valued at £18,750 Jamaican currency, which made him rich but not as rich as some of the established plantocracy, whose estates were valued in the hundreds of thousands.⁴³ However, over the course of his unusually long life, Graham was able to build up his land holdings and eventually plant and export crops of sugar. In doing this, he had realised the dream that so many young men who arrived in Jamaica brought with them.

⁴⁰ BL Add. MSS 12435; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177; JA 1B/11/6, Manumissions, vol. 14, ff. 141 – 42; vol. 18, ff. 15 – 17; vol. 19, f. 152; vol. 26, f. 33. See also chapter 7 below.

⁴¹ IRO, Deeds LOS, vol. 354, f. 79.

⁴² JA 1B/11/3, vol. 128, f. 53.

⁴³ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 128, f. 53.

Graham was not alone in making this kind of advancement, as demonstrated by the career of Hamilton Brown. Brown was much younger than Graham and made his ascent to become a wealthy and powerful man at a later period. Born in about 1775, his original home was County Antrim in Ireland.⁴⁴ His first recorded action in Jamaica was in 1803: a sale of slaves to George Turner, an absentee proprietor. We therefore know that Brown was in Jamaica by his late twenties. In June 1810, aged thirty-five, he purchased a pimento walk in St Ann, comprising about 300 acres, and promptly mortgaged it. From 1815 onwards, he made a series of land transactions in the same parish, buying large pens and sugar plantations and mortgaging them.⁴⁵ By 1816, he owned his original property, Rose Hill, with 31 slaves and 52 stock. He also owned two larger properties: Grier Park and Antrim. By 1830, he had sold Rose Hill, but he was a leading landowner in St Ann, with five properties, including sugar estates. Four of these properties were home to more than 100 enslaved people.⁴⁶

By the early 1830s, Brown was a magistrate, a member of the House of Assembly, and a powerful planting attorney, with responsibility for several large estates in the area around St Ann. Furthermore, he had attained a high officer rank in the militia, was an outspoken member of the Assembly and a leading figure of the pro-slavery and anti-sectarian Colonial Church Union. He also met and entertained the new Governor, the Earl of Mulgrave, who toured the island in 1832.⁴⁷ His rise in status was due mainly to his ability and willingness to borrow

⁴⁴ Wright, *Monumental Inscriptions*, p. 270.

⁴⁵ IRO, Deeds LOS, vol. 536, f. 43; vol. 602, f. 200; vol. 606, f. 1; vol. 657, f. 86; vol. 657, f. 89; vol. 661, f. 249; vol. 683, f. 173; vol. 688, f. 220; vol. 693, f. 211; vol. 697, f. 165; vol. 732, f. 190; vol. 749, f. 128, vol. 764, f. 259.

⁴⁶ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1816, 'Returns of Givings in', 1816, pp. 26 – 27; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, 'Returns of Givings in', 1830, p. 33; IRO, Deeds LOS, vol. 683, f. 150; vol. 690, f. 150.

⁴⁷ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, pp. 52, 90; JA 4/45/52, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 4 April 1832; JA 4/45/62, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 4 October 1832; JA 4/45/64, Hamilton Brown to George French, Spanish Town, 15 December 1832; W. J.

capital. He did not buy any of his many properties outright, but instead mortgaged them with lenders both in Jamaica and in the United Kingdom. By borrowing so extensively, Brown was able to advance rapidly in Jamaican society without going through the lengthy process of saving all the capital necessary to purchase large slave-run sugar estates.

Like Jacob Graham, Hamilton Brown had arrived in Jamaica without land, but unlike Graham, Brown took many risks. He borrowed money and mortgaged his property, which allowed him to rise into the ranks of the landed elite relatively early in life. Having first purchased land in his mid-thirties, Brown was a part of the planter class by his mid-forties. In the end, however, Brown appears to have over-stretched himself. He died in 1846 and, in his will, he described his financial difficulties and was not able to make the types of substantial bequests made by many of the plantocracy.⁴⁸

His indebtedness was possibly a sign of the increased difficulty of becoming a planter by the early nineteenth century. Graham had acquired much of his land by patenting unsettled tracts, which was a relatively cheap way of becoming a proprietor. By the time that Brown entered the land market, there was much less unsettled land in Jamaica than there had been fifty years before, which might help to explain why he took the much more expensive option of purchasing and mortgaging pre-existing concerns. However, in spite of their different career paths, Brown and Graham had much in common. Crucially, they were both non-sugar-producing landholders before they purchased plantations, which

Gardner, *A History of Jamaica* (London, Frank Cass, [1873] 1971), pp. 290 – 291; John Roby, *Members of the Assembly of Jamaica, From the Institution of that Branch of the Legislature to the Present Time* (Montego Bay, 1831), p. 40.

⁴⁸ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 124, f. 100, Hamilton Brown, 4 February 1842.

demonstrates how owning a relatively small holding and making money by means other than sugar planting was a crucial step on the way to becoming a planter.

Of course, not all owners of such smaller holdings went on to become planters. Thistlewood for example, who first became a landowner in his mid-forties, did not choose to go on to become the owner of an estate. Douglas Hall claims that by the time that Thistlewood had become an independent landowner, he had 'abandoned any idea he might have entertained about becoming a sugar planter'. Indeed, in 1779, Thistlewood wrote that '[t]o be the owner of a sugar work is to have external dignity for inward and or internal grief'.⁴⁹ Buying and equipping an estate was expensive and unless an individual could get credit, as Brown was clearly able to do, making the move to sugar was very difficult. It therefore seems very likely that most non-elite landowners who aspired to join the planter class did not attain their goal. Nevertheless, white men with holdings of land could always entertain hopes of transcending their current position and becoming a sugar planter.

Influential local contacts remained important to aspiring white men later in their careers. For example, Thistlewood received assistance from his friend John Cope, who was the chief magistrate of Westmoreland and, as such, able to help Thistlewood to join the magistracy of the parish.⁵⁰ Most of Hamilton Brown's mortgages were provided by British-based creditors. However, local figures, such as Henry Cox, a wealthy and powerful landowner in the area around St Ann, also helped to finance his affairs, showing that the support of wealthy men in Jamaica could be extremely useful in building up holdings of land and slaves.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Hall, *In Miserable Slavery*, pp. 115, 269.

⁵⁰ Hall, *In Miserable Slavery*, 239 – 40.

⁵¹ IRO, Deeds LOS, vol. 602, f. 100; vol. 657, f. 86; vol. 688, f. 220; vol. 693, f. 211.

With such help, young white men could aspire to become sugar planters at some point in the future, even if the road to their goal was typically an extremely hazardous one. This road was only open to white men, as free non-whites were restricted from working on sugar plantations. These opportunities were therefore another part of the package of privileges extended exclusively to white men in Jamaica. However, just a few of the white men who came to Jamaica to pass through the probationary situation of bookkeeper became fully independent landowners. These men joined the ranks of jobbers and penkeepers who contributed to the middle ranks of free Jamaican society. As we saw in chapter 3, such men were not poor, but neither did they enjoy the opulent lifestyles of the sugar planters. However, some white men, such as Jacob Graham and Hamilton Brown, went on to become sugar plantation owners. They represented a very small minority of the white men who had originally arrived in Jamaica to make or mend their fortunes, but they also stood as examples to others of the possibility of becoming successful in the colony.

Other routes to advancement

Many of those within the Jamaican elite were self-made men, and most white plantation employees on the island were men on the make. However, it would be wrong suggest that white society was entirely characterised by unrestrained entrepreneurship and social fluidity. It was, of course, very difficult for an individual to become economically successful, but it is also important to recognise that the sugar-planting elite comprised many men who had inherited their

wealth and that some of the most influential men within the elite came from the island's wealthy families.

One such man was Richard Barrett. Born in 1789, Barrett was part of a powerful Jamaican family. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, his great grandfather had been one of the first pioneering settlers to exploit the fertile land of the area in and around St James, and the two succeeding generations consolidated the family's position in the region. By the time that Richard Barrett was born, the Barrett family owned many large sugar estates in Jamaica. Barrett's grandfather had been wealthy enough to send his sons to Oxford to receive a university education in the metropole, and many of the Barretts served as public officers on the island. Richard Barrett's father and uncle both served as members of the Assembly.⁵²

The Barrett family was therefore well established in Jamaica when Richard's father died of a fever in 1794, leaving his son the land and wealth that would allow him to enjoy a position of privilege and power on the island. Richard Barrett owned two sugar plantations in St James, Greenwood and Barrett-Hall and, as explained by Jeannette Marks in her romanticised and sanitised history of the family, he 'was, for a time, to become the leading Barrett figure in the life of Jamaica.'⁵³ In 1817, at the age of twenty-eight, he was elected to the House of Assembly, representing his home parish, and remained a prominent figure in the House until his death in 1839. In 1825, he became speaker of the House and in the same year was selected by the Governor to serve as the Custos, or chief magistrate, of St James.⁵⁴ Like his Oxford-educated father, Barrett appears to have had strong

⁵² Jeannette Marks, *The Family of the Barrett: A Colonial Romance* (New York, Macmillan, 1938), pp. 154 – 216.

⁵³ Marks, *The Family of the Barrett*, pp. 226, 308, 309.

⁵⁴ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

links with the metropole, where he participated in the public debate over emancipation.⁵⁵ However, he lived in Jamaica for most of his life, overseeing the management of his slave-run properties and participating in public life. Barrett's route to wealth and prominence was therefore very different to those planters who had worked as bookkeepers and speculated in land and slaves to create a fortune. He was born into wealth and his prominence in public life mirrored that of his privileged father.

Other estate owners acquired their wealth and privilege in similar ways. James Cunningham served as Custos of St James in 1823 and, like Barrett, he owned two sugar estates in the parish. When he died in 1812, Cunningham's father, John, left these properties to James, his eldest son, along with two pens. John Cunningham also bequeathed land and slaves to his other two sons, George and Samuel, and directed that James and George were to have joint ownership of his house in Montego Bay. John Cunningham had been one of the richest sugar planters in Jamaica, living a privileged and opulent lifestyle. He was able to ensure that his sons enjoyed the wealth and status associated with being sugar planters, bequeathing plantations and slaves to each of them. This inherited wealth helped his three sons to become influential figures in public life in St James and Trelawny, where they each served as magistrates.⁵⁶

Some of the most powerful planter-politicians in Jamaica had therefore inherited their wealth and social standing. However, previous generations had had to acquire that wealth. In Richard Barrett's case, the family's fortune had been

⁵⁵ Marks, *The Family of the Barrett*, pp. 420–23.

⁵⁶ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 86, f. 113, John Cunningham, 20 April 1811; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 58, John Cunningham, 28 December 1812; According to John Cunningham's will, James was to keep Retrieve estate as his own property, but was to manage the other three properties left to him on behalf of his sisters.

secured by the endeavours of his great grandfather, who had ordered the building of Cinnamon Hill Great House.⁵⁷ Such planters of the early eighteenth century had been able to take advantage of the abundance of unsettled land in the parish of St James and thereby built up their properties relatively cheaply.

Evidence suggests that John Cunningham had become a sugar planter having previously been a merchant. In a list of St James slaveholders, compiled in 1774, 'Jno Cuningham [*sic*]' was listed as a 'merchant' in possession of nine slaves.⁵⁸ Furthermore, since Cunningham's inventory shows that he had part ownership of two ships, it seems reasonable to suppose that he had been a merchant before becoming an estate owner and continuing with his mercantile concerns.⁵⁹

Investing money made in transatlantic trade was a common mode of entry into the landed elite, and throughout the eighteenth century, merchants had been able to transform themselves into planters. Writing in 1732, Robert Robertson claimed that, in the Leeward Islands, once a merchant had 'a Footing on a Piece of Land or on a Plantation...they seldom fail...of soon becoming considerable planters'.⁶⁰ Moreover, Richard Sheridan has argued that, by the late eighteenth century, many merchants in Jamaica had acquired land, become planters and embarked upon lives of leisure.⁶¹ Many traders were therefore as intent on owning land and planting sugar as other groups in free Jamaican society, further demonstrating the widespread appeal of becoming an independent landowner and living by the labour of an enslaved workforce.

⁵⁷ Marks, *Family of the Barrett*, pp. 154 – 59.

⁵⁸ BL Add. MSS 12435, Long Manuscript.

⁵⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 121, f. 58.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623 – 1775* (Kingston, Canoe Press, [1974] 1994), p. 360.

⁶¹ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 374 – 75.

Professionals such as medical doctors and lawyers could also acquire sufficient wealth to become sugar planters. In 1823, J. Stewart asserted that success in the medical profession or law depended upon having useful friends and connections on the island. Luck also played a part, showing that similar factors dictated the advancement of those in these professions as for those serving as employees on the sugar estates. Some doctors were able to become the owners of large properties and join the social and economic elite.⁶² An example is George McFarquhar Lawson, a medical doctor, who became the owner of a large property in St James. During the 1820s, he served as a magistrate, was elected as a member of the Assembly and gained promotion to the high militia rank of colonel.⁶³ Lawyers could also become powerful members of the elite. As Stewart remarked, of the professions on the island, the law was 'perhaps the most lucrative', and some lawyers became planting attorneys, joining those local planters chosen to manage the affairs of absentee landowners.⁶⁴

Marriage was another way of becoming a powerful landowner, and marriage to the daughter of an estate owner could provide a white man from the middling section of free society with the opportunity to acquire wealth, property and the vital family connections that could facilitate his ascent into the plantocracy. A scarcity of evidence makes it difficult to identify such marriages of convenience. Furthermore, in the absence of qualitative sources such as personal letters or diaries, it is impossible to assess the motives behind most Jamaican marriages. An assessment of marriage patterns during this period must therefore remain conjectural. As Trevor Burnard has pointed out with regard to analysing the

⁶² Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 196 – 99.

⁶³ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

⁶⁴ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 198; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript. See especially the entries for John Gale Vidal and William Stanford Grignon.

motivation behind bequests made in wills, we are left to make ‘informed guesses about likely conduct from defective sources.’⁶⁵

Marriages that involved the sons and daughters of planters appear to have occurred mainly within the social elite of the island, although some also involved members of the upper levels of metropolitan society and Jamaican heirs or heiresses.⁶⁶ This reinforced the ties between elite families on the island as well as those between wealthy Jamaican families and the metropole. However, white men from the middling sections of Jamaican free society appear to have occasionally used marriage as a means of improving their social and economic standing. For example, in 1807, John Coates, aged 27, married Mary Cunningham, the daughter of John Cunningham.⁶⁷ There are no extant records of Coates’ economic and social position at this time, but he does not appear to have come from a wealthy local family. In 1774, the only individual named Coates listed as a slaveholder in St James was William Coates, a carpenter.⁶⁸ John Coates’ marriage into one of the most powerful families in the district could therefore only have assisted his rise into the social elite of the area.

In his will, John Cunningham left just £100 sterling to his son in law, but bequeathed £10,000 to his daughter, Mary, half of which was to be paid to her in 1815, the remainder of which was to be invested on her behalf.⁶⁹ As Burnard has argued in his study of bequests in Jamaica between 1665 and 1734, land was by far the most valuable property to inherit. He also comments that bequests of land to daughters declined over time and that ‘the most common legacy that daughters in

⁶⁵ Trevor Burnard, ‘Family Continuity and Female Independence in Jamaica, 1665 – 1734’, *Continuity and Change*, 7/2 (1992), p. 195.

⁶⁶ See NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

⁶⁷ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; ML, Microfilm 1224328, Item 3, Marriages, f.250.

⁶⁸ BL Add. MSS 12435.

⁶⁹ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 86, f. 113.

Jamaica received was cash'.⁷⁰ Cunningham bequeathed land to his sons and cash to his daughters, which bears out Burnard's assertions and demonstrates that similar patterns of inheritance persisted into the early nineteenth century.

All personalty brought to a marriage by a woman came under the complete control of her husband, who also gained the right to manage any real estate owned by his wife. In this respect, the nature of inheritance practices, which frequently involved generous bequests of cash to daughters, was, as Burnard states, 'advantageous to men who married female inheritors.'⁷¹ This seems crucial to understanding the rise of John Coates as a local figure and the importance of marriage in enabling such men to advance in Jamaican society. Having married Mary Cunningham, Coates stood to gain a great deal in material terms.

The year before the death of John Cunningham, Coates owned thirty-nine slaves and thirteen head of stock.⁷² In March 1815, before his wife was due to receive her legacy of £5,000, Coates owned fifty-three slaves and one hundred head of stock.⁷³ However, by 1817, he had acquired thirty-nine more slaves, which strongly suggests that he had taken control of the money left to Mary and invested some of it in buying enslaved workers for his property.⁷⁴ In 1823, John Coates owned two properties: one named John's Hall on which eighty-eight enslaved people were settled and another named Paradise, home to a similar number of enslaved workers.⁷⁵ By 1831, Coates had acquired yet more property and enslaved workers and he owned over 250 head of livestock. He certainly had a large enough labour force at his disposal to have been engaged in sugar production.⁷⁶ In 1809,

⁷⁰ Burnard, 'Family Continuity', pp. 189 – 91.

⁷¹ Burnard, 'Family continuity', pp. 184, 192 – 93.

⁷² *Jamaica Almanack*, 1812, 'Returns of Givings in', 1811, p. 133.

⁷³ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1815, 'Returns of Givings in', 1815, p. 55.

⁷⁴ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 97.

⁷⁵ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1824, 'Returns of Givings in', 1823, p. 119.

⁷⁶ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, 'Returns of Givings in', 1831, p. 122.

two years after his marriage, Coates became a magistrate. By 1825, with a great deal more land and slaves to bolster his social status, he had advanced to become a major in the militia and a director of the Montego Bay Close Harbour Company.⁷⁷ It therefore seems certain that Coates had used the financial advantages associated with his marriage to a wealthy local heiress to build up his landholdings and enslaved workforce and to become one of the most significant landowners in St James. It is also reasonable to assume that the status that this property as well as his new family connections brought him allowed him to become established as a prominent member of the local elite.

Therefore, whilst individuals' motivations are difficult to analyse, it appears that marriage was a crucial conduit of social and economic advancement, at least for those who could attract a suitable spouse. Maria Nugent's journal further highlights this. Nugent recalls meeting Mrs Sympson, the female proprietor of Moneymusk estate in the parish of Clarendon, who had been twice widowed and told Nugent that she had since had many proposals 'but finding all her admirers *interested*' she had declined taking a third husband. Her suitors, it appears, were mainly interested in the sugar estate that she owned and managed, which reveals that men were prepared to use marriage as a means of acquiring property and that women were well aware of such tactics. Indeed, Sympson's rebuttal of these propositions and her willingness to operate her estate 'entirely herself' shows that there were women in Jamaica who wished to hold on to their property in land and slaves and not let them fall into the hands of an avaricious husband.⁷⁸

However, there were very few such women in charge of sugar plantations, which shows that the opportunity to rise to the top of the sugar industry was largely

⁷⁷ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

⁷⁸ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 80 – 81.

reserved for white men. In the area around St James, there were some women who owned land and more than thirty slaves. However, like Mrs Sympson, all of these women were widows, and spinsters rarely amassed large holdings of land or slaves.⁷⁹ Clearly, the chances of independent advancement for white women were limited and that, for them, inheritance were their most reliable means of attaining property.

Colonists' unabated desire to accumulate land and slaves clearly shows that ownership of both remained an important marker of elite status throughout the early nineteenth century. However, sugar plantations were far less attractive as investments by this period. The sugar industry had ceased to be as profitable as it had been in the late eighteenth century, and by this point, a shortage of unsettled land made it more difficult to set up a plantation cheaply. Therefore, many attempted to obtain wealth and social status by acting as attorneys for absentee landowners. As estate owners began to retire to Britain in large numbers, the number of wealthy attorneys on the island rose accordingly. With fewer resident planters on the island, such men were better able to acquire important local offices and break into the ranks of the social and political elite of the colony.

Both William Stanford Grignon and William Miller were able to make this transition. Grignon, a lawyer, did not own a plantation of his own but, by 1817, he had control over the management of several properties in St James.⁸⁰ He became a Member of the Assembly for the parish in 1818, which shows that he was part of the political elite of the region.⁸¹ Furthermore, by 1832, he was a colonel in the

⁷⁹ JA 1B/11/3, vol. 108, f. 100, Sabina Jane Bowen, 25 February 1807; vol. 131, f. 219, Grace Hine, 1 July 1819; vol. 144, f. 156, Rachel Camelia Fowler, 10 May 1828. See also IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 96, f. 129, Grace Hine, 5 November 1808, and vol. 108, f. 130, Rachel Camelia Fowler, 10 July 1822.

⁸⁰ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; T71/201 – 204.

⁸¹ Roby, *Members of the Assembly*, p. 88.

militia, a high rank reserved for men of the social elite.⁸² Miller had, according to the missionary Hope Masterton Waddell, 'gone from Scotland in the lowest capacity, and had risen to almost the highest position in the colony.'⁸³ He became chief magistrate of Trelawny, a major general in the militia and a member of the Legislative Council.⁸⁴ However, he does not appear to have ever owned a sugar estate of his own, and his elite status seems to have rested on the large number of properties that were under his jurisdiction as one of the leading attorneys on the island.⁸⁵

John Gale Vidal, another lawyer by profession, also appears to have been able to increase his wealth and status by acting as an attorney to wealthy absentee landowners. In 1821, he managed the extensive properties of his relatives, the Mitchell family, as well as those belonging to other absentees. He also owned two small properties of his own in St Catherine and St John. From 1820, Vidal served as a magistrate for St Catherine and in 1823 he became clerk of the Assembly, a well-paid post that he held until his death from cholera in 1850.⁸⁶

Vidal continued to act as an attorney until the 1830s. However by 1826, he had acquired a large property in the parish of St Thomas in the Vale, named Shenton. Between 1826 and 1830, Vidal kept about 200 enslaved workers on Shenton. He also raised livestock on the property, although the actual amount of animals there varied, and from the information available, it is unclear whether the property was a sugar estate or a livestock pen.⁸⁷ However, regardless of the main

⁸² NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

⁸³ Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829 – 1858* (London, 1863), p. 39.

⁸⁴ Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies*, p. 39; BL Add. MSS 51818, Holland House Papers, Lord Seaford to Lord Holland, Montpelier, 2 August 1833.

⁸⁵ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818 – 32; 'Returns of Givings in', 1817 – 31; T71/201 – 204; T71/222 – 23.

⁸⁶ JA 1B/5/83/1 - 2; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1822, 'Returns of Givings in', 1821, pp. 9, 14; NLJ. Feurtado Manuscript.

⁸⁷ JA 1B/5/83/2; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1827 – 1831, 'Returns of Givings in', 1826 – 1830.

use of the property, as home to so many enslaved workers, it was a substantial concern. Therefore, Vidal was able to branch out from being an attorney to buy a large property of his own. This suggests that he derived considerable wealth from managing the concerns of wealthy absentees and shows that, despite the economic trouble that had affected the colony, the lure of landownership remained strong into the decade before emancipation.

In spite of the numbers of wealthy landowners and attorneys resident on the island, the metropole also provided a strong lure to the Jamaican elite. Indeed, most elite men maintained strong links with friends and business associates in Britain and many also took the opportunity to travel there. As we have seen, some men chose to remain in Jamaica and pursue political careers on the island. Hamilton Brown, Richard Barrett and John Gale Vidal are all prime examples of such men who showed a steady commitment to public life in Jamaica. However, all of these men had strong links with Britain. Barrett travelled to Britain in 1832 as a representative of the Assembly, charged with representing the Jamaican colonists' case over the slavery controversy before British politicians.⁸⁸ Brown was an attorney engaged in ongoing correspondence with an employer based in England, and Vidal was in a similar position.⁸⁹ Vidal visited Britain, but lived mostly in Jamaica, dying there in 1850.⁹⁰ Richard Barrett died in Jamaica, as did Hamilton Brown and John Coates.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Marks, *Family of the Barrett*, pp. 420 – 23; JA 4/45/55, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 10 May 1832; *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 11 to Saturday 18 May 1833, p. 2.

⁸⁹ JA 4/45; JA 1B/5/83/1; JA 1B/5/83/2.

⁹⁰ Vidal planned a trip to England, arranging the journey through his correspondence with William Mitchell. See JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 48, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 5 August 1822; JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 55, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 21 October 1822; JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 57, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 18 November 1822; JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 59, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 30 December 1822; JA 1B/5/83/1, f. 61, John Gale Vidal to William Mitchell, 20 January 1823. On Vidal's death, see NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

⁹¹ Coates died in an accident at Montego bay in August 1834. Barrett was taken suddenly ill and died in 1839, and Brown died in 1846. See NLJ, Fuertado Manuscript; Marks, *Family of the Barrett*, pp. 468 – 69; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 124, f. 100, Hamilton Brown, 4 February 1842.

However, some planters kept up regular contact with society in the metropole before moving there permanently. William Mitchell was one such proprietor. Maria Nugent visited him in Jamaica, whilst he was still resident on the island. Known locally as 'King' Mitchell, she described him being 'immensely rich'.⁹² Indeed, Mitchell was one of the richest men in the colony and served in the Assembly for the parish of St Catherine.⁹³ He clearly moved frequently between Jamaica and England, and in 1806, Nugent dined with him at his house in London. Her comment that 'all Jamaica was there' demonstrates the fact that others from the elite that she had encountered during her time in Jamaica also traversed the Atlantic between England and the Caribbean.⁹⁴ By 1821, Mitchell was permanently absent from Jamaica and his extensive properties in the hands of John Gale Vidal, his attorney.⁹⁵

The prevalence of this kind of migration to England is hinted at by the lack of testamentary information for many of the elite white men whose names appear on lists of proprietors and officeholders during the early nineteenth century. For example, no will can be traced among the island records for the former Custos of St James, James Cunningham. The same is true for another former Custos, Samuel Vaughan, and for other members of the St James elite. It must therefore be assumed that these men's wills were proved elsewhere and that they had chosen to retire and die away from the island.⁹⁶

This was the thwarted choice of one of the most wealthy and powerful Jamaican proprietors of the early nineteenth century. Simon Taylor owned a

⁹² Cunadall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, p. 77.

⁹³ Cunadall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, p. 24.

⁹⁴ Cunadall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, p. 334.

⁹⁵ JA 1B/5/83/1.

⁹⁶ Of course, it is difficult to make a strong case on the basis of a lack of information. However, the absence of wills for a number of elite men, coupled with other information, suggests that these men left the island and that their wills were proved elsewhere.

number of sugar estates in the east of the island, had been an outspoken member of the Assembly and served as a high-ranking militia officer.⁹⁷ He died at Port Royal in 1813 in an infirm state at the old age of seventy-three. His intention had been to sail for England.⁹⁸ Other elite men who had devoted time and energy to public life in Jamaica were successful in their attempts to retire from the island. Of the five speakers of the Assembly between 1800 and 1834, three resigned from the post in order to leave the island or to go to England.⁹⁹

Walter Murray was another successful retiree. He owned Dundee estate in the parish of Hanover and acted as an attorney for two sugar estates and a pen in St James, which was his home parish. Murray had been a magistrate in Hanover and St James and had been a Major in the militia. He had also served as a member of Assembly for St James between the General Election of 1810 and November 1815, when he had vacated his seat to travel to the metropole, prompting the election of Richard Barrett in his place. In 1816, Murray was re-nominated for election to the Assembly. However, he was not even in Jamaica, and an electioneering address to the freeholders of St James on his behalf came from his friend and influential local figure, Samuel Vaughan. Vaughan's address, published in a local newspaper, noted that Murray, who was 'very shortly expected in this country', was 'devoted to this Parish'.¹⁰⁰ However, apparently belying such claims, on his return to Jamaica in April 1816, Murray made it clear that he was not inclined to take up the reins of the campaign begun on his behalf. He did not sit in the Assembly again, and ten

⁹⁷ See Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), pp. 17 – 20; Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 88 – 92; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1813, p. 174.

⁹⁸ Cambridge University Library, Vanneck Collection, Arcedeckne Family Papers, 3A/1813/1, Mr Shand to Andrew Arcedaeckne, Spanish Town, 24 April 1813.

⁹⁹ John Roby, *Members of the Assembly*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Postscript to the Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 March 1816.

years later, he had become 'an absentee from the island'. He had retired to England and died in Brighton on 20 May 1826.¹⁰¹

Walter Murray may have been committed to his parish and to the colony, where he had friends, property and conducted business. However, other commitments had compelled him to leave Jamaica temporarily in 1815 and to leave permanently by 1826. The decisions of a number of wealthy colonists to leave the island show that the height of many men's aspirations was to acquire the wealth necessary to end their days in Britain. Although not all estate owners joined the ranks of absentee planters living in the metropole, many did leave the island. Some left for England in old age, clinging perhaps to the idea of dying at 'home' in Britain, or perhaps hoping to extend their lives in a healthier environment. This appears to have been the wish of men such as Simon Taylor and Walter Murray, both of whom had made their wealth and careers in Jamaica, but who clearly did not feel attached enough to the source of their success to die there.

Freedpeople and missionaries

Having the relative freedom to realistically aspire to become a wealthy landed proprietor and even to hope for the chance of retiring to Britain were privileges reserved almost exclusively for white men, and the fact that free non-whites did not enjoy these opportunities or privileges was an important factor that limited their loyalties to the planter-elite of the island. The nature of the deficiency laws ensured that freedpeople were excluded from working on the estates, and the

¹⁰¹ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1816, 'Returns of Givings in', 1815, p. 54; T 71/201 – 204; Roby, *Members of the Assembly*, p. 88; *Postscript to the Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 March 1816; *Cornwall Chronicle*, 18 May 1816; JA 1B/11/5, Accounts Current, vol. 23, f. 27; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

restrictive legislation passed by the Assembly in 1761 limited the amount of land or money that they could receive in bequests. This legislation stated that no white person could leave real or personal property worth more than £1,200 sterling to any coloured or black person, which effectively prevented non-whites from inheriting plantations or the necessary capital to buy one. The Assembly revoked this law in 1813, but the practice of not leaving substantial wealth to non-white people persisted.¹⁰² Nevertheless, it was possible for free coloured and free black people to seek to improve their material position in Jamaica, and many of them sought to advance their interests without overtly challenging the structure of slave society in the colony.

Indeed, many freedpeople had previously been enslaved, but were able to achieve freedom and a degree of wealth and independence through cultivating and manipulating relationships with whites. With specific reference to Barbados, Hilary Beckles has described the ‘sociosexual’ manipulation of female domestic servants during the period of slavery, detailing the sexual abuse and manipulation that enslaved women faced at the hands of white planters. However, as Beckles asserts, enslaved women could also pursue relationships with planters as a ‘means of betterment’, self-consciously using such relationships to integrate themselves into white society, gain property and freedom, and improve their social and economic status.¹⁰³ This was apparently also the case in Jamaica, where women such as Frances Graham, a free black ‘housekeeper’ in Jacob Graham’s household, were able to benefit greatly from their relationships with white planters.

¹⁰² Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 5 – 6, 28.

¹⁰³ Hilary Beckles, ‘Black Female Slaves and White Households in Barbados’, in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds), *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 117 - 122.

It appears that Frances had been one of Graham's slaves, but was later freed. In 1801, Graham manumitted a 'negro woman slave named Frances Graham', whom he described as his 'absolute slave and property'.¹⁰⁴ In his will, which he wrote just five months before his death in 1816, he described her as 'a free black woman...and now my housekeeper'. Jacob Graham willed that Frances would have 'free liberty to occupy and live in' a house on part of his property, Fustic Grove, after his death and he left her an annuity of £25 to be paid to her during the course of her life. He also gave her permission to cultivate land at Fustic Grove and on his Lapland estate 'for her own and her negroes' maintenance' and bequeathed nine slaves to her, including an African woman named Queen and her seven children.¹⁰⁵ In this way, Frances, though born a slave, gained land, financial security and slaves of her own. The precise nature of Frances' relationship with Jacob Graham remains unclear. However, it appears that she was able to achieve both social and material advancement through her relationship with a wealthy white benefactor.

Nevertheless, Jacob Graham limited the options open to Frances, preventing her from assisting future generations of her own family with the bequests of land and slaves that he would leave to her. She was only able to occupy the house at Fustic Grove for the course of her own life, and the slaves whom he bequeathed to her would be amalgamated into the estates of his own children when she died. Furthermore, although Jacob Graham ensured that Frances could rely on an annual income during her lifetime, she received no capital in a lump sum and could therefore not easily transfer wealth to her own relatives or friends in a will of her

¹⁰⁴ JA 1B/11/6, vol. 26, f. 34.

¹⁰⁵ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177.

own.¹⁰⁶ In this way, Graham ensured that, although he would provide for Frances, he would continue to control her even after his death.

Jacob Graham was more generous to his free coloured children, who were born between 1760 and 1793. Graham fathered at least seven mulatto children by enslaved women belonging to him and manumitted each of these sons and daughters between 1781 and 1801.¹⁰⁷ When Graham died in 1816, six of them remained alive and five of them were resident in St James.¹⁰⁸ In his will, Jacob Graham left buildings and a small amount of land in Montego Bay to his daughter Eleanor Graham and her daughter, and he left another piece of this lot of land to his children, Jacob, John and Jane. In addition, he left 100 acres of his land at Fustic Grove pen to his surviving six children, to be divided between them. He also bequeathed money to each of his sons and daughters, leaving legacies of £1,200 to the four youngest and £200 to each of the eldest. As well as receiving land and money, each of Graham's children also received at least one slave.¹⁰⁹

Jacob Graham's will therefore helped to ensure that his free coloured sons and daughters could live comfortable lives after his death, and the bequests that he left were especially beneficial to the youngest four, who received the largest legacies. By leaving them capital that they could dispose of and use as they saw fit, Graham ensured that his family in Jamaica would be able to pass their wealth on to succeeding generations. Therefore, though born into slavery, Elizabeth, Eleanor, Mary, Jane, Jacob and John Graham advanced to become landowners and slaveholders by the time that their father died.

¹⁰⁶ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177.

¹⁰⁷ ML, Microfilm 1224328, Item 3, Baptisms, ff. 46, 95, 104; JA 1B/11/6, vol. 14, ff. 141 – 42; vol. 18, ff. 15 – 17; vol. 19, f. 152; vol. 26, f. 33.

¹⁰⁸ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177. See also chapter 7 below.

¹⁰⁹ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177.

However, in spite of this, Jacob Graham did not leave his plantation, Lapland, to any of his free coloured sons or daughters. Instead, the property, along with 127 enslaved people, plantation equipment and livestock, went to his nephew in Britain, a Newcastle merchant named John Graham Clarke.¹¹⁰ Therefore, even after the legislation of 1813 had decreed it permissible to leave an unlimited amount of property to non-whites, Jacob Graham decided not to leave his main capital asset to any of his free coloured children, choosing instead to bequeath his plantation to a white man in England. Graham's children therefore stood to gain a great deal from their father, but as non-whites, they could not hope to inherit his sugar plantation, which highlights the limited opportunities open to free coloured people in Jamaican slave society.

The will of James Galloway, owner of Unity Hall estate in St James, further demonstrates the opportunities available to free coloured people. Galloway made bequests to several free coloured men, including John Galloway, whom he described as his 'faithful servant'. James Galloway bequeathed to John twenty acres of 'mountain land' in Westmoreland 'for the cultivation of provisions...for himself and his children by a free woman named Ann Bucknor'. Galloway also ordered his executors to build a house for John worth £100 'upon such part of Unity Hall Estate as the said John Galloway shall elect' and left him a further twenty acres of provision grounds. In addition, Galloway instructed his executors to 'employ upon Unity Hall any slave or slaves the said John Galloway may be seized and possessed of' and arranged for John to receive an annuity of £50, 'during the time he is learning the trade of a carpenter or the business of a clerk,

¹¹⁰ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177. By 1831, the property was still in the hands of the Clarke family, its ownership having passed to Clarke's son, James. See *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, 'Returns of Givings in', 1831, p. 122.

whichever he shall prefer'. If John trained as a carpenter, James Galloway's will ensured that he would be able to work at Unity Hall and 'have the charge and management of the carpenter gang of Negroes'.¹¹¹

John Galloway thereby received a relatively large amount of property from his former employer, who also provided him with opportunities for economic advancement. However, the assistance that he obtained from James Galloway was similar to that which Jacob Graham extended to his children. John Galloway received pieces of land on which to support himself and his family as well as financial assistance, but there was no suggestion that he or either of Jacob Graham's surviving sons would be able to own their own sugar estates. Instead, it appears that white men such as Jacob Graham and James Galloway expected that free coloured men would work as artisans, clerks or as non-sugar-producing landowners, but not as sugar planters, which was a profession traditionally reserved exclusively for whites. In this way, many free coloured men obtained advantages from white male fathers and patrons, but were denied the range of chances to advance available to white men. Considering this situation, it seems highly likely that the limited opportunities available to free non-whites in Jamaica combined with other factors, such as other forms of discrimination and their relatively low economic status, to ensure that free coloureds and free blacks did not fully identify their interests with those of the planter class and other whites.

Whilst this lack of opportunities contributed to the alienation of free non-whites, a completely different set of ambitions among the non-conformist missionaries who arrived in Jamaica added further to social tensions within free society. The missionaries were distinct from the other white men in Jamaica

¹¹¹ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 114, f. 14, James Galloway, 2 May 1833.

because they did not hope to gain material advancement on the island. Instead, they hoped to win converts for Christ and worked extremely hard to that end. In 1830, Mr Saxton, a Methodist missionary, wrote to Britain from St Ann, reporting that '[t]he prospects throughout this extensive and important Circuit are delightfully encouraging'. Saxton's words reflected the missionaries' hopes of capitalising on the prospect of hundreds of thousands of unsaved souls awaiting salvation on the plantations.¹¹²

One of the main reasons for the tension that developed between missionaries and planters in Jamaica was that they both hoped to obtain different things from those enslaved on the island. The planters hoped to extract labour from enslaved people and thereby further their material ambitions. The missionaries hoped to extract professions of salvation and thereby further their own project of spreading the gospel throughout humanity. These different aims often led planters and missionaries into conflict. Many missionaries also saw slavery as being inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible, but until the 1830s, were content not to promote emancipation in order to obtain the planters' permission to preach to those enslaved on the island.¹¹³

The missionaries found themselves outnumbered in a colony controlled by the planters but, despite opposition from the rest of white society, they were often successful in achieving their aims, largely because of their commitment to their cause. Mr Corbett, a Methodist, exemplified the missionaries' drive. In 1833, he wrote a letter detailing how he had made fifteen converts in Clarendon before setting out at eleven o'clock in the evening to reach a property at two o'clock the next morning. He got two hours of sleep at his destination before he began

¹¹² *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, February 1831, p. 131.

