

**Poor Relief and Philanthropy in the British West Indies, 1834–1938**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between state-organised poor relief and self-help initiatives in the Anglophone Caribbean, from emancipation to 1938 through three key areas: examining the evolution of British poor laws in colonial societies; analysing applications made by paupers for relief; and charting the development of black-organised charity, social work and mutual aid.

The establishment of laws for the relief of the poor shows us what theoretical concerns were being tackled, as laws conceptualised in Britain for Britain were translocated to her West Indian colonies which had no experience of administering poor relief prior to emancipation in 1834. The evolution of colonial poor relief reveals conflicts between the interests of the planter oligarchy, the clergy and evangelical organisations, and British metropolitan interests represented by the governor. These discussions provide a foundation upon which to situate what is essentially a study of pauper agency. The thesis presents the common survival strategies employed by all classes of persons designated poor, from rural labourers to urban professionals. How did they endeavour to maintain family cohesion and support one another in the face of extreme and pervasive poverty? How did their actions refute elite moral judgements upon their racial characteristics and personal interrelationships, and in what ways does the evidence challenge the officially stated causes of poverty, illness and mortality? From basic sharing of food, to pooling savings, to establishing friendly societies and lodges, the activities of the poorer classes reveal how they understood their position as black colonial subjects and how they utilised the trappings of empire, patriotism and Christian respectability to their advantage, while retaining African traditions out of which they developed a uniquely Caribbean culture and identity.

Scholarship on the lives of the poor in the colonial West Indies has increasingly been concerned with the extent to which the people were able to exercise agency – tools and strategies with which they might resist imperial policies and practices and carve out their own paths in life. The reason for this interest in uncovering agency is the paucity of literature in archives produced by the poor or about their lived experiences, meaning that other methods are needed to ‘speak’ those silences. Scholars have therefore focused on different areas in which to evidence people’s attempts to

maintain autonomy, such as through encounters with the judiciary, petitions to government, and non-compliance with state-sponsored services such as education and health. Presenting letters written by paupers seeking relief goes some way towards addressing the hiatus of first hand accounts and allows a more direct window onto the feelings, interests and strategies of the poor. Alongside the poor, women have suffered a similar silence in archives, yet not only were the majority of poor relief applicants female, but women also outnumbered men as members of friendly societies. Furthermore, black women in the 1930s assumed the role of unpaid social workers establishing children's homes, training facilities and pressure groups to effect change at the government level. Thus, the role of women in the development of the politics of self-determination cannot be ignored.

The study concludes that one hundred years of parish poor relief never went beyond addressing the manifestations of poverty, rather than its root causes. The real impetus came from the working classes themselves, who, aided by contact with the outside world principally through migrations and trans-regional benevolent and fraternal societies, were able to maintain economic survival and social cohesion, and work collaboratively to raise the standard of living, improve educational and employment opportunities and lobby for change. Their organisational structures supported the emergence of trade unions and political activism. Hence, alongside petitions to government and the judiciary, poor relief is established as an arena of resistance to hegemony.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the relationship between state-organised poor relief and self-help initiatives in the Anglophone Caribbean, from the Emancipation Act of 1834 to 1938 through three key areas: the evolution of British poor laws in colonial societies; applications made by paupers for relief; and the development of black-organised charity, social work and mutual aid. It aims to address the question of what communities were doing aside from government sponsored schemes to provide for their own survival and progress, and what impact this had on social and economic development and nationalist aspirations. It also begins to explore the extent to which poor relief as applied in the British West Indies may have shaped relief policy and practice in other parts of the empire or indeed in Britain itself.

This broader way of looking at poor relief inclusive of non-governmental initiatives allows for a fuller picture to emerge of how poverty was experienced and the extent of relief efforts. It allows the voices of the people themselves to be centred, rather than the louder and more commonly accessed voice of officialdom through public records. By reading sources produced by black individuals and communities about their own personal and community ambitions, I will argue that self-help had been a continuous process and that the most influential aspect of the relief of poverty was not state-legislated poor relief but charitable and benevolent organisations led by the people themselves. Broadening our view of poor relief to include non-governmental agencies thus allows us to understand its development holistically, as one aspect impacted the other. This leads to new conclusions about the true extent of self-help among the poor, to which authorities appeared – at times wilfully – oblivious, as they pedalled the narrative of ‘lazy natives’ and focused attentions on ‘promoting industry and thrift’.

It also opens up an avenue for considering the influence of this expanded poor relief upon the development of Caribbean nationalist movements of the 1930s. While it has been recognised that female-led philanthropy helped formalise the field of social work, and that friendly societies – with a majority female membership, if not leadership – acted as proto-trade unions, there has not been much acknowledgement or exploration of how this early organising of women around the relief of poverty and promotion of self-help provided fertile ground for fledgling political parties to garner popular support.



Though these processes are focused upon developments within the British West Indies, if we look further afield at the activities of West Indian migrants, we can see how poor relief operated differently in other regions both within and outside of the British empire. Jamaica and Barbados as case studies can exemplify the diversity of practice within the Caribbean, further complicated by the movement of people between the islands and around the empire and beyond. In particular, the largescale migrations of workers to Panama and Costa Rica from the 1880s onwards can assist in demonstrating the challenges, tensions and commonalities between the different agents, for example, black female activists in Jamaica, friendly society leaders in Barbados, and pan-African campaigners across the West Indies and the diaspora in Central America and the USA, as they formed networks to build up their own relief strategies. The Panama migrations also allow us insights into the varying agendas of different governing agencies, shaped in part by the actions of the migrants themselves, and how this impacted the sort of relief offered to impoverished British subjects and influenced British imperial policies on the relief of its citizens abroad.