¹¹³ See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 1 – 30.

preaching. At seven o'clock the same morning, he left the property to travel to Old Harbour Bay. At the town, a congregation awaited him and he 'was obliged to preach without staying to breakfast.' In the afternoon, Corbett preached again and met the leaders of the Old Harbour Bay mission. Then, 'after visiting a sick member', he returned to Spanish Town, which was some twelve miles away, where, after this gruelling period of work, he 'rejoiced in spirit, glorifying in the God of all my mercies.'¹¹⁴ Working so hard, often on the behalf of the slaves, whom the missionaries educated and helped, it is easy to understand why the preachers so rapidly built up large followings of enslaved and free converts.

This led to suspicion and resentment on the part of other whites. Following the Baptist War, which posed a great threat to the planters' material interests, whites combined to try to expel the missionaries from the island. Hamilton Brown played a leading part in this white backlash against the missionaries.¹¹⁵ However, the missionaries withstood the opposition of men such as Brown, largely because of the support of the British government and assistance offered to them by free non-whites.

The clash between white colonists on the one hand and the missionaries and freedpeople on the other reflected the opportunities and ambitions of those on either side. In the struggle over emancipation, white men such as Hamilton Brown had the most to lose, as they depended on slaveholding as a marker of status and enslaved labour as a means of making a fortune. Conversely, free coloured and free black people, who by 1833 generally supported emancipation, did not have the same concerns. Traditionally marginalised, the limited opportunities for economic and social advancement that were available to them further diminished their desire

¹¹⁴ *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, October 1833, pp. 741 – 42.

¹¹⁵ See chapter 8 below.

to join with the planters and other whites in defence of slavery. Finally, the missionaries, who did not have an interest in material advancement, saw slaveholding as a sin and, in the aftermath of the Baptist War, they came to publicly advocate abolition.

Conclusions

In 1793, Bryan Edwards commented that white men in Jamaica exhibited a levelling sort of familiarity, which ensured that the differences between workers and employers were less pronounced than in Europe. He argued that this comparative absence of class-based tension was due to the small number of whites in a colony dominated demographically by enslaved blacks.¹¹⁶ That this led white men to develop a mutual dependency and respect for one another is not in doubt. Fear of an uprising of those enslaved meant that solidarity was vital among white men, who also had a shared interest in maintaining the boundaries of rule that differentiated between enslaved blacks and free whites. Furthermore, the near ubiquity of slaveholding amongst free people meant that many white men had a large material investment in slavery, whilst widespread economic dependency on the sugar estates reinforced support for the institution at the same time as underlining the economic and social pre-eminence of the estate owners.

However, the mitigation of class-based tension in Jamaica was further aided by the opportunities open to white men in the colony. On the island, young white men could aspire to progress from being a bookkeeper to owning a plantation in the course of their lifetime. This transition was not an easy one to make, but

¹¹⁶ Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols (New York, Arno Press, [1793] 1972), vol. 2, pp. 8 – 9.

nonetheless, for some, Jamaican society was relatively fluid. This social and economic mobility reinforced white male solidarity, because white men were less likely to voice their discontent at being subordinate members of free society whilst the possibility of progressing within the existing structures on the island remained. The owners of the estates were therefore unlikely to face concerted opposition from other white men in Jamaica, because such men harboured a desire to acquire as much land and as many slaves as possible and perhaps become planters themselves. Shepherd is therefore correct to point out that the white exploiting group was not homogenous and that many within this group faced marginalisation at the hands of the sugar-planting elite.¹¹⁷ However, opportunities for economic advancement helped to ensure that fractures within this group were minimised.

Jamaican free society did remain heavily stratified throughout the period of slavery, and many of those who ruled the colony were not self-made men, but came from one of the few powerful families that made up the traditional plantocracy of the island. However, though rule in the colony was generally oligarchical, access to the social and economic elite was possible for a fortunate few, which meant that Jamaica could be described as a place of opportunity for poor men. Indeed, many colonists saw the island not as a place to settle permanently, but as a conduit that could facilitate their bid for wealth and riches, allowing them to return to Britain and retire in comfort. Not all successful settlers left the island, but many chose not to die there, and most lived their lives between two worlds, maintaining close personal and business contacts with the metropole and even travelling between Jamaica and Britain.

¹¹⁷ Shepherd, 'Land, Labour and Social Status', p. 174.

The unique opportunities and privileges that were open to white men in Jamaica were intimately connected to the racialised boundaries of rule that underpinned slave society on the island and helped to distinguish life in the colony from that in the metropole. As such, the relative social and economic mobility that local white men experienced helped to define local white society as being distinctly creole and distinct from British norms. White male mobility and the aspirations that it fuelled had beneficial effects for the planters. Above all, the fact that the ownership of a slave-run sugar estate remained the pinnacle of most white men's ambitions reinforced the institution of slavery. Their ambitions also ensured that most white men viewed enslaved people primarily as units of labour. To most of these men advancement automatically implied the systematic exploitation of others. Moreover, only white men were eligible for the public offices that underlined the social status of those who had successfully climbed the economic ladder. For white men, social and economic betterment was possible due to the institutionalised disenfranchisement of the majority of those who lived in the colony.

Self-interest compelled many whites to defend this system. However, the systematic exclusion of free non-whites meant that this expanding social group had fewer reasons to support the system of slavery, and the lack of material ambitions among non-conformist missionaries contributed towards tensions between them and the rest of white society. These factors helped to ensure that when enslaved people rose up against slavery in 1831, many in free society were predisposed to oppose violent attempts to retain and restore the old order.

From Parish to Colony to Metropole: Voters, Representatives and the Role of the Assembly

The Jamaican Assembly met annually in the capital, Spanish Town. The elected House, which represented the interests of colonists, was the main legislative body on the island and claimed the exclusive right to pass laws relating to local affairs. The chamber where the House met to discuss issues relating to the colony was in a large building in the centre of town, directly opposite to the Governor's residence at King's House. The Governor was the representative of the British Crown in Jamaica and he therefore promoted the interests of the metropolitan government, whose policies provoked increased irritation and opposition from settlers during the early nineteenth century. Members of the House could stand and look over at King's House from the first-floor balcony adjoining the chamber of the Assembly building. In this way, the positioning of official buildings around the Parade in Spanish Town neatly reflected the opposition between the metropole and the colonists.

However, there were two other edifices around the square. Looking across to King's House from the Assembly building, there were public offices to the left, but to the right was an elaborate statue of the British naval hero, Admiral Rodney. The victory of Rodney's fleet at the Battle of the Saints in 1782 had delivered Jamaica from an imminent Franco-Spanish invasion, and the colonists showed their

immense gratitude for this British protection by funding and building the statue and monument, which still stands.¹ The Rodney memorial site, interposed between King's House and the Assembly building, is a potent reminder that the competition between the Assembly in Jamaica and Parliament in Britain was never an equal contest.

To the resident plantation owners in Jamaica, the Assembly was the most important local institution. As Brathwaite has commented, the Assembly gave expression to the aspirations and interests of Jamaica's white settlers, and the planters used the legislature to pass the laws that defined and controlled slave society.² Local propertyholders believed that they had the right to govern themselves through their Assembly and decide the future of slavery on the island. However, as long as they relied on British military protection, they were not in a strong position to defend this assertion and defy the British Government. Their main concern, though, was not protection from invasion from the French or Spanish. By the time of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the threat of foreign invasion had subsided. The planters worst fears were of an internal uprising of the enslaved people who outnumbered them in Jamaica so comprehensively. They therefore went to great lengths to maintain a strong British military presence on the island, which would guard against such an eventuality or combat a rebellion should it break out.

The House of Assembly consisted of two representatives from most parishes of the island and three from the parishes of St Catherine, Kingston and

¹ See Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 235 – 37.

² Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), p. 40.

Port Royal.³ Those elected were required to own substantial amounts of property, which clearly worked to the advantage of the owners of sugar estates. As the sugar industry expanded, sugar plantation owners came to dominate seats in the House and, by the early nineteenth century, most representatives owned substantial amounts of property and large numbers of slaves. The small electorate was composed exclusively of white men, who had to own property in both land and slaves in order to vote.⁴ The House met between October and December each year, although the Governor could summon the Assembly at other times and prorogue its sessions.⁵

The legislators who met at these sessions of the House had two main spheres of concern. Members were responsible for the internal affairs of the island, which meant responding to the needs and demands of the freeholders who had elected them. However, they were also responsible for representing the interests of the colonists to the British Government, and the Assembly was an outspoken force in the campaign over slavery, representing the pro-slavery cause of the planters and other colonists. Throughout the early nineteenth century, the increasing interest of Parliament in the internal affairs of the island meant that the distinction between these two main spheres of activity became blurred. Ministers in London subjected legislation passed by the Assembly to increased scrutiny and were more prepared than they had been in the eighteenth century to invoke the Royal veto, especially on legislation connected to slavery. Additionally, abolitionists pressured ministers at

³ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 43. The parishes of St Catherine, Kingston and Port Royal had contained the largest towns in Jamaica during the early years of English settlement, which meant that each had an extra representative.

⁴ The property requirement for Assemblymen was a freehold of £300 per annum or a personal estate of £3,000. Electors had to have a freehold worth £10 per annum and own land and slaves. See Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 44; *Abridged Laws of Jamaica 1680 – 1739*, p. 82 (21 Geo. III. xv. 2). These requirements changed in 1830, when the Assembly granted free coloured and free black men equal rights with whites.

⁵ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 50.

Westminster to take a proactive stance over slavery and legislate directly for the colonies, leading to increased tension between the Assembly and the British Government.⁶

This chapter will argue that the Assembly was important to the planters for more than just its legislative and lobbying roles. Elections to the House provided them with an opportunity to reinforce a sense of mutual group interest among all the white male propertyholders who voted. Plantation owners were acutely aware of the importance of solidarity between white men in a society where enslaved blacks outnumbered whites so comprehensively. They therefore tried to ensure that elections and meetings of the Assembly were not occasions for visible disagreements and splits between whites. Nevertheless, tensions and disagreements did occur between Assemblymen and the freeholders who elected them. However, when confronted with this, the sugar planting elite were reluctant to compromise their own power and influence.

In 1830, faced with a changing demographic and political situation, Assemblymen felt compelled to grant full civil liberties to free non-white men in order to try to widen local support for slavery. This allowed some free coloured and free black men to vote in elections and a small number of the free coloured elite to take seats in the Assembly. However, the white elite sought to welcome such men into the body politic whilst retaining their own influence and power. Although the character of elections was altered after 1830, the House remained dominated by the white owners of sugar plantations, and the local white elite remained intensely hostile to those who did not support slavery.

⁶ See Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 9 – 10.

Finally, this chapter will argue that in spite of the local importance of the Jamaican Assembly throughout the pre-emancipation period and afterwards, the colonists' reliance on British military protection constantly curtailed its influence. Representatives continually argued that they were entitled to legislative autonomy over local affairs. However, as the British Government's opposition to slavery increased, the Assembly's reliance on British military force in the event of slave unrest played a major part in preventing them from resisting reform to their local institutions.

Elections

Dominated by members of the wealthy planter elite, the Jamaican political system during the pre-emancipation period could appear almost aristocratic. Those powerful landowners who owned the majority of land and slaves and who dominated the local economy also arrogated political power in the colony to the extent that the island appeared to be run entirely by a small and exclusive sugar-planting oligarchy. Although slaveholders other than planters were occasionally elected to the Assembly, the House was effectively run by wealthy estate owners, which can elide the fact that electoral politics was actually relatively inclusive throughout the period. Indeed, whilst the system was far from being democratic in the true sense of the word, the owners of sugar plantations were outnumbered at the polls by their less wealthy, non-sugar-producing neighbours. In this way, those men identified as making up the 'middling' sections of free society in Jamaica, such as penkeepers, wealthy craftsmen, doctors and jobbers, had a crucial political role to play. Naturally, such men shared much in common with the planter elite:

they were landowners, slaveholders and relied upon the sugar industry for the bulk of their income. Furthermore, many among them were planters in the making. However, the inclusion of such men in the political process reveals the political life of the colony to have been far more complex than the situation might at first appear. In order to maintain control and to rule effectively, the small sugar-planting elite had to maintain the support of such men whilst simultaneously preventing them from undermining planter control of the political structures of the island.

Members of the Assembly were selected by popular ballots, which were usually held at the courthouses in the main towns of each parish. General elections occurred about every six years, but deaths and resignations of existing members meant that contests for single seats in the House occurred more regularly.⁷ Before 1830, the franchise excluded women and non-whites, but throughout the period before emancipation it allowed a large number of middling white men to vote along with the elite. Voters had to possess a freehold of at least £10 per annum in the parish where they proposed to vote and, before 1830, all voters had to be slaveowners.⁸ Men thus qualified to vote were commonly known as ‘freeholders’, a term which described those who possessed real estate independently by freehold. It was a much-used term in the political discourse of the period and one that neatly encapsulated the character of the franchise on the island. White men were, of course, the only people in Jamaica who were completely free. However, not all free white men in Jamaica could vote. Only those who also held property in both land and slaves could claim this privilege. Therefore, the law overtly proclaimed the control and exploitation of Africans and their descendants as a vital prerequisite for

⁷ John Roby, *Members of the Assembly of Jamaica from the institution of that branch of the legislature to the present time* (Montego Bay, 1831); JA 1B/11/23/18, House of Assembly Poll Book, 1803 – 1843.

⁸ *Laws of Jamaica 1680 – 1739*, p. 82 (21 Geo. III. xv. 2).

white male voters, whose added freedom was thereby intimately tied to the ongoing enslavement of others. In this way, the term 'freeholder' identified those who were doubly empowered, as free white men and as propertied slaveholders, and who comprised the group eligible to participate in the public life of the colony.

The franchise in Jamaica allowed a relatively large number of male landowners to vote at elections. However, to sit in the Assembly it was necessary to have a freehold of £300 per annum, or a personal estate of at least £3,000.⁹ Furthermore, election to the Assembly meant attending lengthy sessions at the capital, Spanish Town, and the expense of having to reside away from their home parish over a period of months helped to exclude anyone who was not wealthy from sitting in the House. These factors helped to ensure that those men whom voters actually returned to the Assembly were mainly plantation owners from the social and economic elite of the island and helped to curtail the political ambitions of white men from outside the sugar-planting elite.

The process of electing members to the House of Assembly involved a number of stages, each of which played an important part in cementing lines of solidarity and hierarchy in white society. Candidates were often returned unopposed, but many elections were contested and so had the potential to divide white society. With an election imminent, candidates would present themselves in the parishes where they sought election, or other leading public figures in the parish would promote the nomination of a specific candidate.

It is clear that candidates addressed voters verbally before elections.¹⁰

However, they also used the local press to promote their credentials. In 1816, *The*

⁹ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 44; JA, *Laws of Jamaica, 1680 – 1739*, p. 82 (21 Geo. III. xv. 2).

¹⁰ For examples of such pre-election campaigns and hustings, see *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 6 to Saturday 13 April 1833, p. 10; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 27 April to Saturday 4 May 1833, p. 10.

Cornwall Chronicle published recommendations on behalf of candidates from the parish of St James who were seeking to occupy one of the two seats of the parish in the Assembly, both of which were contested in the general election of that year. The nature of this method of campaigning can be seen in the address of the St James sugar plantation owner, William Stirling, to the '*Freeholders of the Parish of St James*', published in the run up to the election. He explained that he was 'induced by flattering assurance of support by my Friends, at the ensuing election to offer myself as a Candidate' and promised that freeholders could depend on his 'best exertions to forward the interests of this Parish, as well as those of the Island at large.'¹¹ As was typical with such announcements of candidacy, Stirling's short message was posted in the local press throughout the months preceding the election.¹²

Stirling's message was similar in important ways to those posted by other candidates throughout the period. For example, he mentioned pre-existing assurances of support, which marked him out as already having some backing from his community. He further reinforced his claim to be committed to the collective interests of the St James freeholders by his promise to promote the wider interests of his parish and the 'Island at large'. These claims were echoed in the address that an existing representative, Richard Barrett, made to the St James freeholders at the same election. Barrett wrote that during his short period in the Assembly, he had to the best of his 'judgement and ability maintained the interests of the island and particularly of my Constituents', thereby demonstrating that he was capable of effectively performing the two most important duties of an Assemblyman.¹³

¹¹ *Postscript to The Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 March 1816.

¹² *The Cornwall Chronicle*, 18 May 1816.

¹³ *Postscript to The Cornwall Chronicle*, 2 March 1816.

Addressed to the freeholders of the parish, pre-election addresses by planters such as William Stirling or Richard Barrett were intended to court the favour of voters, emphasising the common interests of local freeholding men and linking this to a joint concern about the welfare of the island as a whole. In the politically charged atmosphere of the early nineteenth century, representing the interests of the island strongly implied defending slavery and the legislative autonomy of the Assembly. Planter politicians thereby sought to continually reiterate the shared interests of white male slaveholders in their parish with the wider issues affecting the island as a whole: issues which such men claimed they could handle on the freeholders' behalf if returned to represent their parish in the Assembly. The apparently benign election campaigns of candidates such as Stirling and Barrett were therefore part of a system that promoted white male solidarity and reinforced the planters' position as the political leaders of the colony.

Following their campaigns to uphold the interests of the freeholders of St James, Richard Barrett and William Stirling were elected to serve the parish in the Assembly at an uncontested election held at the Montego Bay courthouse on 20 June 1816. Barrett was returned with thirty-eight votes, whilst Stirling was not far behind with thirty-six.¹⁴ Such uncontested elections were common and they highlight the absence of deep political divisions and party political loyalties amongst the freeholders of the colony. Indeed, it is clear that the planters who stood as candidates were concerned to repress oppositional politics and emphasise the need for solidarity among the freeholders of the island. For example, at an uncontested ballot at the Montego Bay courthouse in 1833, a local planter nominating the absent Richard Barrett proclaimed that he did 'not consider this the

¹⁴ JA IB/11/23/18, f. 43.

proper scene for political discussion.’¹⁵ Notwithstanding this absence of debate, uncontested elections were politicised events because they included white men in rituals excluding women and non-whites and because the identical policies proposed by the candidates implicitly reiterated the common interests of the planters and other white male property owners.¹⁶

It is not entirely clear how electors cast their votes when electing members of the Assembly. However, the vote was public, and the Assembly successfully resisted attempts, such as that of Bryan Edwards in 1788, to pass bills that proposed voting by ballots.¹⁷ After an election, the names of voters were recorded in a list beneath the names of the candidates for whom they had voted and entered into a poll book. Each voter had two votes to cast, though he did not have to use both of them and, at any given election, could only vote for each candidate once.¹⁸

As mentioned before, those who elected representatives were by no means all plantation owners. Further details about the breadth of the electorate are revealed by data from a poll in St James held during the general election in 1810. Information from the poll for this election is rare in that it contains rudimentary details of voters’ landholdings. In 1813, three men stood for election in St James. They were William Anglin Scarlett, Walter Murray and James Galloway, and all three were from the local social elite.¹⁹ Ninety-one men cast votes, electing

¹⁵ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 11 to Saturday 18 May 1833, p. 2.

¹⁶ Stephanie McCurry has described how a similar process of inclusion and exclusion operated to the advantage of all white men in Antebellum South Carolina. McCurry argues that in South Carolina white men’s political involvement, whilst not making them equals, privileged and separated them from women and African Americans. Her analysis of the operation of Republican democracy in the US South therefore highlights significant parallels with the operation of the franchise and elections in colonial Jamaica during the same period. See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 239 – 40.

¹⁷ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 46.

¹⁸ JA 1B/11/23/18.

¹⁹ JA 1B/11/23/18, f. 27; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1816, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1815, p. 54; T71/201 – 204; H. P. Jacobs ‘The History of Montego Bay & The Parish of St James’, *The West Indian Review*, Montego Bay Souvenir edition (no date), p. 12; Philip Wright

plantation owners Murray and Galloway to the Assembly. Many of these voters owned just a house, a pen, or a house and some land. Less than half of the voters owned plantations in the parish (See table 8).²⁰ Details from this poll thereby show how the planters allowed other white men a stake in public life, giving some of them the ability to influence political affairs beyond the confines of their parish.

However, there are some potential problems with the data from the poll. Firstly, it is possible that some of the voters had properties in different parishes. Furthermore, the data provide no information on the actual size of the holdings listed or the wealth and occupations of these landowners. By tracing the names of individual voters in different sources from the period, it is possible to obtain further information on them, which reveals that the electorate was not as broad and inclusive as the raw data on the voters' holdings suggest.

Although many of the voters did own just a house or a house and a small amount of land, this did not necessarily mean that they were poor. In fact, it appears that most voters listed as owners of houses were moderately, or even extremely, wealthy. For example, the merchant John Fray, whose freehold in 1810 consisted of just a house, was a rich man. Similarly, John Ingram, another voter owning just a house in 1810, was a merchant who had a personal estate valued at over £10,000 when he died five years later. The poll records also show that James Cunningham owned just a house. However, his father was one of the wealthiest planters in Jamaica and, in 1816, Cunningham inherited a number of large properties.²¹ Clearly, his family connections meant that Cunningham was a part of

(Compiler), *Monumental Inscriptions of Jamaica* (London, Society of Genealogists, 1966), p. 159; JA 1B/11/3/150, Inventories, f. 84, James Galloway, 24 September 1833.

²⁰ JA 1B/11/23/18, f. 27.

²¹ JA 1B/11/23/18, f. 27; JA 1B/11/3/135, Inventories, f. 135, John Fray, 8 January 1822; JA 1B/11/3/128, Inventories, f. 49, John Ingram, 25 June 1816; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 86, f. 113, Last Will and Testament of John Cunningham, Esquire, 20 Apr. 1811.

the planter elite when he polled his vote in 1810, a fact hidden by the data from the lists of voters and freeholds.

Table 8. Freeholds of voters in St James at the 1810 general election

Type of freehold	Number of voters	Percentage of electorate	Percentage of electorate by type of freehold (plantation, house or 'penn')
'Plantation'	33	36%	39%
'Plantation Jurat'	3	3%	
'House'	28	31%	52%
'House & Land'	10	11%	
'House & Lands'	1	1%	
'House Jurat'	1	1%	
'Houses'	6	7%	
'Houses & Land'	1	1%	
'Penn'	7	8%	9%
'Penn & House'	1	1%	
Total	91	100%	100%

Source: JA 1B/11/23/18, ff. 27 – 28.

In spite of such examples, some of the voters who were registered as owning just houses or pens were not part of the economic elite in St James. Many were part of the middling section of St James society that existed between the wealthy planters and merchants and poorer, wage-earning whites.²² For example, one of the electors who voted in 1810 was William Boyd, a doctor who owned five slaves and a personal estate worth a little over £2,000 when he died in 1813.²³ Joseph Vernon, who appears to have worked as a plantation employee, probably as an overseer, also cast his vote in the election in 1810 and died with a personal estate of almost identical value to that of Boyd. Vernon owned a pen along with

²² On this 'middling sort', see chapter 3 above.

²³ JA 1B/11/23/18, f. 27; JA 1B/11/3/122, Inventories, f. 17, William Boyd, 29 April 1813.

twenty slaves.²⁴ Another pen owner to cast a vote in 1816 was Nicholas Robson, who also worked as a land surveyor. At his death in 1815, Robson owned seventeen slaves and his personal property was worth about £3,760.²⁵ The presence of such men among the electors in St James demonstrates the involvement of the middling section of St James society in the process of selecting representatives from the parish to sit in the Assembly. However, poorer white men could not vote, and the evidence from the 1810 election suggests that men like William Boyd, Joseph Vernon and Nicholas Robson were the least privileged of the electorate.

The inclusion of these men in the electorate did not represent a threat to the planters' power. As discussed in previous chapters, such owners of land and slaves generally had large material investments in slavery and a significant stake in the rural economy. As such, they had much in common with the planters and were likely to share the planters' interest in defending slavery. The public nature of the vote also worked to the advantage of the planter class. The least privileged of voters were likely to have derived their income from activities linked to the sugar industry, for example, as jobbers or by supplying the estates with livestock. In a parish such as St James, which was a stronghold of sugar production, unequal economic ties would therefore have meant that some voters were reluctant to risk their livelihood by failing to vote for any planters upon whom they relied for their income. Moreover, many of the least economically privileged voters will have had hopes of improving their social and economic position. As discussed in chapter 4, such men aimed to eventually join the ranks of the planter class, and advancement of this nature was only possible with the support of existing members of the elite.

²⁴ JA 1B/11/23/18, f. 27; JA 1B/11/3/122, f. 20, Joseph Vernon, 15 May 1813.

²⁵ JA 1B/11/23/18, f. 27; JA 1B/11/3/127, Inventories, f. 82, Nicholas Robson, 20 November 1815; B. W. Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Kingston, University of the West Indies Press, [1988] 2001), p. 66.

Self-interest could therefore operate in a variety of ways to incline less-wealthy voters to elect candidates from the local elite.

However, as Brathwaite points out, not all Assemblymen were planters.²⁶ Furthermore, the sugar industry did not dominate all parishes. There were therefore important limitations to elite planters' control over local politics. In the parish of St Ann, for example, the owners of livestock pens seem to have had considerable influence at the polls. Isaac Higgin, a penkeeper and member of the Assembly for St Ann, appears to have represented the interests of other penkeepers from the parish.²⁷ In 1832, another representative of the parish, Hamilton Brown, wrote that that he had 'got a bill passed laying a duty of 40 s on Spanish cattle imported, which will operate to the interest of the pen keeper.'²⁸ As well as producing sugar, Brown raised livestock on his own properties and on those that he managed as an attorney, so this legislation favoured him personally.²⁹ However, it would also have favoured the penkeepers who were eligible to vote for Brown, suggesting that Assemblymen were aware that they had to act in the interests of non-sugar producers in order to win their votes. There are therefore strong suggestions that the political power of the owners of sugar estates differed from parish to parish and was never as complete and uncompromising as many from within this small elite would have liked.³⁰

²⁶ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 41.

²⁷ See pp. 167 – 69 below.

²⁸ JA 4/45/64, Tweedie Papers, Hamilton Brown to George French, Spanish Town, 15 December 1832.

²⁹ See JA 4/45; IRO, Deeds LOS, vol. 661, f. 249; vol. 662, f. 214; vol. 683; f. 173.

³⁰ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that formal politics in Jamaica was less confrontational than in Barbados, where wealthy planters and less wealthy whites formed two groups that were frequently in conflict with one another. See Karl Watson, 'Salmagundis vs Pumpkins: White Politics and Creole Consciousness in Barbadian Slave Society, 1800 – 34', in Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (eds), *The White Minority in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1998).

At times this could lead to the sorts of tensions between voters and politicians that the elite were keen to avoid. However, in general, by including some of the middling sections of Jamaican society in the electorate, the sugar-planting elite were able to strengthen their control over Jamaican society. The exclusive qualification for members of the Assembly operated alongside a more inclusive franchise for voters and reinforced the planters' position at the top of Jamaican society at the same time as including other white men in the political process. The planters therefore used the franchise and elections to empower white men and disempower other groups in Jamaican society, thereby reinforcing the gendered and racialised boundaries of rule that segregated local society.

The rituals of election days were intended to serve similar purposes. At a by-election in 1823, freeholders in Hanover met to return a new member. The election was uncontested and Henry Plummer, owner of two plantations in St James, 'was returned by forty-five votes'. According to the *Jamaica Courant*, after the election, '[s]ixty-one gentlemen sat down to dinner, which was excellent, and every thing passed off with the utmost good humour and hilarity, several loyal toasts and songs.'³¹ After an election in St Catherine in 1833, the candidates 'retired with their friends and the freeholders to the Cross Keys' Tavern, where a sumptuous second breakfast was spread in two spacious halls'. According to the *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, there was an abundance of food available and '[d]rinkables of every description were also in profusion.'³² Such post-election

³¹ *Jamaica Courant*, 10 October 1823. For information on Plummer's properties, see *Jamaica Almanack*, 1824, 'Returns of Givings in', 1823, p. 125.

³² *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 13 to Saturday 20 April 1833, p. 10.

entertainment, involving speeches and sumptuous amounts of food and drink, was the norm and was one of the most important aspects of an election.³³

The unifying role of such a gathering is apparent. This is made clear by a speech delivered by Mr Zincke, following the Hanover election of 1823. Zincke had intended to stand at the election before withdrawing his candidacy in favour of Plummer. He proclaimed that, when he had put himself forward, he 'was not aware that a candidate would be exhibited to you in all respects so highly qualified to perform the various duties, and support the important colonial interests now tottering to their fall'.³⁴ His eulogising of Plummer shows that it was important for any apparent or possible fissures between candidates to be swept away after an election, and most candidates were keen that elections remain occasions for re-affirmations of the solidarity and mutual interests of white men. At the celebrations that followed elections, the voters of the parish joined with the candidates and prominent men in the public life of the district to make toasts and enjoy a feast. These men were thereby brought together in a common ritual of sociability, which highlighted their shared involvement in a single body politic. All of those who had voted during the day would have shared with the candidates an understanding that they had participated in an important political event and had influenced public life on the island in some way.

However, just as these events brought white male property holders together and cemented the bonds between them, they also served as a reminder of social divisions between such men. It is generally only the leading figures in local public life, such as the Custos of the parish, the candidates and their representatives, who

³³ See the reports in *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 20 to Saturday 27 April 1833, p. 11; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 5 to Saturday 12 November 1831, p. 12.

³⁴ *Jamaica Courant*, 10 October 1823.

are recorded as having spoken at these meetings. These men were generally plantation owners from the social and economic elite and it was they who made the speeches and proposed the toasts. They controlled events, and in the written record of such meetings all that remains of the participation of the remainder of those freeholders present is a mention of the applause and cheers that characterised their responses to the words of elite white men who addressed them. The events of election days were therefore designed to promote community spirit among electors, but they also reiterated the hierarchy that existed between the political elite and other white male landowners.

Most pre-election addresses and the events and speeches of election days suggest that candidates worked hard to ensure that these occasions were replete with examples of sociability and shared purpose. However, there is evidence that the efforts of candidates and electors to maintain a focus on their common interests often thinly disguised the fissures between freeholders, who were never as united as many newspaper reports and election addresses suggest. For example, before the Hanover election in 1823, an article in the *Jamaica Journal* highlighted tensions over elections that contrasted sharply with most election commentary from the period. The *Journal* encouraged its readers not to vote for Zinke, describing him as being ‘of foreign lineage’ and ‘of no property’. According to the newspaper, Plummer was, by contrast, ‘a gentleman...born in this island, of large property, of most honourable character, and of distinguished talents.’ The article went on to extol the virtues of ‘gentlemen of landed estate’ as candidates for the legislature, arguing that only a propertied man could ‘be a patriot’ and ‘support in the legislature the existence of his country’. The *Journal* suggested that, at a time when ‘[o]ur fortunes and existence are in danger’, men without an independent income or

a strong material interest in land and slaves were not well placed to defend the interests of the island.³⁵

The suitability of candidates could therefore be rigorously contested, and the attitudes expressed by the *Journal* reflect elite attitudes that only local men who owned considerable property were suitably qualified to sit as representatives in the island legislature. Since most ‘gentlemen of landed estate’, who were ‘of large property’ would have been sugar planters, it is clear that there was a body of opinion amongst the social and economic elite of the island that only they were fully qualified to serve in the Assembly. Such opinion held that other freeholders, whilst having an important role to play as voters, should not overstep themselves and develop ambitions to actually sit in the House. Clearly, the social and political elite were concerned that relatively inclusive boundaries of political participation might allow their near monopoly of political power in the Assembly to be challenged. Furthermore, when they perceived such a challenge, they were swift to denounce those involved and to try to restore a political consensus that favoured their own interests as wealthy sugar-producing slaveholders.

Representatives

Before 1830, formal politics was strictly a white male domain and the sugar-planting elite dominated the House. Serious and prolonged conflict was rare and there were no formally organised political parties. However, just as in white society as a whole, opinions among Assemblymen varied. There was also a

³⁵ *Jamaica Journal*, 13 September 1823, p. 336.

hierarchy within the Assembly, where wealth, social status, and ability all helped to separate representatives.

In the House, representatives generally sought to maintain the consensus that the white elite considered vital in a colony where enslaved people and free non-whites so heavily outnumbered the free white minority. However, as at elections, attempts to maintain the appearance of consensus often masked disagreements and tensions. For example, in November 1831, Augustin Beaumont proposed to the House his motion for a scheme allowing slaves to purchase their own freedom, which the Assembly resolutely rejected. During discussion of his proposal, Beaumont proclaimed that he was ‘not afraid, or ashamed of any thing I say being heard’, but other members insisted that the doors of the House should be closed.³⁶ Discussions in the House were normally public affairs, and this anxiety to isolate the debate was informed by the members’ desire to prevent enslaved people from hearing discussions of emancipation, which most members believed would incite insubordination. It also demonstrates the importance that the majority of Assemblymen attached to keeping up the appearance of solidarity among white men over the issue of slavery. However, Beaumont’s attitudes clearly show that such solidarity was not always as strong as many planters wished and demonstrate that not all Jamaican legislators thought alike over the issues of slavery and emancipation.

The resignation of Isaac Higgin from the House in 1823 and the discussions that followed also exposed some of the tensions in Jamaican politics. Higgin was a landowner with three large properties in St Ann. In 1823, he owned over 400 slaves, and the large number of animals on two of his properties suggest that he

³⁶ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 29 Oct to Saturday 5 November 1831, p. 10; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 12 to Saturday 19 November 1831, p. 10.

was a penkeeper.³⁷ He represented St Ann in the Assembly, but resigned his seat at the beginning of 1823. A letter in *The Trifler* suggests some of the reasons for his resignation. His mistake appears to have been ‘nominating for a Vestryman, the Collecting Constable of Arrears’, which the letter writer pointed out was ‘directly contrary to the letter and intention of the Poll Tax Law’. Higgin’s nominee was ‘considerably indebted to the parish’ and clearly unpopular with some freeholders.³⁸

The letter accused Higgin of having ‘descended from being the Representative of the whole parish’ to becoming ‘the member of a contemptible faction’ and invoked the argument that ‘[a] virtuous Representative of the people...would consider each of his constituents as having an equal part of him, and would, therefore, never become a partisan among them’.³⁹ Since a letter to the *Jamaica Journal* described Higgin’s supporters as ‘ox-headed graziers’, it appears that Higgin, himself a penkeeper, came to be associated with livestock farmers.⁴⁰ Both of these letters voiced the opinion that members of the House should represent the interests of all of the freeholders of their parish and avoid involvement in factional politics. These commentators saw Assemblymen as being responsible for maintaining a sense of common purpose among freeholders and were quick to censure Higgin when they believed that his actions had undermined this solidarity. Moreover, on resigning, Higgin explained to his supporters that, whilst the composition of the House remained as it was, he would ‘only continue in the Minority’, showing that he represented views that were frequently different to

³⁷ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1823, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1822, p. 38.

³⁸ *Trifler*, 22 February 1823, p. 1.

³⁹ *Trifler*, 22 February 1823, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Jamaica Journal*, 19 April 1823, p. 1.

the majority of other members.⁴¹ Higgin's case therefore demonstrates the lack of complete unanimity between white male freeholders during this period, and the fact that members of the Assembly were not always united in their aims.

However, the reaction to Higgin's resignation also reveals attempts to exclude men who were not considered suited to public life from participating in local politics. The *Jamaica Journal* proclaimed that there were other men like Higgin, who thought themselves 'well fitted for the labours of the office [of Assemblyman]'. The *Journal* hoped to do such men and the public a service by 'holding up Mr. Isaac Higgin as a warning to stifle their passion for notoriety'. The author continued:

not that we look forward to an Assembly of sages and men of high talent; we cannot expect it in this narrow society; but we would warn men of *mediocre* talents and confined education and ideas, since such must form part of our legislation, to be content to follow where their superiors lead, and not to make themselves ridiculous by vain pretensions, and attempts beyond their depth.⁴²

This writer therefore recognised the importance of inclusivity to the political process in Jamaica, but emphatically stated that the political elite expected men whom they considered less able legislators to know their place. According to the *Journal*, Higgin had been such a legislator, out of his depth among the more able planter politicians of the Assembly.

This case shows that although the sugar planters were committed to empowering other white men of property, they did so mainly to elicit their support. Planters allowed white male landowners privileges, such as being able to vote and

⁴¹ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 1 to Saturday 8 March 1823, p. 14.

⁴² *Jamaica Journal*, 19 April 1823, p. 2.

even stand for election to the Assembly, but they demanded loyalty in return. Therefore, although all of them had privileges, all white men were by no means equal. The sugar planters' system of inclusion and empowerment promoted solidarity and they went to great lengths to present the interests of the freeholders in different parishes as being identical to the interests of the island as a whole. However, if groups of freeholders or an elected representative upheld interests that appeared to diverge from those of the planters, they were quickly censured.

Tensions between voters, candidates and representatives therefore threatened to undercut the unity among freeholders that the planters strived to achieve. Nevertheless, regardless of the occasional appearance of such tension, representatives, although mostly members of the sugar-planting elite, purported to legislate on behalf of settlers in the colony, and the Assembly remained a popular creole institution. Election to the Assembly was especially important to members of the local elite, as local settlers selected the members and not the Governor. This became clear in 1833, when the Governor stripped some local planters of their commissions as magistrates and militia officers to punish their involvement with the controversial Colonial Church Union.⁴³ Hamilton Brown was one such planter, who after being stripped of his public commissions, was re-elected by freeholders in St Ann to represent them in the Assembly. Brown addressed these voters, saying, '[m]y friends! you have this day conferred on me a commission which I value far above any other commission, civil or military, that I ever held, and of which our omnipotent Governor *cannot* deprive me.' According to the *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, this statement was met with '[i]mmense cheering'.⁴⁴ Brown's

⁴³ On the Governor's withdrawal of civil and military commissions, see chapter 8 below.

⁴⁴ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 27 April to Saturday 4 May 1833, p. 10.

words and the response that they received demonstrate the political importance of the Assembly to its members and to white settlers more generally.

Political change in the early 1830s

Evidence from St James between 1800 and 1834 illustrates the sugar planters' dominance within the Assembly.⁴⁵ Men who represented the parish between 1800 and 1834, such as John Perry, Sir Simon Haughton Clarke, Samuel Vaughan, James Galloway, Walter Murray, James Irving and Richard Barrett, were all from the landed elite of the district. However, there were two notable exceptions to this rule. In 1820, the freeholders of the parish returned the lawyer, William Stanford Grignon, to the House, where he kept his seat for over eleven years.⁴⁶ When Grignon vacated his seat in 1831 the freeholders of the parish selected John Manderson, a wealthy merchant, to take his place. Manderson was one of the first free coloured representatives to take a seat in the House after December 1830, when the Assembly had granted full civil rights to freedpeople.⁴⁷ The fact that such men acted as representatives in the Assembly highlights the point that the planters did not have a total monopoly over the House.

Grignon was a sugar-planting attorney, responsible for sugar plantations in St James. He was also a militia commander and played an active part in the campaign to repress the rebellion of enslaved people that broke out in the parish in

⁴⁵ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 40.

⁴⁶ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; John Roby, *Members of the Assembly*; Glory Robertson (Compiler), *Members of the Assembly of Jamaica from the General Election of 1830 to the Final Session June 1866* (Kingston, Institute of Jamaica, 1965), p. 40.

⁴⁷ Robertson, *Members of the Assembly*, p. 40; Gad J. Heuman *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood, 1981), pp. 57 – 58.

December 1831.⁴⁸ His selection by the white freeholders of St James is therefore understandable. Manderson's selection is less easy to understand. Although he owned thirty-nine slaves in 1832, he was a free coloured man and his election as representative for the parish therefore appears inconsistent with the exhibitions of white male solidarity that characterised previous elections.⁴⁹ Of course, after 1830, freedmen could vote and many of them might have been inclined to elect a free coloured candidate such as Manderson. However, in 1833, when free nonwhites first exercised their right to vote in an island-wide election, there was no sudden shift in the racial composition of the Assembly, which remained dominated by whites throughout the 1830s.⁵⁰

Indeed, Manderson appears to have been returned to the Assembly with the backing of local whites. In October 1831, the *Jamaica Courant* published an extract from the *Montego-Bay Gazette* that announced Grignon's resignation from the Assembly and informed freeholders of John Manderson's intention to stand for election. The *Gazette* hoped that 'the proper pride of the Freeholders...would always manifest itself, when to be exacted in favour of the pretensions of a resident candidate of the description of Mr. Manderson, over a stranger to the parish'. The author of the extract went on to state his satisfaction that, 'should no other opponent appear', Manderson's election 'may be considered secure'. The *Courant*, a newspaper firmly committed to the maintenance of slavery and the rights claimed

⁴⁸ T71/201 – 204; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, 'Returns of Givings in', 1831, pp. 122, 129; B. W. Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom 1739 – 1912* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, 1998), pp. 264 – 69.

⁴⁹ On Manderson's slaveholdings, see T71/222 – 23.

⁵⁰ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 57 – 58; Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832 – 1938* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 219.

by white settlers in Jamaica, offered no comment expressing opposition to Manderson's candidacy.⁵¹

No other candidates presented themselves, and on 7 November 1831, the freeholders of St James elected Manderson to the Assembly. Manderson then addressed the freeholders. We do not know the content of his speech, but it reportedly 'was received with considerable applause'. Afterwards, the tradition of feasting was observed and 'a splendid second-breakfast was laid out in the Ball Room in the Court House', where about 120 persons gathered to 'enjoy the festivities of the occasion'. Grignon addressed this gathering, which drank to the health of their new representative and made other toasts.⁵² Manderson was therefore accepted and incorporated into the rituals that traditionally surrounded elections of white candidates to the Assembly.

One likely reason for Manderson's success was his conservatism. As Gad Heuman notes, 'Manderson supported the whites in their resistance to abolition' and was far from being the most radical of free-coloured politicians.⁵³ In 1831, the planters needed a wider base of local support than that which they had relied on previously. The support of other white men was no longer enough to ensure the survival of slavery and the continuation of their power. It was therefore politic to promote the inclusion of wealthy slaveowning free coloured men, such as Manderson, who could be incorporated into their system and perhaps help to win the support of other free coloureds for the planters' causes.

⁵¹ *Jamaica Courant*, 6 October 1831. On the editorial stance of the *Courant*, see *Facts and Documents Connected with the Late Insurrection in Jamaica and the Violations of Civil and Religious Liberty Arising out of it* (London, 1832), pp. 7, 14 – 18.

⁵² *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 5 to Saturday 12 November 1831, p. 12.

⁵³ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 57 – 58.

Indeed, it seems likely that many white men chose to support Manderson in 1831 for the same reasons that had led the Assembly to extend full civil rights to free non-whites the previous year. By supporting a free coloured representative, the white freeholders of St James could build lines of coalition between themselves and the free coloured population of the parish, thereby widening the support base for slavery. The fact that ideas of racial difference had come to provide the basis for the boundaries of rule in Jamaican society meant that such a coalition had previously been unthinkable to most whites. However, by the early 1830s, the crisis over slavery had deepened and the free non-white population grown so rapidly that many planters decided to attempt to effect a compromise with free coloured men.

In common parlance, whites and free coloureds were described as the two 'classes' that comprised free society, and despite the tension that existed between them, attempts were made by individuals from within both groups to demonstrate that they were fully united in their outlook and interests. In 1831, as freeholders met across the island to complain bitterly about renewed British plans for emancipation, free non-whites held similar meetings to upbraid Dr Stephen Lushington.⁵⁴ Lushington had suggested to the British Parliament that free coloureds were willing to give up their slaves without compensation and that the coloureds might support the British if local whites had to be coerced into accepting emancipation. Some free coloureds resented this, and those from the parish of St Thomas in the Vale resolved that they rejected 'with indignation the attempt of Doctor Lushington to sow discord between two classes whose interests are essentially the same.'⁵⁵ Similarly, white commentators tried to remove or ignore the wedge that years of unequal treatment had driven between whites and

⁵⁴ See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 84 – 85.

⁵⁵ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 1.

freedpeople. In 1831, contributions from free coloured men were encouraged at the meetings of freeholders that met to discuss how the colonists should respond to British threats of emancipation. At such a meeting in St Mary, a free coloured man, unsure whether he was invited to contribute, was reassured with '[c]ries of [y]es, yes, there is no distinction.'⁵⁶

At elections, similar efforts were made to mask the serious tensions that existed between many freedpeople and whites. In St Catherine, in 1833, an unsuccessful coloured candidate addressed the freeholders, saying: '[n]o one, gentlemen...can be desirous of perpetuating, I may say, reviving a complexional distinction.'⁵⁷ At elections, white candidates and their supporters tried to show their solidarity with the coloureds, and even those candidates who had opposed the enfranchisement of freedmen were keen to claim that they harboured no ill feelings against free nonwhites.⁵⁸ Difficult times and changing demographic circumstances called for a partial erasure of some of the official lines of exclusion that the planters had previously enacted. Nevertheless in 1833, there were verbal clashes between coloured men and white candidates at the polls, and attempts by two free coloured opponents of slavery, Edward Jordon and Robert Osborn, to win seats outside their native parishes met with stern opposition from whites.⁵⁹ Planters were willing to solicit support from freedmen and to try to bring whites, coloureds and blacks together, but they were only prepared to consider a union that promoted their interests of prolonging slavery and resisting reforms forced on them by Britain. These factors probably played a large part in persuading the white freeholders of St

⁵⁶ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 10.

⁵⁷ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 13 to Saturday 20 April 1833, p. 10.

⁵⁸ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 11 to Saturday 18 May 1833, p. 2; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 27 April to Saturday 4 May 1833, p. 11.

⁵⁹ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 20 to Saturday 27 April 1833, p. 11; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 27 April to Saturday 4 May 1833, p. 11; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 4 to Saturday 11 May 1833, p. 11.

James, a parish dominated by the sugar industry, to accept a free coloured merchant as their representative and to re-elect him on three further occasions.⁶⁰

The planters' attempt to win the support of free coloured men was, however, largely a failure. After 1830, the free coloured representatives who gained seats in the Assembly were often opposed to the planters' main policies. Price Watkis became the first non-white member of the House, easily winning his Kingston seat just four days before Manderson was elected in St James.⁶¹ Watkis represented the most urbanised constituency in Jamaica, where there were fewer planters and a larger concentration of free coloured voters than in St James. This meant that the parish was inclined to return a reform-minded representative, and Watkis was more radical than Manderson, reflected the opinions of the majority of the free coloured and free black people in Jamaica, and opposed many of the planters' policies, especially over the issue of slavery.⁶² The dynamics of elections to the House therefore changed after 1830, and the membership of the House altered in the years that followed, as more free coloured representatives took seats there. Elections and debates in the Assembly were also more rigorously contested after emancipation, when the electorate expanded yet further.⁶³

In spite of the changes that occurred in the early 1830s, which made the general election of 1833 a far more controversial election than those that had preceded it, the Assembly continued to claim to represent the interests of its propertied male constituents. Before 1830, elections were communal events that were intended to bind white men together. After 1830, many whites and nonwhites

⁶⁰ Robertson, *Members of the Assembly*, p. 40.

⁶¹ JA 1B/11/23/18, ff. 27 – 28.

⁶² Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 58.

⁶³ For a discussion of political life after emancipation, see Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 57 – 71, 97 – 195.

tried to use them to maintain solidarity within a far broader constituency of freeholding men. This solidarity was often lacking, but candidates' continued efforts to foster such links show the importance of elections in maintaining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion upon which the planters' continued control over Jamaican society relied.

The work of the Assembly

The Assembly claimed a large degree of autonomy from the British government, reflecting the opinion of most planters that they had the right as free-born Englishmen to tax and govern themselves. After 1728, Parliament in London honoured those claims, although the colonists were still subjects of the Crown and any decisions of the Assembly were liable to veto. Legislative bills could be disallowed either by the Governor, or by representatives of the Crown in Britain. Disputes over legislation became particularly fierce in the years before the abolition of slavery, as local laws regarding slavery and the rights of missionaries became focal points for dispute between the government in London and the planters in the Jamaican Assembly.⁶⁴

At a most basic level, the Assembly was a local institution charged with caring for the everyday welfare of its constituents. This meant ensuring that there were enough troops in the colony to protect it from an external attack from a foreign power or an internal insurrection of enslaved people. It also meant tending to such day-to-day issues as ensuring the upkeep and improvement of the

⁶⁴ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 8 – 10, 52 – 53.

infrastructure of the island. Constituents could also petition the House to redress perceived grievances.⁶⁵

Since the slaveholding elite dominated the legislature, the laws passed in the Assembly reflected their interests and those of other slaveholders. For example, representatives passed laws that revealed their deep-seated fear of an uprising of enslaved people. 'All nightly or other private meetings of slaves' were unlawful and the law further stated that because rebellions had previously 'been concerted at dances and nightly meetings', owners 'suffering slaves so to assemble' could face up to six months imprisonment. Free people who attended or permitted such meetings could face up to three months in prison.⁶⁶ These laws clearly endeavoured to prevent enslaved people from plotting together against the whites. However, they were also designed to enforce solidarity amongst the free population by punishing anyone who permitted or attended potentially seditious meetings. White landowners, acting as magistrates, ensured that these laws were enforced.⁶⁷

In addition to attending to the internal government of the island, the Assembly was also concerned with defending the interests of its Jamaican constituents. As a colonial legislature, it was vital that the House maintained links with Britain. The Assembly therefore organised an elaborate and efficient system for representing the colonists' interests outside Jamaica. These links became even more important when the controversy over slavery heightened in the decades before emancipation. Central to these links were the Assembly's commissioners of

⁶⁵ Such grievances were usually mundane. For example, in 1808, planters George Perry and James Bell petitioned the Assembly for compensation money, claiming that, in the previous year, detachments of the island militia had damaged their properties during martial law. See CO 140, Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica, vol. 96, f. 18. On the activities of the Assembly during this period more generally, see Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 51 and CO 140.

⁶⁶ *Abridgement of the Sixth Volume of the Laws of Jamaica* (1810 – 16) pp. 86, 88 (57 Geo. III. xxv. 36 & 51).

⁶⁷ See JA 1A/2/8/1, St James Court of Quarter Sessions, Calendar Book, 1793 – 1841.

correspondence, appointed to meet periodically throughout the year.⁶⁸ They were regularly in touch with the agent of the island, who was the Assembly's representative in London and responsible for representing the interests of the Jamaican colonists in Britain. Through the commissioners of correspondence, the Assembly continually briefed successive agents with information and advice on how to represent the cause of the planters and other colonists to the British Government and public. In return, the agent supplied them with regular reports and updates on events in the metropole that were relevant to their interests and lobbied prominent public figures, including politicians, on their behalf.⁶⁹

The Assembly, with the aid of successive island agents, lobbied for better conditions of trade, such as advantageous tariffs on sugar and rum and fewer restrictions on the trade between the British Caribbean and the United States.⁷⁰ However, by the early nineteenth century, their main concern was with the interference of the British Government with the legislative autonomy of the Assembly, especially over the issue of slavery. This issue became prominent in 1815, following an address by William Wilberforce suggesting the introduction to Parliament of a registry bill to prevent the illegal importation of slaves into the colonies. George Hibbert, the island agent, arranged a meeting with the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, to discuss the significance of the address for slaveowners in Jamaica. After his meeting, Hibbert wrote to the commissioners of correspondence describing the disposition in Britain 'among all ranks of people to interfere with our internal legislation'. He explained that the Prime Minister had

⁶⁸ JA 1B/5/12/1, House of Assembly Commissioners of Correspondence, Minutes 1795 – 1846.

⁶⁹ JA 1B/5/12/1; JA 1B/5/14/3, Committee of Correspondence, out-letter book of Agent in England Edmund P. Lyon, 1804 – 1815; JA 1B/5/14/4, Committee of Correspondence, out-letter book of Agent in England George Hibbert, 1814 – 1824; JA 1B/5/14/5, Committee of Correspondence, out-letter book of Agents in England George Hibbert and William Burge, 1824 – 1832.

⁷⁰ JA 1B/5/14/4, ff. 109, 105.

advised that ‘the colonial legislatures should by some proceeding of their own take away the plausible pretext for such interference’.⁷¹

In other words, Liverpool believed that the Assembly should pass their own registry bill and thereby prevent the constitutional crisis that would occur if the British Parliament passed such a bill on behalf of the colony. Liverpool also hinted that such action on the part of the colonists would cut short the criticisms of the abolitionists by showing that the colonists were capable of reforming and regulating the system of slavery themselves. However, the Prime Minister warned that

if no proceedings were adopted by the colonial Assemblies approaching these objects, there would most probably ensue acts of the parent legislature more directly and offensively militating against the rights claimed by the colonial legislatures than this measure of enforcing a registry.

Hibbert wrote that ‘the part I took in the conversation all tended to deprecate any degree of the interference in question’.⁷² However, in spite of his arguments, the weak position of the Assembly was clear. Liverpool was able to threaten the colonists, via Hibbert, with direct interference in their affairs if they did not acquiesce to the will of the British Government and reform their slave system.

Hibbert suggested that the Assembly could respond to this situation by sending a report that would counteract the ‘various misrepresentations’ of the abolitionists. He suggested that such a report should stress the protection which the law in Jamaica ‘has from time to time granted to the slaves’ and ‘the truly humane spirit of the laws of manumission’. He also suggested that it refer to the ‘late laws of your legislature in favour of the people of colour’. In this way, like the Prime

⁷¹ JA 1B/5/14/4, ff. 50 - 51.

⁷² JA 1B/5/14/4, f. 51.

Minister, the agent suggested that the Assembly could try to win back the initiative from the abolitionists by demonstrating their own humanitarian and reformist credentials.⁷³

On 13 January 1816, Hibbert received a report from the Assembly and arranged for it to be 'inserted in the most circulated newspapers of Bristol, Liverpool, Whitehaven, Glasgow and Edinburgh.' He also wrote that one thousand copies were being prepared for distribution to members of the British cabinet, representatives in the Houses of Commons and Lords, 'and to such individuals as are likely to have weight in influencing the public judgement'.⁷⁴ The wide circulation of the report shows how, through their agent, the Assembly could attempt to influence the public and politicians in the metropole.

However, the Assembly's public relations drive was clearly ineffective in the face of abolitionist pressure and British public opinion, and on 4 July 1815, Hibbert advised the Assembly to enact their own registry bill. Hibbert informed the Assembly that direct action by Parliament on the issue of slave registration would be 'borne out by popular opinion' and that such an intervention would 'afford a precedent for interference still more objectionable hereafter.'⁷⁵ Accordingly, the Assembly passed their Registry Bill in 1816, in order to pre-empt such direct action, and the first Returns of Registrations were made in 1817. Hibbert's letters from 1815 and 1816 therefore show the impotence of the Assembly in the face of opposition from the British Government, the abolitionists and the British public. In spite of their attempts to lobby in the metropole, the Assembly was forced to take the advice of the Prime Minister and institute their own reforms out of fear that a

⁷³ JA 1B/5/14/4, f. 52.

⁷⁴ JA 1B/5/14/4, f. 62.

⁷⁵ JA 1B/5/14/4, f. 57.

refusal of its co-operation with the project of reforming the slave system would precipitate a greater intrusion on its perceived rights as an independent legislature.

Hibbert's record of his discussion with Lord Liverpool and the submission of the Jamaican Assembly over registration show that the supposed rights of the House stood for very little when the British Government could so easily cow the colonists into submission. The pattern of events that occurred during the controversy over registration was repeated after 1823, when the gradual amelioration of the conditions of those enslaved became official policy of the British Government. Throughout the 1820s and early 1830s, the Assembly reluctantly passed ameliorative bills and had to face the task of redrawing them when the British Government disallowed them, often on the basis of clauses that denied religious toleration to non-conformist missionaries. Finally, in 1833, undeniable pressure from Britain forced the Jamaican Assembly to pass the Emancipation Bill, legislating for the eventual liberation of enslaved people on the island.⁷⁶

The Assembly jealously guarded their independence. However, the members of the House repeatedly allowed the British Government to suggest and dictate policies for the island that interfered with, undermined and eventually outlawed the system of slavery that had made the planters wealthy and defined all aspects of local life. This was because the Assembly was heavily dependent on Britain in a number of ways. The members of the Assembly all saw themselves as subjects of the British Crown and, notwithstanding a short-lived display of secessionist rhetoric in 1831, white colonists identified themselves as an important

⁷⁶ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), pp. 120 – 22, 189 – 90. See also chapter 8 below.

part of the British Empire. Furthermore, despite their desire to legislate for themselves, the House and the colonists depended upon support from Britain for its continued existence.

This reliance underpinned the language of loyalism that characterised petitions and letters to the Crown throughout the early nineteenth century. An example of this language is contained in a petition of 1809, in which the Assembly complained to the Crown about renewed British contact with Haiti and the use of black troops in Jamaica. The beginning of the address shows that this was a humble request from loyal and subordinate subjects. The Assembly described themselves as ‘your majesty’s dutiful and loyal subjects’, before going on to ‘most humbly beg leave to approach your throne, and to represent some of the many grievances with which your majesty’s faithful people in this island are at present afflicted.’⁷⁷

The wording of such petitions reveals that, far from being in a position to assert their rights of constitutional independence, the House and the colonists it represented were in a weak position vis-à-vis Britain. Indeed, despite the invective they levelled at the abolitionists and the British Government, the colonists always presented themselves as loyal subjects, who were upholding their constitutional rights. Even in 1831, when public meetings of freeholders across Jamaica discussed petitioning the Crown to allow them to break away from the Empire, colonists presented themselves as ‘a people ever distinguished by loyalty to their King’.⁷⁸

The most important factor in ensuring the Assembly’s ongoing loyalty was the protection that Britain offered to the colonists against a slave uprising. The issue of protection was a recurring theme in letters to the island agent.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁷ CO 140, vol. 96, f. 140.

⁷⁸ *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, 23 to 30 July 1831, p. 5.

⁷⁹ See JA 1B/5/14/3, ff. 41 – 44; JA 1B/5/14/4, ff. 28 – 29, 71, 74, 73, 79, 83 – 87, 142, 152, 173.

Assembly continually petitioned for better protection from locally-stationed British troops, and the issue of British protection was important to virtually all whites in Jamaica, which helps to explain why loyalism was so strong amongst these settlers. Indeed, in 1809, a meeting of freeholders in the parish of St John claimed that 'it is a position incontestible [*sic*], that protection and allegiance are reciprocal.'⁸⁰ Colonists themselves clearly recognised that their safety and their close ties to the metropole were intimately connected.

Conclusions

Elections of members to the Assembly played a large part in maintaining the white male solidarity that helped to define the boundaries of rule in Jamaica. For almost all of the period before emancipation, elections involved just white male propertyholders, and by allowing a large number of settlers to vote, the elite fostered a sense of belonging among them. These attempts at inclusivity stand in stark contrast to the retreat from democracy that characterised elite attitudes in the decades after emancipation, described by Mimi Sheller.⁸¹ Throughout most of the pre-emancipation period, the events on election days drew freeholders together in common rituals which encouraged sociability between candidates and voters by focussing as much on food and drink as on casting votes. Indeed, in the campaigning before elections and on the day itself, outright disagreements over policies were strongly discouraged. In this way, elections to the Assembly

⁸⁰ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, 28 January to 4 February 1809, p. 1.

⁸¹ Mimi Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (London, Macmillan, 2000).

generally helped to reinforce the racialised boundaries of rule that privileged white men and defined a local, creole social system based on slavery.

Nevertheless, whilst the relatively inclusive nature of political life on the island helped the local sugar-planting elite to maintain the support of other white men, it could also simultaneously threaten to undermine their political ascendancy. The elite were clearly unable to completely eradicate political disagreements and tensions within white society. However, candidates and representatives who were considered unsuitable because of their relatively lowly social backgrounds were severely criticised and undermined, especially if they did not behave in accordance with the planters' expectations. The local social and political elite therefore encouraged consensus and solidarity between white men, but demanded that this occur on their terms.

After 1830, when free coloured men joined the electorate, elections became more rigorously contested. However, as before, those standing for election were often eager to ensure that solidarity between freeholders prevailed on the day, although there was increasingly strong opposition between many candidates and their supporters. The breadth of the franchise therefore assisted the planters in maintaining a sense of common purpose throughout white society before 1830 and throughout free society immediately thereafter, although free coloured men proved far less willing to conform to the planters' expectations than property holding white men.⁸²

In the Assembly, the elite dominated the House and encouraged a similar sort of solidarity among members. Differences of opinion regularly occurred, but

⁸² After 1830, white politicians were anxious that a relatively broad franchise would allow non-whites to have a considerable influence in local politics. They therefore sought to restrict the franchise, and in the 1850s, the Assembly passed legislation that excluded many black and coloured voters. See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 91, 119, 130 – 31.

most members sought to deflect attention away from serious controversy, especially when there were disputes about the continuation of slavery. The elite were also quick to criticise and isolate those who they believed represented a faction that might challenge the near monopoly on power enjoyed by wealthy local planters. Nevertheless, although it was dominated by the planter class, most white settlers appear to have seen the Assembly as a vital local institution that could help to defend their distinctive social and economic system from reform imposed from outside, seeing the Assembly as a buttress against the interfering designs of the British Government and the Governor.

White colonists therefore looked to the Assembly to uphold their interests when the defining local institution of slavery came under attack from the metropole. Generally, Assemblymen were among the most vociferous critics of British Government policy and they attempted to use their strong links with Britain to maintain their autonomy and resist metropolitan calls for reform. However, Assemblymen remained loyal to the Crown, which severely circumscribed their ability to oppose metropolitan plans for amelioration and emancipation. This loyalty was partly due to British patriotism on the part of the colonists but, significantly, it was also the result of the fact that colonists depended on the metropole for military aid. Therefore, regardless of their campaigning and invective, a combination of vulnerability and loyalism meant that control of the island's future was largely out of the hands of local freeholders and the Assemblymen who represented them.

Reinforcing the Boundaries: Parish Vestries, Local Courts and the Island Militia

Each Jamaican parish had a principal town from where the leading local figures governed the parish. These towns were frequently ports, such as Savanna-la-Mar in Westmoreland, Falmouth in Trelawny or Montego Bay in St James, although some inland parish capitals did exist, for example, Mandeville in Manchester and Spanish Town in St Catherine. An imposing courthouse building stood at the heart of most of these towns. These buildings were built in a similar neo-classical style to many of the planters' great houses. With their symmetrical design, triangular porticos and large pillars, they were also similar in appearance to public buildings being constructed in Britain and throughout British-America during this period. The sheer grandeur and size of Jamaican courthouses ensured that they were the dominant architectural features of the small parish towns of the island. Their size, position and design all contributed to the impression of power and control that the planters who governed from them wished to convey, helping them to massage their own sense of self-importance.¹

¹ For examples of courthouses on the island, see Marguerite Curtin (ed.), *Jamaica's Heritage: An Untapped Resource* (Kingston, The Mill Press, 1991), pp. 27, 53, 59. James Robertson describes how, from the mid-eighteenth century, '[l]ocal designs re-adapted classical architectural orthodoxies to tropical realities'. See James Robertson, 'Architectures of Confidence: Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1655 – 1790', unpublished paper presented to the Department of History Graduate and Staff Seminar, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, 12 October 2001, p. 15. On the cultural significance of Georgian architecture to colonists in British America, albeit in a different colony, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740 – 1790* (New York and London, Norton, 1982), pp. 36 – 39, 351 – 354. John Michael Vlach also discusses the cultural significance of American colonists' adoption of the architectural and landscaping tastes of the English gentry in *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 2 – 8.

These imposing edifices also dominated the towns and parishes of the island in a more literal sense, since it was from them that the planter class dispensed justice, conducted local administration and held political meetings. Important public occasions occurred at the courthouses, including balls, elections of members to the Assembly and the feasts that followed. Parish vestries met at these buildings, making them the seats of local government and administration. Criminal trials of free and enslaved people also occurred there, closely associating them with the meting out of the planters' often-rough justice. Courthouses were also the venues of various public meetings that occurred throughout this period.²

The grand design and imposing size of the courthouses therefore combined with their functions and enabled the elite to use these buildings to project a sense of their power and control for the benefit of the people over whom they sought to rule. For example, in 1832, many of those enslaved people found guilty of rebelling were hanged in the square in front of the Montego Bay courthouse.³ The message conveyed to those who saw or heard of these executions was obvious: individuals who challenged or denied the power of the planter class, symbolised by and exercised from the courthouses, would face retribution that was swift and brutal.

Military review-grounds were another significant site in the geography of the parish capitals. Both regular British troops and the local militia units paraded for review on these grounds, which were often located away from town centres, presumably because of the space required. During his tour of the island in 1802,

² Frank Cundall (ed.), *Lady Nugent's Journal* (London, West India Committee, [1907] 1934), pp. 121 – 22; JA 2/3/1, Parochial Board St James, Vestry Minutes, 1807 – 1825; JA 2/7/1/2, Westmoreland Vestry Minutes, 1816 – 1831; JA 1A/7/4, Cornwall Assize Court, Pleas of the Crown, 1811 – 1830; JA 1A/2/8/1, St James Court of Quarter Sessions, Calendar Book, 1793 – 1841; *Jamaica Courant*, 6 October 1831. On the use of courthouses for public meetings, see chapter 8 below.

³ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), p. 162.

Governor George Nugent spent much of his time reviewing troops and militia companies in the different parishes.⁴ These strictly choreographed public occasions represented an overt display of military might designed to unite free society and deter anyone considering a challenge to the existing system. In this sense, the events that took place at the parade grounds, like those at the courthouses, reiterated the power and mastery of the planter class for the benefit of the rest of Jamaican slave society.

This chapter will argue that the institutions associated with the courthouses and parade grounds were vital to the planters in maintaining their control over the colony, and that these institutions enabled the planters to re-inscribe their dominance within free society. As magistrates and militia officers, the owners of sugar plantations retained control over events at the courthouses and parade grounds. However, the relatively few white men in Jamaica meant that it was necessary for individuals from outside the planter class to become involved in the operation of local institutions, which meant that elite men had to ensure that there was a strict hierarchy among those white men privileged enough to be admitted to serve within them. In this way, they were able to build upon their ties and alliances with other white men, whilst ensuring that the authority and influence of non-elite whites remained limited and contained.

Nevertheless, despite having an immense influence, the planters themselves did not have the final say over who would dominate within these local structures. It was the Governor's executive privilege to select magistrates, who ran the courts and who sat on the vestries, and to select the officers who commanded the militia. The Governor could also withdraw magistrates' commissions and demote as well

⁴ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 88 – 132.

as promote militia officers.⁵ Furthermore, the drilling of British troops alongside their own militia served as a constant reminder to the embattled white Jamaican minority that their continued safety was, to a large degree, dependent on British forces, sent by the British government. Therefore, their vulnerability and dependence on metropolitan protection ensured that there were important limits to the planters' power, which meant that white Jamaican propertyholders were dependent on British support and could only hope to control local events as colonial subjects.

The planters as magistrates

In Jamaica, a culture of amateurism ensured that social standing and connections were usually the only prerequisites for local office. Indeed, in 1823, J. Stewart commented that 'a fondness for dignified situations and high-sounding titles' meant that one man could simultaneously hold 'the different situations of major-general of militia, assistant-judge of the grand court, and Custos rotulorum and chief judge of the court of common-pleas, *without being either a soldier or a lawyer*.'⁶ It was mainly as magistrates, otherwise known as justices, that the sugar planters were able to run and control public life in Jamaica. Magistrates presided over the vestry meetings that were responsible for the government of each parish. They also presided over the local courts of Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas, which, whilst not trying serious or important cases, were a vital and frequently used part of the judicial system. The Governor also selected a Custos Rotulorum, or

⁵ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), pp. 18, 27.

⁶ J. Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (New York, Negro Universities Press, [1823] 1969), p. 161.

chief magistrate, to preside over each parish. These Custodes were the most important public figures in their respective parishes. They chaired meetings of the parish vestry and other parish meetings and, as chief magistrate, often helped to preside over the parish Courts of Quarter Session.⁷

Custodes came from among the wealthiest within the social elite of each parish. In St James, between 1816 and 1834, William Murray, Samuel Vaughan, James Cunningham and Richard Barrett all held the post.⁸ All four men were from sugar-planting families and possessed large areas of land and large numbers of slaves.⁹ Many ordinary magistrates in the parish also came from the ranks of the wealthy propertied elite. In St James in 1818, over half of the fifty-two magistrates were sugar plantation owners, and seven of these proprietors owned more than one sugar estate in the parish.¹⁰

In spite of the involvement of these members of the sugar-planting elite, eleven St James magistrates did not own slaves in the parish. However, some of these men were attorneys with control over large properties in the area. For example, William Miller and Walter Murray, both magistrates in St James in 1818, had control over the running of large plantations. Magistrates without slaves in the parish also often owned sugar plantations in different parts of the island and often lived in different parishes.¹¹ Walter Murray, for example, owned a plantation in Hanover.¹² Therefore, although some magistrates did not have their own holdings

⁷ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 14 – 15, 17 – 18, 20.

⁸ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1816 – 34.

⁹ The wealth and family connections of Barrett and Cunningham are discussed in chapter 4 above. Murray owned more than one sugar estate: see *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 102. On the Vaughan family, see Alton Hornsby, 'Documents: A Record from an Eighteenth Century Jamaican Estate', *Journal of Negro History*, 59/2 (April 1974).

¹⁰ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204.

¹¹ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204.

¹² *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 95.

of slaves in St James, they frequently still had a large stake in the sugar planting economy and derived their wealth and status from the ownership or management of sugar estates. Furthermore, about two thirds of the resident plantation owners in St James acted as magistrates.¹³ The fact that so many resident proprietors had the opportunity to exercise power and influence over public life in this way further demonstrates the dominance that the planters had over local society.

Nevertheless, in St James in 1818, thirteen of the fifty-two magistrates owned forty or fewer slaves in the parish. Some of these men did not have property elsewhere and were non-sugar producers, thus demonstrating that such men could aspire to have an influence over local affairs.¹⁴ Such non-sugar-producing magistrates were in the minority, but absenteeism among the larger landowners reduced the ratio between them and magistrates from the propertied elite. In 1818, local magistrates, resident on their own holdings in St James numbered thirty-four.¹⁵ About half of these men had sugar estates and large holdings of slaves, but the remainder of them were attorneys and non-sugar-producing landowners.¹⁶ Therefore, although most of the men whom the Governor selected as magistrates were planters, absenteeism meant that, of those magistrates ready and available to carry out duties for the parish, there were in fact about equal numbers of sugar planters and non-sugar producers.

In spite of involvement by non-sugar producers, the sugar planters were still able to dominate the magistracy. For example, only the very wealthiest and best

¹³ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204.

¹⁴ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 73 – 113; T71/201 – 204.

¹⁵ In that year, ten of the magistrates with sugar plantations in St James were absent from the island. Another seven of the fifty-two magistrates lived in different parishes. *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56.

¹⁶ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, p. 56; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204.

connected sugar planters served as Custodes, showing that it was elite planters who had the most influence and power among the magistracy. Furthermore, most resident sugar planters were guaranteed to serve as magistrates, whilst far fewer non-sugar producers could aspire to do so. Therefore, the involvement of other property-owning men in the organisation and running of local affairs, whilst significant, did not constitute a threat to the planters' control of public life. Furthermore, as demonstrated in previous chapters, most white propertyholding men supported the leadership and policies of the resident planters and were committed to maintaining the existing local social and economic order based on slavery.

Vestries

The law permitted an unlimited number of local magistrates to attend meetings of the parish vestry, along with ten elected vestrymen, two elected churchwardens and the parish rector. These meetings, convened on an ad hoc basis, usually in the parish courthouses, were the main basis for local government. Although they gathered at irregular intervals, they did meet several times a year.¹⁷ The wide-ranging responsibilities of the vestries included the upkeep and construction of roads and public buildings in the parish. They dispensed licences for the sale of liquor, granted licenses to non-conformist preachers and investigated the manumission claims of freed slaves. They were also responsible for local services such as fire prevention and local policing and managed the levying and collecting of the local taxes that funded most of their activities. From 1830, free

¹⁷ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 20 – 21. For example, in 1818, the St James vestry met eleven times. See JA 2/3/1.

non-whites could seek election to the vestries. However, before then, only white male property-holders were able to participate. Those freeholders enfranchised to vote for members of the Assembly elected vestrymen and churchwardens on an annual basis.¹⁸

The vestrymen whom freeholders selected on these occasions came from a variety of backgrounds and included sugar estate owners. For example, in 1818, there were three such men on the St James vestry.¹⁹ Generally, however, those men who sat on the vestry, whilst always slaveholders, were not from the planter class. Further information on St James vestrymen in 1818 can help to demonstrate their social and economic backgrounds (see table 9). All ten were slaveholders, and at least eight of them were landowners. Half of them owned over fifty slaves, showing that even if they did not come from the estate-owning elite, they were mainly quite wealthy property-owning men. Apart from the sugar planters, the landowners included men such as John Henderson Hay, who raised livestock.²⁰ Of the ten, three vestrymen had responsibility for large numbers of slaves as attorneys.²¹ The only vestryman who did not have a stake in rural property, either as a manager or as an owner, was Patrick Green. Poll records from 1810 show that that the only property that he owned was a house, and it appears that he was a relatively wealthy merchant and town dweller.²²

¹⁸ JA 2/3/1; Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 20 – 23.

¹⁹ These were Philip Anglin Scarlett, George McFarquhar Lawson and Benjamin Haughton Tharp. See *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, pp. 56 – 57; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204.

²⁰ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, pp. 56 – 57; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204; JA 1B/11/3, Inventories, vol. 141, f. 151, John Henderson Hay, 3 November, 1825.

²¹ Philip Anglin Scarlett managed the affairs of Duckett's Spring and was also responsible for the management of slaves in smaller holdings. John Parnter and Edward Montague, were in joint charge of Eden sugar estate. Furthermore, Montague was in charge of another four sugar estates in St James as a receiver. See T71/201 – 204.

²² Green was often described as a merchant. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 108, f. 75, James White, 6 August, 1806; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 109, f. 92, Thomas Mockler, 5 September, 1807, both of which inventories were jointly compiled by Green, described in the records as a 'merchant'. Green's own inventory

Table 9. Vestrymen, St James, 1818

Name	Properties	Slaves held as owner (1817)	Livestock	Slaves held as attorney (1817)	Probable occupation/status
Patrick Green	-	6	2	0	Urban Householder
John H. Hay	-	3	47	0	Landowner
George M. Lawson	Porto-Bello	84	97	0	Doctor and Sugar Planter
Edward Montague	-	11	2	126	Freeholder and Attorney
John Parnther	Belle-Vue	47	7	89	Landowner, Jobber and Attorney
John Ritchie	Farm and Retirement	75	39	19	Landowner
Philip A. Scarlett	Cambridge	129	180	1035	Sugar Planter and Attorney
Henry Shergold	Bloomsbury Hill	13	6	5	Printer and Smallholder
Benjamin H. Tharp	-	143	-	0	Sugar Planter
Raynes Waite	Mount Waite	55	7	0	Landowner and Jobber

Sources: *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, pp. 56 – 57; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204; JA 1B/11/3, Vols 130 – 62.