Thus, this work also seeks to open up a field of enquiry not much considered: the confluence of ideas and influence between Britain and its various possessions. Not only did Britain imprint its vision upon its colonial societies, but colonial agents and events demonstrably influenced British policy and practice in other parts of its empire, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that this influence extended to British home affairs in various ways. To what extent poor relief in Britain was influenced by the colonial poor relief experiment is only beginning to be explored. The research presented here offers a new avenue of exploration inviting historians of British poor relief to include empire in their analyses to draw parallels between the treatment of the poor in Britain and its nearby colonies as well as those in more distant parts of the globe.

### **The Development of Poor Relief in England**

Provocatively entitled *The Den of Horrors*, chapter seventeen of *The Mysteries of London* describes the poor neighbourhoods of the City with lurid details of starvation, incest and disease, and concludes,

These are the fearful mysteries of that hideous district which exists in the very heart of this great metropolis. From St. John-street to Saffron Hill—from West-street to Clerkenwell Green, is a maze of narrow lanes, choked up with

dirt, pestiferous with nauseous odours, and swarming with a population that is born, lives, and dies, amidst squalor, penury, wretchedness, and crime.<sup>1</sup>

The compelling description strikes a kind of voyeuristic dread in the reader. It is, after all, from a work of fiction. However, George Reynolds was not only writing to entertain. Having experienced poverty himself he strove to highlight the injustices of the rich/poor divide and the system that contributed to the perpetuation of such injustices. That system was the Poor Law Amendment Act, passed in 1834, ten years before Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* began to appear in weekly instalments. Although popular disgust and horror at urban slums and their 'depraved' inhabitants pre-dates the nineteenth century, such ideas solidified during the century with increased industrialisation and rising unemployment putting intolerable pressure on overcrowded working class areas. Certain neighbourhoods were unsavoury, dangerous, seething with all manner of abandoned people waiting to burst forth and menace the good people of the town. Cartoonists depicted the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods in caricature, highlighting physical differences between 'respectable' people and the 'race' of the poor. The perceived disparity in nature as well as the separate spaces inhabited by paupers served to shape policies to the poor but also increased as a result of policies, as we will examine further on. The New Poor Law was conceived in a rural context, so its application to the phenomenon of urbanisation required ongoing change in its outlook and practice towards the thousands of poor people it was supposed to relieve.

The distribution of charity by the church, parish or individuals has been a familiar action in England for centuries, but from a legal standpoint the 43<sup>rd</sup> Elizabeth of 1601 was the basis of a state legislated system of relief to be conducted at the parish level in England and Wales through the collection of mandatory rates.<sup>2</sup> Scholars refer to it as the Old Poor Law, and its key features were relief to supplement wages, provision of work for those who had none, and the right to request relief from one's parish of settlement. Relief offered outside of a workhouse was known as outdoor relief, while relief within a workhouse was called indoor relief. Voluntary aid was tightly interwoven with this, as was the element of personal acquaintance between recipients and donors. As for the Poor Law Amendment Act, or New Poor Law, it attacked the Old Poor Law as wasteful and creating pauperism, and instituted

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<sup>1</sup> Reynolds, George, *The Mysteries of London* (London: Vickers, 1844).

<sup>2</sup> Steven King, 'Negotiating the Law of Poor Relief in England, 1800–1840' *History*, Vol. 96, No. 324, 2011, 410–435, 410.

reforms primarily to curtail outdoor relief, introduce formalised means testing and expand workhouses.

The development of the New Poor Law was the product of complex political, economic, social and cultural changes; but three forces can be isolated: eighteenth century thinkers, Christian evangelical ethics and working class organising. The philosophers, moralists, and political and economic reformers of the eighteenth century conceived opinions about free trade and the Old Poor Law whose influence on the thought and direction of the New Poor Law cannot be underestimated. Among them were the political economist Frederic Morton Eden who in his 1779 *State of the Poor* attacks the wage fund – sums set aside to supplement incomes in times of seasonal unemployment or trade slumps – for draining the country’s resources and not promoting material development. Instead, he wanted a restricted poor law with more friendly societies and working class self-help. Edmund Burke in his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795) went further by calling for total abolition and free trade capitalism, believing that mandatory relief killed the charitable spirit and injured social cohesion. Fear of the poor, and fear of revolution was strong as events in France unfolded. However, he did not subject every institution to the rigorous criticism of the poor laws.

Two other thinkers of the eighteenth century need to be mentioned, especially as their works were reprinted in 1817 and stimulated much discussion about the future poor laws.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Townsend, a clergyman of Wiltshire, in his 1786 *Dissertation on the Poor Laws* called for the abolition of mandatory relief so the poor would be forced to strive in the free market for their own betterment. He took the view that their poverty was their own fault and the fault of the relief system which succoured them, making them lazy and workshy, rather than the fault of any adverse market forces. The second was Thomas Malthus, clergyman and political economist, whose *Essay on the Principle of Population*, first published in 1798, entered a fifth edition. Malthus claimed that population increase far outstripped the means of subsistence, and this ‘law of nature’ as he saw it accounted for the inevitable state of poverty suffered by the majority of mankind.<sup>4</sup> He believed that because the amount of relief was linked to the size of the family, it contributed to population increase and made ‘the supply of

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002) 45.