The parish vestries were therefore not the sole preserve of the sugar-planting elite. However, this did not undermine the planters' control over local affairs. Vestrymen shared important common interests with the planter class, and slaveholding was the principal link between them. As white slaveholding men, vestrymen shared privileges denied to other groups in Jamaican society. Therefore, like magistrates, vestrymen all had an interest in maintaining slavery and the system of racialised and gendered exclusion that went with it. Most St James vestrymen were also involved in the rural economy and, as such, could hardly have avoided a degree of economic dependence on the sugar estates. Therefore, whilst not always planters themselves, the men on the parish vestries came from the

shows that he had been relatively privileged in terms of material wealth. See JA 1B/11/3, vol. 143, f. 37, Patrick Green, 22 November 1826.

sections of Jamaican society that were most forthcoming in their support for the planters and their institutions.

Furthermore, when the St James vestries actually met, it was the sugar planters who had the most influence. The Custos chaired every meeting, and when he was absent, another magistrate took his place as chairman. These replacements were usually from the sugar-planting elite.²³ The fact that an unlimited number of magistrates could attend vestries also meant that magistrates usually outnumbered elected members at meetings. In 1818, magistrates outnumbered vestrymen at seven of the eleven St James vestry meetings.²⁴ Therefore, unelected magistrates, chosen by the Governor largely from the ranks of the sugar-planting landed elite, dominated these meetings. This would clearly have diminished the contribution of non-elite vestrymen, who could be easily outspoken and outvoted by their more powerful sugar-producing neighbours.

Unfortunately, it is practically impossible to assess the opinions of freeholders and elected vestrymen in St James regarding the dominance of the magistracy at parish vestry meetings, as there are no extant sources detailing their thoughts or reactions. However, in 1772, Westmoreland penkeeper, Thomas Thistlewood, did record his frustration at how non-elected magistrates controlled the parish vestry. On the day that freeholders met in Savanna-la-Mar to elect the vestry, he wrote that he 'did not go as it is all a farce, for at all Vestrys the Justices carry all as they please owing to their numbers.'²⁵ Clearly, for a non-elite landowner such as Thistlewood, the behaviour of the magistracy was a source of

²³ In 1818, local estate owners James Cunningham and Raynes Barrett Waite took on the role of chairman when the Custos, Samuel Vaughan, missed two meetings. See JA 2/3/1. Raynes Barrett Waite owned Blue Hole estate in St James, along with nearly 300 slaves. See *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, p. 104.

²⁴ JA 2/3/1.

²⁵ Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750 – 86* (Kingston, University of the West Indies Press, [1989] 1999), p. 230.

irritation. The situation that caused Thistlewood's complaint persisted in St James in the early nineteenth century, with the magistracy continuing to dominate vestry proceedings. It therefore seems likely that the marginalisation of vestrymen continued to cause resentment among freeholders.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that within three years of expressing his frustration about the behaviour of the local justices, Thistlewood was himself a magistrate. His friend, John Cope, Custos of Westmoreland, recommended him to the Governor, who appointed him as a magistrate, thus enabling Thistlewood to attend meetings of the vestry in the years afterwards.²⁶ This demonstrates that it was possible for some of those who felt excluded by the local political process eventually to become involved in and to have an influence over local affairs. Therefore, the small size and close-knit nature of white society, coupled with opportunities for advancement, probably mitigated any serious tensions between the sugar-planting elite and other white freeholders.

Indeed, Thistlewood's case shows that having influential contacts was a necessary part of ascending to a position of prominence in public life. It is therefore possible that some of those non-elite men who stood for election and served as vestrymen did so partly in order to cultivate links with the sugar-planting magistrates who attended the vestry meetings. Such relationships could be useful to non-sugar-producing white men because they could help them to advance their political ambitions and economic interests. Therefore, regardless of inequalities between those who attended them, vestry meetings brought white male slaveholders together, providing a forum for the development of friendly relations.

²⁶ Hall, *In Miserable Slavery*, pp. 239 – 40; JA 2/7/1/2.

As we have seen, the narrow white society that existed in Jamaica made the support of non-elite white men indispensable to the planter class. In St James, the elite sugar planters of the parish lent leadership to the vestry and helped to maintain its connections with the Assembly. However, long- and short-term absenteeism meant that there were few plantation owners available to attend vestry meetings regularly. The vestries required men who would make a commitment to attend all year, and other locally resident landowners were in an ideal position to do this. Their reliability made effective local government possible. The inclusion of non-sugar producers in local government also helped the planters to ensure that they did not alienate other white men. Election to the vestry was possible for men with just a few slaves and relatively small holdings of land. These men could therefore aspire to have some influence over local affairs and, by sitting on the vestry, could hope to improve their standing in public life. In this way, parish vestries enabled the planters to draw other white men into the process of government. Power relations between the men that attended meetings reinforced the accepted hierarchy of white society, with the sugar producers placed firmly at the top. However, the inclusion of other white men, albeit in a relatively subordinate capacity, was vital to the planter class, mainly because it helped to broaden their base of support within white society.

When they met in January, one of the first tasks of each new vestry was to select parochial officers for the year. These salaried officials were responsible for the effective operation of public services in the parish. These were important local posts and their annual salaries, whilst not large, were mostly enough to live on. The best paid and most important posts were clerk of the vestry, collecting constable, head constable, and surgeon of the hospital and gaol. Holding such positions

offered employment and a public role for non-elite white men. William Place Walker, who never owned more than seven slaves, held the post of head constable for over ten years. His salary was £200 and his combined annual income from this and his other official posts was £350. Assistant constables, who earned an annual salary of £100, were frequently non-slaveholders or had very small holdings of slaves.²⁷ Local blacksmith, David Griffiths, worked for several years as the captain of fire engines, an important job considering the propensity for Montego Bay to catch fire.²⁸ Other non-elite white men found employment as harbour pilots and firewardens. The vestry also employed women. Elizabeth ‘Betsy’ McCathy, a local woman with one slave, served for several years as matron of the hospital. Mary Sharp served a long stint as the organist of the parish, and in 1817, the vestry selected Mary Brown as parish poundkeeper.²⁹

The Assembly denied free coloured and black people the right to ‘interfere in the administration of the Government’, which meant that public offices were the preserve of whites.³⁰ This helped to distinguish non-elite whites from free non-whites, thereby reinforcing the racialised boundaries that structured slave society. The possibility of inclusion in the processes of local government and administration therefore helped to distinguish and privilege all white people. However, at the same time, the hierarchy among public officers in the parishes, from the Custos to the minor parish officers, reflected the stratification inherent in white society. It is also important to note that practical constraints meant that

²⁷ JA 2/3/1; T71/201 – 204; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818 – 25, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1817 – 24; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1822, pp. 50 – 52; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1822, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1821, pp. 111 – 23.

²⁸ JA 2/3/1; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 140, f. 160, David Griffiths, 5 February 1825. On the fire that nearly destroyed Montego Bay in 1795 and the subsequent fires of 1811 and 1818, see Clinton V. Black, *The History of Montego Bay* (Montego Bay, Montego Bay Chamber of Commerce, 1984), p. 12.

²⁹ JA 2/3/1; T71/201 – 204.

³⁰ Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 28.

participation in local government was not open to all. For example, most of the parochial officials in St James would have had to live in or near Montego Bay to carry out their duties effectively. Nevertheless, the vestry and the public posts connected to it did provide structures that could help engender a sense of white solidarity and inclusiveness at the same time as perpetuating the strict stratification of white society.

Local courts

The Jamaican criminal justice system for free inhabitants of the island closely mirrored that of the metropole.³¹ The most important court on the island in the early nineteenth century was the Supreme Court in Spanish Town, which also fulfilled the role of an Assize court for the county of Middlesex. The county Assizes tried the more serious cases on the island and sat three times a year. Montego Bay was, after 1815, the site of the Assizes for the county of Cornwall, and Kingston performed the same function for the county of Surrey.³² In Jamaica, sessions of the lower Courts of Common Pleas occurred quarterly in each parish at the same time as the Courts of Quarter Sessions, which tried petty offences.³³ Within these courts, the process of prosecution seems to have been similar to that of English courts. According to Jonathan Dalby, victims were generally responsible for taking the initiative in prosecution. When a case came before the court, the

³¹ For overviews of the British system upon which the Jamaican legal system was based, see James Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England: 1550 – 1750* (London, Longman, [1984] 1999); Peter King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England: 1740 – 1820* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000).

³² Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 16 – 20; Jonathan Dalby, *Crime and Punishment in Jamaica: 1756 – 1856* (Kingston, The Social History Project, Department of History, University of the West Indies, 2000), pp. 12 – 14. The Supreme Court was apparently also known as the Grand Court.

³³ JA 1A/2/8/1.

grand jury would judge whether it was worth trying. If the grand jury decided to proceed with the prosecution, the defendant came before a trial jury, who decided the case. Before 1830, all judges and jurymen had to be white.³⁴

In Jamaica, a concern with slavery helped to define those offences that judges and magistrates saw as particularly serious, and magistrates had a reputation for being harsh towards slaves and missionaries and lenient on fellow slaveowners. This was a reputation that they were keen to avoid, but which was well deserved.³⁵ In fact, slavery was the main factor that distinguished the judicial system of the colony from that of the metropole. In Jamaica, enslaved people only became involved in the trial procedure at the free courts as property, victims and exhibits and could not bring suits against free people.³⁶ Although other provisions for complaints by enslaved people against their owners did exist, complainants faced the prospect of punishment themselves if magistrates deemed their claims to be 'idle and frivolous'.³⁷ Trials of enslaved people took place at separate slave courts, although these courts usually met at the courthouse on the same day as the Quarter Sessions.³⁸ Enslaved people therefore had few legal protections or rights.

Information on magistrates and on the composition of juries can provide an insight into who was involved in the dispensation of justice. Court records show that, as in the meetings of the parish vestries, the socially and economically privileged controlled affairs in the courthouse, but that they relied on white men from lower down the social order to carry out the business of the courts. The cases

³⁴ Dalby, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 14 – 19; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 5.

³⁵ For examples of cases involving the victimisation of slaves and missionaries and leniency towards slaveholders, see Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 16 – 17, 133, 139, 165. The journal of sugar planter, Matthew Lewis, also provides insights into the concerns of local judges. See Matthew Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor: Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, [1834] 1999), pp. 135 – 38.

³⁶ Dalby, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 12.

³⁷ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 148.

³⁸ JA 1A/2/8/1; Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 16 – 20; Dalby, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 12.

brought to prosecution and the verdicts and sentences handed out also reflect the concerns of the elite, who used the courts to police and control the boundaries of rule in slave society.

The assistant judges who presided over the Assize courts were appointed by the Governor 'from among the most respectable gentlemen of property in each county', which reserved these positions for sugar plantation owners. They were unpaid and were not usually professional lawyers. At the Courts of Quarter Session, the Custos presided, assisted by two or three magistrates.³⁹ Court records from St James show that the local elite of planter-magistrates ran the local criminal justice system, with the same individuals taking a leading role in proceedings over many years.⁴⁰ The fact that these individuals were often also involved in the parish vestry and the militia shows how a relatively small oligarchy of local landowners governed the parish throughout this period.

Members of this small ruling elite controlled events in the courthouse on court days, but they relied on the assistance of other local white men. At the Cornwall Assizes, juries were selected from a pool of jurors taken from each parish. An analysis of those jurors selected from St James in 1816 shows that the composition of juries was likely to have included men from the social and economic elite of the parish as well as individuals who were far less privileged (see table 10). Among the twenty men from St James selected to serve in the court were sugar planters, wealthy merchants and powerful planting attorneys. However, most of the men were plantation employees or craftsmen, with few or no slaves.⁴¹

³⁹ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 17 – 18; Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 144 – 48.

⁴⁰ JA 1A/2/8/1; Jamaica Almanack, 1812 – 32. 'Returns of Givings in', 1811 – 31; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

⁴¹ *Supplement to the Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 2 March, 1816; Jamaica Almanack, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204; 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 135, John Fray, 8 January 1822.

Table 10. St James jurors for the March Cornwall Assize Court, 1816

Name	Status	Properties in St James	Slaves in St James (1817)
Sir John Gordon	Baronet	Carlton	139
Robert Scarlett, Junior ⁴²	Esquire	N/A	N/A
John Fray	Merchant		21
Raynes Barrett Waite	Esquire	Blue Hole	290
Raynes Waite	Esquire	Mount Waite	55
Alexander Cumming	Merchant		10
William Ewart	Merchant		15
Thomas Homes	Merchant		N/A
John Coates	Merchant	Paradise	89
Samuel Hayward	Coppersmith	Broughton	12
Thomas Stennett	Carpenter		9
James Stewart	Planter		N/A
James Humphreys	Planter		N/A
Alexander Heatley	Planter		N/A
James Hill	Planter		2
John Hamilton	Planter		2
Alexander White	Carpenter		6
John Tulloch	Planter		33
William Vernon	Carpenter	Mount Vernon	96
William R. Grizzell	Planter		3

Sources: *Supplement to the Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 2 March 1816; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Giving in', 1817; T71/201 – 204.

In the Courts of Quarter Session, non-elite white men were even more numerous. The grand jury usually consisted of fifteen men, and few of those jurors appear to have belonged to the social elite (See table 11). The lists of jurymen for the year 1817 reveal that, of the men who served on the four juries sitting during the year, none owned more than 100 slaves. Most jurors owned relatively few slaves and many appear to have been non-sugar-producing landowners. In addition, the juries contained some plantation employees and urban-based, non-elite males.⁴³

⁴² It is not possible to list the property or number of slaves belonging to Robert Scarlett Junior, as the lists of landholders and slaveowners do not differentiate between him and Robert Scarlett Senior. It is, however, extremely likely that he owned, or was heir to, a large slave-run property in St James.

⁴³ JA 1A/2/8/1; T71/201 – 204; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 - 104. The backgrounds of some non-elite jurymen, such as Benjamin Porter, who leased a house in Montego Bay, can be traced through probate inventories: see JA, 1B/11/3, vol. 135, f. 57, Benjamin Porter, 18 September 1821. However, it is difficult to judge the backgrounds of all of the men who served on the grand juries. Nevertheless, the fact that their names do not appear in lists of slaveholders, coupled with the fact that it is not possible to trace inventories for some of these

Table 11. Grand Jury for St James Court of Quarter Session, April 1817

Name	Properties in St James	Slaves in St James (1817)	How held	Livestock in St James (1817)	Probable occupation/status
Joshua S. Waite	-	-	-	-	-
John Christie	Montrose	9	Owner	0	Overseer and Landowner
Samuel Whittingham	-	-	-	-	-
John Rose	-	1	Owner	-	Master in the Court of Chancery
Andrew Young	-	34	Attorney	-	'Gentleman'
John Hilton	Comfort Hall	2 4	Owner Guardian	47	Penkeeper
John Irving	-	-	-	-	-
John Appleton	-	-	-	-	Overseer
James Hill	-	2	Owner	-	'Gentleman'
Cargill Mowat	Newing-Green	32	Owner	2	Overseer and Landowner
Thomas Minto	-	-	-	-	Overseer
James Humphries	-	-	-	-	-
Daniel Hine	Comfort Hall	19	Owner	2	Landowner
Robert Gow	-	-	-	-	Plantation Employee
William J. Angus	-	23 2	Owner Trustee	-	-

JA 1A/2/8/1; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T 71/201 – 204; JA 1B/11/3 Vols 131 – 53.

Research on those participating in the court system of eighteenth-century England has shown that the landed gentry generally only served on grand juries at Assize courts. Trial juries and the grand juries at smaller courts consisted of 'farmers, artisans, and tradesmen'.⁴⁴ A similar situation prevailed in Jamaica, and we can add overseers and jobbers to the list of those included on such juries. The involvement of such men in the judicial process was practical in a society where the small size of the white community meant that there were few qualified men available to assist on juries.

individuals, strongly suggests that many of them came from the less-wealthy sections of St James white society.

⁴⁴ King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion*, p. 243.

However, the involvement of such men in the operation of the courts also served a political purpose. In attending to cases of larceny, assault, breaches of the peace and affray, these men were closely involved in the day-to-day policing of free society and performed an important public function. In this way, many white men were involved in the running of local affairs in Jamaica. Such men did not control events in the courthouses, but they did have a voice there. As with the inclusion of non-elite men in vestry meetings and their employment as parochial officers, jury service helped to contribute to a sense of white male solidarity. It was a privilege, at least before 1830, reserved exclusively for white men and it helped to set these individuals apart from the free non-whites, women and enslaved people who were excluded from involvement in public life.

It is impossible to tell exactly who attended the court sessions held at the courthouse in Montego Bay. However, slave courts occurred on the same days as the Courts of Quarter Session and the testimony of enslaved people was admissible in pre-trial investigations.⁴⁵ Therefore, enslaved people were in and around courthouses on court days and witnessed the proceedings. Records from the Cornwall Assize courts and the Montego Bay Courts of Quarter Sessions show that free coloured people attended the courts regularly as defendants and probably also as plaintiffs. White men and women of all social and economic status appeared as witnesses, defendants and plaintiffs, with white men in attendance as jurors and magistrates.⁴⁶ Individuals from all sections of Jamaican society therefore congregated at the courthouse whilst trials took place.

⁴⁵ For the records of the slave court of St James, see JA 1A/2/8/1. The indictment of the slaveholder, Thomas Ludford, in 1817 sheds interesting light on the involvement of enslaved people in pre-trial proceedings. See CO 137, Jamaican Governor's Correspondence, vol. 144, ff. 68 – 70.

⁴⁶ JA 1A/2/8/1; JA 1A/7/4.

The influence and position of these individuals in relation to the proceedings in the court reflected their standing in Jamaican society. Enslaved people were the least powerful group in the courthouses. They had few rights and often faced swift and summary justice. Free coloureds and free blacks also faced serious restrictions. Before 1813, free coloured and free black people were not able to testify against whites, although the records of the St James courts show that this did not prevent cases involving attacks by whites on free coloureds from coming before the courts.⁴⁷ Free non-white and non-elite white men and women were the two groups most often before the courts as defendants. In this capacity, they were at the mercy of the white men who comprised the juries and the elite men who led the court as magistrates. Of course, socially and economically privileged white men were not exempt from the law and, in theory at least, could be brought before the court if they committed an offence. However, in practice, such men virtually never appeared as defendants.⁴⁸ The dignity and power of elite white men was therefore very rarely compromised by the spectacle of seeing them publicly tried and punished in the local courts.

The restrictions and exclusions imposed on enslaved people, non-whites and women therefore ensured that the drama of court days reinforced the domination of white men over Jamaican society. Furthermore, the part played by elite white men as magistrates ensured that the difference in social standing between them and the non-elite white men, who were integrated into less prominent positions of authority on the juries, was also plain for all present to see. In these ways, each individual's place in relation to the proceedings of the courts reiterated the boundaries of rule imposed by the planter class on Jamaican society.

⁴⁷ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 5, 28; JA 1A/2/8/1.

⁴⁸ JA 1A/2/8/1; JA 1A/7/4.

The island militia

The island militia was one of the most important institutions in Jamaica and provided another arena for the planters to publicly exercise and display their power. Like the system of local government and the criminal justice system, it also gave white men opportunities for involvement in public life that were denied to other groups and brought white men together in common rituals. Furthermore, at militia musters, as at vestry meetings and trials, the hierarchy that the planters sought to impose on Jamaican society was clear for all to see.⁴⁹

The explicit practical function of the militia was to defend the colony from attack. In this respect, the main threat that the colonists perceived to their lives and property came not from a possible external attack but from a potential uprising of those enslaved on the island. The planters and other white settlers realised that they were outnumbered by an enslaved majority comprised of individuals who had every reason to resent them and their system. The planters' reliance on the militia, and on British military support, to protect them and their properties shows that they realised, tacitly at least, that their control over slave society in Jamaica was ultimately dependent on force.

In 1823, there were 8,000 – 10,000 men enrolled in the militia, which encompassed all free men in Jamaica between the ages of sixteen and sixty and included about 2,000 free coloured and free black men. The Governor acted as Commander-in-Chief. He appointed the officers, who, in the period before 1830,

⁴⁹ In a detailed and well-argued study, Harry S. Laver has demonstrated that the Militia performed a similar role in slave-holding Kentucky. See Harry S. Laver, 'Rethinking the Social Role of the Militia: Community-Building in Antebellum Kentucky', *Journal of Southern History*, 68/4 (November 2002).

had to be white, and the highest ranks tended to be reserved for the planter elite.⁵⁰ In the central command structure, the Governor was assisted by a small number of aides-de-camp, below whom were two or three lieutenant generals and about ten to fifteen major generals. Various staff officers, such as an adjutant general, deputy adjutant generals and artillery superintendents completed the central command structure.⁵¹

Amateur planter-officers filled many of the offices in this central command structure, which appear to have been mainly reserved for the very wealthiest of the sugar planters on the island. In 1806, two of the richest and most powerful sugar plantation owners in Jamaica served as lieutenant generals. One was William Mitchell, and the other was Simon Taylor, who according to Nugent was the 'richest man in the island'. Both men owned more than one sugar estate and both served as members of the Assembly. Before Taylor's death in 1813, they were the most powerful and high-ranking planter-officers in the militia.⁵² Major generals also came from the ranks of the very wealthiest and most influential sugar planters. For example, John Cunningham from St James gained promotion to this rank in 1807.⁵³

Below the central command structure, the militia was organised into parish regiments, although each county also had cavalry regiments and there were separate regiments for western and southern interior districts. A colonel, who was usually a member of the local land-owning elite, commanded each regiment.

⁵⁰ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 26 – 31; Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 158 – 60.

⁵¹ The command structure of the island militia was published annually in the *Jamaica Almanack*. For examples, see *Jamaica Almanack*, 1813, pp. 174 – 75; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1824, p. 75; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, pp. 82 – 83.

⁵² Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 41, 77, 81; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1806, p. 163; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1813, p. 174; Roby, *Members of the Assembly*, pp. 9 – 10, 72 – 73; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 87, f. 1, Simon Taylor, 2 December 1808.

⁵³ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

Beneath the colonel were two lieutenant colonels and two majors, and the lower ranked officers included several captains, lieutenants and ensigns. Below these commissioned officers were non-commissioned officers and the privates, who made up the rank and file.⁵⁴

As with the magistracy, there were many sugar planters among the officers of the St James militia. Such men generally held the highest-ranking posts. For example, in 1818, the colonel of the St James regiment was Thomas Joseph Gray, owner of Easthams sugar estate and one of the most prominent and influential men in the parish. Samuel Jackson, owner of two estates and over 300 slaves, was one of two lieutenant colonels, and George McFarquhar Lawson, another plantation owner prominent in local public life, served as major. Among the eleven captains of the regiment, four were sugar planters.⁵⁵

However, the other lieutenant colonel in the St James regiment of 1818 was Roderick Tulloch. He owned five slaves and was a relatively wealthy merchant. The involvement of men such as Tulloch as high-ranking officers shows that the planters did not completely dominate the leadership of the militia. Indeed, the relative scarcity of sugar planters, especially by the early 1830s, by which time many estate owners had left Jamaica to live as absentees, meant that other white men formed a crucial part of the command structure of the militia. For example, in 1818, Patrick Green served as a major in the St James regiment. As we have seen, like Tulloch, Green appears to have been a moderately wealthy merchant. Non-sugar-producing and non-elite white men were even more prominent among the lower ranked officers. Seven of the eleven captains of the St James regiment in

⁵⁴ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 26 – 31; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1814, p. 191 – 96; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, pp. 97 – 102.

⁵⁵ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, pp. 84 – 85; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204.

1818 do not appear to have been sugar planters. Among these captains were George Hayle Tharp, who owned twenty-eight slaves in 1817 and a property called Cedar-Grove in Westmoreland, and George Longmore, who owned a St James property called Rock-Pleasant and could call on the labour of fewer than forty enslaved people in 1817.⁵⁶ Both of these men appear to have been non-sugar-producing landowners. As landowners with such numbers of slaves, they were by no means poor and probably occupied an upper-middling position in St James free society in terms of their wealth and social status.

William Bellinger was also a captain in the regiment. Bellinger owned thirty slaves in 1817. He appears to have owned a wharf, and his probate inventory, compiled after his death in 1833, shows that he lived comfortably, though not opulently.⁵⁷ All of the evidence suggests that he was part of the middling section of St James free society. By 1825, he had gained promotion from captain to major, showing that even men of relatively modest means could aspire to reach the upper ranks of the militia.⁵⁸ Therefore, the militia offered opportunities for white male property owners from outside the estate-owning elite to become leaders and enabled such men to assert a degree of dominance over other social groups within the colony. However, such opportunities generally depended upon the friendship or patronage of the local sugar-planting elite. As Stewart remarked, the officers of the militia were appointed by the governor on the recommendation of the colonels, most of whom were sugar planters. He also asserted that in the recommendations to

⁵⁶ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, pp. 84 – 85; T71/201 – 204; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 131, f. 34, Roderick Tulloch, 12 November 1818; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 143, f. 37, Patrick Green, 22 November 1826; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1818, 'Returns of Givings in', 1817, pp. 96 – 104; T71/201 – 204. On Patrick Green, see also note 22 above.

⁵⁷ T71/201 – 204; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 150, f. 64, William Bellinger, 13 August 1833. A letter written in 1833 describes 'Bellinger's Wharf' in St James. See UWI, Belmore Papers: Correspondence of the 2nd Earl of Belmore as Governor General of Jamaica (Microfilm), Film no. 1 (1371), W. C. Morris to Col Lawson, Montego Bay, 13 January 1832.

⁵⁸ NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

commissions, 'much depends on petty local interests and connexions – on the favour and affection of the colonels, or their friends'.⁵⁹

The involvement of men from outside the plantocracy in positions of high status in the militia therefore occurred within a society where the planters remained dominant. In order to advance their own interests, most other groups in free society were dependent upon the support of planters. Furthermore, the fact that poor whites and free coloured men comprised the rank and file of the militia shows how this institution reflected the racial exclusion and gradations of class that characterised free Jamaican society. Like vestries and juries, the militia allowed many white men the opportunity to improve their social position at the same time as reinforcing the ties of dependency and rank that existed between those men who served in it.

The organisation was only able to operate effectively with widespread participation, and officers attempted to ensure that involvement in the militia served to engender a sense of male solidarity that encompassed the less privileged men who served in the ranks. The law stated that all able-bodied men had to enrol in the militia immediately on arrival on the island. This ensured a speedy introduction and integration into local society for newcomers arriving from the British Isles. The militia also met regularly and the law stated that men had to attend a drill once every month and attend field inspections four times a year.⁶⁰

In Jamaica, as in other sites of British colonialism, there was a perceived need for the active engagement of the entire European community in the colonial project and white society was essentially a community under arms.⁶¹ To this end,

⁵⁹ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, pp. 158 – 59.

⁶⁰ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 160.

⁶¹ For a comparison with another area of British colonisation, see Mary Procida, 'Good Sports and Right Sorts: Guns, Gender, and Imperialism in British India', *Journal of British Studies*, 40/4 (2001).

frequently held militia reviews brought militiamen together in a way that encouraged sociability and fostered a sense of male solidarity. As well as having a military purpose, militia drills and inspections were also social events. After witnessing a militia review during her visit to the island, Maria Nugent described the ‘magnificent second breakfast, which succeeded this display’.⁶² This kind of hospitality was common after reviews and performed a similar social function to the feasting, drinking and speech giving that followed the election of members to the Assembly. As Robert Dirks has observed, these ‘frequent gatherings around the dining table...amounted to rituals of communion’ that helped to cement social bonds between those men present.⁶³

The pomp, ceremony and catering that characterised these days allowed planter-officers to demonstrate their generosity as hosts but also to display their status and power in a deliberately public manner. In spite of attempts to encourage a sense of shared purpose among free men through the militia, musters and drills, by their very nature, remained highly structured affairs that reiterated the social hierarchy that separated free men. In 1823, J. Stewart described the officers of the island militia as ‘parade warriors’, and throughout the period, militia officers were renowned for their garish dress.⁶⁴ Maria Nugent watched a militia review and remarked how men and officers ‘each displayed his own taste in the ornamental part of his dress’.⁶⁵ The officers’ ostentation was the subject of ridicule at the hands of metropolitan observers such as Nugent. However, the time and effort that officers put into their self presentation shows the importance that they attached to

⁶² Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 77 – 78; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 17 to Saturday 24 September 1831, p. 11.

⁶³ Robert Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1987), p. 186.

⁶⁴ Stewart, *A View of Jamaica*, p. 163.

⁶⁵ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 77 - 78.

visibly asserting their authority. In so presenting themselves, they stressed their social rank and martial power to those non-elite men who comprised the rank and file of the militia as well to any onlookers. Nugent noted the presence of enslaved people at militia inspections, at which the units demonstrated their skill with their muskets, which shows that these performances of martial masculinity were also intended for the eyes of those enslaved people who witnessed them.⁶⁶

The drama of militia reviews is a reminder that actual or threatened violence always underpinned the planters' rule in Jamaica. The militia, with its regular displays of power in the form of parades, drills and inspections helped to allow a very small white minority to perpetuate the appearance of absolute dominance over the enslaved majority of the island. These were therefore public displays of military superiority and unity. As with trial proceedings in the courthouses, the planters intended for the carefully choreographed routine of the militia reviews to reinscribe their vision of the hierarchy of Jamaican society. By parading in garish uniforms, property-owning officers visibly reinforced their dominance over onlookers and those in the ranks. As such, regularly convened militia reviews were also symptoms of the vulnerability and anxiety of the planters and of the white minority more generally. Comprehensively outnumbered by those whom they routinely exploited, settlers' safety was indeed fragile and dependent upon the threat of force provided by the island militia and, more crucially, by the military support of the mother country.

⁶⁶ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, p. 76.

British links and local institutions

Throughout the pre-emancipation period, the planters and the other male freeholders who organised and led meetings of the vestries, local courts and militia musters sought to exclude enslaved people, women and, until 1830, free non-whites from wielding power at these events. Those who benefited most from these institutions throughout the entire period before emancipation were white male freeholders and most notably the owners of plantations, who used them to reinforce and preserve slavery, the existing economic order and the racialised boundaries that characterised slave society.

They did this on a number of different levels and in a variety of ways. For example, at a very basic level, the day-to-day activities of the vestry included providing funds for the upkeep of the infrastructure of roads that connected the sugar estates of the island with each other and with the ports that gave them access to Atlantic trading systems. The vestries also ensured that the courthouses were in a good state of repair, and these court houses were the sites of trials, at which those free and enslaved people deemed to have committed crimes that undermined the structure of local slave society were condemned for punishment. The militia meanwhile was organised as a standing force to be called upon in the event of slave society being threatened by uprisings of those enslaved. In each of these institutions, the organisational hierarchy reiterated boundaries of rule that conferred autonomy upon white men whilst disempowering women and non-whites, with wealthy property holders enjoying the most responsibility and enslaved people being the least privileged.

These local institutions therefore reflected and reinforced distinctively local power relations. In this sense, they were creole institutions, because they helped to define a slave society which was distinct from metropolitan society in many key aspects, the most important of which were the defining institution of slavery itself and the importance of ideas of racial difference in organising local affairs. The propertied white men who operated these institutions gained a great deal from maintaining the lines of inequality within slave society. They therefore defended their local practices against metropolitan criticisms, whilst attempting to maintain and reinforce their control over local events.

Nevertheless, metropolitan influences affected the operation of each of these institutions as well as the attitudes of those who controlled them. For example, in 1817, at a well-attended meeting of the St James vestry, a letter from Walter Murray to Samuel Vaughan, the Custos, was read aloud. The letter stated that the Governor, the Duke of Manchester, 'had presented to the parish of St James (thro the Honble Wm Murray late Custos) the portrait of their Majesties'. The vestry gratefully accepted this gift of a painting of the King and Queen, and resolved that 'the Custos be requested to return to his Grace the Duke of Manchester the unanimous thanks of the Magistrates & Vestry of this parish'. The magistrates and vestrymen were keen to express not only their loyalty to the Governor, but also their patriotism, by placing the painting in 'the most conspicuous part of the Ball Room' at the courthouse.⁶⁷

This episode shows that the vestrymen and magistrates of St James saw their commitment to their distinctively local way of life as being entirely reconcilable with loyalty to the Governor and the British Crown. Their courthouse,

⁶⁷ *Royal Gazette*, 21 – 28 February, 1817, p. 7.

built in an English neo-classical style, was the symbol of white authority in St James and the site from which the propertied elite of the parish sought to exercise its control over the local slave society. However, whilst they remained committed to preserving a distinctively local social and economic hierarchy, and in spite of rising hostility from the metropole to the defining local institution of slavery, the white men of the vestry showed their patriotism as loyal Britons, by proudly displaying the royal portrait in their courthouse.

Their status as dependent colonial subjects also affected the activities of the planters when they served as justices. In Jamaica, the bench of the Assize court performed a similar role to those that presided over equivalent courts in England, where the judges 'had an important function in passing the concerns of central government into the localities'.⁶⁸ For example, at the March Cornwall Assize court of 1816, the presiding judge and local plantation owner, John Stewart, informed the jury that charges had been 'brought forward in England of slave laws not being enforced'. Because of this, the bench felt it necessary 'to call in a strong manner on the grand jury to be particularly vigilant and attentive to the discharge of this part of their duty.'⁶⁹ Stewart's words therefore demonstrate how, at times, Jamaican planters, in their capacity as civic leaders, had to take the concerns of the British government seriously. His advice to the Grand Jury bears comparison with the Jamaican Assembly's decision to introduce a registry bill, described in the previous chapter. It appears that the bench, realising that it was in a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the metropole, adopted a policy of accommodation, wanting to be seen to be policing their own communities along lines outlined by Parliament in London. Using such tactics, the Jamaican elite hoped to retain both a large amount

⁶⁸ Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *Journal*, p. 135.

of local autonomy and ongoing British military support through their limited compliance with government policy.

Such compliance was necessary partly because the British Government offered military protection to the planters, providing them with troops to protect them from the enslaved majority on the island. Furthermore, although the planters appeared to dominate local public life, they did so only according to the will of the Governor, who maintained full control over the granting and rescinding of public and military commissions on the island. An incident that occurred in Clarendon during 1817 illustrates how the intervention of the Governor, who was the most important political figure on the island, could swiftly undercut the local elite's objective of preserving the interests of local white propertyholders.

At the centre of this incident was a white Clarendon coffee planter and storekeeper, Thomas Ludford. The evidence of one of Ludford's slaves, Edward La Cruize Forth, that times had been hard for at least two years on Ludford's Mount Libanus plantation, suggests that Ludford was in financial difficulty. In 1817, Ludford was indicted for an act that was described by Governor Manchester as a crime 'of singular atrocity', having murdered Cuffee, one of his slaves. Some time in October or November of 1816, Ludford had left his store in St Jago Savannah in Cuffee's care and, on his return, accused Cuffee of having stolen some sugar and rum. Cuffee admitted that he had done so because he was 'in a hard place and nobody helped me'. Ludford took Cuffee back to Mount Libanus and confined him using a set of Bilboes. Cuffee was periodically whipped over the course of six or seven months until, in April 1817, Ludford shot him in the buttocks for refusing to divulge the names of those who Ludford alleged had assisted him in his thefts from

the store. A few days later, Cuffee died, apparently from the wounds inflicted by his master.⁷⁰

Having committed the crime of killing his slave, Ludford not only evaded arrest, but also appears to have been aided and abetted in this by members of the white elite in Clarendon, including the Custos, R. W. Fearon, a man whom the governor was quick to admit was ‘a gentleman of respectability and of some consequence in the country.’ Manchester believed that, in not issuing a warrant for Ludford’s apprehension, Fearon had allowed the fugitive planter ‘time to screen himself from detection’ and felt that Mr Howell, the coroner called to the incident, had shown similar negligence in not holding an inquest on Cuffee’s body. Manchester also implied that these men had helped Ludford to escape from the island.⁷¹

This evidence suggest that as a propertyholding white man, Ludford received the sympathy of the local elite, who assisted him in evading punishment for having tortured and killed one of his own slaves. This shows the extent to which those lines of solidarity that connected white male propertyholders could be stretched. It also highlights the depth of commitment among members of that elite to maintaining a slave society in which white propertyholding men enjoyed virtually untrammelled rights and where enslaved people were so disempowered and disenfranchised that they could essentially be put to death on a whim of their owner.

Nevertheless, the case also shows the limits of the local elite’s ability to shape local society as it pleased. In the aftermath of Ludford’s indictment, Manchester dismissed Fearon as Custos of Clarendon and instructed the Attorney

⁷⁰ CO137, vol. 144, ff. 65 – 74.

⁷¹ CO 137, vol. 144, ff. 65, 110, 128.

General to bring the coroner, Howell, to justice for failing in his duties along with anyone found to have aided Ludford in his escape.⁷² In so doing, the Governor showed that he would not tolerate attempts by local office holders to cover up illegal activity in the areas under their jurisdiction. The Crown, through the Governor, therefore reserved the right to shape social life in the colony, uphold the laws of the island and disempower those officials who were seen as failing in their duty.

Moreover, Manchester's actions in the aftermath of the Ludford incident were repeated. The Colonial Office in London directed Manchester's replacement as Governor, the Earl of Belmore, to dismiss David Finlayson from his post as Custos of Westmoreland for inflicting an illegally harsh sentence on a slave preacher, Sam Swiney.⁷³ More significantly, in 1833, the Earl of Mulgrave used his prerogatives as Governor to suppress the illegal activities of the Colonial Church Union, a movement led by elite men, which aimed to drive non-conformist missionaries from the island. Mulgrave cancelled the commissions of those involved, thereby preventing them from wielding power as magistrates or militia officers, and placed more tractable men in their stead.⁷⁴ In this way, the significant local influence of magistrates and militia officers was always limited by the powers of the Governor, and those public officers who sought to promote the interests of propertyholding white men by using their position to subvert the law faced being dismissed for their actions.

Even if the local elite believed that they had the right to govern the island through their local institutions, it is clear that close links prevailed between these

⁷² CO 137, vol. 144, ff. 65, 110, 128.

⁷³ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 139 – 41.

⁷⁴ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 183 – 189. See also chapter 8 below.

institutions and the British Crown and that the colonists' control over local affairs was dependent on British support. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the case of the militia. Despite being the settlers' first line of defence, the militia was not a sufficient force to effectively defend the planters and their interests and therefore relied on assistance from British troops, highlighting the extremely vulnerable position that the colonists were in.

During his 1802 tour of the colony, George Nugent reviewed several units of British troops, often alongside militia units.⁷⁵ The exercise of British regiments was a reminder that the defence of the island relied upon an outside force. The planters were always keenly aware of that fact, which was demonstrated by the frequent requests of the island legislature, through their agent in London, for more troops for defence of the island.⁷⁶ Furthermore, when an uprising of enslaved people did occur, a combined force of British troops and local militia units was necessary in order to restore white control. This combined force was under the overall command of Willoughby Cotton, a British major general, and though the militia had a significant and often brutal role to play, Cotton was frequently critical of them, and it appears that the quick suppression of the revolt was mainly due to British military intervention.⁷⁷

Conclusions

Writing about the political culture of the South Carolina lowcountry in the period prior to the Civil War, Stephanie McCurry has described how the yeoman

⁷⁵ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 98, 116, 120, 123.

⁷⁶ See chapter 5 above.

⁷⁷ See chapter 8 below.

farmers of the region were '[e]mpowered by inclusion in the ranks of freemen' whilst being 'simultaneously subordinated to the greater power of planter freemen.' She has described how this group of property-holding yeomen were '[s]et apart from the mass of disenfranchised and dependent others that surrounded them'. Being thus distinguished from women and enslaved people gave them 'more than passing reason to feel common cause with planters', since 'they knew their own freedom to be secured by riveting the unfreedom of others.'⁷⁸ Whilst the situation in Jamaica was by no means identical to that of the lowcountry, political life in the colony had much in common with that described by McCurry. In Jamaica, as in South Carolina, a small planter elite dominated public life, but they did so whilst allowing for the limited involvement of other white men, and relied upon other white male slaveholders and landowners as a crucial source of support.

In early nineteenth-century Jamaica, parish courthouses were powerful symbols of the planters' local power. As the most influential local figures, plantation owners enjoyed a great deal of power within the local parish vestries and courts that met there. As officers, they also dominated parade grounds during militia reviews and musters. In spite of the involvement of other white men in these institutions, local sugar plantation owners usually held the most important posts, serving as custodes, magistrates and senior officers. However, these institutions also empowered other white colonists, providing them with limited opportunities to become involved in public life, and without the support of such men, these institutions would not have been effective.

⁷⁸ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 240, 271.

In St James at least, a small number of wealthy planters comprised a powerful and influential local oligarchy. The fact that some planters' names appear repeatedly in the court records, in lists of those attending vestries and in lists of militia officers demonstrates this point. For example, Richard Barrett, Samuel Vaughan, George McFarquhar Lawson and James Cunningham all fall into this category and there were others, most of them drawn from the ranks of the landowning elite. These individuals devoted a great deal of time to the government of the parish.⁷⁹ Such men also held other public positions of responsibility. For example, in 1814, Samuel Vaughan was the president of the directors of the Montego Bay Close Harbour Company. Also with him on the thirteen member board were Thomas Joseph Gray and James Cunningham. Gray was still on the board in 1831, by which time Richard Barrett was the director. In 1814, the Free School in Montego Bay had a board of trustees, consisting of the Custos, the representatives in the Assembly, the churchwardens and three other members, one of whom was George McFarquhar Lawson.⁸⁰ This further demonstrates that there was a group, consisting mainly of sugar planters, who took the lead in routine local administration and government. They controlled local affairs, presiding over all of the major parish institutions.

However, this ruling oligarchy was not comprised exclusively of sugar plantation owners. Partly because of a growing shortage of planters resident on the island, other men were able to become leading local figures. Such men were always slaveholders. Some were merchants and others were plantation attorneys. Indeed, leading merchants, such as John Fray, were as much a part of the local

⁷⁹ For example, as magistrates, they carried out numerous mundane duties, such hearing the oaths sworn by those compiling probate inventories for deceased parishioners. See JA 1B/11/3.

⁸⁰ *Jamaica Almanack*, 1814, p. 168; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, p. 69.

establishment as resident planters, and attorneys were becoming increasingly powerful throughout this period.⁸¹ Having become wealthy and gained high status through a strong attachment to the sugar-producing economy, such merchants and attorneys were fully committed to the perpetuation of slavery and were staunch allies of the resident sugar-planting elite.

Non-sugar-producing landowners were often on the periphery of these local oligarchies. In St James, these landowners frequently gained appointment to positions of responsibility. Despite this, jobbers and other non-sugar-producing landowners did not enjoy the same extensive involvement in public life as the planter elite. In fact, the main sphere of influence for jobbers and penkeepers appears to have been on the parish vestries and the various juries that tried criminal cases. Serving in these capacities, such men were performing important public duties, but they were always under the control of the planter-led magistracy.

The sugar planters therefore continued to dominate local institutions whilst including a relatively wide cross section of landowners and other free people in public life. This system served a political as well as a practical purpose. On a practical level, the small white community on the island meant that, as long as only whites could hold public office, the planters had to rely on other white men in order for local institutions to be effective. However, by granting other white men opportunities denied to enslaved people, free non-whites and women, they also encouraged a culture of white male solidarity in the colony and preserved the gendered and racialised boundaries of rule on which slave society was founded. The elite therefore manipulated local institutions so that they reflected and

⁸¹ On the status of attorneys. see chapters 3 and 4 above.

reinforced the boundaries that they sought to impose upon Jamaican society as a whole.

However, the power of the colonists to control and govern their own affairs remained dependent on British support. Whilst the colonists argued in favour of their rights to legislate for and govern themselves through the island Assembly and local institutions such as the vestry and the courts, they could not aspire to complete independence. The sense of the planters' power that the parish courthouses projected was therefore in part illusory. The fact that the portrait of the King and Queen, which the vestry had received with such gratitude, hung behind the imposing façade of the St James courthouse in Montego Bay neatly illustrates this point. The limits to the planters' power was starker still on the parade grounds, where British troops marched alongside and augmented the relatively weak parish militia units. Planters and other white men therefore enjoyed a great deal of local power and prestige, but this hid the fact that they were generally loyal to the Crown and beholden to the British government for military protection. As we shall see, this weak bargaining position meant that, in 1834, they had little choice other than to accept the British government's decision to end slavery.

Colonial Creoles: Transatlantic Networks and Local Practices

Ships were vital to the British colony of Jamaica. Synonymous with the Middle Passage endured by enslaved Africans taken from their homelands, ships took slave-produced sugar to the metropolitan marketplace and brought plantation supplies to the island. The British navy protected Jamaica and brought troops to bolster the colonists' defences against a rebellion of those enslaved. Ships also brought other people from Europe, and local planters such as Hamilton Brown and John Gale Vidal often mentioned the names of the vessels from which hopeful new arrivals had disembarked. Successful white colonists who had become rich enough to live as absentees in Britain undertook voyages in the opposite direction, and an immense volume of correspondence flowed between colony and metropole on fast packet ships, enabling these absentees to have a hand in the conduct of business on their Jamaican properties over 4,000 miles away. Such correspondence also allowed family contacts to remain strong over long distances and enabled colonists in Jamaica to remain in touch with ideas, events and fashions in the metropole. Likewise, ships carried news from the colonies back to the Imperial centre and ensured that colony and metropole remained distant, different yet connected parts of one social, cultural and political whole.¹

¹ On cultural connections between Britain and the Caribbean and on the management of West Indian plantations by absentee proprietors, see Susanne Seymore, Stephen Daniels and Charles Watkins, 'Estate and Empire: Sir George Cornwall's management of Moccas, Herefordshire and La Taste, Grenada, 1771 – 1819', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24/3 (1998).

In his seminal study of the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy recognised both the economic utility of ships and their cultural and political impact. Ships, as Gilroy notes, were ‘the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined’.² Commercial networks spanned the Atlantic, and, as discussed in chapter 3, the dominance of the plantations meant that most free and enslaved people in Jamaica were somehow integrated into transatlantic systems of production, trade and consumption. Furthermore, along with goods and people, ideas criss-crossed the Atlantic world and beyond. As Alan Lester has commented, ‘colonial and metropolitan sites were articulated discursively as well as materially, and through the same kinds of network infrastructure that serviced a global commerce.’³ Scholars have therefore noted the ways in which a maritime empire enabled the development of global capitalist expansion and how this affected the development of ideas and culture within colonial settings and in the metropole.

This chapter will seek to build upon this work by examining the links that connected white colonists in Jamaica with the British Isles. Focussing mainly on the social and economic elite, to whom most extant sources relate, it will argue that settlers in Jamaica adapted to local circumstances and lived creole lifestyles that marked them out as being distinct from people in the metropole. However, it will conclude that the planters were colonial creoles who sought to reconcile their local practices with moral, humanitarian and other concerns prevalent in Britain.

² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, Verso, [1993] 2002), pp. 16 – 17.

³ Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, Routledge, 2002), p. 6.

Transatlantic family connections

Family ties provided some of the most powerful linkages between those in Jamaica as well as connecting individuals across the Atlantic. Such ties often coexisted with commercial relationships. For example, we have seen how John Gale Vidal acted as an attorney for his wealthy absentee uncle, William Mitchell, and how the career prospects of hopeful young bookkeepers were enhanced by the help of family members settled in Jamaica.⁴ Similarly, long-distance family networks and long-term sexual relationships facilitated cultural integration and exchange. Correspondence and visitors to and from Britain kept colonists abreast of metropolitan developments in fashion and politics, and liaisons between white men and non-white women provided an arena for cultural transfer and were often the bases for the creation of new identities. Indeed, Brathwaite has claimed that 'it was in the intimate area of sexual relationships that the greatest damage was done to white apartheid policy and where the most significant – and lasting – inter-cultural creolization took place.'⁵

A shortage of qualitative information from sources such as diaries or letters means that it is difficult to trace the exchange and development of ideas and concepts between Jamaica and the rest of the Atlantic world. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct some of the inter-personal and family connections that spanned the Atlantic and facilitated cultural transfers. An examination of these networks shows how distinctive Jamaican family units developed as well as how white colonists remained intimately tied to friends and relations in the British Isles.

⁴ See chapter 4 above.

⁵ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica: 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), p. 303.

These connections are apparent in the family history of the sugar planter, Jacob Graham. Having arrived on the island from his native England in 1746 at the age of twenty, Graham built up his landholdings in St James and by his mid thirties began to father coloured children by enslaved women.⁶ Eve, an enslaved black woman belonging to Graham, was the mother of the first three: Elizabeth, William Blackham and Eleanor Graham.⁷ Eve died before 1782, since in that year Graham manumitted his three children, and the manumission documents described her as ‘a negro woman slave named Eve formerly the property of the said Jacob Graham but since deceased’.⁸ An enslaved black woman named Statira was the mother of another four of Jacob Graham’s children: Mary, Jane, Jacob and John Graham, who were born after 1776 and each manumitted shortly after their births. John, the youngest of these children, was born in 1793, by which time Jacob Graham was aged in his sixties. Like Eve, Statira was enslaved and belonged to Jacob Graham, but she outlived him, remaining enslaved in 1816.⁹

Among Jamaican settlers, Graham was an unusually religious man. Unlike most planters, he began his will by commending his soul to God ‘in the hope of glorious resurrection through the merits and mediation of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’.¹⁰ He showed a similar concern for the eternal welfare of his seven freed children, all of whom were baptised at the parish church in Saint James.¹¹ However, although Jacob Graham showed this apparent compassion towards his mixed race sons and daughters, his will of 1816 also shows how the institution of slavery intruded into family relations. To his eldest surviving son,

⁶ See chapter 4 above.

⁷ JA 1B/11/6, Manumissions, vol. 14, ff. 141 – 42; ML, Microfilm 1224328, Item 3, Baptisms, f. 46.

⁸ JA 1B/11/6, vol. 14, ff. 141 – 42.

⁹ JA 1B/11/6, vol. 18, ff. 15 – 17; vol. 19, f. 152; vol. 26, f. 33; ML, Microfilm 1224328, Item 3, Baptisms, f. 46, 95, 104; IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177, Jacob Graham, 24 March 1816.

¹⁰ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177.

¹¹ ML, Microfilm 1224328, Item 3, Baptisms, ff. 46, 95, 104.

Jacob Graham junior, Graham bequeathed five slaves including Archie, described as the son of Statira, and Statira herself, whom he identified as 'the mother of the said Jacob Graham'. He made special mention that Statira should receive care and protection from their son. In his will, Graham mentioned how each of the slaves whom he bequeathed to his children were related to one another, bequeathing some of Statira's children to his children, Jane and John.¹² Jacob Graham's free coloured sons and daughters thereby gained full legal control over the lives of their half brothers and sisters, and Jacob Graham junior gained ownership both of his half brother and his mother.¹³

It is impossible to tell what factors motivated these bequests, though it is possible that Graham had hoped that his children would be able to care for their siblings in the way that he indicated Jacob Graham junior should care for Statira. However, this does not explain why he did not simply free Statira and her children rather than enabling his children to sell them or benefit from their labour if they so chose. Regardless of such ambiguity, Jacob Graham's will highlights the ways that the inequalities of legal status and race could permeate all spheres of life in Jamaica. These inequalities shaped day-to-day experience for all on the island and were central to the processes of cultural exchange and creolisation that occurred there. Therefore, Jacob Graham's relationships with Eve, Statira and his free coloured children mitigated against the maintenance of inviolable racialised boundaries between blacks and whites. However, whilst they facilitated the development of a creole culture and society that brought Africans, Europeans and

¹² IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177.

¹³ By 1817, it appears that Jacob Graham junior no longer owned Statira but still owned the twenty-one year old Archie, otherwise known as Archibald Graham. See T71/ 203.

their children together in intimate and close relationships, these relationships also occurred within a system of gross inequality and exploitation.

In addition to his family in Jamaica, Graham had a family in England, with whom he maintained contact. It is possible that Graham returned to England to visit, and it is clear that the lives of Jacob Graham's English and Jamaican families were not entirely constrained by the vast distance between the British Isles and the Caribbean. Mary, Graham's mulatto daughter by Statira, crossed the Atlantic and settled in the metropole. In his will, Graham described her as 'Mary Howard now married in England'. Further details of her situation have not yet been found, but we know that at the age of forty and having been born into slavery in Jamaica, Mary was married and living free in the metropole. Jacob Graham made bequests to Mary in his will, suggesting that he maintained contact with her, and similar evidence suggests that he also kept in touch with his English-born family. He certainly would have corresponded with his nephew, John Graham Clark of Newcastle upon Tyne, who acted as his merchant, facilitating the importation of his crops of sugar and coffee into Britain, and bequests made in his will suggest that he kept in contact with his two English sisters, Mary Barnfather and Eleanor Bell, and with his niece, Mary Woodcock of Kent.¹⁴

Such transatlantic relationships were not always confined to letter writing, and one of Jacob Graham's nephews, Joseph Graham, made the journey from England to Jamaica. He lived in Saint James, perhaps because he could benefit from the fact that his uncle was living there. His uncle outlived him, however, as Joseph Graham died in Jamaica in 1807. Shortly beforehand, Joseph had written his will, in which he described himself as a 'planter', thereby indicating that he had

¹⁴ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177; JA 1B/11/3, Inventories, vol. 128, f. 54, Jacob Graham, 9 Sep 1816.

probably been a white plantation employee. He does not appear to have owned land, but he possessed thirty-two slaves. He also had a relationship with a black housekeeper named Mary Graham. Whether Mary was free is not clear, but Joseph bequeathed legacies of twenty pounds to her enslaved mother, Fanny, and to enslaved people named Jupiter and Quashee, all of three of whom belonged to his uncle, Jacob Graham. Joseph appointed Jacob Graham, his 'Uncle Jack', as executor of his will. He also made bequests to his uncle's mixed-race Jamaican family, leaving a male African slave, named Granby, to Jacob Graham junior and a male slave named Fox to John Graham, his uncle's youngest son.¹⁵

However, Joseph ensured that most of his wealth went home to England, ordering that twenty-one of his slaves be sold and the proceeds sent to his sister in Kent.¹⁶ His uncle later behaved similarly, bequeathing his plantation to another of his white nephews, John Graham Clark. Jacob Graham thereby ensured that Clark and not any of his own coloured children inherited the bulk of his wealth.¹⁷ When it came to distributing the wealth of their estates, no matter how creolised men such as Jacob and Joseph Graham had become, the main beneficiaries were typically white. Furthermore, their propensity to bequeath the bulk of their estates to people living in Britain shows how those in the metropole were enriched by their family connections in the Caribbean, whilst those living in the region were often passed over.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the kinds of relationships that occurred between Jacob Graham and Statira and Eve did facilitate what Brathwaite described as

¹⁵ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 77, f. 223, Joseph Graham, 29 October 1806; JA 1B/11/3, vol. 109, f. 150, Joseph Graham, 9 September 1807.

¹⁶ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 77, f. 223; Presumably, Joseph Graham's Sister was Mary Woodcock of Kent, Jacob Graham's niece, also mentioned in Jacob Graham's will. See IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177.

¹⁷ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 92, f. 177. See also chapter 4 above.

‘inter-cultural creolisation’.¹⁸ Graham’s daughter, Mary, would have had to adapt to English norms in order to emigrate to the metropole, and after having been born into slavery, all of Graham’s children would presumably have been brought up to conform to many of their father’s English behavioural standards. Indeed, after free coloured men gained equal rights with whites, Jacob Graham junior appears to have served on the petit jury during the Montego Bay court of quarter sessions, showing how free coloured men were able to fit into the government of a colony that had hitherto been ruled exclusively by white men.¹⁹

On the other hand, Maria Nugent described the distinctive speech of Jamaican whites, which had certainly been shaped by these colonists’ immersion in a society where English was the official language, but where African speech patterns were more prevalent than those of Europe.²⁰ Nugent’s observations were not complimentary and neither were those in the novella *Marley*, in which the protagonist encounters white creole women who not only spoke differently to him, but who also ate ‘in the negro fashion’.²¹ Such creolisation clearly disturbed many whites, including Edward Long, who suggested instituting a Jamaican boarding school for white girls that would ensure that its pupils were ‘weaned from the Negro dialect’ and discouraged from ‘a loose attachment to Blacks and Mulattoes [*sic*]’.²² Such fears show just how uneasy many white colonists were with their involvement in cultural exchanges with Africans, but they also show that these exchanges did occur, playing an important part in shaping the culture of the island during this period.

¹⁸ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 303.

¹⁹ JA 1A/2/8/1, St James Court of Quarter Sessions, Calendar Book, 1793 – 1841.

²⁰ Frank Cundall (ed.), *Lady Nugent’s Journal* (London, West India Committee, 1934), pp. 72, 102, 132.

²¹ Anon, *Marley; or, A Planter’s Life in Jamaica* (Glasgow, 1828), pp. 210 – 11.

²² Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island*, 3 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1774] 1970), vol. 2, pp. 250.

Jacob Graham's families were divided by the Atlantic and the very different attitudes and ways of life that existed on either side. Until the emigration of his mulatto daughter, Graham's family in England was entirely white, consisting of his married sisters and his nieces and nephews born in wedlock. On the other side, in Jamaica, he had relations with enslaved black women and was head of a family of mixed-race children born out of wedlock. With enslaved mothers, a white English father and family on both sides of the Atlantic, these children were truly creolised, occupying a position between black and white. It is therefore clear that such family relations could make the process of cultural exchange between European and African cultural traditions possible. However, the relationships that existed between Jacob Graham and his two white nephews, Joseph Graham and John Graham Clark, also show how family ties that stretched across the Atlantic could prove especially profitable and useful to white men. The ways in which slavery affected family relations and the manner in which property was distributed in wills therefore also make it clear that such families were defined by unequal power relations, which facilitated the perpetuation of oppression and inequalities of wealth and status.

Concubinage and metropolitan values

Graham's relations with his slaves, Eve and Statira, were characteristic of practices that were distinctly Jamaican and creole and often looked upon with disdain by those from the metropole. However, the behaviour of his nephew, who came to Jamaica and took an enslaved black woman as a 'housekeeper', suggests the ease with which white English men could traverse such moral boundaries. Both

elite and non-elite white men engaged in sexual liaisons with black and coloured women, including Simon Taylor, whom Maria Nugent declared was ‘the richest man in the island’, when she met him in 1802.²³ Taylor was part of the plantocratic elite and owned several sugar plantations on the island. He spent most of his time in Jamaica, where he led a creole lifestyle, shaped by local customs. However, he also had a house in London and, like many men of his social and economic standing, he had an extremely strong attachment to Britain. He, like Jacob Graham, lived between two worlds that were increasingly at odds with each other and, when he died in 1813, he too left the bulk of his wealth to a nephew in England.²⁴

The tensions created by living between Jamaica and Britain are apparent in Taylor’s attitudes towards his housekeepers and their daughters. In his will, Taylor made substantial bequests to Sarah Hunter, whom he described as his ‘housekeeper’, leaving her five hundred pounds, along with an annuity of one hundred pounds and ‘as much of my furniture [and] bed and table linen at my house at Liguinea as she shall chouse [*sic*] not exceeding the value of two hundred pounds’. Given the contemporary meaning attached to the term ‘housekeeper’, it seems probable that Taylor had a sexual relationship with Hunter and that her daughter, ‘a free quadroon’ named Sarah Taylor, was Simon Taylor’s own child. Simon Taylor left Sarah Taylor a large legacy of one thousand pounds and an annuity of one hundred pounds. He also left Sarah Taylor’s daughter, Sarah Taylor Hunter Cathcart, two thousand pounds and ordered his executors to ‘purchase a negro for the said Sarah Hunter Taylor Cathcart’ whom she would receive along with her legacy when she reached twenty-one years of age.²⁵ These bequests

²³ Cundall, *Lady Nugent’s Journal*, p. 88.

²⁴ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 87, f. 1, Simon Taylor, 2 December 1808.

²⁵ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 87, f. 1.

suggest that Simon Taylor felt a degree of affection, or at least a sense of responsibility, for this family.

However, his large bequests to his free-coloured housekeeper, her daughter and her granddaughter appear paltry when compared to the huge legacies of ten thousand pounds sterling that Taylor left to his two white nieces, Margaret Graham and Martha Harriet Spiers. Taylor also bequeathed three thousand pounds sterling to his nephew, Nicholas Graham, five thousand pounds sterling to his niece, Eliza Mayne, and left all of his land and slaves in Jamaica to his nephew, Sir Simon Brissett Taylor.²⁶ It seems certain that these relatives resided in Britain, although Taylor's will is not explicit about this. Indeed, Nugent had predicted the flow of capital from colony to metropole that would accompany Taylor's death when she noted how Taylor 'piques himself upon making his nephew, Sir Simon Taylor...the richest Commoner in England'. Simon Taylor's bequest to his nephew would indeed have made Simon Brissett Taylor as opulently wealthy as his uncle had been.²⁷ In this way, Taylor's will provides further evidence of how white Jamaican proprietors could give generously to free coloured people in Jamaica, whilst enriching their white relatives in Britain even further.

Taylor's bequests to Sarah Hunter's family therefore appear generous, but his will suggests that his affinity to them was superseded by his attachment to a British-based white family. Indeed, whilst Taylor certainly fathered a number of mixed-race children, he did not explicitly acknowledge this fact in his will, suggesting a reticence to admit paternity of non-white children not shown by other white men such as Jacob Graham.²⁸ Maria Nugent, on visiting Taylor at his Golden

²⁶ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 87, f. 1.

²⁷ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, p. 88.

²⁸ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 87, f. 1.

Grove estate, experienced Taylor's awkwardness about this aspect of his life. She wrote in her journal that '[a] little mulatto girl was sent into the drawing-room to amuse me'. She noted that Simon Taylor 'appeared very anxious for me to dismiss her, and in the evening, the housekeeper told me she [the child to whom she had been introduced] was his own daughter, and that he had a numerous family, some almost on every one of his estates.'²⁹ Taylor's housekeeper therefore provided testimony of Taylor's paternity of mulatto children. However, if Taylor had children on each of his estates, he certainly did not provide for them all as well as he did for Sarah Hunter and her family. His eagerness to dismiss his mulatto daughter, along with the fact that it was not he, but his housekeeper, who revealed to Nugent that she was his child, also suggests that he felt a sense of embarrassment or awkwardness about having fathered children by non-white women.³⁰ Taylor would almost certainly have been aware that Nugent, part of the metropolitan elite, would view such intimate relationships with distaste. If so, his eagerness not to draw attention to it shows that he was reluctant to be viewed as a degenerate creole, transgressing from metropolitan standards.

Taylor was, in Michael Craton's words, a 'reluctant creole'.³¹ His unease about Nugent meeting his coloured daughter indicates how elite white colonists struggled to reconcile their creolised lifestyles with their desire to be seen as genteel Englishmen who shared the attitudes and values of the British elite. Men such as Taylor were prepared to exploit their dominant position in Jamaican society

²⁹ Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, p. 93. This housekeeper was not Sarah Hunter.

³⁰ It is also possible that the housekeeper, Nelly Nugent, informed Maria Nugent of Taylor's liaisons with non-white women in order to undermine her employer in the eyes of Maria Nugent, the Governor's wife. In this way, the episode might be seen as a tantalising suggestion of the strategies utilised by black and coloured women to retaliate against and resist the exploitation imposed upon them by men such as Taylor.

³¹ Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

to engage in sexual relations with non-white women. These relations were often violent and certainly never occurred between individuals of equal social standing and power. However, Taylor's behaviour suggests that he was well aware of the sorts of criticisms that an observer such as Nugent might make about his practices and was keen not to have them levelled at him. It is therefore clear that Taylor was prepared to take advantage of the opportunity to be promiscuous with enslaved and other black women on his properties, but was not prepared to acknowledge that fact when it threatened to undermine him in front of an important British guest.

Taylor's pre-emption of Nugent's attitudes towards inter-racial sex was well-founded, since Nugent bemoaned what she described as 'the general disregard of both religion and morality, throughout the whole island'. She complained that 'white men of all descriptions, married or single, live in a state of licentiousness with their female slaves' and that the 'upper ranks' of white men 'are almost entirely under the domination of their mulatto favourites'. One of her main concerns was how this promiscuity impacted upon the morality of the enslaved population, complaining that marriage could never be instituted among those enslaved whilst white men set such examples. She went on to write that 'until a great reformation' occurred among the white elite, 'neither religion, decency nor morality, can be established among the negroes'.³² Abolitionists shared Nugent's concern about the effects of slavery on women and family life, as exemplified by an abolitionist pamphlet that described enslaved women as 'helpless victims alternately of cruelty and lust'.³³

³² Cundall, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, pp. 118, 131.

³³ Quoted in Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780 – 1870* (London, Routledge, 1992), p. 96.

These metropolitan criticisms were multifaceted. In one way, they presented black and coloured women as victims of the cruelty of sexually aggressive white men in a society that offered such women little protection. However, they were also imbued with a sense of distaste and fear about interracial sexual relationships. Indeed, many critics of concubinage, including Nugent, echoed the views of the pro-slavery author Edward Long, who attacked interracial sex on moral grounds.³⁴ Nugent's complaint about the dominating effect of 'mulatto favourites' over white men, for example, indicates that she equated the dysfunction that she perceived in Jamaican society with an inversion of the racial order.

Some of the complexities of the critiques of concubinage were conveyed by a letter published in 1796 in the *Columbian Magazine*, a Jamaican periodical. The author, a visitor to the island 'from an obscure corner in the North of England', railed against what he described as 'the fever of libidinous intercourse, whose eruptions or postules [*sic*] are manifested in the shape of a *yellow fever*, the pest and pollution of almost every mansion!'³⁵ This was a clear attack on white male sexual relations with black and coloured women and 'yellow fever' was a reference to the coloured children resulting from these relationships, a symptom of a society that the author clearly saw as being diseased and degenerate. He went on to ask

[w]hat...must be the feelings of the reputed fathers of these partly-coloured beings, thus pawned upon the world, without parental solicitude or protection! without education, morality, stability, industry, and not unfrequently, without liberty itself! [*sic*]³⁶

³⁴ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, p. 327.

³⁵ *The Columbian Magazine; or Monthly Miscellany*, vol. 1, July 1796, pp. 118 – 19.

³⁶ *Columbian Magazine*, vol. 1, July 1796, pp. 119.

In the next edition, there appeared a letter by a local settler asking permission of the editor ‘to reply to one of the strictures of our *North of England* visitor’. The author of this reply identified himself as the father of a mulatto child and claimed that ‘[i]t has been a uniform practice with some writers...to brand the connections of white men with women *of colour*, as they are called, with every term of reprobation that ingenuity can devise’. He denied ‘that the connection in question is reconcilable either to “depravity” or “degeneracy.”’ and argued that the coloured children of white parents ‘experience all the solicitude of parental affection’. In defence of such connections, he argued that maintaining a white wife would be too expensive for a ‘prudent’ man, arguing that relationships with coloured women offered white men with a more economical and practical alternative. However, the author was keen to point out that he was not advocating concubinage as being favourable to marriage, but ‘simply accounting for that general adoption of coloured women, which the writer in question rather exultingly terms the *yellow fever* of residenters. [*sic*],³⁷

Both letter writers used pseudonyms, but appearing in a gentleman’s magazine, the letters are indicative of elite discourses on this issue. In defending the institution against the attack from the ‘North of England visitor’, the second author claimed that concubinage was convenient, practical and suited to local conditions, but offered no self-assured affirmation of the institution.³⁸ The sexual practices of local settlers were presented as an acceptable compromise in response to conditions and attitudes in Jamaica, and the most vociferous criticisms of local behaviour were rejected whilst metropolitan practices, in this case monogamy and marriage, were acknowledged as preferable. This demonstrates that it was possible

³⁷ *Columbian Magazine*, vol. 1, August 1796, pp. 162 – 64.

³⁸ *Columbian Magazine*, vol. 1, August 1796, pp. 162 – 64.

for white settlers to mount a defence against metropolitan attacks on their creole institutions. However, this response is comparable to Simon Taylor's embarrassed reaction when Maria Nugent met his coloured daughter and demonstrates that although elite white colonists engaged in peculiarly local practices, their cultural affinity to Britain prevented them from presenting Jamaican institutions as being preferable to those of the metropole.

The ambiguities and ambivalences surrounding planters' discussions of the question of concubinage show that white Jamaicans did not cite this creole institution as a badge of their difference from whites in the metropole. Large numbers of men were engaged in sexual relationships with enslaved and free black and coloured women, and as Brathwaite points out, these relationships formed the basis for a great deal of cultural transfer between African and European traditions. These relationships were often coercive and the many inequalities that attended slavery affected the resulting families. Nevertheless, some local whites attempted to defend the institution on the grounds of its practicality, but confronted with disapproval from the metropole, many also conceived of it as a troublesome source of embarrassment. Instead, the critics of the planters, particularly abolitionists, were most inclined to use concubinage as a marker of the distinctiveness of white Jamaicans. By presenting white men as lasciviously engaging in coercive as well as consensual sex with non-white women, they intended to show the planters and their whole social system to be depraved and at odds with British moral standards.³⁹ Seeing themselves as transplanted Britons, the planters were unable to respond

³⁹ See Diana Paton, 'Decency, Dependence and the Lash: Gender and the British Debate over Slave Emancipation, 1830 – 34, *Slavery and Abolition*, 17/3 (December 1996); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 – 1867* (Cambridge, Polity, 2002), pp. 72 – 73.

positively to such criticisms and developed an ambivalent attitude towards their sexual practices.

White creoles and the defence of slavery

The importance of links to the metropole also had an effect on Jamaican settlers' defence of slavery. As Catherine Hall has observed, the intensity of the debate over slavery 'masks the links between planters and abolitionists.' Both groups cited British society and culture as touchstones for civilisation and abhorred what they saw as the savagery and heathenism of Africa, and both groups were committed to the idea of empire.⁴⁰ They also often utilised the same language, and by the early nineteenth century, pro-slavery propagandists were using rhetoric more often associated with British abolitionism to defend the institution of slavery from its critics. Of course, the abolitionists and the planters had widely differing views, but in the debate over slavery, anti- and pro-slavery arguments fed off each other.

By the early nineteenth century, even the most vociferous defenders of the planters, took the apparently paradoxical stance of opposing slavery on principle whilst arguing for its continuation. They claimed that emancipation would have to occur eventually but foresaw no point in the immediate future when abolition would be practicable, choosing to argue in favour of a slow, evolutionary 'civilising' process. This would allow enslaved people to obtain freedom at an unstated point in the future, after the passing of several generations. These gradualist doctrines had developed in parallel with the growth of anti-slavery sentiment in the metropole and show another aspect of the extent to which

⁴⁰ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 107.

Jamaican settlers were influenced by those British attitudes and ideas that crossed so freely over the Atlantic.

In the 1770s, pro-slavery writers such as Edward Long conceded little to the arguments of the incipient anti-slavery lobby. Long viewed Africans as being not far removed from animals and did not believe that they had the capacity to progress and become civilised. He also defended both the Atlantic slave trade and slavery as being fundamentally useful and beneficial. However, by the 1790s, anti-slavery sentiment was more influential and things had changed. When the Jamaican plantation owner, Bryan Edwards, published his influential history of the British West Indies in 1792, he wrote ‘that the age itself is hourly improving in humanity’, claiming that ‘this improvement visibly extends beyond the Atlantic.’ In adopting this stance, he was clearly influenced by humanitarian ideas that had originated in Europe, and had transposed these ideas into his analysis of slavery in the British Caribbean.⁴¹

Edwards still maintained that Africans were inferior to Europeans and reiterated common stereotypes that presented enslaved people as libidinous, untrustworthy thieves. He believed that Africans were better off enslaved in Jamaica than living in Africa. However, unlike Long, Edwards did not claim to perceive natural and irrevocable distinctions between Africans and Europeans. Instead, he argued that the characteristic behaviour of Africans was partly influenced ‘by their situation and condition in a state of slavery’ and claimed that

⁴¹ Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. 2, pp. 351 – 404; Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols (New York, Arno, [1793] 1972). vol. 2, pp. 33 – 34, 72, 93 – 105, 130, 138. For a detailed comparison of the arguments of Long and Edwards, see Gordon K. Lewis, ‘Pro-Slavery Ideology’, in Verene A. Shepherd and Hilary McD. Beckles (eds), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 2000), pp. 550 – 54. Whilst Edwards’ views differed from those of Long, there is evidence that the two men knew each other and that Long helped Edwards to prepare his *History of the West Indies*. See Harry E. Vendryes, ‘Bryan Edwards 1743 – 1800’, *Jamaican Historical Review*, 1 (June 1945), p. 81.

the nature of slavery was so degrading to blacks 'that fortitude of mind is lost as free agency is restrained.' Indeed, Edwards claimed to be 'no friend to slavery, in any shape, or under any modification'.⁴² Yet, he was a pro-slavery writer. He was very certain that 'an immediate emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies, would involve both master and slave in common destruction.' Writing during the revolutionary period and after the beginning of the revolution in Haiti, Edwards warned that emancipation could result in a servile war that might entail the annihilation of either the whites or blacks in Jamaica.⁴³ His main aim therefore was to ensure that the planters continued to benefit and profit from their ownership of slaves.

Instead of emancipation, he proposed a continuation of the gradual ameliorative processes that were already under way, favouring a conservative, organic kind of transition.⁴⁴ Edwards and other defenders of slavery argued that a radical move such as immediate emancipation would be a disaster. In this way Edwards adopted a pro-slavery stance that was a development from that which had preceded it. Despite his prejudices, Edwards' recognition of the humanity of Africans and their descendants marked a shift in the pro-slavery argument as well as in the wider discourse about race. Furthermore, although his main aim was to preserve slavery, his analysis of the situation in the West Indies reflected European concerns about benevolence and humanitarianism that further signalled a qualitative change in pro-slavery thought.

⁴² Edwards, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 62 – 64, 69, 72 – 76, 138.

⁴³ Edwards, *History*, vol. 2, p. 138.

⁴⁴ For example, he proposed that 'the Negroes be attached to the land, and sold with it', likening this to the reforms that had once been made to the system of villeinage in Europe. See Edwards, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 140 – 42.

This was precisely the conservative and counter-revolutionary stance of George Wilson Bridges, an Anglican clergyman who lived in the parish of St Ann in Jamaica. As Mary Turner has noted, Bridges emerged in the 1820s as ‘the ideologue of the Jamaican slave owners’.⁴⁵ However, he claimed to favour the eventual ending of slavery. Replying to a pamphlet written by William Wilberforce that signalled the beginning of a new abolitionist drive in the metropole, Bridges claimed that whilst he was ‘equally anxious’ as Wilberforce ‘to hasten the period when emancipation may safely be made subservient to the moral happiness of our fellow creatures here’, he would nevertheless ‘not see that object pursued by unworthy means, nor gained in a field of blood.’ ‘[T]he abolition of slavery itself’, he wrote, ‘must be left for the accomplishment of another generation’.⁴⁶

Other white colonists agreed that emancipation should not be considered in the immediate future. In August 1831, *The Cornwall Chronicle* proclaimed: ‘[w]e are convinced that no man in his senses would indulge the idea that the slaves of this country will, for a number of years, be in a fit and proper state for emancipation.’⁴⁷ Bridges pursued the idea that immediate freedom for enslaved people would result in bloodshed, informing Wilberforce that ‘success, in the cause you now prematurely urge, must undoubtedly be purchased by the ruin of many thousands of your countrymen; by a deluge of blood; and by the certain misery of the very objects whom you professedly labour to relieve.’ He beseeched the abolitionist leader to ‘look on St. Domingo’, referring to the revolution that had

⁴⁵ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), pp. 105 – 106.