<sup>4</sup> J.R. Poynter, ‘Eden, Bentham and Malthus’, in *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (University of Toronto Press, 1969) 106-185, 145.

labour exceed the demand for it.’<sup>5</sup> Relieving paupers was ultimately at the expense of deserving labourers, as an increase in prosperity among the poor would correspond to an increase in the price of food, reduce the buying power of real wages, and create a new cycle of dependence.<sup>6</sup> The alternative was to restrict and eventually abolish poor relief so as to act as a check against the inclination to procreate, and relief would be bestowed upon the deserving poor at the discretion of philanthropists.<sup>7</sup> He promoted, then abandoned the idea of workhouses, as the labour of its inmates would devalue free labour.<sup>8</sup>

Others, such as the philosopher and reformer Jeremy Bentham held a more ambitious view of the potential of workhouses.<sup>9</sup> He designed the Panopticon, a prison in which architecture itself would aid the aims – pentagonal buildings with sections for each category of occupant, where the overseer or governor could observe all from a central point. It was to influence the design of future workhouses, though the ideal was never fully implemented.<sup>10</sup>

Malthusian ethics had many followers, including amongst the evangelical movement which greatly influenced the direction of poor laws and relief practices. Brundage describes evangelicalism as ‘a deeply personal, emotionally charged form of Christian belief [which] ...placed stern demands on its adherents’ and was ‘partly generated by the fear of social revolution.’<sup>11</sup> Its mission was to create a more godly society by trying to reform others as well as oneself. Followers might set up Sunday schools, visit the sick, establish charities for children, the elderly, fallen women, etc. all while proselytising in a manner not dissimilar to foreign missionaries. Evangelicalism was not new; charitable giving had been part of the very fabric of poor relief under the old poor laws, and religious motivations had undoubtedly played a part. What changed during the nineteenth century was the expanded influence of the middle classes through franchise and wealth, among whom evangelicalism was common. Adherents championed the values of classical economy – self-promotion and social development through one’s own endeavours – along with the reciprocal relationship between giver and receiver. In other words, the character and behaviour of the chosen recipients

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> J.R. Poynter, ‘Eden, Bentham and Malthus’, 152–153.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 156–157.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 37.

reflected on the giver and could increase their sense of self-esteem or even, as Alan Kidd suggests, pave the way to political office.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas in a rural setting personal acquaintance of giver and recipient was expected, as the relief operation expanded beyond the parochial and the numbers of paupers increased especially in urban centres, having a personal acquaintance with all was not possible. Thus, the means test of the New Poor Law provided a way of rooting out ‘impostors’ and its harsh criteria and treatment served as a deterrent to all but the truly needy, thus maintaining the deserving/undeserving model. This allowed a person to fulfil their Christian and charitable obligations without feeling guilty for not giving to everyone. It reinforced a moral and religious distance from the ‘race’ of the ‘undeserving’ poor. As Peter Mandler explains, ‘This combination of natural theology and political economy influenced the politics of liberal Toryism which gave parliamentary support to the Whig reform of the Poor Laws in 1834.’<sup>13</sup>

Another force exerting itself on the demise of the Old Poor Law and ushering in of the new, was that of the labouring classes themselves. Industrialisation was destroying the fabric of rural life – enclosure, the demise of cottage industries, and migration from one parish to another in search of work and to swell urban populations. The Captain Swing Riots of 1830–1831 saw angry workers protesting, destroying machinery, attacking workhouses and removing overseers and their assistants. They petitioned, cajoled or threatened landowners in order to achieve the required results. In the short term and in some parishes, these activities secured the poor their particular needs but in the long run it augmented fears of revolution in a society already facing political upheaval with the death of the king and the Whig victory in 1830, followed by the parliamentary reform bill which was being discussed in 1831, to be passed in 1832.<sup>14</sup>

It was in this atmosphere and against the backdrop of political and economic events at local and imperial level, war and parliamentary reform, that the Royal Commission into the Causes

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<sup>12</sup> Kidd, Alan, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999) 69.

<sup>13</sup> Mandler, Peter, ‘Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor Law’ *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No.1, 1990, 81–103.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on the Captain Swing riots and the political environment surrounding them, see Anthony Brundage, 57–60.

of Poverty was set up in 1832 to investigate the Old Poor Law to inform the direction of the new.

Centralisation was the key difference between the ethos if not the practice of the old and new poor law systems. The Old Poor Law was parish based and relied on personal knowledge as well as local voluntary contributions. The New Poor Law was central and means-tested, with the avowed intention of abolishing outdoor relief to able-bodied males to encourage them to try harder, with the threat of the workhouse hanging over them and all categories of paupers if they did not.<sup>15</sup> However, the method of relieving paupers continued to be through their parish of settlement, with parishes grouped into regional unions. For example, if a person relocated and fell into poverty, he or she would be relieved at the expense of their parish of origin rather than that of their place of residence, or even returned to that parish.

The political economist Adam Smith, Malthus and several other reformers were against the law of settlement, which in many cases moved a pauper back to their place of origin if in need of relief. In Smith's view it hindered labour mobility, inhibited wage rates and was contrary to human rights.<sup>16</sup> This theme was returned to in 1847 when parliament resolved 'that the Law of Settlement and Removal is generally productive of hardship to the poor and injurious to the working classes, by impeding the free circulation of labour.'<sup>17</sup>

The century was marked by an increase in the institutionalisation and centralisation of services, particularly places of pauper confinement and control such as the lunatic asylum or the workhouse. Changes in public health, education and care of the elderly are some of the provisions that were closely related to the poor laws and developed out of a desire to separate out the inmates of the workhouse.

Debate around the New Poor Law was augmented through the statistical and social inquiry of reformers such as William Booth who founded the Salvation Army in 1878, and Seebohm Rowntree who conducted a series of studies on poverty in York between 1899 and 1951 and influenced liberal reforms. In addition, scandals uncovered at the Andover Workhouse

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<sup>15</sup> See Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report from His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws* (London: Fellowes, 1834).

<sup>16</sup> The laws of settlement are discussed in Michael Rose, 'Settlement, Removal and the New Poor Law', in Derek Fraser (ed.) *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave, 1976) 25–44.

<sup>17</sup> Norman Longmate, *The Workhouse*, (London: Temple Smith, 1974) 21.

fuelled public indignation.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary authors also contributed to popular awareness of poverty, hardship and injustice. Last but by no means least, there was opposition by the poor themselves for whom the New Poor Law and the menace of its physical manifestation – the workhouse – was dreaded and distrusted. There were riots, songs, letters, but also their day-to-day exchanges with the system which influenced the law's trajectory, as will be shown through a summary of some of the historiography of poor relief.