⁴⁶ George Wilson Bridges, *A Voice from Jamaica in Reply to William Wilberforce* (London, 1823), p. 4. See also Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 105 – 106.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 6 to Saturday 13 August 1831, p. 12.

occurred in nearby Haiti and which many pro-slavery authors cited as evidence of the bloodshed that would accompany the premature ending of slavery.⁴⁸

Bridges expanded on his ideas in his most famous pro-slavery work, *The Annals of Jamaica*, published in 1828. Bridges produced this work in order to argue for the indefinite postponement of abolition, and, by claiming that slavery enjoyed the support of those in the colonies and was relatively benign even though it was morally objectionable in modern times, he reiterated the central tenets of the pro-slavery arguments of the period. However, in detailing his arguments in favour of gradual amelioration, Bridges went into far more detail than most pro-slavery authors. Bridges, who had studied at Oxford before arriving in Jamaica, was interested in situating the contemporary debate over emancipation in the history of slavery to reinforce the case for slow reform and the retention of slavery in the British colonies for several generations.⁴⁹

Bridges attempted to show that slavery was an ancient institution that had existed since creation and throughout the age of Christianity. He went on to describe how the emancipation of European peasants from serfdom had 'required that melioration of their circumstances, that progress of civilization both in themselves, and in their semi-barbarous masters, which time alone could produce'.⁵⁰ Having been educated in the metropole, Bridges therefore made clear comparisons between the situation in Jamaica and the history of Europe. Bridges was defending a peculiar institution without parallel in the metropole, but his choice of examples demonstrates that he was constrained by a largely European frame of reference. However, these examples also suited his argument for organic

⁴⁸ Bridges, *A Voice from Jamaica*, pp. 6 - 7.

⁴⁹ George Wilson Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, 2 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1828] 1962), vol. 1, pp. vii, xi.

⁵⁰ Bridges, *Annals*, vol. 1, p. 475.

change, allowing him to claim that enslaved people in Jamaica would ‘eventually, though gradually, climb to salutary enfranchisement’ and that the transition from slavery ‘to the exercise of the plenary rights of citizenship has not been sudden in any age or country.’⁵¹ Nevertheless, as a defender of slavery, he still believed firmly in the inferiority of Africans and their descendants.⁵² In this way, Bridges balanced his defence of slavery and belief in deep racial inequality with his British education and his desire to be seen as a loyal subject in an English colony.

Whilst arguments as detailed as those in Bridges’ *Annals* were rare, the views expressed in the book were largely representative of those of white settlers in Jamaica. Colonists continually reiterated their avowed belief that enslaved people had to be ‘kept in a state of pupilage, under constant though humane restraint.’⁵³ In this way, they reiterated the central themes of pro-slavery ideology: that black people, and more specifically black men, were violent and unpredictable and that allegedly civilised white men, should forcibly contain them for the good of all concerned. By inserting the claim that this was a humane course of action, those who adopted these views could count themselves as being in step with modern ideas about the necessity of benevolence. By claiming to be educating enslaved people for freedom, they attempted to demonstrate their awareness that all people were capable of progress. In this way, they reconciled an institution based on gross inequality, exploitation and racism with modern ideas of humanity and human progress. As Bridges wrote: ‘the desirable period of emancipation, only awaits the arrival of the negroes at that state of civilization which will render self-controul

⁵¹ Bridges, *Annals*, vol 1, pp. 510 – 11.

⁵² Referring to Africans and their descendants. Bridges wrote that ‘[a] much longer time must necessarily be required to wipe the stain of barbaric life from those who have been fettered, mind and body, through ages beyond all record’. See Bridges, *Annals*, vol. 1, p. 513.

⁵³ Cynric R. Williams, *A Tour Through the Island of Jamaica, from the Western to the Eastern End in the Year 1823* (London, 1826), p. 69.

[sic] advantageous to themselves, by making them good, industrious, and faithful subjects of our empire.’⁵⁴

Most white colonists, regardless of social rank, appear to have shared this analysis. They stated that responsibility for change should be left entirely in the hands of their local legislature and continually invoked examples that were intended to illustrate their argument that immediate emancipation was an implausible folly. They argued that only they had the necessary first hand knowledge to take the necessary measures. According to a meeting of the freeholders of the parish of St Mary, held in 1831,

the legislature of this island warmly supported by the people have ever evinced a desire to forward the wishes of his Majesty’s Government, in ameliorating the situation of the slaves, and in promoting their improvement, so as to fit them for a state of emancipation.

The freeholders claimed, however, that the colonists had applied their ‘local knowledge’ to these reforms and had ensured that such changes were consistent with the ‘preservation of property, and the welfare of the slaves themselves’, who would, they predicted, ‘most certainly, be plunged into worse than African barbarism, if the hasty and ill-digested measures of wrong-headed enthusiasts... were adopted.’⁵⁵

In Jamaica, stories abounded of the violence that settlers predicted would follow emancipation. For example, in July 1831, a story appeared in the *Cornwall Chronicle*, which stated: ‘[w]e have just been informed, of a most wanton outrage committed at Lucea... on the person of a negro boy of about four years of age.’ The paper described how one of the ‘Workhouse gang’ had used a machete to

⁵⁴ Bridges, *A Voice from Jamaica*, p. 41.

⁵⁵ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 9.

strike the boy twice on the head, inflicting injuries that it was believed would prove fatal. The newspaper report claimed that the assailant had ‘mistook the victim for the son of his own master, on whom, it would appear, he wished to be revenged’ and went on to argue that this showed ‘what scenes of cold blooded cruelty would be enacted in Jamaica, were these wretches to be let loose upon society by an immediate and ill-timed emancipation.’⁵⁶

However, the planters and their allies voiced concerns that went beyond a fear of the consequences of freedom for social order on the island. They also feared the financial cost and wanted above all to maintain control over the labour of those enslaved, claiming that freedpeople would not wish to work on the estates after emancipation. This led Hamilton Brown to advertise for the hire ‘for a few months, 100 free Negroes, to cultivate coffee & [illegible] at 2s / 6 p. diem.’ He told George French that he knew that none would volunteer their services and explained: ‘I have done it just to convince the Government that sugar &c cannot be raised by free labourers. They [free black and coloured people] think that they cod [sic] disgrace themselves by working in the fields as slaves do.’⁵⁷ Slavery guaranteed the planters a steady supply of labour to perform arduous work on the estates. Planters foresaw that freedom could jeopardise this, and men such as Brown did all that they could to try to show that emancipation would have profoundly adverse economic consequences.

In spite of professions that blacks were human beings who could progress to become civilised subjects of the Empire, Brown and other slaveowners saw Africans and their descendants as being inherently lazy and believed that enslaved

⁵⁶ Quoted in *Supplement to the St Jago Gazette*, Saturday 15 to Saturday 22 October 1831, p. 10.

⁵⁷ JA 4/45/61, Tweedie Papers, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, Jamaica, 6 September 1832.

people did not realise the true meaning or cost of freedom. In 1832, Brown wrote to George French, telling him that ‘three of the worst disposed men on an estate under my care, applied to me to buy themselves free, but when I told them their price & that they must give up their comfortable houses & fine provision grounds, & quit the estate, I have not heard a word more from them on the subject.’⁵⁸ Planters and the pro-slavery lobby therefore took a predictably pessimistic view of the ability of enslaved people to make a smooth transition to being free. This stood in stark contrast to the optimism of abolitionists and missionaries, who believed that blacks could quickly make the transition to become industrious and useful members of the Christian family of man.

Most planters continued to perpetuate ideas about deep racial differences, whilst declaring that the enslaved population would not be prepared for emancipation at any point in the near future. It is therefore possible to argue that any humanitarian rhetoric that they espoused was intended simply to continually postpone emancipation.⁵⁹ Such rhetoric can be seen as a form of political posturing, contrived to try to convince the British public that slavery was a humane institution undergoing gradual reform. However, there is evidence to suggest that at least some slaveowners took the idea that slavery could be made to comply with humanitarian concerns seriously. For example, Simon Taylor wrote in his will: ‘I earnestly intreat [*sic*] my executors...to be particularly careful and attentive in respect to the appointment of overseers of my...properties that they are men of approved integrity humanity and abilities as planters’.⁶⁰ Taylor wished his properties to continue to turn a profit after his death and so was sure to stipulate

⁵⁸ JA 4/45/62, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 4 October 1832.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Lewis, ‘Pro-Slavery Ideology’, p. 556.

⁶⁰ IRO, Wills LOS, vol. 87, f. 1, Simon Taylor, 2 December 1808.

that any overseer be skilled in sugar planting. However, by making it plain that overseers should be men of humanity, he showed that he had some concern that his slaves be cared for humanely. This suggests that adopting the persona of a caring master was important to his own self-image.

Indeed, by the early nineteenth century, the concern that benevolence should form part of the management culture on the estates was clear. According to Thomas Roughley, whose guide for sugar planters was published in 1823, the overseer of an estate 'should be a man of intelligence, tempered with experience, naturally humane,' and 'steadfast in well devised pursuits'.⁶¹ Clearly, ideas about the correct treatment of enslaved people as fellow human beings had become important to the planters even if the reality on the plantations themselves provided palpable evidence that the lives of enslaved people were difficult, painful and generally short. New ideas might have meant that some slaveowners came to see their workforce as people, but it certainly did not entail an acceptance of black people as equal human beings to whites, and the very nature of slavery was of course an offence to humanity.

It is apparent that the humanitarian rhetoric that slaveowners came to adopt did not translate into improved conditions and life expectancy for those enslaved. Indeed, studies have shown that in the decades before emancipation, deaths outweighed births within the enslaved populations of individual estates and that of the island as a whole.⁶² However, in spite of this glaring gap between rhetoric and reality, the fact remains that many planters were able to square their involvement

⁶¹ Thomas Roughley, *The Jamaica Planter's Guide* (London, 1823), p. 40.

⁶² See Ursula Halliday, 'The Slaveowner as Reformer: Theory and Practice at Castle Wemyss Estate, Jamaica, 1808 – 1823', *Journal of Caribbean History*, 30/1 & 2 (1996), pp. 72 – 73; Betty Wood and Roy Clayton, 'Jamaica's Struggle for a Self-Perpetuating Slave Population: Demographic, Social, and Religious Changes on Golden Grove Plantation, 1812 – 1832', *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 6/3 (Autumn 1988); B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica: 1807 – 1834* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, [1976] 1979).

with slavery with new-found feelings of humanitarian concern and benevolence. Choosing to ignore the hardships endured by those forced to work on their properties, planters cultivated an image of themselves as benevolent and fair masters, respected by their slaves and in step with changing times. That is not to argue that they identified with British radicals, but they certainly did not wish to be seen as being out of touch with broader metropolitan intellectual, political and cultural developments.

Richard Barrett was a planter who was prepared to defend slavery whilst making such claims about the benevolence and humanity of his fellow slaveholders. He was also, according to a missionary in his home parish of St James, 'said to be a very free thinker indeed'.⁶³ Nevertheless, Barrett took a conservative and typically pessimistic stance with regard to emancipation. In 1833, a speech given in London by a Mr Barrett, who was almost certainly Richard Barrett, claimed that 'the free inhabitants of the Colonies may be massacred' as the result of the immediate abolition of slavery. Barrett went on to argue that 'those slaves themselves, that we design to civilise and to make happy, may be driven back to the barbarism, the vices, and the sufferings of savage life.'⁶⁴ However, he was also keen to point out that recently in Jamaica, '[p]rogress was making, though slowly in melioration'. He cited the admission of slave evidence in court, the abolition of Sunday markets and the sanctioning of slave marriage as proof of this.⁶⁵ Barrett went on to illustrate his view that slavery was a reciprocal

⁶³ Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829 – 1858* (London, 1863), p. 37.

⁶⁴ [Richard?] Barrett, 'Mr Barrett's Speech' in *The Speeches of Mr Barrett and Mr Burge, At a General Meeting of Planters, Merchants, and Others, Interested in the West-India Colonies* (London, 1833), p. 5. Though attributed simply to 'Mr Barrett', the nature and circumstances of this speech leave little doubt that it was delivered by Richard Barrett, who was visiting Britain on behalf of the Jamaican Assembly.

⁶⁵ Barrett, 'Speech', pp. 24 – 31.

arrangement between unequal individuals by his insistence that enslaved people each had a master, who 'supplies all his [*sic*] wants'.⁶⁶ His view was therefore anti-radical and opposed to the designs of the abolitionists and the British Government. Yet he argued that colonists had evinced an increasingly benevolent attitude during the years that slavery had been under debate. He claimed that planter-magistrates had learned to treat enslaved defendants with compassion and offered the following explanation for this alteration in his fellow slaveowners:

They are Englishmen; their literature is English; every ship takes them the lamentations and the curses of the real and mock friends of the Slave. Every newspaper, every magazine, and review paints, in the darkest colours, the wretchedness and the crime of Slavery. Our brethren in Jamaica sympathise with their friends in England; and though each will defend his own and the general property in Slaves with his life, yet he is willing in particular cases, if he does not grossly violate justice, to yield to impress in favour of the Slave, which he hardly dares acknowledge himself.⁶⁷

Therefore, according to Barrett, the sheer weight of abolitionists' arguments, which had come to exert a great deal of influence over British public opinion, also affected the attitudes of local white men towards enslaved people. Most slaveowners lived a great distance from the metropole, but as Barrett pointed out, they still conceived of themselves as being either English or British. They were struggling to reconcile their local practices, and most importantly the institution of slavery, with their identity as transplanted Britons. As a large number of people, huge amounts of correspondence and a plethora of printed material arrived in the

⁶⁶ Barrett, 'Speech', p. 33.

⁶⁷ Barrett, 'Speech', p. 38.

colony, bringing metropolitan ideas and opinions regarding slavery with them, the settlers had to try to reorient their own ideas if they wished to remain loyal British colonists. In this context, though they continued to treat their slaves appallingly, the planters passed legislation that claimed to be ameliorative, and they certainly used new ideas imported from the metropole to excuse the continuation of slavery to themselves and others.

Moreover, though white settlers had to respond to criticisms originating in Britain, the discussion over slavery was also profoundly intertwined with British and European affairs, and it intersected with debates about metropolitan social issues. For example, in 1828, Richard Barrett warned the British House of Commons that '[f]rom advocating the claims of the blacks and the people of colour', it was an easy transition for the British working class to 'advance their own'. He went on to claim that emancipation in the West Indies would make it difficult for the British elite to 'preach to the common people of the rights of property, social order, and the unchangeable disposition of ranks among mankind ordained by the Almighty'. Barrett's defence of the colonists' rights to maintain slavery was therefore part of a more general assault on calls for radical change, a point that was reiterated when he proclaimed that Britain and Europe had 'paid dearly for the doctrine of the rights of man.'⁶⁸ His words were also designed to inspire caution in the minds of the British ruling class, by encouraging them to think about the potential ramifications of emancipation in the Caribbean on their own privileged and powerful position in the metropole.

Strong cultural and intellectual ties therefore linked resident planters and their local allies to the metropole. Nevertheless, important differences in outlook

⁶⁸ Richard Barrett, *A Reply to the Speech of Dr Lushington in the House of Commons on the Condition of the Free-Coloured People of Jamaica* (London, 1828), pp. 3 – 4, 19.

simultaneously marked them apart as having a separate creole identity. A crucial factor in this regard was the planters' antipathy towards non-white people. Richard Barrett, despite citing the influence of British opinions on white settlers in Jamaica, made an issue of such distinctions. Whilst Barrett believed that white colonists were transplanted Britons, he also argued that whites in the West Indies were in some regards distinct from those in Britain. For example, he wrote that white West Indians disliked having close contact with blacks and that they 'have been used from infancy to keep mulatto men at a distance'. However, he claimed that they did not share the English elite's prejudices against Jews and Catholics, which he claimed as evidence that the only difference between 'the Englishman born, and the English *creole*' was that 'creole tastes are rapidly becoming less exclusive'.⁶⁹ It is therefore apparent that the racial boundaries that defined slave society in Jamaica also helped to define white colonists as creoles with values and practices distinct from those of Britain.

It is notable that Barrett wrote about white colonist's disdain for 'mulatto men', making no mention of the mulatto women with whom so many planters forged intimate relationships. It is, however, more significant that he acknowledged a tendency on the part of Jamaican whites to accept white Jews and Catholics as equals, whilst such groups experienced prejudicial treatment in the metropole. By arguing this, Barrett highlighted the existence of a relatively inclusive and egalitarian attitude towards white men in Jamaica: an attitude that made stark distinctions between whites and non-whites, but allowed for the political and social inclusion of religious groups that faced exclusion in Britain. As such, this white

⁶⁹ Barrett, *A Reply*, p. 48.

male solidarity was, by Barrett's own admission, the criteria that distinguished English creoles in Jamaica from other Englishmen.

Most white settlers in Jamaica viewed themselves as British subjects whilst simultaneously continuing with creole practices such as slaveholding. They often struggled to reconcile their respect for British norms with their institutions, which led them to present slavery as a flawed though temporarily necessary solution to local problems. However, they did not believe that, just because they viewed themselves as being British, they should favour immediate abolition. They were also aware that the solidarity that existed among white men in Jamaica and their ideas regarding racial difference marked them out as being distinct from metropolitan whites. In this way, they saw themselves as colonial creoles, as Britons who were also different from whites in the metropole. This sense of their own identity appears to have made sense to individual colonists. In spite of the difficulties and contradictions that it involved, these individuals attempted to pursue their distinctively local way of life at the same time as being loyal British subjects in touch with modern ideas such as humanity and benevolence.

Conclusions

Peculiarly colonial institutions such as concubinage and, most obviously, slavery drew censure from metropolitan observers, which colonists sought to refute. However, tied closely to a transatlantic cultural marketplace and seeing themselves as transplanted Britons, white settlers in Jamaica frequently faltered in defending their social and economic institutions as viable and favourable alternatives to those existing in Britain. Concubinage continued and the planters

campaigned hard to maintain slavery, but the attitudes of whites in Jamaica to their local systems were always influenced by metropolitan attitudes and ideas. In this sense, white settlers led creolised lifestyles and developed local identities, but their intimate transatlantic connections meant that their outlooks were as much influenced by British attitudes and culture as by local circumstances.

Outnumbered by people of African descent, the creole outlook of the white settlers in Jamaica was always shaped by their regular and often extremely intimate contact with non-white people. Interaction between blacks and whites went far beyond the brutal extraction of labour from those enslaved, and it involved cultural mixing that went both ways. According to Gilroy, such 'processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity' that constitute creolisation can 'exceed racial discourse', overcoming and challenging ideologies that seek to separate or disempower people according to notions of racial difference.⁷⁰ However, whilst this analysis is both useful and positive, Gilroy's theorisation of cultural hybridity is problematic when applied to a group such as the planters of Jamaica: creoles who often kept non-white mistresses and fathered mulatto children, but who also kept Africans and their descendants enslaved. The planters' intimate relations with non-white people was one factor that rendered them culturally distinct from whites in the metropole, but they clearly had not overcome racial discourse and remained committed to maintaining social and economic boundaries based on ideas of racial difference. Neither can recognition of their close colonial relationship with Britain alone explain their commitment to slavery, especially as the tide of humanitarian and anti-slavery sentiment rose in the metropole. Instead, it seems clear that the colonists' ideas of racial difference were part of a complex and distinctly local

⁷⁰ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 2.

creole identity that was at times discordant, and which also encompassed a commitment to European ideals.

In *The Development of Creole Society*, Brathwaite suggests that white colonists in Jamaica evinced a 'dichotomy of thought, action and attitude', whereby conservative ideas, shaped by their colonial relationship with Britain, vied with the possibility of a creole outlook that could allow them to defend their peculiarly local interests. In fact, as we have seen, British values did have a large influence over colonists; as Brathwaite states, 'all Jamaican creoles were colonials'.⁷¹ However, there was no necessary dichotomy between a colonial and creole outlook. Of course, there were tensions within the planters' world view, and different colonists expressed different attitudes over issues such as concubinage and slavery. However, for most of the early nineteenth century, white settlers in Jamaica appear to have reconciled their status as British subjects with their adoption of practices that distinguished them from whites in the metropole.

Colonists did exhibit a largely coherent world view that allowed them to both defend slavery and their other aberrant practices and define themselves as colonial Britons. However, in Britain, opposition to slavery was increasingly seen as a patriotic duty, and by the early nineteenth century, many metropolitan commentators and legislators were convinced that slavery would have to be abolished in the British Empire.⁷² In response, planters sought to redefine their rationalisation of slavery and adopted a stance that, whilst pro-slavery, did not stress the long-term viability of the institution. It is easy to define this stance as an insincere and politically motivated position that allowed the conservative planters

⁷¹ Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, pp. 100 – 101.

⁷² On the association between anti-slavery and British patriotism, see David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780 – 1860* (London, Routledge, 1991); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707 – 1837* (London, Pimlico, [1992] 2003), pp. 350 – 60.

to mount a rearguard defence of an institution that was fundamentally regressive and barbaric. The fact that the planters' racist discourse perpetuated a social order that was iniquitous and unjust is not in doubt. Neither is the brutality of slavery. However, keen to preserve slavery and to keep in touch with modern ideas emanating from Europe, Jamaican planters integrated European ideas of humanity and benevolence into their world view. As Joyce Chaplin notes, slaveholders were able to marry seemingly progressive features of modern western thinking with an institution that was fundamentally exploitative and oppressive.⁷³

In the US south, as Chaplin and Jeffrey Robert Young have shown, planters were able to mould humanitarian sentiment with slavery to present a blueprint for a modern society based on ideas of racial difference.⁷⁴ This, southern slaveholders were keen to assert, stood in stark contrast to the social order of the Antebellum north, which they saw as corrupt and inferior. Such posturing was not possible for Jamaican slaveholders, who had such a close and dependent relationship with Britain that they were unable to present a vision of colonial slave society as a preferable alternative to metropolitan norms. Instead, commentators such as George Wilson Bridges and Richard Barrett combined ideas of humanity and an almost universal criticism of slavery with their pro-slavery arguments. This meant that they presented a defence of the institution that emphasised its present utility whilst expressing their support for an eventual abolition at a perpetually deferred point in the future. In this way, pro-slavery ideologues evinced a conservative world view that enabled them to defend the creole institution of slavery in a way

⁷³ Joyce E. Chaplin, 'Slavery and the Principle of Humanity: A Modern Idea in the Early Lower South', *Journal of Social History*, 24 (Winter 1990).

⁷⁴ Chaplin, 'Slavery and Humanity'; Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670 – 1837* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 1 – 15 and *passim*.

that incorporated recent shifts in the climate of opinion in Britain and which they hoped would be palatable to a metropolitan audience.

Therefore, just as the Jamaican economy was firmly integrated with that of the metropole, the planters' ideology drew upon metropolitan currents of thought. In Barrett's view, colonists were creole Englishmen, influenced by local circumstances and British values. However, as the next chapter will discuss, this outlook caused tension and disillusion when the British Government finally decided to legislate against slavery. In the months before emancipation, the colonists' local identity and their cultural and practical reliance on the metropole left them indignant, powerless and divided over the dismantling of the system that lay at the centre of their local way of life.

‘Souls of Transatlantic Englishmen’:
Disillusion, Dissent and the Collapse of Slavery

On 5 December 1833, Governor Mulgrave dismissed the Jamaican legislature, which had completed its work after a lengthy session. He congratulated the men of the Assembly on the result of their labours, telling them that ‘[s]lavery, that greatest curse that can afflict the social system, has now received its death blow.’¹ Just two days previously, the House had finally voted to end the institution in Jamaica, and 1 August 1834 was the date on which the institution would be replaced with the system of apprenticeship.² The Assembly’s decision and emancipation were the culminative events in a tense and violent period during which local society in Jamaica stood bitterly divided over the issues of emancipation, religious toleration and the relationship of the island with Britain. From 1831 until emancipation, these issues took on greater significance than they had ever done before. This chapter will therefore consider that period in detail, demonstrating how the defence of local institutions and practices combined with colonists’ loyalty to Britain and their dependence on military support from the metropole to inform their responses to events during this period of crisis.

During this period, planters and other white men attempted to preserve the boundaries of rule that they had consistently sought to maintain between themselves and enslaved people. These boundaries had typically differentiated

¹ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 December 1833, p. 10.

² See *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 December 1833, pp. 2 – 3.

between whites and non-whites, but had been substantially redrawn in 1830, when the Assembly granted free non-white men equal civil rights. This reconfiguration of the privileges allowed to free non-whites reversed over seventy years of discrimination and was designed to allow free coloured and free black men to participate in public affairs. The inclusion of non-elite white men in public life had helped the elite to maintain their support. By allowing free coloured and free black men opportunities to perform jury service, to become vestrymen and to vote in elections, the white elite hoped that these men could be co-opted to support slavery and the existing social order in the same way. However, events between 1831 and 1834 demonstrated that this support was generally not forthcoming from free non-whites.

This chapter will argue that, in spite of these divisions in free society, planters and other white men showed a strong commitment to maintaining slavery and all of the privileges that this system conferred on them as free white men. This desire to preserve local institutions and patterns of rule was evident at anti-abolitionist protest meetings, during the militia's suppression of the slave uprising that began in St James in 1831, and in the rhetoric and activities of the pro-slavery and anti-missionary Colonial Church Unions that were formed throughout 1832. In all of these contexts, white men asserted their right to govern and control the island themselves. They evinced a counter-revolutionary ideology, which opposed subversion of the existing social order of the island by British liberals and local missionaries.

However, the chapter will also contend that this white male defence of creole institutions was consistently undercut by a variety of factors. There was a persistent threat of continued slave rebellion if emancipation was withheld. The

colonists' military dependence on Britain and the opposition of the large free non-white population meant that recalcitrant planters and other colonists were unable to offer strong resistance to British Government policies. The fact that emancipation was to be accompanied by financial compensation from Britain also played a crucial part in ending many local slaveholders' resistance abolition. Moreover, even the most strident pro-slavery opponents of the British Government wished to remain part of the British Empire. Dependency on Britain was therefore central to the colonists' ideology, and by 1833, the promise of compensation, combined with their strong personal and cultural links with the metropole, helped to convince some local planters to back compromise with the government in London. A number of factors therefore helped to undermine white male solidarity and meant that not all slaveholders were equally committed to resisting the British Government and maintaining slavery.

White dissent and the threat of secession

During the early 1830s, a renewed sense of urgency gripped reformers in Britain. Disillusioned by the prospects for gradual emancipation, they began to seek a more immediate solution to the problem of slavery in the knowledge that the new Whig ministry that had come to power in London was largely sympathetic to their cause. These developments presented the planters with the prospect of immediate emancipation.³ Inevitably, this caused alarm in Jamaica. It also led

³ On this renewal of British anti-slavery zeal, see David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 168 – 226; William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830 – 1865* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1976), pp. 99 – 127; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776 – 1848* (London, Verso, 1988), pp. 436 – 59.

colonists to voice frustration over the perceived inaction of their supporters in London.⁴ The *Cornwall Chronicle* articulated such concerns, describing the ‘extreme apathy displayed by the West India interest in the mother country, whenever the vital question of colonial slavery becomes the subject of debate’. The *Chronicle* claimed this inaction to be both ‘vexatious and alarming’ and declared that the time had come for the colonists to act for themselves. ‘For which purpose’, the editor continued, ‘a meeting, by requisition of his honour the custos... will take place at the court-house here, on Wednesday the 6th of July, when it is expected that every person, who has his own, as well as the colony’s interest at heart will attend.’⁵

This meeting, convened by Richard Barrett, Custos of St James, was held at the courthouse in Montego Bay. It was followed by similar meetings in almost every Jamaican parish and marked an important precedent because, for the first time, colonists met and publicly discussed the possibility of breaking their allegiance with Britain. The meeting in St James resolved that if the British government went ahead with plans for immediate emancipation,

they will alienate from his Majesty’s government, and from the country which upholds it in its unjust and despotic measures, the affections of his Majesty’s hitherto loyal and faithful subjects of Jamaica; and will compel them to petition his majesty to absolve them from their allegiance, that they may seek the protection of some other power able and willing to secure to them the enjoyment of their rights, and the peaceable possession of their properties.⁶

⁴ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 2 to Saturday 9 April 1831, p. 11.

⁵ Quoted in *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 25 June to Saturday 2 July 1831, p. 2.

⁶ *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 5.

The resolution was clear: if ministers imposed emancipation from London, the colonists would try to secede from the Empire. The meeting went on to resolve that they viewed ‘with unfeigned regret the prospect of a separation from the Mother Country’, claiming that they could contemplate such an event ‘only under a strong apprehension of a violation of constitutional rights’. They also called upon Jamaican colonists not to be co-opted by British plans for emancipation, stating that they trusted the Assembly to ‘pass no laws under the influence of any coercive measures threatened by the British Government.’ The resolutions of the freeholders concluded with a rallying call to settlers across the island, calling ‘upon the Inhabitants of Jamaica to be true to themselves, faithful to their country; and calmly, but firmly, to resolve, that by no act of their own, will they become the instrument of their own destruction’.⁷

Less than a week had passed since the meeting in St James, when a similar meeting of freeholders, voicing virtually identical grievances, gathered in Falmouth, Trelawny.⁸ By the end of July, meetings had occurred in Clarendon, Hanover, St Mary, St Ann and St Thomas in the Vale. According to the *Cornwall Courier*, these were a clear signal to abolitionists that ‘there is such a thing as spirit and patriotism in the inhabitants of Jamaica’. The *Courier* then impressed upon its readers the need for unity in pursuing their cause and continued with the exhortation: ‘[l]et EVERY other parish follow the good example’.⁹ By the end of August 1831, all but three of the remaining parishes had shown their solidarity and

⁷ *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 5.

⁸ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 1.

⁹ Quoted in *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 16 to Saturday 23 July 1831, p. 10.

passed resolutions similar in content and tone to those laid down by the meetings in St James and Trelawny.¹⁰

These parish meetings were firmly rooted in a local culture of organised and loyal opposition to British reform. Parish meetings that resolved their opposition to British colonial policy and abolitionist influence were common occurrences in early nineteenth-century Jamaica.¹¹ Therefore, although they marked an escalation of tension between white Jamaican colonists and the British Government, the events of 1831 should be seen as a development of the planters' conservative, counter-revolutionary opposition to British liberal reform. However, though not unprecedented, the strength of rhetoric at the meetings was new, as was the extent of their appeal.

Custodes and magistrates convened the meetings at the request of men in their parishes, and a range of settlers, including a few free coloureds, appear to have attended meetings in large numbers.¹² The meetings therefore demonstrated the depth of interest in slavery that existed across free society. Usually gathering in the parish courthouses and described as meetings of 'the Freeholders and other Inhabitants' of the parishes, leadership and attendance at these gatherings mirrored

¹⁰ The dates and resolutions of the meetings can be seen in *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, July to September, 1831. Only the parishes of St Elizabeth, Port Royal and Kingston did not publish records of meetings in the *Gazette*. No record of meetings in these parishes has been located elsewhere.

¹¹ From December 1815, parish meetings protesting about government plans to introduce slave registration influenced one another in a similar way to the meetings of 1831. In 1815 and 1816, a meeting in Trelawny was closely followed by meetings in Hanover and St James. Similar resolutions were passed at all three. See *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 30 December 1815 to Saturday 6 January 1816, pp. 1, 4; *St Jago de la Vega Gazette* Saturday 6 to Saturday 13 January 1816. For examples of other parish meetings, see *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, 28 January to 4 February 1809, p. 1; *Jamaica Courant* Thursday 6 November 1823.

¹² In July 1831, the *St Jago de la Vega Gazette* published an open letter signed by thirteen men from the parish of St John and addressed to Thomas Smith, senior magistrate of the parish. The letter asked Smith to arrange a meeting in order that they could pass resolutions 'as may be deemed most expedient in averting those evils which our enemies, in Great Britain threaten us with.' Smith obliged and the meeting took place on 8 August. See *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, p. 9. For details of the popularity and attendance of the meetings, see *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 July 1831, pp. 10 – 11.

power relations at other meetings that occurred in the parish courthouses, such as vestry meetings and the local courts.¹³ The planters led and controlled proceedings whilst encouraging the involvement of non-elite men.

Colonists in other British Caribbean colonies made similar protests to those voiced in Jamaica during 1831. On 28 June of that year, a meeting of planters and merchants in Grenada first broached the idea of breaking away from Britain, and the Assembly in St Vincent avowed their determination to resist any attempt to deprive them of their property in slaves.¹⁴ However, despite this climate of dissent and the popularity of the meetings in Jamaica, the British authorities, though concerned by events, did not see the meetings as signs of a serious crisis.¹⁵

The notion that Jamaican or other West Indian colonists might secede from the British Empire might appear revolutionary. It is better characterised, however, as an empty threat. In threatening to secede, the colonists had to make it plain that they would seek the protection of 'some other power'. At the time, the United States represented the only viable alternative source of protection. However, with Jamaica in such a state of social upheaval and with a large and enfranchised free non-white population, such an alliance was unthinkable.¹⁶ The US consul in Kingston remarked as such, describing the colonists' break-away threats as 'the

¹³ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 30 July to Saturday 6 August 1831, p. 4; CO 137, Jamaican Governor's Correspondence, vol. 181, ff. 14 – 16.

¹⁴ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 16 to Saturday 23 July 1831, p. 9; *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 20 to Saturday 27 August 1831, pp. 2 – 3. On the extent and nature of this dissent, see B. W. Higman, 'The Colonial Congress of 1831', in Brian L. Moore and Swithin R. Wilmot (eds), *Before and After 1865: Education, Politics and Regionalism in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Ian Randle, 1998).

¹⁵ UWI, Belmore Papers: Correspondence of the 2nd Earl of Belmore as Governor General of Jamaica (Microfilm), Film no. 2 (1372), William Bullock to Belmore, 31 August 1831.

¹⁶ The US consul saw the Jamaican free coloureds as a dangerous and subversive element of local society and was afraid that such free non-whites might incite a slave rebellion in the US if they travelled to the American mainland. See UWI, Despatches from US Consuls in Kingston, Jamaica, 1796 – 1906, (Microfilm), Roll T – 2, Robert Munroe Harrison, US Consul in Jamaica, to Edward Livingston, US Secretary of State, Kingston, 30 June 1832; Harrison to Livingston, Kingston, 5 July 1832.

language of mere passion; of persons driven to desperation, who speak without reflection'.¹⁷ The consul, Robert Munroe Harrison, was sympathetic to the white colonists, but his despatches to Washington offer no indication that he or the US Secretaries of State took the colonists' attempts to court US favour as being made truly in earnest.¹⁸

Nevertheless, throughout 1831, the invective of local whites continued unabated. By October, their spirit of colonial self-reliance had reached a new high point. This was illustrated by an anonymous letter published in the *Saint Jago de la Vega Gazette*, whose author called upon colonists not to content themselves with words and resolutions but to prepare the militia to defend their property in slaves. He claimed that the threat of forceful resistance on the part of the colonists might cause the British Government to abandon plans for emancipation and, addressing his fellow colonists, wrote: 'SPIRITS OF JAMAICA! SOULS OF TRANSATLANTIC ENGLISHMEN! NEIGHBOURS and BROTHERS OF AMERICA! look to yourselves!'¹⁹ Such vitriolic rhetoric was extreme, and the prospect of a successful armed rebellion by Jamaican whites was unlikely. Few countenanced the idea of armed conflict with Britain. However, the *Cornwall Chronicle* noted that the colonists' situation bore 'a close analogy to the Americans, in remonstrating on the Stamp and Tea Acts'.²⁰ Such comparisons with the American Revolution show that Jamaican settlers were willing to express their dissatisfaction about the prospect of emancipation in the most forthright way possible.

¹⁷ Despatches from US Consuls, Harrison to Livingston, Kingston, 10 June 1831.

¹⁸ Despatches from US Consuls, *passim*.

¹⁹ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 14 October 1831.

²⁰ Quoted in the *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 6 to Saturday 13 August 1831, p. 12.

The colonists' disaffection was therefore clear. However, whilst they proclaimed that they would not submit to emancipation imposed on them by the British Government, it was not feasible for them to back their threats up with force. Outnumbered by their own slaves, they relied on British military protection and, as David Brion Davis has observed, 'the government could call the colonists' bluff simply by threatening to take away British troops'.²¹ Indeed, on the subject of a potential white rebellion, James Stephen at the Colonial Office pointed out that Jamaican whites were 'so utterly impotent that the smallest British garrison ever maintained there would suffice to deter them from so insane a project'.²² As a Barbadian newspaper noted, the colonists' threatening language did 'not become people who are utterly powerless to resist the government', and without American support, the planters and their allies were certainly in a weak position.²³

The Baptist War

The public meetings that occupied the attention of the colonists in 1831 took place during a stiflingly hot summer and as enslaved communities across the island manifested growing signs of discontent. In April, fires were reported on estates in the west of Jamaica, and enslaved incendiaries were blamed for blazes in St James and Westmoreland.²⁴ The *St Jago de la Vega Gazette* reported fires throughout the summer, and in late August, when the trash houses of Belmont estate in Trelawny caught light, the *Cornwall Courier* attributed the spread of the

²¹ Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, p. 180.

²² Quoted in Davis *Slavery and Human Progress*, pp. 179 – 80.

²³ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 20 to Saturday 27 August 1831, p. 3.

²⁴ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 2 to Saturday 9 April 1831, p. 9; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 20 to Saturday 27 August 1831, p. 12.

blaze to the influence of ‘the sectarian parsons...who preach sedition to the negroes’.²⁵

From the beginning of the British campaigns against slavery, colonists had expressed their concern that talk of reform would incite a slave uprising, and their responses to these fires demonstrate that such concerns were at the forefront of their minds. In June 1831, a settler from St James wrote to a contact in Britain, claiming that ‘[o]ur black population are firmly impressed with the idea that they are to be made free next Christmas’. He went on to write that there was ‘too much reason to apprehend that blood will be shed amongst us’.²⁶ By December, rumours that emancipation was granted in London but was being withheld by local whites had become so widespread that the Governor had issued a proclamation to try to dispel them.²⁷ By the end of the year, the whites’ fears of a rebellion sparked by talk of abolition were rife, as was their belief that the missionaries were responsible for inciting insurrection amongst the enslaved population of the island.