### **Historiography of Poor Relief in England**

Much scholarly output has begun with the Tudor period, and much with the eighteenth century through to World War I, while others have traced the poor laws right up to the development of the Welfare State post World War II. Since this study aims to examine the poor law as it was exported to the colonial Caribbean, the review focuses on the historiography around the pivotal 1834 amendment, from the 1700s to the end of the 1800s. Historians such as Anthony Brundage have approached the topic through a wide lens, providing a chronological narrative about what the poor law was, how it operated, who the key players were, and how it developed and changed over time. This approach does not focus on one geographical area, but elucidates central policies and general facts, while occasionally including evidence of regional variation where appropriate. Thus, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* is an excellent starting point for trying to grasp this immense subject. However, while Brundage acknowledges the importance of social history focusing on the poor themselves, this book is more of a political and administrative history of the rise and demise of the poor laws rather than a 'history from below'. Nevertheless, it presents a clear and lucid account of what the New Poor Law was, how it came into existence, developed, reformed and was eventually abolished, through which one can steer a clear path to understanding the branches of the historiography in context.

Brundage also notes the relationship between the poor and philanthropy, a topic frequently overlooked in favour of official poor relief. This approach is taken up by Alan Kidd who discusses the manifold strategies resorted to by the poor to support themselves, and makes frequent mention of friendly societies as part of the mixed economy of welfare.<sup>19</sup> Friendly

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<sup>18</sup> See Ian Anstruther, *The Scandal of the Andover Workhouse* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

societies were insurance clubs run by the working classes to provide their members with benefits in times of sickness and need. However, Kidd does not address the influence of friendly society activity on the poor law itself, an argument made by Penelope Ismay in her recent book.<sup>20</sup>

Ismay convincingly argues that the absence of a mention of friendly societies in the New Poor Law did not mean it was overlooked. On the contrary it was foremost in the thinking of the poor law commissioners, as it had been in that of the reformers of the previous half century. Eden, Townsend, Malthus and many other reformers remarked on them with approval and saw in them the means of eradicating poverty. Eden believed that inadequacy of wages was due to a want of economy, and made a distinction between the ‘wretched poor’ who relied on relief and the respectable industrious labourer who was a member of a friendly society.<sup>21</sup> Townsend wanted to see the total gradual abolition of poor relief but in conjunction with promoting friendly societies and charity. Malthus too felt that friendly societies could render all the poor independent of poor relief, but that it should be separately legislated so as not to stigmatise it by association with the poor laws.<sup>22</sup> The 1829 Friendly Society Act centralised the administration of friendly societies, followed by the 1834 amendment which consolidated the offices of friendly societies into one post with official oversight, the registrar. This, argues Ismay, paved the way for a centralised poor law.<sup>23</sup> The poor law commissioners, reporting on their plans to establish a Central Board of Control, wrote, ‘The precedent which we have adduced with relation to the control of savings’ banks and friendly societies illustrates this course of operations.’<sup>24</sup>

While on the one hand a broad, geographical survey is a necessary starting point for digesting the scope of the New Poor Law and the general terms under which it operated, on the other hand a narrow geographical or topical approach can come closer to engaging the reader with the lives of the people – though it is hard to generalise the national relief experience from case studies to find what was typical if, in fact, there was a typical. Both methods can evidence different results. For example, the regional case studies of some scholars assert that

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<sup>20</sup> Penelope Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers: Friendly Societies in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–79.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Poor Law Commissioners’ Report of 1834’, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/chadwick-poor-law-commissioners-report-of-1834> accessed 14 December 2020.



the old ways persisted unaffected by the New Poor Law, such as Anne Digby researching in Norfolk, and Michael Rose on Lancashire and the West Riding. Their research shows that relief practices in certain regions resembled closely the practices of the Old Poor Law.<sup>25</sup> However, Karel Williams asserts that local case studies are insufficient evidence of a general continuity of practice, since the evidence shows that ‘employment related relief was virtually abolished by the middle of the century.’<sup>26</sup> What the case studies show is that in spite of the organising principles of the central body, it never fully succeeded in controlling every aspect, and that poor law guardians interpreted it in their own way according to how they saw fit in their own regions. What we have is not a poor law history, but poor law histories, since the object of centralisation was never fully realised, so local studies produce different conclusions about continuity or change, and whether or not outdoor relief for the able-bodied male was really abolished or simply disguised in the statistics under other sorts of relief.

Thus, the inapplicability of local evidence to general conditions should not be seen as a criticism of local studies, rather an admission that the poor laws simply were not applied in the same way in each place. Therefore multiple and/or comparative regional studies are perhaps the only way in which to approach an understanding of the complex workings of the poor law machinery. Peter Jones and Natalie Carter have used letters from paupers writing to the Central Poor Law Commission from a variety of regions to examine how the relationship between paupers and the poor law authorities changed from the start of the New Poor Law to its maturity in the 1870s.<sup>27</sup> The letters are largely appeals against local decisions, based upon old age, widowhood and other ‘deserving’ circumstances. Jones and Carter thus conclude that natural laws were frequently invoked by paupers to demonstrate their entitlement to aid, showing that Old Poor Law practices of relieving people under such conditions continued in spite of the strictures of the New Poor Law. Through their samples, the authors demonstrate how the regional fed directly into the national, as correspondence from all over the country came to the attention of the commissioners. For example, workhouse inmates exposed injustices such as fraud, pilfering and cruelty, and put pressure on the commissioners to take action against those officials they exposed.<sup>28</sup> In the 1860s, at least a decade of increasing

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<sup>25</sup> Anne Digby, *Pauper Palaces* (Boston: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1978). Michael Rose, ‘The Allowance System under the New Poor Law’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1966, 607–620.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Palgrave, 1999) 31.