After Christmas 1831, their fears were realised when a large rebellion began in St James. On the 27 December, the *Cornwall Courier* reported that Westmoreland, St James and Trelawny had ‘been in a considerable state of excitement, in consequence of reports and official information to the Magistracy, of intended insurrections among the slave population.’ Before 10 o’clock that night, enslaved rebels set light to the works at Kensington Pen in St James. Further properties were torched and, according to the *Courier*, by 11 o’clock, the whole

²⁵ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 23 to Saturday 30 April 1831, p. 10; *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 25 to Saturday 2 July 1831, p. 2; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 2 to Saturday 9 April 1831, p. 9.

²⁶ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 24 September to Saturday 1 October 1831, p. 10.

²⁷ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787 – 1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998), pp. 150 – 56.

sky to the south west of Falmouth was illuminated.²⁸ In the rebellion, St James was the most affected parish. Crops were destroyed along with property valued at over £1,000,000, and 20,000 – 50,000 slaves were involved. During the rebellion, fourteen whites were killed, whilst at least 200 enslaved people lost their lives. Subsequent courts martial condemned a further 312 suspected rebels to execution or transportation. However, these are conservative estimates of black mortality.²⁹

The rebellion was put down by local militia units and regular British troops, all of whom were under the overall command of the British General, Sir Willoughby Cotton. Initially, local militia units faced the rebels and, in the five days between the start of the insurrection and Cotton's arrival in St James, they retreated while fires spread across the parish. Local whites were in a state of panic before regular British troops arrived in the affected district to relieve the militiamen and quell the rebellion. By 2 January, estates in the immediate vicinity of Montego Bay were in flames, and white women and children had been placed on board boats in the harbour.³⁰ On the same day, having recently arrived at Montego Bay, Cotton wrote: '[t]he state of this town was most wretched when I arrived', but remarked that his arrival with reinforcements had 'tranquilized the minds of the [white] people.' After the arrival of British troops, the rebellion was quickly contained and defeated.³¹

²⁸ Quoted in *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 30 December 1831.

²⁹ B. W. Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739 – 1912* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, 1998), p. 262. One report estimated that the militia and regular troops had killed as many as 200 supposed rebels within the first week of the rebellion. See *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 6 January 1832. As Mary Turner argues, the summary executions that were prevalent in the aftermath of the uprising 'make nonsense of the official figure for slaves killed in the rebellion'. See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 161.

³⁰ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 6 January 1832; Theodore Foulks, *Eighteen Months in Jamaica; with Reflections on the Late Rebellion* (London, 1833), p. 72.

³¹ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, Willoughby Cotton to William Bullock, Montego Bay, 2 January 1832; Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 157 – 58.

Men from all sections of free society were involved in suppressing the rebellion. In 1831, the estate owner, George McFarquhar Lawson, was colonel of the St James militia regiment. However, according to Cotton, he was 'old, & an alarmist', and it does not appear that Lawson led troops in the field, a task that was left to other officers. The attorney and prominent local figure, William Stanford Grignon was a major commanding the western interior regiment of the militia in the Great River district of St James.³² Grignon and his men used the barracks at Shettlewood pen as base for operations against the rebels, but their search for the insurgents in the surrounding area proved relatively fruitless. On 29 December, Grignon received reinforcements. William Ewart, a captain in the St James regiment met him and his force at Old Montpelier estate with a company of free coloured militiamen. Like Grignon, Ewart was not a sugar planter. Apparently a merchant, he lived in Montego Bay and owned fifteen slaves. These men led their white and free coloured militia companies in battle with the rebels, when they came under attack at Old Montpelier on the evening of the 29 December.³³

Ewart and Grignon's militiamen fended off the advancing rebels, but were not prepared to maintain their position, and the next morning they withdrew from Montpelier to Montego Bay in haste. The overseers of Old and New Montpelier estates were also among the militia officers who saw action in this the largest engagement of the Baptist War. Both served as ensigns.³⁴ The involvement of such

³² *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, pp. 100, 102; Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, Willoughby Cotton to William Bullock, Montego Bay, 2 January 1832; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; Roby, *Members of the Assembly*; Glory Robertson (Compiler), *Members of the Assembly of Jamaica from the General Election of 1830 to the Final Session June 1866* (Kingston, Institute of Jamaica, 1965); T71/201 – 204; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, 'Returns of Givings in', 1831, pp. 122, 129. Grignon's brutal treatment of an enslaved woman from Salt Spring estate, for which he was the attorney, apparently contributed to the unrest among the enslaved people in St James that had preceded the start of the rebellion. See Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 264.

³³ Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 264 – 66; *Supplement to the Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 2 March, 1816; NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript; T71/222 – 23.

³⁴ Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 265.

men, under the command of Grignon and Ewart, shows that non-elite white men played a large role in attempting to protect sugar estates and other white-owned properties in the district of the rebellion, as did the free coloured men who served under Ewart.

Even when the rebels had the initiative in the first days of the uprising, they did not engage in wholesale killing: the massacre of whites that the settlers so feared did not materialise. Moreover, evidence suggests that, rather than wishing to run the free population off the island, the instigators had hoped to win freedom and wages.³⁵ In general, instead of directing their attack against their oppressors, the rebels burned down the places where they had been exploited, such as plantation works and canefields, as well as looting and destroying the opulent houses that had been built and furnished with the profits derived from their labour.³⁶

The white backlash, however, was extremely bloodthirsty. Reports from early January estimated that hundreds of insurgents had been killed by the troops.³⁷ In the aftermath of the uprising, white men serving in the militia committed many of these atrocities. In the weeks after the rout at Montpelier, the army and militia gained the initiative against the rebels, and the violent actions of white men of all positions in society in the repression of the rebellion demonstrates the extent of their commitment to the system of slavery and to preserving the existing social order.

With the militia revelling in exacting revenge against the slaves for the destruction of the settlers' property, Cotton attempted to prevent extra-judicial murders. In January 1832, he suspended captain John Cleghorn from duty for

³⁵ See Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 148 – 58; Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 264.

³⁶ Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 114, 274.

³⁷ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 6 January 1832.

setting fire to and destroying the slave village at Adelphi estate and summarily executing two suspected rebels from Carlton estate.³⁸ Reports of these events provide an insight into the nature of the retributive violence engaged in by the militia. In a letter to Lawson, Cleghorn, a local penkeeper and magistrate, explained that he had in fact killed three slaves from Carlton ‘on clear evidence’ that they had ‘acted in the most rebellious manner by plundering the Great House and [the] estates’ stores’. He further claimed that they had threatened to kill the head driver, who had attempted to save the property. Lieutenant Robert Cron, ‘the attorney and resident on Carlton’, was present with Cleghorn at these summary killings and had advised him that the three men posed a serious and ongoing threat to the property. According to Cleghorn, this advice was ‘corroborated by other evidence’ that ‘was considered sufficiently strong to make them suffer.’³⁹

Cleghorn’s account of his and Cron’s behaviour shows the commitment of such men to reasserting white domination in the aftermath of the rebellion. As the resident manager at Carlton, Cron experienced the privileges and responsibilities that the proprietor would have had, and it seems likely that his advice to Cleghorn was influenced by a desire for revenge against the insurgents who had raided his house. Cleghorn, as a landowner and a slaveholder, also had a strong interest in maintaining slavery and repressing the rebellion. The brutal actions of both men were apparently inspired by a self-interested desire to protect and restore their own privileged positions in local society and to seek revenge against rebels who had

³⁸ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, Willoughby Cotton to William Bullock, Montego Bay, 13 January 1832.

³⁹ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, John Cleghorn to Colonel Lawson, Montego Bay, 13 January 1832. Cleghorn was a magistrate and owned Grange Pen in St James, on which seventy-one enslaved people were settled in 1831. Cron does not appear to have owned any slaves of his own in 1831, though he acted as an attorney for three sugar estates and at least one other large property in St James. See *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, p. 68; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1831, p. 122; T 71/222 – 23.

dared to violently resist the racialised boundaries of privilege and control that shaped local society.

The fact that local militia officers did not share Cotton's concern over extra-judicial killings was illustrated when Cotton ordered that Lieutenant John Gunn of the Trelawny militia be arrested and court martialled. On 15th January, Gunn had returned to Lima estate, for which he was the attorney, and summarily executed the second driver. In so doing, he acted illegally and against the wishes of Cotton, who had previously visited the estate and pardoned the slaves there for any involvement with the rebellion. However, when he came to be tried by a court comprised of militia officers, Gunn was acquitted.⁴⁰

As well as being exposed to summary executions, suspected rebels also faced swift and brutal treatment at the hands of courts martial made up of militiamen that were instituted in January 1832 for the trial of suspected insurgents. In one week at the end of that month, twenty-two rebels were executed and fifty whipped.⁴¹ The ferocity of the punishments that these courts meted out is illustrated by the fate of the head driver of Ironshore estate, who died as a result of the whipping he endured at Montego Bay.⁴² One typically swift trial involved an enslaved defendant named Scipio from Ipswich estate in St Elizabeth. John Palmer, a private in the militia, told the court that he had seen the defendant running away from Ipswich works, which had just been fired and 'was going to shoot him, but was restrained by his officer'. Scipio was unarmed when Palmer took him prisoner. Arms were discovered at the slave village at Ipswich, and it was alleged that Scipio

⁴⁰ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, Sir William Cotton to William Bullock, Montego-Bay, 17 January 1832, B. Blower Gibbes to Sir W. Cotton, Latium Estate, 15 January 1832, B. Blower Gibbes to Lieutenant Gunn, Content Estate, 15 January 1832; *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 3 February 1832.

⁴¹ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 3 February 1832.

⁴² *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 3 February 1832. On the composition of these courts, see Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 161.

had wished to evade capture. On this evidence, the defendant was sentenced to death and was shot the same day.⁴³

Many sentences were carried out at Montego Bay, whilst some convicts were returned to their homes for execution. Enslaved people were forced to watch such executions in order to dissuade them from rebellion. At a firing squad sentence, carried out in front of the boiling house at Y. S. estate, St Elizabeth, 100 slaves looked on, along with 'a large crowd of boys and men, servants, belonging to the different officers and soldiers'. The *Saint Jago de la Vega Gazette* reported that they 'all appeared quite appalled at what took place.' After the execution an officer read a proclamation from Sir Willoughby Cotton which exhorted slaves who had fled to give themselves up and stated that 'all who are found with the rebels will be put to death, without mercy.'⁴⁴ Such public events were clearly designed to forcibly highlight the reinstatement of white dominance over the black people living in the district of the rebellion, and were intended to provide a shocking and awful warning to the slaves about the potential cost of rebelling.

In spite of this vicious retribution, local settlers were reluctant to credit enslaved rebels with full responsibility for having conceived of and organised the rebellion. Less than two weeks after its outbreak, the *Cornwall Courier* claimed that '[t]he acts of rebellion and incendiarism [*sic*], committed and still committing, in this parish and St. James's, are occasioned by the slaves having been deceived and misguided by the Sectarians.' The *Jamaica Courant* claimed that the Baptist missionaries were 'the sole cause of the discontent' that had manifested itself in the northern parishes. These sentiments were echoed by Hamilton Brown who told George French that the rebellion had 'emanated entirely from the Government, the

⁴³ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 January 1832.

⁴⁴ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 January 1832.

Saints & their agents – the preachers here, for never did a single rebel complain of bad usage having caused them to rebel.’⁴⁵ The spirit of mistrust that had long existed between the planters and the preachers therefore led local whites to accuse the missionaries of encouraging the slaves to rise against their masters.

However, the extreme anti-sectarian rhetoric and violence unleashed in the months after the revolt was influenced by more than the planters’ long-standing suspicion of the missionaries. By blaming missionaries for planting the seeds of the revolt, local whites were able to maintain the main tenets of their pro-slavery argument, which was otherwise severely undermined by the rebels’ actions. As we have seen, the planters presented themselves as humane masters, in step with the benevolent outlook of those in the metropole.⁴⁶ They argued that though slavery should gradually be phased out, their slaves were content and not yet morally prepared for freedom. When tens of thousands of slaves showed themselves utterly discontented with their situation and prepared to claim their freedom by engaging in open rebellion, the flaws in this argument became apparent.

Indeed, many planters appear to have been genuinely shocked and disillusioned by the actions of the rebels, many of whom had been those privileged slaves, or confidentials, whom the planters believed would remain loyal. Some of the leaders of the rebellion, including the main organiser, Sam Sharpe, were skilled slaves working in Montego Bay; others were head men or skilled workers on the estates.⁴⁷ The *Jamaica Courant* evinced surprise that a rebel named McIntosh had ordered the great house at Poverty Hall, St Elizabeth, to be burned ‘although the

⁴⁵ *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 31 December 1831 to Saturday 7 January 1832, p. 7; *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 5 January 1832; JA 4/45/56, Tweedie Papers, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 24 May 1832.

⁴⁶ See chapter 7 above.

⁴⁷ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 152.

man was allowed by his mistress to keep stock on her property, on which he had four mares'.⁴⁸ In March 1832, Hamilton Brown wrote that the 'confidence & I may add affectn [*sic*], which subsisted between master and slave – namely domestics & head people, who were most implicated – will be long, if ever again, perfectly restored.' Two months later Brown wrote to George French to tell him that the works at James Galloway's estate in St James, Unity Hall, had been burned down. He went on to comment that Galloway's 'mansion was burned during the rebellion by his own people, to whom he was a most kind master'.⁴⁹

Not all privileged slaves in the area affected were involved in leading the rebellion, as illustrated by a report in the *Cornwall Courier* on the 28 December 1831, describing how the head men at Green Park estate, Trelawny, 'voluntarily mounted guard...for the purpose of protecting their master's property from incendiaries.'⁵⁰ However, such a large rebellion involving many so-called confidentials seriously threatened the planters' self-image as benevolent and caring masters. The rebellion offered evidence that those enslaved were not content and demanded to be free, regardless of how they were treated. It also provided clear proof that enslaved people could think and act for themselves in claiming their liberty.

In spite of this, local whites were able to continue to deny the independence and autonomy displayed by the rebels by blaming the insurrection entirely on local missionaries. Of course, the slaves did not require missionaries to inform them of the value of freedom. As Gelien Matthews writes: '[i]t was hardly necessary for

⁴⁸ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 20 January 1832.

⁴⁹ JA 4/45/51, Hamilton Brown to George French, Spanish Town, 17 March 1832; JA 4/45/55. Brown to French, Dry Harbour, St Ann, 10 May 1832.

⁵⁰ Quoted in *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 31 December 1831 to Saturday 7 January 1832, p. 7.

any external source to give birth to a principle replete with such significance to their very existence.’⁵¹ However, to Jamaican whites, the missionaries, seen as the proxies of the abolitionist lobby and as a threat to the local social order, provided ideal scapegoats. In the months after the rebellion, a discourse emerged that presented the enslaved people who had tried to claim their freedom as mere ciphers under the influence of calculating and malevolent non-conformist preachers. In this way, the planters claimed that contented but credulous workers had been given false hopes of freedom by white preachers, whilst maintaining the idea that blacks were incapable of thinking and acting for themselves.

The planters not only attempted to defer responsibility for the uprising onto the missionaries; they also attempted to blame them for the bloody reprisals. An editorial column in the *St Jago de la Vega Gazette* identified the missionaries as the cause of the uprising and proclaimed: ‘[l]et the blood that must be spilt rest on the heads of the instigators.’⁵² The planters were clearly determined to use violence to cow enslaved people into submission, but this approach was difficult to incorporate with the caring image that most planters sought to fashion. Planters and their allies therefore blamed the need for such a reaction on the preachers. Whilst promoting brutal punishments and retribution, local whites could speak of ‘holding Courts Martial on the poor deluded people’, thereby presenting themselves as having a humane concern for the rebels whilst being forced to act harshly against individuals led cruelly astray.⁵³

⁵¹ Gelien Matthews, ‘The Rumour Syndrome, Sectarian Missionaries and Nineteenth Century Slave Rebels of the British West Indies’, *The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers*, 2 (2001), <<http://www.scsonline.freemove.co.uk/olvol2.html>> [accessed 5 June 2003], p. 9. See also, Michael Craton, ‘Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies, 1816 – 1832’, *Past and Present*, 85 (1979).

⁵² *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 31 December 1831 to Saturday 7 January 1832, p. 7.

⁵³ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 3 February 1832.

White violence and the Colonial Church Union

In the weeks after the outbreak of the rebellion, as the invective levelled at the missionaries rose, local whites' praise for the actions of the militia increased. In a letter dated 17 January, a Montego Bay merchant wrote that the militia had 'really done their duty', claiming that 'nearly all the active service has been performed by the Militia' and that 'the Regulars can't stand bush fighting.'⁵⁴ At the beginning of February, a letter appeared in the *Jamaica Courant* praising the militia's noble behaviour and claiming that '[h]ad we been without Sir Willoughby Cotton, the Militia Officers would have put down the rebellion before this.'⁵⁵ However, the militia were in retreat before the arrival of regular troops at Montego Bay, who brought technologically advanced fire power to bear against the rebels when they arrived, thereby turning the tide of the conflict against the slaves.⁵⁶ The co-operation of the Maroons with the authorities also played a crucial part in the rebels' defeat.⁵⁷ Settlers' criticisms of the effectiveness of Cotton and the regular troops therefore had little basis in fact. Instead, they are better interpreted as symptoms of the intensification of the bitter opposition to British humanitarianism that had been so prevalent among the settlers throughout 1831. Cotton promoted calm and measured treatment of the defeated rebels from the men under his command, which appears to have led some locals to refer to him as 'Saint

⁵⁴ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 20 January 1832.

⁵⁵ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 3 February 1832.

⁵⁶ On the technological advantages of the regulars, such as the Congreve rockets that they used, see Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 272. As Theodore Foulkes wrote, 'Congreve rockets, cannister-shot, and shells, were found very useful, not only in destroying the enemy, but in inducing many to surrender, terrified by these formidable, and to them unknown, material of modern warfare.' See Foulkes, *Eighteen Months in Jamaica*, p. 86.

⁵⁷ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 20 January 1832; Belmore Papers. Film no. 1, W. Henderson to Willoughby Cotton, Seven Rivers, 13 January 1832. Maroons from the East of the island also volunteered their services to fight the rebels. See *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 14 to Saturday 21 January 1832, p. 5.

Willoughby', thereby associating him with British humanitarians.⁵⁸ Therefore, as before the rebellion, colonists' responses to British involvement in local affairs were informed by feelings closely connected with distaste for abolitionists, humanitarians and local missionaries.

Many militiamen were brutal and cruel, whilst also demonstrating a great amount of zeal and energy in their efforts to quell the insurrection. During the rebellion, Hamilton Brown, serving as a lieutenant colonel in the militia, won praise from Cotton for his actions in charge of a mounted division in St Ann. He was later involved in the search for rebels in St James. Brown's exertions left him ill with a fever, and on 11 February 1832, he was unable to write his usual letter to his employer in Britain due to 'indisposition from fatigue during the late rebellion'.⁵⁹ The exertions of militiamen such as Brown, as well as the atrocities that they committed, stand as testimony to their commitment to protecting property and preserving slavery along with all of the advantages and privileges that they as white men derived from the maintenance of slave society.

In January 1832, Cotton described the atmosphere amongst colonists in Montego Bay as '[c]ruel & sanguinary inclined', before going on to add that he was 'disgusted hourly by the infuriated absurdities I am obliged to hear'.⁶⁰ Before the ending of martial law on 5 February, the fury of some whites was brought to bear against the missionaries, when Captain George Gordon of the militia ordered his men to burn down Salter's Hill, a new mission chapel in St James. Gordon was a magistrate, proprietor of Moor Park estate, and one of the leading planting

⁵⁸ See *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 20 January 1832.

⁵⁹ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, J. L. Hilton to Willoughby Cotton, Rio Bueno, 3 January 1832; *Postscript to St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 January 1832, p. 9; *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 3 February 1832; JA 4/45/50, McAlister to George French, Dry Harbour, 11 February 1832.

⁶⁰ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, Willoughby Cotton to William Bullock, Montego Bay, 17 January 1832.

attorneys in the district of the rebellion.⁶¹ The involvement of such elite men was common in the destruction of mission property that followed. On 8 February, a mob including twenty-two militia officers, ten magistrates and the head constable of St James tore down the Baptist chapel in Montego Bay. The mob comprised plantation owners and magistrates as well as a number of pen keepers and men with relatively small holdings of slaves. They acted in the middle of the day, and though Richard Barrett and George McFarquhar Lawson, the Custos and militia colonel of the parish, were apparently both informed of plans to destroy the building, the demolition went ahead undisturbed. The ensuing weeks saw the proliferation of such activities. With the active approval of many magistrates, militiamen destroyed mission chapels in Westmoreland, Hanover, Trelawny and St Ann.⁶²

This activity became more organised in February 1832, when militiamen and magistrates in St Ann founded a branch, otherwise known as a chapter, of the Colonial Church Union (CCU). The idea for such an organisation predated the rebellion and chapters of the CCU were instituted ‘to offer an antidote to the destructive poison of the Sectarians...to hunt this pestilence from our shores’ and to produce ‘quarterly reports illustrating the real state of our labouring population’. The Unionists aimed to publish these reports in British newspapers to counter those by the abolitionists.⁶³ After the rebellion, the growth of the Union was firmly predicated on the involvement of militia officers and men. The leaders of the movement described these recruits as ‘men who have borne the brunt of six weeks

⁶¹ *Facts and Documents Connected with the Late Insurrection in Jamaica and the Violations of Civil and Religious Liberty Arising out of it* (London, 1832), p. 3; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, pp. 67, 100; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, Returns of Givings in, 1830, p. 123; T 71 222 – 23.

⁶² Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 166 – 67; Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood, 1981), p. 87; *Facts and Documents*, p. 4; William F. Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell: Twenty Two Years a Missionary in Jamaica* (London, 1849), pp. 204 – 5; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1832, Returns of Givings in, 1831.

⁶³ *Jamaica Courant*, Thursday 13 October 1831.

severe marching over hill and dale’, and who ‘were eye-witnesses of the ruin and devastation in the parishes of St. James, Hanover and St. Elizabeth’.⁶⁴ Basing their meetings on the organisation instituted in St Ann, white settlers, who were angry about the rebellion and eager to seek retribution, instituted chapters of the CCU throughout the island and began to destroy mission property and intimidate missionaries.⁶⁵

Organisers of the Union did not present themselves as being anti-British, even when they continued to promote anti-sectarian activities which were declared illegal by a proclamation from the Crown. The Union, they claimed, ‘was formed to preserve the remnant of property left to us, and to prevent this island becoming a second St. Domingo’. Unionists thereby claimed that their activities were directed towards preserving the colony as a valuable asset of the Crown. The leaders of the movement declared their ‘purest loyalty for the King’ and ‘attachment to the doctrines and tenets of the established Churches of England and Scotland’. Looking back to a period when ‘the laws and constitution were treated with respect’, they presented themselves as loyal patriots who were at odds with modern ideas of liberty and reform. They accused the Whig ministry in London of ruining Jamaica and bringing Britain to the brink of revolution, criticised the Governor, and execrated the missionaries for ‘preaching sedition and exciting rebellion’.⁶⁶

The CCU was therefore a counter-revolutionary movement that had a firm basis in the planters’ conservative tradition. Unionists opposed hasty reform and resisted British attempts to interfere with the government of the colony. However,

⁶⁴ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 26 January to Saturday 2 February 1833, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 168 – 69.

⁶⁶ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 26 January to Saturday 2 February 1833, p. 12; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 16 to Saturday 23 February 1833, p. 9.

colonists did not falter in their loyalty to the Crown, and the unfulfilled threats of seeking secession from the Empire that had been voiced in 1831 did not re-emerge after the Baptist War. Instead, the Unionists verbally attacked reformers in Britain and Jamaica, who had made it increasingly difficult for them to maintain their British creole identity as slaveholders and patriots. They also intimidated missionaries and their supporters whilst physically attacking their property, in an effort to rid the island of those elements whom they saw as having undermined the strictly defined boundaries of rule that had previously ensured the strict separation of free and enslaved people. In this way, the CCU represented a strong backlash against the recent changes that colonists believed had threatened their property, undermined their independence and induced enslaved people to rebel.

In the weeks after the meeting in St Ann, four Custodes along with several magistrates and militia officers took leading roles in the organisation of chapters of the CCU.⁶⁷ The movement's activity was centred mainly in the north and west of the island, and the destruction of mission property continued throughout 1832.⁶⁸ In St Ann, Hamilton Brown was a prominent Unionist and wrote to George French explaining that he had taken an active part in 'expelling the Baptist parsons from preaching: on the success of accomplishing which', he claimed, 'the present safety of the island depends.'⁶⁹ Brown and many of the other leaders of the Union were from the sugar-planting elite. However, the movement attracted a broad cross section of white society, and at Stoney-Hill, north of Kingston, a Methodist

⁶⁷ For discussions of the growth of the CCU, see Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 166 – 69; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 86 – 88. On elite involvement in the organisation, see *Facts and Documents*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ *Facts and Documents*, pp. 3 – 8; Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 166 – 83.

⁶⁹ JA 4/45/58, Hamilton Brown to George French, Dry Harbour, 4 July 1832.

missionary identified the bookkeepers and overseers of the area as posing the major physical threat to his chapel.⁷⁰

Therefore, as pro-slavery rhetoric gave way to pro-slavery violence in the aftermath of the rebellion, the estate owners, other landowners and non-elite whites combined to attack the chapels that they associated with abolitionism and threats to the established social order of the colony. The militia companies, on which the Union chapters were based, had long performed the function of bringing men together and engendering solidarity between them, and in 1832 white male settlers began actively attempting to expel those whites who did not support their vision of social order in Jamaica. By attacking the missionaries in this way, they sought to restore well-defined boundaries of rule, whereby social distance was maintained between enslaved black labourers and white men.

However, the appeal of the CCU was by no means universal within free society. When Willoughby Cotton arrived in Montego Bay in 1832, he remarked that '[s]ociety here is jarring, all pulling different ways, & jealous of each other to a degree', and the varied attitudes of the planters towards the missionaries bears out his observation.⁷¹ Whilst the majority of whites appear to have blamed the preachers for the rebellion, some, like Cotton himself, saw this as absurd. Most prevalent among those whites who did not approve of the actions of the CCU were those plantation owners who had inherited their wealth, and who maintained particularly close links with the metropole. Richard Barrett maintained close links to Britain and appears to have adopted a somewhat ambivalent stance towards the activities of the Unionists in St James.⁷² In 1832, according to a statement by

⁷⁰ *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, January 1833, p. 64.

⁷¹ Belmore Papers, Film no. 1, Willoughby Cotton to William Bullock, Montego Bay, 17 January 1832.

⁷² On Barrett's British links, see chapter 4 above.

Baptist missionaries, he abetted the destruction of the Baptist chapel in Montego Bay. However, Mary Turner states that Barrett later approved successful attempts to defend the town's Wesleyan chapel against the CCU.⁷³ He also discharged the missionaries Abbott, Whitehorne, Burchell and Knibb from facing trial for their supposed part in the rebellion, thereby publicly exonerating these men, whom most of the local whites had identified as their sworn enemies.⁷⁴ The same month, his cousin, Samuel Barrett wrote to the Baptist missionary, William Knibb, telling the preacher that he had never attributed to him 'any blame as directly producing or promoting the late melancholy disturbances.' He went on to tell Knibb of his deep regret 'that the feelings of the country should so strongly mark out yourself, and the other baptist [*sic*] missionaries, as objects of persecution.' Samuel Barrett was the owner of two sugar estates in St James and, though born in Jamaica, lived most of his life as an absentee in Britain.⁷⁵

Some elite whites therefore withheld their support from the CCU. Nevertheless, the popularity of the movement showed that many white colonists were prepared to violently assert their right to retain slavery along with a rigidly segregated local social order whilst enjoying the protection of the Crown. However, increased opposition from free non-whites, changes in British public opinion and government policy, and the forthright opposition of enslaved people meant that, by 1833, these colonists' interpretation of their colonial relationship with the metropole was no longer feasible.

The free coloured and free black population comprised a large and varied group and evinced a range of responses to the rebellion and the crisis that it caused.

⁷³ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 166 – 67; *Facts and Documents*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Marks, *The Family of the Barrett*, p. 408.

⁷⁵ Marks, *The Family of the Barrett*, pp. 319 – 20, 346 – 47, 409.

It appears that free coloureds and free blacks generally supported the efforts to suppress the rebels. Insurgents took free coloured prisoners, and a free coloured militia detachment fought against the rebels at Montpelier.⁷⁶ However, the rebellion saw an increase in tension and mistrust between whites and freedpeople, because some free non-whites took the slaves' side in the uprising, and other free coloureds attracted suspicion as sympathisers to the insurgents. Military reports identified free brown men among the rebel leaders. One such report stated that a free man, Alexander Campbell, commanded a band encountered by the militia in the backcountry and that 'several free men of no character' were reportedly in league with the rebels in that area.⁷⁷ In January 1832, suspicion fell on Price Watkis, a liberal free-coloured Assemblyman, who was kept under surveillance. Militiamen in St Ann accused Watkis, who defended his right to express his opinions, of helping to incite the rebellion through voicing his advocacy of emancipation.⁷⁸

The actions of some free non-whites during the crisis that followed the insurrection served to heighten white resentment and opposition towards them. When local whites threatened Henry Bleby's chapel at Stoney-Hill, the missionary was able to rely on freedpeople to 'nightly guard the chapel' and described how 'the coloured people generally, whether connected with us or not, are determined to protect it from violence.' Another story of free coloured support for the missionaries appeared in the *Jamaica Courant*, which described how Methodist missionaries in St Ann, fearing an attack on their chapel, had 'sought protection from the petticoat of a mulatto wench', who the reporter alleged had '*slept with*

⁷⁶ Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 266 – 69; *Additional Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 to Saturday 14 January 1832, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Jamaica Courant*, Friday February 3 1832; *Jamaica Courant*, Tuesday January 20 1832.

⁷⁸ *Jamaica Courant*, Tuesday January 20 1832; *Jamaica Courant*, Tuesday February 7 1832.

these men of God in the Chapel, to save them from violence!!'⁷⁹ In St James, the missionaries' free coloured supporters mounted an armed guard, which prevented the destruction of the Wesleyan chapel in Montego Bay. Resentment of such behaviour from free non-whites was highlighted by the attempt, in the summer of 1832, to try the free-coloured activist, Edward Jordon, for sedition.⁸⁰

By taking a stand with those whom the majority of white colonists had identified as their enemies, coloureds and blacks became the targets of white abuse. However, they also limited the effectiveness of the CCU's activities. By 1832, free coloureds and free blacks outnumbered whites, and although a few freedpeople joined the Union to defend slavery and protect their privileged position in Jamaican society, the combined opposition of non-whites meant that the CCU could not present a credible threat to the British Government. The Unionists were determined to oppose any British attempt to interfere with local affairs and to forcibly resist emancipation. However, as Parliament in London came to recognise the necessity of imposing emancipation, the free non-whites in Jamaica acted 'as loyal Englishmen' in support of such measures.⁸¹ The US consul to Jamaica recognised the importance of this. In a letter to the Secretary of State in Washington, he cast the militia as 'a brave and well disciplined body of men', but went on to add that 'the mulattos and blacks joined to the regulars can annihilate them at once.'⁸²

It is therefore clear that without the support of the British Government or the majority of the free population, the CCU was in a weak position. In September 1832, the new Governor, the Earl of Mulgrave, prevented the escalation of Unionist-led violence in Westmoreland by sending a detachment of British troops

⁷⁹ *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, January 1833, p. 64; *Jamaica Courant*, Tuesday February 7 1832.

⁸⁰ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 166 – 67; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 88.

⁸¹ See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 72 – 94.

⁸² Despatches from US Consuls, Harrison to Livingston, Kingston, 12 February 1833.

to the parish. By the beginning of 1833, the British Government, unconvinced by the colonists' claims that the missionaries were dangerous seditionists, resolved to terminate anti-sectarian violence and introduce religious toleration to Jamaica. The Governor dismissed James Hilton, the president of the CCU, from his positions as a magistrate and militia colonel, and another founding member of the organisation, Henry Cox, resigned his commission in the militia as well as his post as Custos of St Ann in protest.⁸³

However, Hilton and Cox, along with Hamilton Brown, remained defiant. At a meeting of the CCU on 9 February 1832, Brown proclaimed that he was blessed with a good voice, had 'a good old rusty sword' and that 'whenever my country requires their services I shall be ready at a moment's notice, to raise them both'.⁸⁴ Brown's words appear to have reflected the mood of the white inhabitants of this district, because on 11 February, the US consul reported that in St Ann, an 'effigy of the Governor was carried through the streets in a wheel barrow, and afterwards burnt!'⁸⁵ Such words and actions persuaded the Governor to take action against Unionists in the parish. On 11 February 1833, two companies of British troops from the 5th regiment, along with 200 from the 77th, left Kingston for St Ann, 'to over awe or put down' the CCU.⁸⁶

On 15 February, the Governor reviewed the militia under Hamilton Brown's command at Huntley Pasture in St Ann. Accompanied by British officers and the new custos of the parish, Samuel Barrett, the Governor informed the militiamen that their activities against the missionaries were illegal and forbade

⁸³ *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 9 to Saturday 16 February 1833, p. 6; *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 9 to Saturday 16 February 1833, p. 9. See also Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 182 – 189.

⁸⁴ *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 9 to Saturday 16 February 1833, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Despatches from US Consuls, Harrison to Livingston, Kingston, 12 February 1833.

⁸⁶ Despatches from US Consuls, Harrison to Livingston, Kingston, 12 February 1833.

CCU meetings that coincided with militia musters. In front of the men of the militia, Mulgrave upbraided Brown for having publicly criticised him as Governor and cancelled Brown's commission as lieutenant colonel. The *Saint Jago de la Vega Gazette* reported that Brown 'appeared considerably excited' and attempted to dismiss the militia, but that the men were 'ordered to "fall in"' and order was restored.⁸⁷ Though the *Gazette* did not mention the presence of British troops at the scene, it seems likely that the men from the 5th and 77th regiments were on hand and that the preparation of these detachments to support the Governor played a part in subduing the militia and cowing Hamilton Brown and the CCU into submission.

The capitulation of the St Ann militia to the Governor's authority marked the effective end of Unionist-led attempts by white colonists to remain British subjects entirely on their own terms. The events surrounding Hamilton Brown's dismissal at Huntley Pasture also neatly highlight the reasons for the failure of the counter-revolutionary effort to ignore the will of the British Government, expel the missionaries from Jamaica and maintain slavery. The Unionists were unable to offer any physical resistance to the King's troops. Militarily weak and outnumbered by non-whites in free society, recalcitrant whites were left with little choice but to defer to the Governor. However, the presence of Samuel Barrett at the Governor's side at Huntley Pasture represented another crucial element in the planters' submission to British authority. The Governor chose Barrett, a liberal plantation owner with unusually strong links to the metropole, to replace Henry Cox as Custos of St Ann, thereby highlighting the importance of tensions within the local elite to the political events of this period.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 16 to Saturday 23 February 1833, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Barrett had lived most of his life in Britain, but arrived in Jamaica in 1827. He remained on the island until his death in Kingston in 1837. See NLJ, Feurtado Manuscript.

Emancipation: the final compromise

After his confrontation with Mulgrave at Huntley Pasture, Hamilton Brown was involved in two dramatic courtroom incidents. Both demonstrate the divisions in Jamaican free society that stifled the influence of hard-line Unionists. In July 1833, he made an impromptu, but impassioned speech in the courthouse in St Ann, where Courts of Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas were being held. A Methodist missionary, Mr Greenwood, was present to apply for a licence to preach. However, before Greenwood could make his application, Brown stood up and advised those present that, as the senior representative of the parish in the Assembly, he felt it his duty to request the court to refuse to grant the licence. His speech made clear that he saw missionaries as having a dangerous influence on the slaves and instigated a small-scale riot: a crowd of whites rushed into the courthouse and tried to assault the missionary. Greenwood sought protection behind Samuel Barrett, who was presiding over the court as Custos. Barrett reproved Brown for addressing the court without permission, stated his determination to uphold the law and grant Greenwood's licence, and ensured that the missionary made his escape.⁸⁹ The fracas therefore demonstrated the continued influence of Unionist ideology among whites in St Ann, but it also revealed that not all white men in positions of authority were prepared to tolerate the illegal violence of former Unionists.

The Governor responded to the riot in the St Ann courthouse by sending British troops to the parish, which ensured that Greenwood eventually obtained

⁸⁹ For an extended report of these events, see *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 19 October to Saturday 26 October 1833, p. 9; *Supplement to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 26 October to Saturday 2 November 1833, pp. 6 – 7; *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 2 November to Saturday 9 November 1833, pp. 1 – 3.

permission to preach.⁹⁰ Three months later, Brown was again in court, this time at the Grand Court in Spanish Town, where he and his associates stood trial for their part in the disturbance. Accused of ‘obstructing the stream of justice’, the men were acquitted after a highly publicised three-day trial, but on leaving the court, they found that they were now the targets of an angry crowd. Brown and his friends ‘were followed by the mob, with cries of “down with Colonial Union,” “knock him down.” “He is no Christian, down with him.” “Murder him, we’ll have his blood,” &c.’ In the scuffle that followed, Brown received several blows from stones, sustaining injuries to his head and leg.⁹¹ His continued part in leading the anti-missionary campaign therefore helped him to command the support of white men in St Ann, but his experiences in Spanish Town provide evidence of the strong anti-Union feeling that existed elsewhere in Jamaica.

According to J. R. Ward, by the spring of 1833, West Indian spokesmen in Britain, ‘resigned at last to the fact that emancipation was unavoidable, began to negotiate the details of possible compensation terms.’⁹² At the same time, a similar spirit of resignation appears to have prevailed among many plantation owners in Jamaica. By the beginning of 1833, the influence of the Union had waned, and most in Jamaican free society, including whites, appear to have concluded that compromise with Britain over emancipation was practical and desirable.

At the end of 1832, Mulgrave dismissed a hostile Assembly and called a general election. At the election in 1833, many successful candidates for the Assembly adopted conciliatory policies that promoted the importance of

⁹⁰ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 189.

⁹¹ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 26 October to Saturday 2 November 1833, p. 11.

⁹² J. R. Ward, ‘Emancipation and the Planters’, *Journal of Caribbean History*, 22/1 – 2 (1988), p. 125.

compromise with the British Government's plans for emancipation. These opinions are summarised in an editorial statement in the *Cornwall Chronicle*, which expressed the hope that when the new Assembly met they would tackle the issue of emancipation 'with mild, deliberate, and reasonable deliberation, and that they will consider that the *point of wisdom lies in the line of mutual concession*'. The statement went on to proclaim that were the *Chronicle* 'to advise resistance, like the imbeciles that have endeavoured to drive things to extremities in this country, we should deservedly be condemned by the wise and the good'.⁹³ The widespread adoption of such opinions meant that the tone of election addresses and speeches in 1833 generally contrasted with the anti-government rhetoric that white colonists had favoured over the preceding two years.⁹⁴

At a post-election reception in April 1833, a successful candidate from St Catherine declared that '[h]e did not consider it the duty of the House of Assembly to form itself into a systematic opposition to the King's government'.⁹⁵ In Trelawny, a successful candidate, John Kelly, informed freeholders that the recent problems of the island could 'only be allayed by temperate discussions and reasonable Legislative enactments'.⁹⁶ Kelly had the support of Samuel Barrett, who delivered an acceptance speech in St James on behalf of his cousin, Richard Barrett. The other successful candidate from St James, the free coloured merchant, John Manderson, also shared this moderate outlook, stating that in approaching the issue of emancipation 'the only rational plan is that of *conciliation*'.⁹⁷

⁹³ Quoted in *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 13 to Saturday 20 April 1833, p. 10.

⁹⁴ One possible reason for such conciliatory rhetoric was the involvement of free coloured and free black men in a general election for the first time. Since free non-whites generally adopted a more liberal approach to the issue of emancipation than whites, candidates would have had to moderate their approach accordingly if they were to attract their votes.

⁹⁵ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 13 to Saturday 20 April 1833, p. 10.

⁹⁶ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 2 to Saturday 9 February 1833, p. 5

⁹⁷ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 11 May to Saturday 18 May 1833, pp. 2 – 3.

Of course, not all politicians adopted such policies, and the election highlighted the depth of the differences that had come to exist between many local whites. In St Ann, Hamilton Brown retained his hard-line political outlook and was the most popular of the three candidates. In St Elizabeth, a supporter of the CCU declared that the Custos, Duncan Robertson, who was re-elected to represent the parish, had been 'mute as a mouse' in the Assembly and 'had never brought forward or supported any measures for the advantage of the country'. He went on to say that Robertson 'was bought by the King's House, and shewed [*sic*] his subserviency by following the Governor to Huntley Pastures to witness the degradation of an old and meritorious officer.' Robertson reportedly replied that 'he held his accuser in too much contempt to reply to his allegations'.⁹⁸ Clearly, by 1833, there were serious lines of division between whites over the issue of how to address the problem of emancipation.

Despite some whites' continued opposition to any British interference with local affairs, most Assemblymen returned in 1833 were prepared to come to an agreement with the British Government over emancipation. This was partly because resistance to the Governor had been shown to be futile. However, the British scheme for abolition, introduced to parliament in London in May 1833, granted slaveholders a large amount of compensation as well as a transitional period of 'apprenticeship' between the abolition of slavery and the granting of full freedom.⁹⁹ These were crucial concessions to the pro-slavery lobby's gradualist arguments and concerns over property rights. Compensation was also particularly attractive to those planters in financial difficulty. Furthermore, in spite of their desire to maintain their local institutions and patterns of rule, most white settlers

⁹⁸ *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 27 April to Saturday 4 May 1833, p. 10.

⁹⁹ See Blackburn, *Colonial Slavery*, pp. 453 – 59.

had strong links with Britain that made open conflict with the mother country impossible, even over the issue of slavery.

Transatlantic links had also played a large part in persuading the British Government to pass emancipation in 1833. News of the brutal repression of the Baptist War was carried to Britain, often by returning missionaries appalled by what they had seen and experienced. According to David Brion Davis, these reports led to an ‘outburst of public protest, which included demands that Parliament be “compelled” to annihilate slavery immediately’ which even astonished the leaders of the London Anti-Slavery Committee.¹⁰⁰ The rebellion galvanised public opinion, but the slaves’ forthright rejection of slavery also demonstrated to the British Government that the institution had become impracticable and would have to go. On 14 May 1833, the Colonial Secretary, Edward Stanley, introduced the government’s emancipation scheme to the House of Commons. Modified, but retaining the spirit and major principles of the original proposal, the bill passed into law at the end of August 1833.¹⁰¹

However, for this bill to come into effect, it had to be approved by the legislative assemblies of slaveholding colonies. The Jamaican Assembly received the Emancipation Bill in October 1833.¹⁰² About two months before its arrival in Jamaica from Britain, the estate owner, Lord Seaford, voiced his ‘strong misgivings’ about the conduct of the Assembly. He saw the men who sat in the House as ruined individuals, intent on improving their local reputations by giving ‘trouble and opposition to the Government’. He also noted that some eight or ten of

¹⁰⁰ Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, p. 198.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica, 1832 – 1938* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 48 – 49; Blackburn, *Colonial Slavery*, pp. 456 – 57.

¹⁰² Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 54; JA 1B/5/83/2, Attorney’s letter book, f. 86, John Gale Vidal to Rowland Mitchell, Spanish Town, 12 October 1833.

the members were 'animated by the strongest feelings of hostility to Mulgrave in consequence of his having degraded them from their situations in the magistracy & militia'. Though the House did eventually pass the Emancipation Bill, Seaford despaired that they would attempt to block it.¹⁰³

Lord Seaford was the owner of Old and New Montpelier, two adjoining sugar estates in St James. Born Charles Ellis in Jamaica, he lived most of his life as an absentee in Britain, where he served in the House of Commons before becoming a member of the House of Lords in 1826.¹⁰⁴ However, in the summer of 1832, he returned to Jamaica, where he remained for nearly two years, managing his properties and carrying out public duties as a magistrate alongside other local proprietors.¹⁰⁵ With over a thousand slaves, he was one of the leading slaveholders in the British Empire, and in Jamaica, his high status and connections allowed him to move in exclusive circles, including paying a visit to Governor Mulgrave.¹⁰⁶

Seaford was one of the leading advocates of the planters in Britain. However, he advocated the gradual amelioration of slavery and the moral education of those enslaved. He had clearly been influenced by humanitarian ideas and, in 1823, when he stood up in the Commons to speak on the behalf of his fellow slaveholders, he begged the House not to consider him 'as the champion of slavery'. His ideas about racial difference also lacked the virulence of many pro-slavery ideologues. His view of Africans and their descendants was that they were

¹⁰³ BL Add. MSS 51818, Holland House Papers, Lord Seaford to Lord Holland, Montpelier, Aug 2 1833.

¹⁰⁴ BL Add. MSS 51818, Seaford to Holland, Paris, Nov 13 1826; Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 29 – 36, 51 – 55.

¹⁰⁵ On Seaford's activities whilst in Jamaica, see Higman, *Montpelier*, pp. 32 – 36, 51 – 55. On his activities as a magistrate, see *Postscript to the St Jago de la Vega Gazette* Saturday 16 to Saturday 23 February 1833, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ BL Add. MSS 51818, Seaford to Holland, Montpelier, Aug 2 1833.

inferior to Europeans, but Seaford was more optimistic than many of his fellow slaveholders about their capacity for progress.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, by 1833, Seaford was convinced by the arguments for emancipation. When he heard about the Emancipation Bill, he wrote to his friend, Lord Holland, telling him that he would stay in Jamaica as he would 'not feel justified in quitting this country without doing whatever may be in my power towards carrying your measure [emancipation] into effect.'¹⁰⁸ Seaford was even prepared to advocate the circumvention of the Assembly, if they chose not to pass the bill, and was well aware that such sentiments 'might be considered treason' by others on the island.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, his attitudes do not seem congruent with his position as a leading slaveowner and long-time defender of the planters. Residing so long in the metropole, surrounded by abolitionists, appears to have shaped his views on slavery and on the necessity for emancipation at all costs. As David Brion Davis argues, some absentee West Indian planters 'were reformers at heart, eager to soften the brutalities of slavery if this could be done without endangering public order or a reasonable return on their investment.'¹¹⁰

It is clear that long-distance relationships between the Jamaican elite and metropolitan friends, relatives and business associates helped to cultivate an intellectual climate in which emancipation could be considered viable. By 1833, other slaveholders in Jamaica had come to share Seaford's assessment that slavery must end sooner rather than later, though opinion on the matter was divided. On 1 August 1834, the day of emancipation, John Gale Vidal wrote to a correspondent in

¹⁰⁷ Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 52; BL Add. MSS 51818, Seaford to Holland, Audley Square, May 7 1832.

¹⁰⁸ Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 54; BL Add. MSS 51818, Seaford to Holland, Montpelier, Aug 2 1833.

¹¹⁰ Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, p. 192.

Britain to express his guarded optimism about the potential to continue profitable production under the system of apprenticeship that was to follow slavery. He wrote that he was ‘in hopes the people might be induced to work the harder during the few hours they have now to labour, and in some measure make up for the loss of time’. In the same letter, Vidal went on to say that ‘now that the day has arrived’ it was necessary for those on the island to do their best ‘to make matters work well’ and, though he did not expect apprenticeship to be as productive as slavery, he did not judge the situation to be ‘so desperate, as many of my friends fear.’¹¹¹

Vidal’s stoicism in the face of change differed slightly from Lord Seaford’s enthusiasm for emancipation, but both men appear to have seen the immediate end of slavery as necessary. It also appears that Vidal’s close links with Britain led him to adopt this stance. As we have seen, Vidal was a planting attorney, who had close professional links with a number of clients in the UK. He also had family ties with the British-based Mitchell family, and in October 1833, he wrote to Rowland Mitchell in England to tell him about how the Emancipation Bill had been received by the Assembly. ‘It will be satisfactory to our friends in England’, he wrote, ‘to know that as yet not the slightest disposition has been shown to resist the wishes of Parliament.’ He went on to say that the positive response of the Assembly to the bill, ‘ought to convince the British Nation that we are not so devoid of humanity [illegible] we have been presented to be.’ Vidal also expressed his hope that the House would unite behind the Emancipation Bill and allow for a smooth transition to apprenticeship.¹¹² Clearly, he was keen to show his British correspondent that he and his fellow colonists were in tune with the spirit of the times and not in any way opposed to Parliament and the will of the British public.

¹¹¹ JA 1B/5/83/2, f. 85, John Gale Vidal to William W. Fearon, Spanish Town, 1 August 1834.

¹¹² JA 1B/5/83/2, f. 86, John Gale Vidal to Rowland Mitchell, Spanish Town, 12 October 1833.

By 1833, many absentee slaveholders in Britain had accepted the inevitability of emancipation, and planters in Jamaica who were loyal to the Governor and the British Government helped to promote acceptance of the measure.¹¹³ In spite of the widespread influence of the CCU, men such as Lord Seaford and Samuel Barrett ensured that the local elite were not united in outright opposition to the Government's plans. Indeed, Seaford showed a keen interest in swaying the opinion of the planters towards an acceptance of emancipation, informing his friend, Lord Holland, that

[i]f you have obtained, as seems to be the case, the cooperation of the W.

I. [West Indian] Body in England, Mulgrave would be sure of the assistance of al the great attornies (managers of Estates not Lawyers) who constitute a very large & influential portion of the community[.][sic]¹¹⁴

The West India lobby that Seaford referred to consisted of absentee planters and merchants with interests in the Caribbean. Seaford recognised that many attorneys on the island were employed by such absentees and hoped that these absentee proprietors might therefore persuade local attorneys to support the Governor. This shows how important he perceived transatlantic connections to have been. Indeed, such links appear to have affected the opinions of John Gale Vidal over the issue of emancipation, and British ties helped to divide opinion among local plantation owners.¹¹⁵ The presence in Jamaica of plantation owners who were resigned to the

¹¹³ According to Robin Blackburn, by 1833, absentee West Indian proprietors with seats in the House of Commons were in favour of Government plans for emancipation. See Blackburn, *Colonial Slavery*, p. 457.

¹¹⁴ BL Add. MSS 51818, Seaford to Holland, Montpelier, August 2 1832.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Holt has questioned the degree of influence that absentee proprietors had over locally-based attorneys. However, the evidence provided by Vidal's letters suggest that, rather than being instructed and directed by their absentee employers, such men were reluctant to be seen as being out of step with the spirit of the times, especially by correspondents in the metropole. Of course, in spite of cultivating this kind of self-image, men such as Vidal retained their ideas about deep racial differences and sought to maintain their authority over former slaves in the years after emancipation. See Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, pp. 84 – 87.

inevitability of abolition and who welcomed the generous compensation that would accompany it ensured the passage of the Emancipation Bill through the Assembly.

There was never a clear dividing line between metropole and colony. However, whites in the Caribbean reacted differently to calls for abolition compared to West Indians living in the metropole, and those whites with strong metropolitan links were often more willing than other local whites to contemplate an early emancipation.¹¹⁶ Those with strong links to Britain were frequently wealthy men who were able to afford to spend time in the metropole away from their Jamaican properties. As such, it might be argued that attitudes over slavery coincided with differences of wealth and social background. As demonstrated in chapter 1, sugar planters were a small economic elite and some were richer than others. Of those planters who did accept the idea of immediate emancipation, many were extremely wealthy men. However, other planters and whites in Jamaica appear to have been far more hostile to the idea of emancipation than this small group.¹¹⁷ One possible reason for this was that those who had close and regular contact with enslaved people, such as plantation employees and resident slaveholders with fewer slaves, would have been more directly affected by emancipation than the wealthiest of planters, who spent little time attending to the management of their properties.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ward observes that white men in the Caribbean had slightly different concerns to absentees, since for residents, 'emancipation threatened both material livelihood and racial authority.' See Ward, 'Emancipation and the Planters', p. 117. Thomas Holt makes a similar argument in *The Problem of Freedom*, pp. 81 – 87.

¹¹⁷ Backers of emancipation, such as Seaford and Samuel and Richard Barrett, were certainly members of the social and political elite. Nevertheless, some elite men, such as Hamilton Brown, remained opposed to emancipation, and further research is necessary to shed light on the social dynamics of the dispute over emancipation in Jamaican society.

¹¹⁸ Similarly, bookkeepers and overseers could be especially hostile towards missionaries who preached to enslaved people, because such preaching threatened to undermine their authority on the estates. Wealthy planters were removed from the day-to-day management of the estates and were less likely to feel threatened in quite the same way. See Higman, *Montpelier*, p. 261.

Irrespective of continued local opposition, when the Emancipation Bill arrived in Jamaica, the Assembly could no longer afford to oppose it and they passed the 'Act-in-Aid of the Abolition Act' in December 1833 by 24 votes to 11.¹¹⁹ Circumstances had helped to force this decision on the Assembly and emancipation was a serious setback for local whites. However, by the time it passed into law, the act truly was a compromise between abolitionist radicalism and pro-slavery conservatism. This is reflected in its full title, which described the bill as an act 'for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies; for promoting the industry of the manumitted slaves; and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the services of such slaves'. To the planters, the second two parts of this were of paramount importance, promising a continued supply of labour and guaranteeing proprietors' rights to remuneration for the loss of their slaves. Indeed many planters used slave compensation money to pay off debts and consolidate their financial position.¹²⁰ The Jamaican Assembly also further compromised the measure by omitting some clauses of the act, including new ones that were objectionable to the British Government, and drafting poorly defined rules about the treatment of apprentices. However, as Holt points out, expediency led the British Government to accept these subversions of the initial plan.¹²¹

Such concessions and tampering notwithstanding, emancipation was a defeat for the pro-slavery lobby, but it did not represent the death of pro-slavery arguments and neither did it spell the end of the creole outlook that differentiated Jamaican from British whites. Slaveholders accepted the idea of emancipation, but

¹¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, Hamilton Brown opposed the measure. Richard Barrett and John Manderson, the representatives from St James, were both in favour. See *St Jago de la Vega Gazette*, Saturday 7 December to Saturday 14 December 1833, pp. 2 – 3.

¹²⁰ Ward, 'Emancipation and the Planters', p. 130.

¹²¹ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, pp. 94 – 95.

they did not relinquish ideas and attitudes that they had held during the period of slavery. In 1834, slavery was replaced with the similarly coercive and repressive regime of apprenticeship, and when the apprenticeship period ended four years later, the planters continued to try to control the lives and labour of the former slaves. During the post-emancipation period, planters responded to the reluctance of blacks to work on the estates and the freedpeople's resistance to low wages and poor conditions with arguments that had their roots firmly in the slavery period. They claimed that blacks were lazy, that they did not understand the value of hard work and had not yet attained the level of civilisation achieved by whites.¹²²

Furthermore, these sorts of arguments about racial difference began to find a larger audience in the metropole, especially after 1849, when Thomas Carlyle published his scathing critique of the effects of emancipation. In the 1850s, Anthony Trollope reiterated demeaning caricatures of the black population of Jamaica in his travel writing, but he voiced his admiration for the white settlers' masculine independence and their willingness to voice their belief in racial inequality.¹²³ Therefore, although emancipation marked an important and positive change for the better, the attitudes of white Jamaican colonists showed a marked continuity with the attitudes of the preceding generation.

¹²² See Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*. On local planters' attempts to retain control over their former slaves during the period of apprenticeship, see Henrice Altink, 'Slavery by Another Name: Apprenticed Women in Jamaican Workhouses in the Period 1834 – 38', *Social History*, 26/1 (January 2001).

¹²³ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 209 – 21, 347 – 79.

Conclusions

In October 1833, Mr Mais, a white plantation owner, made a speech to the House of Assembly in which he observed that for ‘a series of years the colonies have been kept in a constant state of agitation and reiterated excitement’. Mais, a member for the parish of St Andrew, went on to confess that ‘feeling how much better certain evil was than continued agitation’, he ‘was glad that that the subject [of emancipation] was now to be discussed’. He promoted conciliation and compromise with the British Government and said to the other men of the Assembly: ‘let us not by ineffectual resistance lose all the chance which remains to us of saving a portion of our property.’¹²⁴ This speech is illustrative of the mood of many planters by the last months of 1833. By this time, many local estate owners were aware that they were in no position to forcibly resist the government in London. The Governor’s dismissal of Hamilton Brown at Huntley Pasture had provided a firm illustration of how easily even the most recalcitrant militiamen could be overawed. Furthermore, by peacefully accepting the British Government’s plans for emancipation the planters would receive a large financial settlement.

However, Mais’ speech also indicates another aspect of the planters’ thinking, which was rarely articulated. By observing how British campaigns for the abolition of slavery had kept Jamaica in a ‘constant state of agitation’, Mais recognised that rebelliousness among enslaved people was helping to make slavery unworkable. He therefore advocated acceptance of the ‘evil’ of emancipation as an alternative to ongoing social unrest and, presumably, the threat of another large insurrection. Of course, enslaved people had always resisted slavery, but the

¹²⁴ *St Jago de la Vega Gazette* Saturday 26 October to Saturday 2 November 1833, p. 2; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, p. 31; *Jamaica Almanack*, 1831, ‘Returns of Givings in’, 1830, pp. 75, 80.

Baptist War represented the largest slave uprising in Jamaican history. Emboldened by the knowledge that their bondage was opposed by groups in the metropole and by some within free society on the island, many enslaved people were prepared to radicalise their own campaign against slavery. In 1832, the audacious bid for freedom made by enslaved people from St James and neighbouring parishes was suppressed in a grisly and bloody fashion, but the insurrection and its aftermath had a wide-ranging and revolutionary impact in both Britain and Jamaica. In Britain, reformers were galvanised, convinced that the rebellion showed slavery to be unworkable. Mais' speech suggests that the Baptist War helped some planters to reach a similar conclusion.

The acceptance of the Emancipation Bill came after a period of unprecedented activism on the part of white men in Jamaica. The threat of emancipation had prompted actions on the part of the colonists that were designed to preserve the existing social order on the island. Above all, the response of most white colonists in 1831 and 1832 was directed at maintaining slavery along with the boundaries of rule that guaranteed privileges and opportunities to free men, especially to whites. These concerns had led local planters to convene meetings, attended by a range of settlers, which broached the threat of seceding from the British Empire, and a commitment to reinstating white dominance had underpinned the militia's brutal reprisals against the rebels in 1832. Such concerns, along with a desire to rid the island of those who did not conform to the standards of behaviour expected of white men, influenced the formation of the CCU, a conservative movement dedicated to preserving slavery in Jamaica and resisting any reforms that might be imposed from Britain.

However, this widespread and popular resistance to reform was counteracted by the loyalty of the large free non-white population to the British Government, which combined with military vulnerability to confirm the whites' position of weakness. During 1832, the freedpeoples' defence of mission property demonstrated their opposition to the extremist pro-slavery and anti-missionary stance of the CCU. These divisions demonstrated the failure of planters' attempts to court free coloured and free black support for their system.

Further divisions were apparent within white society, and the Governor was able to take advantage of the discord that existed between some planters to defeat the CCU. The divisions between those colonists who opposed emancipation and those who promoted a policy of conciliation with the British Government appear to have been affected by links to the metropole. Strong metropolitan links and a concern to be seen as being in step with British intellectual and moral standards apparently persuaded some local planters, such as John Gale Vidal, to accept emancipation with stoicism, although not with enthusiasm.

Just as, at least by the nineteenth century, the planters' pro-slavery argument was a compromise between the defence of a distinctive creole institution and the British values that most colonists held as their own, the settlers' attitudes in the months before the acceptance of emancipation were affected by their commitment to defending a distinctive local social order and their desire to remain British subjects. Even those whites who joined the CCU articulated their loyalty to the Crown, hoping to remain British whilst retaining slavery. When it became clear that this was no longer possible, many whites appear to have accepted the necessity of adapting their approach and striking a compromise with the British Government.

However, the promise of compensation also played a crucial part in convincing Assemblymen and indebted local planters to accept emancipation on the Government's terms. In spite of their apparent capitulation over the issue of slavery, the Assembly accepted emancipation whilst ensuring that many of the privileges of former slaveholders were retained. Compensation and the transitional period of apprenticeship represented concessions to the pro-slavery lobby, and the act passed by the Jamaican Assembly reserved a great deal of freedom for former slaveholders regarding the management of apprentices. Along with the continuation of ideas about black inferiority in the post-slavery era, these factors ensured that emancipation, whilst a watershed, did not mark the dismantling of racialised social and economic boundaries in Jamaican society.

Conclusion

In 1803, John Browne Cutting of Boston, Massachusetts, published a 'Succinct History of Jamaica' as a preface to R. C. Dallas' *History of the Maroons*.¹ This history included a description of the white population of the island that contained many of the stereotypes common to such descriptions from that of Long in 1774 to that of Ragatz in 1928. He described local whites, implicitly referring to white men, as being litigious, ostentatious and extravagant, yet 'eminent for hospitality, distinguished by vivacity, and nobly generous.'² Cutting also wrote that notwithstanding the migration of many white settlers to Jamaica from Britain and return migrations to the metropole for education, there existed 'a cast of character that may be distinguished, and is sufficiently marked in the native white Creoles of Jamaica.'³ He expanded on some of the causes of this distinctively local 'cast of character' among local whites, writing:

Masters of slaves, they are jealous and proud of their own freedom; which is to them not merely an enjoyment, but a dignity and rank. Hence throughout all classes of them, there is diffused and displayed an independence of spirit combined with a certain consciousness of equality unknown to the European communities.⁴

In so doing, Cutting echoed the analysis of a better known contemporary historian, Bryan Edwards, in recognising that it was slavery, the act of riveting the unfreedom

¹ See R. C. Dallas, *The History of the Maroons*, 2 vols (London, Frank Cass, [1803] 1968), vol. 1, p. x.

² Dallas, *History of the Maroons*, vol. 1, p. cxiv.

³ Dallas, *History of the Maroons*, vol. 1, p. cxiii.

⁴ Dallas, *History of the Maroons*, vol. 1, pp. cxiii - cxiv.

of others, that lent Jamaican white society its distinctively local, or creole, character and made it distinct from society in Europe.⁵ Both Cutting and Edwards argued that it was slavery that defined social relations in Jamaica and which augmented independence and assuaged class tensions amongst white men.

With the labour of enslaved Africans, planters produced export crops in the Americas for European consumers, thereby changing the cultures and economies of all three parts of the Atlantic world. Slave-operated plantations therefore defined creole societies in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the New World and the brutal experience of slavery, exploitation and profit shaped the process of creolisation throughout the Americas, especially in Jamaica.

Therefore, on the island, the processes of creating and reproducing political attitudes, cultural identities and the social order all occurred within a framework of unequal power relations, coercion and disenfranchisement. Crucially, slavery defined the boundaries of rule that the planters used to attempt to control and regulate Jamaican society. This elaborate system of social and economic exclusion operated to the advantage of all white men on the island whilst disenfranchising other groups, most notably the enslaved majority. However, a concern with maintaining a racialised system of inequalities meant that free non-whites were also adversely affected. The system of exclusion also operated along gendered lines, which led to the disenfranchisement and close control of white women in Jamaica. Of course, enslaved people resisted this system: most obviously by rising en masse over the Christmas period of 1831 – 32, but also in smaller day-to-day acts of resistance. Free coloured and free black people campaigned successfully for their civil rights and white women, whilst largely denied a political voice, were

⁵ Bryan Edwards, *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols (New York, Arno Press, [1793] 1972), vol. 2, pp. 8 – 9.

sometimes able to circumvent the obstacles placed in front of them to become independent propertyholders.

However, for most of the period between 1800 and emancipation, the system advantaged white men above all other groups on the island. This was reflected by the fact that white men monopolised the ownership of land and slaves. Proprietorship of both land and slaves was a crucial measure of social status in the colony, and the fact that the owners of sugar plantations made up a small minority in local society but owned the largest tracts of land, on which the largest holdings of enslaved people were settled, shows that they were uniquely privileged within white society. Nevertheless, large numbers of whites and free non-whites gained a great deal from slavery, either indirectly through the privileges bestowed on them as white or free people in a slave society, or directly as the owners of land and slaves.

Clearly, by disproportionately profiting white men, this system helped to alleviate tensions between the sugar-planting elite and others within white society, who together formed a largely unified and privileged minority. Unity was further facilitated by the fact that most white settlers were dependent on the sugar estates, either because they supplied goods or services to the plantations or were employed by the planters to work on the estates for a salary. The fact that whites were a small and vulnerable minority, outnumbered by enslaved blacks, also helped to contribute to a sense of solidarity in a community where compulsory enrolment in the militia meant that all white men between sixteen and sixty were under arms.

The prospect of social mobility also reinforced the ties that existed between white men. Most of these men were not wealthy, and the social elite of the island was largely comprised of a few powerful sugar-planting families. However, the

Jamaican social and economic elite was not entirely closed, and it was possible for young white men arriving from Britain to eventually accumulate land, slaves, wealth and political influence. The path from bookkeeper to estate owner was a treacherous one. Success depended on having influential local contacts, luck and, increasingly, the willingness to take huge financial risks. Very few managed to make their fortune in Jamaica, but the fact that it was possible meant that class tensions between white men were alleviated, as poorer white men came to view their social and economic status as a temporary condition.

Social, economic and physical mobility therefore helped to set white men apart from other groups in local society, and upward social and economic mobility was obtained largely by taking advantage of the lack of freedom and opportunity available to others. White men were able to travel to Jamaica and many hoped to be able to obtain the wealth necessary to retire in Britain, but such success was made possible via the exploitation of enslaved people. Some opportunity for social and economic advancement was a possibility for a small minority of enslaved people. Manumissions occurred and free coloured and free black people were able to become property holders. However, the social and economic opportunities extended to free non-whites were severely restricted, which meant that the planters struggled to win their full support.

This system of limited empowerment and exclusions was perpetuated by various local institutions such as the Assembly, parish vestries, local courts and the island militia. The effective operation of each of these required the planters to draw upon the support of non-elite members of free society. White men from outside the planter class played a crucial part in public life as voters, vestrymen, jurors and militiamen. After 1830, changing demographic and political circumstances induced

the elite to include free coloured and free black men in public life, in a largely vain attempt to co-opt their political support.

Throughout the period before emancipation, the major local institutions performed two crucial social functions for the benefit of local estate owners. Firstly, they reinforced sociability and a sense of solidarity between free people, most notably amongst white men. Men met together several times a year for militia reviews and musters, and the eating, drinking and speechmaking that followed events such as elections and militia reviews also brought white men together and reminded them of their shared privileges, purpose and vulnerability. The second social function performed by local institutions was to reinscribe the social hierarchy of Jamaican society. At court days, vestry meetings, militia musters and elections, individuals from the local oligarchy of leading public figures were the most prominent and powerful figures, acting as judges, magistrates, officers and candidates. Militia musters and reviews were also intended as spectacles for the benefit of enslaved people, presenting them with a choreographed display of white unity and military superiority. In these ways, creole institutions helped the planters to strike a finely drawn balance between co-opting local support and maintaining their social and political power and prestige, whilst reaffirming white rule in the colony.

Nevertheless, the planters' ability to control local life through these institutions was always limited by their dependence on British support. As magistrates and militia officers, they exercised considerable power and influence, but these offices were distributed and rescinded by the Governor, who represented the Crown. The ability of the British Government to control the local elite through the Governor was highlighted in 1833, when pro-slavery and anti-missionary

members of the Colonial Church Union, such as Hamilton Brown and Henry Cox, were stripped of their public commissions and replaced by men, such as Samuel Barrett, who were more open to the idea of change and reform. Colonists were also constrained by their military dependency on Britain, a fact illustrated during the Baptist War, when the rebels forced local militia units to retreat to Montego Bay before regular troops arrived in the district.

Colonists also saw themselves as Britons. Richard Barrett described white settlers as English creoles, whilst another commentator referred to his fellow settlers as 'transatlantic Englishmen'.⁶ The use of such terminology makes it clear that white colonists in Jamaica saw themselves as being British subjects who were nonetheless in some ways distinct from their counterparts in the metropole. Echoing Edwards and Cutting, Richard Barrett recognised that it was attitudes towards race that helped to distinguish local whites in this way. Intimately linked to the defining local institution of slavery, these attitudes shaped the boundaries of rule in the colony and contributed to the cultivation of white male solidarity. It was living in and profiting from such a colonial society, in which Africans and their descendants were routinely exploited, that defined the planters and other local whites as creoles.

However, creolisation in Jamaica was complex. As Brathwaite notes, it was a creative process and significant and lasting intercultural creolisation did take place between people of African and European descent.⁷ Planters such as Jacob Graham and Simon Taylor, for example, both had long-term relationships with

⁶ Richard Barrett, *A Reply to the Speech of Dr Lushington in the House of Commons on the Condition of the Free-Coloured People of Jamaica* (London, 1828), p. 48; *Jamaica Courant*, Friday 14 October 1831.

⁷ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 – 1820* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971). See especially pp. xiii – xvi, 96 – 101, 296 – 311.

non-white and enslaved women. However, these liaisons occurred within a social system that left non-white women vulnerable to sexual exploitation by white men, and although many planters showed remarkable generosity to their free coloured children, their wills demonstrate that this kindness only extended so far. Most planters bequeathed their most important assets to other white men, even if this meant leaving property to extended family members living in Britain. Enslaved and free non-white women routinely resisted the strategies of domination employed by their white male partners, often using such relationships to help them to partially overcome their disenfranchisement, and many of the free coloured descendants of local whites were politically at odds with the white elite of the island. These relationships were therefore as much about struggle as they were about solicitude, and show how the process of creolisation occurred within a framework of conflict, exploitation and resistance.⁸ Creolisation did not necessarily entail the development of an autonomous local society of individuals all pulling in the same direction.

Nevertheless, close contact with Africans and their descendants inevitably led to the Africanisation of whites, as Maria Nugent noted in her comments about local speech patterns. However, many planters were uneasy about these relationships. Keen to be seen as conforming to metropolitan moral standards, Taylor tried to prevent Nugent from finding out about his inter-racial relationships and other elite observers presented concubinage as a convenient but imperfect alternative to marriage, made necessary by local circumstances. Similarly, the planters' defence of slavery, their most important creole institution, incorporated metropolitan ideas about benevolence and humanity. Indeed, by the early

⁸ Brathwaite, whilst frequently focussing on the positive and integrative aspects of the process, pointed out this context and dimension of creolisation. For example, see Brathwaite, *Creole Society*, p. 305.

nineteenth century most pro-slavery activists claimed to be against the institution in principle, concocting a conservative argument for gradual reform and organically slow change.

British cultural and intellectual influences therefore affected the ways in which the planters' local identity developed. Planters saw themselves as colonial British subjects, but clung nostalgically to a period when their Britishness was easily reconciled with their status as slaveholders. As Gad Heuman has shown, free coloured people also evinced loyalty to Britain, but were in alliance with the reforming liberal politicians whom the planters so despised.⁹ Retained African ideas and practices continued to define the cultural life of those enslaved in Jamaica, but Mary Turner has also shown how enslaved people adapted the Christian message preached by British non-conformists to inform a rebellious demand for social justice that reverberated back to the metropole, precipitating emancipation in 1834.¹⁰ A variety of influences therefore helped to ensure that all groups maintained and made Old World connections and that creolisation did not necessarily entail a break with colonial relationships. This also led to different varieties of creolisation within the same locale.

The early nineteenth century had been a time of crisis for the planters, during which they faced a range of difficulties. Economic decline affected planters throughout this period, but the main dilemma facing them was how to maintain the local institution of slavery whilst also continuing to enjoy a reciprocally beneficial relationship with the metropole. Local settlers wished to continue to profit from slavery and the racialised and gendered social boundaries that had developed with

⁹ Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792 – 1865* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 83 – 96.

¹⁰ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Kingston, The Press University of the West Indies, [1982] 1998).

it. However, as the institution came under increasing criticism from influential British reformers, it became clear that the colonists would not be able to reconcile their position as slaveholders with their status as loyal British subjects. Simultaneously, slavery and the boundaries of rule that accompanied it were being undermined by the resistance of enslaved people and by the increasingly large free non-white population.

The serious tensions that had characterised the period became especially pronounced between 1831 and 1833. A rise in abolitionist activity in Britain led to an angry planter-led backlash in Jamaica, followed by the largest slave revolt in the history of the colony. During this period of crisis, led by the planters, white men from all levels of society showed their commitment to maintaining slavery and a racialised social order. They showed this commitment in a variety of ways, notably by gathering in parish meetings to express their disgust for abolitionist plans, by brutally repressing the rebellion whilst serving in the militia, and as members of the CCU, they persecuted missionaries and enslaved converts.

However, regardless of local whites' commitment to maintaining their creole way of life, other factors ensured that this period was one of reform. Significantly, the steadfast and continued opposition to the conservative stance of the planters and their allies from enslaved people, free non-whites and British liberals all ensured that emancipation was achieved. Nevertheless, the Emancipation Bill had to be approved by the planter-politicians of the Assembly. The ties of dependency between the planters and Britain were crucial in bringing this about. Dependent on the metropole for military aid and markets for their produce, it was difficult for Assemblymen to reject a measure which had such strong backing from the British Government and public. Most settlers also

maintained strong personal and business links with people in the British Isles, and white colonists' cultural ties with Britain remained strong throughout this period. It appears that these factors, along with the fear of further social unrest, played a crucial part in persuading many colonists of the necessity, if not the desirability, of emancipation.

Whilst many planters remained steadfastly opposed to emancipation, by 1833, others were prepared to compromise, especially since the Emancipation Bill came with financial compensation and conceded to many of the gradualist principles of the pro-slavery lobby. Indeed, whilst emancipation was a vital reform, acceptance of the measure did not entail the end of the planters' conservative creole outlook and their commitment to an unequal social and economic order in Jamaica based upon ideas of racial difference.

As Mimi Sheller suggests, something of the usefulness of the very concept of creolisation might be lost if we take it to be 'simply a kind of cultural mixing'.¹¹ This becomes particularly clear when we consider the fact that, in early nineteenth-century Jamaica, creolisation occurred within a slave society. The social, cultural and economic development of Jamaica, whilst creative and dynamic, was frequently a violent process, and those planters who contributed to this process were deeply implicated in the institutionalisation and perpetuation of systems of brutal exploitation. Recognition of this fact can help to reinject some appreciation of structural inequality to theories of creolisation.

Perpetuating slavery and the privileged social and economic position of white men helped to define Jamaican whites as creoles, as did their relations with non-white women. Planters and other white settlers also maintained extremely

¹¹ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London, Routledge, 2003), p. 195.

close ties of dependency to the metropole, and the influence of British business, family and cultural links also helped to define their specifically colonial creole identity and outlook. These influences encouraged planters to rethink their attitudes towards slavery and eventually contributed to their decision to abandon this defining local institution. However, metropolitan ties did not force the planters to abandon hopes of profiting through coercing labour from Afro-Jamaicans and neither did they cause them to fundamentally rethink their ideas about racial difference. Indeed, the strength of the ties between metropole and colony might help to explain the transfer of many of the planters' pro-slavery ideas into mainstream metropolitan thought by the 1840s.

During the nineteenth century, Jamaican planters' fortunes declined as Caribbean colonies became increasingly less significant territories in Britain's expanding empire. During the nineteenth century, West Indian planters lost the political power that they had enjoyed at the end of the eighteenth century. However, the ideas that they had mobilised to justify slavery did not disappear or wither away and the local ideology that the planters and their allies had developed in their attempts to justify slavery outlived the institution itself and were reconfigured and put to new uses in Jamaica and in the metropole. These continuities require further study and remind us of the continued relevance and importance of Caribbean histories and histories of slavery.

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