<sup>27</sup> Peter D. Jones and Natalie Carter, ‘Writing for redress: redrawing the epistolary relationship under the New Poor Law’, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 34, 2019, 375–399.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

complaints forced an investigation which secured the dismissal of three senior officers of the Bethnal Green workhouse.<sup>29</sup>

Over time, pauper agency became less about appeals to natural laws, moral obligations or the spirit of the Old Poor Law, and more geared towards ‘evidence-gathering and quasi-legal interpretation’ and ‘the fulfilment of their rights as citizens and legal subjects’ albeit within a system which was arguably deeply flawed and unjust.<sup>30</sup> Stephen King’s sampling of 2,842 letters from the Midlands unions also examines the epistolary relationship between paupers and officials, with the aim of showing what collective legal knowledge was available to paupers, how they exploited grey areas of the law, and what this tells us about pauper agency.<sup>31</sup> He argues that policy was not only based on the New Poor Law but on local custom and practice, case law and precedent, which paupers demonstrated an understanding of through their letters. Carter and Jones used letters to show how appeals to sentiment and discretion gave way to appeals for poor law officers to be held to account through the law’s own dictates; while King looks at what legal challenges paupers sought to invoke against loopholes in the law.

There is no doubt that the regional facilitates a closer look at the paupers themselves within their communities, and this angle is of increasing interest to historians. Similarly, studies of gender and the poor law are often contextualized within specific areas in order to extract the detail often obscured by a broad-brush approach. For example, Jane Long makes it clear that her decision to position her analysis of working women within Newcastle-upon-Tyne and its rural environs is not to draw conclusions about typical national experiences, though ‘certainly the regional focus at times illustrates broader patterns, and at others exhibits regional differences’.<sup>32</sup> Rather, her aim is to trace the daily workings of contemporary discourses on femininity, work and poverty more clearly through this narrower frame. She wants to revisit the silences and reread contemporary sources and the constructions built upon the silences within them; in short, to have the ‘conversations in cold rooms’ as per the title of her book. Long gives insights into the feelings if not the strategies of poor women through their answers to the relief application questions, pointing to a preference for independence, a keen sense of maternal obligations and feelings, and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen King, ‘Negotiating the Law of Poor Relief in England, 1800–1840’, *The Journal of the Historical Association*, Vol. 96, No. 324, 2011, 410–435.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Long, *Conversations in Cold Rooms: Women, Work and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Northumberland*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1999) 6.

a canny appreciation of cost considerations in guardians' decisions.<sup>33</sup>

The gendered dimensions of poverty and relief are crucial to our understanding of poor law application and outcomes, and it would be rare to find an in depth study of poor relief that that does not mention the characteristic experiences of working women, on whose behalf the majority of relief applications were made.<sup>34</sup> Marjorie Levine-Clark looks at the concept of able-bodiedness, women and the domestic ideal under the New Poor Law using parish records from London, Sussex, and the West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>35</sup> She also looks at intergenerational family relationships, evidencing her arguments with material from the Black Country between 1871 and 1911, giving clear reasons for her selections of these regions.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in Stourbridge there was a steady decline in the local industries, resulting in large numbers of unemployed men moving into poorly paid jobs traditionally carried out by women, thus driving down wages and further impoverishing those women. Levine-Clark argues that the economic downturn led to a greater restriction on outdoor relief as well as a more strictly enforced 'liable relatives' clause of the poor law which was predicated on the assumption of a male breadwinner and female dependants and tended to ignore the centrality of women's wages to family welfare.<sup>37</sup>

Levine-Clark exposes the paradox in poor law thinking: a woman was not a legal person in her own right but a daughter or wife entitled to be supported, yet at the same time a working class woman was expected to work. One of the most disadvantaged groups in such situations was the elderly, who could be denied relief if they had able-bodied sons deemed capable of contributing to their support, even though such support was not a legal obligation, unlike the requirement to maintain one's wife and children. Levine-Clark notes that this obligation was placed on sons rather than daughters. Thus, dependants (women and aged parents) could be refused relief if their husbands or sons did not or could not assist them.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>34</sup> Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'The Gendered Economy of Family Liability: Intergenerational Relationships and Poor Law Relief in England's Black Country, 1871–1911', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2006, 72–89, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'Engendering Relief: Women, Ablebodiedness, and the New Poor Law in Early Victorian England', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.11, No.4, 2000, 107–130.

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'The Gendered Economy of Family Liability', 74.

The models and tenets of the poor laws in the Caribbean closely resembled their English progenitor, but though poor relief was mandated by the imperial government shortly after the emancipation act of 1834, it was not promulgated into law until the 1880s in some colonies and even later in others. Nevertheless, the trajectory bore many similarities. The theories, however, with their inherent class and gender-based assumptions, were further complicated where family structures differed and where race was an intrinsic component of colonial class systems.

Challenges and tensions are evidenced in the application of the poor laws in different colonies and among subject peoples. Colonial office administrators typically moved between appointments around the empire and carried their own experiences and beliefs with them in terms of how they applied the law in one place or another. If historians of the New Poor Law consider its empire-wide implications, then looking at areas within the Caribbean as a form of local practice in a law that was universally applied, the results can feed into understandings of the application of the law and the experiences of the poor in these places as well as other comparable places in England. Given that in England each region and sub-region had different industries, unemployment rates, population densities, etc. which made the application of the poor law different in every locality, widening the study to look at the Caribbean is not a departure but a sensible broadening of the overall view.

### **Historiography of Poor Relief in the Caribbean**

The topic of poor relief in the Caribbean has not been expounded upon at length, but Richard Carter and Leonard Fletcher have written comprehensive articles on poor relief policy and operational development. Richard Carter's research centres the pivotal 1880 Poor Relief Act in Barbados, the 1875 Commission of Enquiry which led up to it, and the outcome which was the notorious 'almshouse test', restricting eligibility for relief to only those who were willing to enter the almshouse.<sup>38</sup> Carter examines how the 1834 Poor Relief Amendment Act in England which stigmatised poverty, was played out in Barbados after 1880, and how the almshouse test propelled the poor law towards a deterrent to pauperism rather than a provider of relief to the needy. The 1880 Poor Relief Act aimed to ensure only the really 'deserving' received relief, and to facilitate self-help. Falling numbers of applicants was celebrated as effective efficiency of the

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Carter, 'The Almshouse Test: Deterring the Poor Under the 1880 Poor Relief Act', *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society (JBMHS)*, Volume XLI, 1993, 140–162.

\_\_\_\_\_, 'The Development of Social Assistance Policy in Barbados since 1875' (MPhil thesis, University of the West Indies, 1986).

This was the equivalent of the English 'workhouse test', and sought to restrict eligibility for outdoor relief and promote indoor relief as the only form available to applicants. This, the applicant was asked if they were willing to enter the almshouse. A refusal resulted in withdrawal of relief.

system rather than parsimony, but as economic depression worsened towards the end of the nineteenth century, poverty, immense suffering and mortality remained high. Carter's concluding sentences, 'But there was as yet no voice to give expression to these concerns of the labouring poor. They had to endure half a century of the Almshouse test before help came,' indicate that he has not considered the voice of the labouring poor themselves, and his final sentence no doubt refers to the Moyne Commission, which was appointed in 1938 to investigate and find solutions to the causes of poverty in the British West Indies.<sup>39</sup> Carter is therefore exclusively focused on government appointed social assistance initiatives.

Similarly, Leonard Fletcher's articles on Poor Relief in Barbados 1838–1900, and 1900–1969 discuss the development of parochial poor relief looking at the reasons for change or stagnation. He concludes that the causes of the failure of poor relief were insufficiency of colonial government provision and lack of enforcement by the imperial government.<sup>40</sup> Understanding the relationship between the colonial and imperial governments allows us to see how laws or actions were approved and fulfilled at the local level, and both Carter and Fletcher's research undoubtedly make valuable contributions to an under-researched field.

However, there are more recent studies considering the topic of local versus imperial government which dissolve the binary position and allow for a complex analysis of effects both within the colonies and the imperial arena. For example, Darcy Hughes Heuring focuses on the Kingston Lunatic Asylum in order to demonstrate the inner workings of colonial rule.<sup>41</sup> Health and medical care were central components of poor relief, and included under this umbrella was provision for the aged and infirm, orphans and expectant mothers. Asylums for 'pauper lunatics' were part of the provision of parochial poor relief, though in some territories they were financed by the colonial government's treasury. As Fletcher previously observed, improvements to the conditions in and outside of pauper institutions were hampered by the failure of the imperial government to compel the colonial governments to act. Heuring confirms this but looks more deeply into the complex dynamics of colonial rule to demonstrate how the failure to improve the

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<sup>39</sup> Richard Carter, 'The Almshouse Test', 157. The West India Royal Commission began its investigations in 1938 and published its findings in the Moyne Report in 1945.

<sup>40</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838–1900', *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 26, Issue 2, 1992, 171–209; and 'The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados', *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3/4, 1992, 255–276.

<sup>41</sup> Darcy Hughes Heuring, '"In the Cheapest Way Possible...": Responsibility and the failure of improvement at the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, 1914-1945,' *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2011.

Kingston asylum was not only felt locally but that debates around it helped shape British imperial policy. This view is taken up by Christienna Fryar who similarly argues that the fallout from the scandal helped define and bolster the concept of ‘moral management’ as yet imperfectly conceived and implemented in Britain.<sup>42</sup> Both studies help us to ‘better understand the ways in which colony and metropole were “mutually constitutive,” as Catherine Hall and other scholars have argued.’<sup>43</sup> Henrice Altink also used the locus of the asylum to examine the effects of racial discrimination, embodied within the ethos of the empire, not only upon patients but also upon the black staff who were frequently passed over for promotion in favour of unqualified white staff.<sup>44</sup> Altink also shows the ways in which black politicians challenged or failed to challenge the racial hierarchies of colonial rule and society in which they found themselves enmeshed.

In addition to discussions centring the providers of relief, there is increasing interest in exploring the level of agency the poor may have exercised over the services offered them, and the ways in which they attempted to exercise control over their own lives. Leonard Smith has written extensively about insanity and asylums in the British West Indies, as well as in England.<sup>45</sup> Some sense of pauper agency comes through in Smith’s descriptions of ‘lunatics’ displaying violent non-cooperation and sabotage, but the pauper voice is not a developed theme of his work. Christienna Fryar has examined the 1860 case of Ann Pratt whose public criticism of the inhumane treatment she received at the Kingston Lunatic Asylum shone a light on endemic failings across colonial asylums, leading to investigations, dismissals and reforms.<sup>46</sup> The outcome was markedly similar to that of the Bethnal Green workhouse inmates in the same decade, discussed above.

The voices of women in pre-twentieth century government archives are rare, and the voices of poor women even rarer. Ann Pratt’s published pamphlet *Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum and What I Saw There* is singular and exceptional, and allows Fryar to effectively

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<sup>42</sup> Christienna D. Fryar, ‘Imperfect Models: The Kingston Lunatic Asylum Scandal and the Problem of Postemancipation Imperialism’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 55, Issue 4, October 2016, 709–727.

<sup>43</sup> Darcy Hughes Huring, “In the Cheapest Way Possible...”, excerpt, [muse.jhu.edu/article/463344#info\\_wrap](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/463344#info_wrap), accessed 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Henrice Altink, ‘Modernity, Race and Mental Health Care in Jamaica, c. 1918-1944’, *Journal of the Department of Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 2, (1), December 2012.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Leonard Smith, *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean 1838–1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> Christienna Fryar, ‘The Narrative of Ann Pratt: Life-Writing, Genre and Bureaucracy in a Postemancipation Scandal’, *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 85, Issue 1, 2018, 265–279.

examine the impact of a text on its intended readership due to characteristics of the writing style and genre.

This is an interesting line of enquiry particularly when examining the written narratives of any subordinate or disadvantaged people. Their levels of literacy and ability to write their own accounts is often questioned, thus the authenticity of the work is called into question. Ann Pratt may or may not have been assisted by an interested party, but she had been educated at a respected school and could therefore be expected to have been able to write a coherent narrative. The importance of textual analysis lies in what it implies about the intention of the writer, in this case to evoke strong sympathy, indignation, and a demand for action. Thus, the focus shifts from what the text tells us about the writer to what we can infer from the writer's words about her knowledge of the intended readership. Pratt's case is not the only instance of where this fascinating line of enquiry can be pursued. One means of doing so is the analysis of letters written by paupers seeking aid, which will be undertaken in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The rarity of primary sources has undoubtedly hindered scholars in their efforts to distance themselves from hegemonic narratives and find evidence of subaltern narratives in the historical record. Juanita de Barros has comparatively studied the development of reproductive health initiatives provided out of parochial or government funds in Jamaica, Barbados and Guyana. Like Smith, De Barros endeavours to show the resistance of patients (poor women) through non-compliance with official midwifery provision. Non-compliance is often explained by scholars who take this approach as the pauper's only tool of resistance. While it may be the case that non-compliance, protest and petitions were the most common strategies, there is yet another form of resistance in the form of seeking means of relief independent of state-sponsored initiatives. These alternative sources of aid were charitable organisations and friendly societies. Of the former, Patrick Bryan's preliminary study of the various religious and secular organisations in Jamaica from 1838 to post-1962 is a useful starting point, though its purpose is largely descriptive rather than analytical.<sup>47</sup> There have been pamphlets produced by the charities themselves but very little scholarly output.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick Bryan, *Philanthropy and Social Welfare in Jamaica: An historical study* (UWI, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> For a study of early to mid-nineteenth century philanthropy in Jamaica see Janet Speirs, *Poor Relief and Charity: a Study in Social Ideas and Practices in Post-Emancipation Jamaica*, (MPhil thesis, University of the West Indies, 2009).

Margaret Jones' work on healthcare in Jamaica 1850–1940, perhaps the only book focusing exclusively on this topic, traces the causes of under-development to chronic neglect and failures of local and imperial governments.<sup>49</sup> However, in a departure from debates around governance, an important development which Jones identifies is the intervention of the International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation which revolutionised Jamaican healthcare between 1919 and 1950. Similarly, from 1890 the Religious Sisters of Mercy (RSM) were formally established in Jamaica but very little has been written about the significant impact of their interventions in education and orphan care beyond their own publications. Women's philanthropy in general heavily impacted the Caribbean colonies' abilities to provide adequate aid, yet it remains an under-researched area. Melanie Newton, for the time period 1790–1850, has looked at how race, class and gender intersected in the way that Barbadian women active in philanthropy and public life were expected to behave so as not to be branded 'unseemly'.<sup>50</sup> Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith undertook a detailed investigation spanning 1900–1944, analysing how women in post-emancipation Jamaica were first ideologically and then de facto removed from economic independence and pushed into the domestic realm through propaganda, land reforms and employment initiatives which privileged men.<sup>51</sup> This is relevant because these decades were also a time of increasing social and charitable activity conceived and executed by black women, including training centres to prepare young women for domestic service.

The 1930s also saw the implementation and growth of birth control movements. On the one hand, birth control was an attempt to limit the growth of the black population, as several statements from local medical officers reveal.<sup>52</sup> As such, many saw it as an attack on black women's bodily autonomy. But on the other hand, black female champions of birth control saw in it the means of freeing poor women from the burden of unwanted pregnancies and empowering them with choice over their reproductive lives. As the effects of birth control could not be measured for at least a generation, studies in this area tend to focus mainly on the 1950s onwards, such as Nicole Bourbonnais' research on reproductive politics and practice in

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<sup>49</sup> See Margaret Jones, *Healthcare in Jamaica Public Health in Jamaica, 1850-1940: Neglect, Philanthropy and Development* (University of the West Indies, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Melanie Newton, 'Philanthropy, Gender and the Production of Public Life in Barbados c.1790–c.1850', in Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (eds.) *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (USA: Duke University Press, 2005) 225–246.

<sup>51</sup> Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944* (Kingston: Sistren Research, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> Nicole C. Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970*, (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 30.



Bermuda, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the origins of this movement were bound up with other social and charitable enterprises initiated by black middle class women on behalf of their poorer countrywomen from the 1930s. Therefore, the early debates around birth control fall within the remit of this study and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

A question which often arises in studies of colonial Caribbean society is the extent to which imperial ideologies were internalised and perpetuated by the subject populations, and the extent to which they were able to retain African cultural traditions. This question is addressed by Brian Moore and Michele Johnson in their study of cultural imperialism in Jamaica 1865–1920, arguing that Afro-Jamaicans adopted levels of resistance and opposition relative to their class status. In other words, the upwardly mobile abandoned Afro-Jamaican practices in favour of anglicised behaviours, while the numerically dominant Afro-Jamaican masses rejected imported Victorian ‘civilising’ ideals. Henrice Altink also addresses this question in her study of African Jamaican womanhood 1865–1938, but disagrees with Moore and Johnson’s conclusions, asserting that lower class African Jamaican women in many instances shared values with the dominant class which may have looked similar but have different origins.<sup>54</sup>

This theme of identity runs through this study, which in part concurs with Altink that lower class Caribbean values could indeed be similar to those of the British middle classes without being considered ‘inauthentic’. But this study will also show instances where people seemed to *consciously* voice sentiments pleasing to elite sensibilities with the intention of gaining a certain advantage. Overall, I will argue that social reformers should not be thought of in terms of degrees of African or British values, but in terms of a uniquely Caribbean culture which emerged organically as a response to the circumstances of place and time, for which they were entirely appropriate.

The question also arises in relation to friendly societies, largely made up of the lower middle classes and fulfilling a multiplicity of social as well as economic functions. Friendly societies were so popular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that histories of the period would be incomplete without reference to their roles and influence. As in England, the commissions charged with investigating parish poor relief in Barbados recognised friendly

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Henrice Altink, *Destined for a Life of Service: defining African-Jamaican womanhood, 1865-1938* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

societies as a means of promoting self-sufficiency, and discussed the desirability of centralising their administration within their report on poor relief which would lead to the poor law being established there in 1880.<sup>55</sup>

Those who have made complete studies of friendly societies have tended to focus on the economic aspects of rise and decline through time, notably Leonard Fletcher for Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St. Lucia and St. Vincent.<sup>56</sup> However, Michael Bradshaw's article on Bermuda focuses more broadly on the influence of friendly society organisation on education, health, welfare benefits and advocacy in order to show its role in empowering the people from the very beginning of emancipation.<sup>57</sup> Howard Johnson on the Bahamas (1834–1910) makes the argument that though the structure of friendly societies was English-derived, the culture was African, reflecting in particular certain societies of the Igbo people whose descendants were numerically dominant in Bahamian society.<sup>58</sup> However, Johnson's main focus is their development and operation, especially their political action. Aviston Downes in his sociocultural history of Barbados (1880–1914) discusses all aspects of working class thrift and mutual aid, including social and political objectives and cultural formations, effectively showing that 'African' and 'British' are nuanced concepts and not mutually exclusive.<sup>59</sup>

Scholars have yet to explore the intersections between poor relief and friendly societies, as well as the influence of migration which enabled friendly societies to tap into wider networks of cooperation. To summarise, the historiography of state poor relief as experienced by its recipients in the British West Indies is limited, particularly for the period from the passing of the poor law acts in the 1880s to the 1930s. Post-1938 the topic is addressed in relation to labour unrest which highlighted the state of poverty and triggered the Moyne Commission of 1938.<sup>60</sup> This study will focus on the 1870s to the 1930s, showing that this was not a period of passivity,

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<sup>55</sup> Barbados Poor Law Commission, 1875, 32, 43.

<sup>56</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'The Decline of Friendly Societies in Barbados', *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1976, 73–85; 'The Friendly Societies in St. Lucia and St. Vincent', *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3/4, 1978–1979, 89–114; 'Some Economic Aspects in the Decline of Friendly Societies in the Windward Islands', *Journal of Voluntary Action Research*, Vol. 6, Issue 3–4, 1977, 191–203.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Bradshaw, 'True But Brief History of the Friendly Societies and Development of Black Bermudian Communities after Emancipation: Black People Seek Pride and Power in a Post-Slavery and Post-Emancipation World, the Bermuda Experience', *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.12, No.1, September 2018, 560–578.

<sup>58</sup> Howard Johnson, 'Friendly societies in the Bahamas 1834–1910', *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 12, No.3, 1991, 183–199.

<sup>59</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880–1914: A socio-cultural history* (University of York, PhD thesis, 1994).

<sup>60</sup> Great Britain. West India Royal Commission (1938-1939), 'Report of the West India Royal Commission, presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, July 1945,' (London: H.M.S.O., 1945).

nor of awaiting the Moyne Commission's intervention, but rather it was a period of intense self-help activity involving the pauper, the lower classes and the middle classes who were all invested in the process of upliftment for the benefit of all black Caribbean populations. Studies on colonial governance reveal a catalogue of neglect, but a focus on philanthropy allows us to look not only at what did not happen but what did happen, allowing for other aspects of relief work to be studied simultaneously for a more thorough investigation into the relief of poverty. This is more useful not only for the historian to understand the past but for contemporary practitioners of health and social policy concerned with current and future development.

While this thesis centres events in the Caribbean, it also looks at migration to Panama to provide an additional layer of richness to the discussion which can open up a further field of enquiry into the influence of the colonial Caribbean on metropolitan debates and processes. Similarly, through the international networks of religious sisters, feminist reformers, friendly societies and lodges, evidence of wider spheres of influence are revealed.

### **Structure and Methodology**

The practical application of poor relief varied between the Caribbean islands and territories to the extent that an in-depth analysis of the whole region would be impractical within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the underlying principle of 'self-help' – a component of the laissez faire ideology which was a founding principle of the English poor laws – underpinned the conception and practice of the poor laws in every colony. It was problematic because within the plantation economies self-help as conceived by proponents of the poor laws was not a viable means of lifting a person out of poverty, as continuous employment was not available and opportunities for social advancement were restricted by race and class. There was a dichotomy between what elites proclaimed: that black poverty could only be solved by their adopting 'continuous habits of industry'; and what they knew to be possible, which was that plantation work was cyclical and in highly populated colonies such as Barbados there was not enough work within the capitalist agrarian economy to support the entire population in continuous work. While the black worker was accused of laziness and lack of thrift, fertile land was not made available on which people could support themselves, and white collar jobs were reserved for whites and a handful of 'coloureds'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In the colonial Caribbean, the word 'coloured' denoted a person of mixed European and African heritage.

This study seeks to uncover the counter narratives to ‘lack of habits of industry and thrift’. I have therefore selected as case studies Barbados and Jamaica, two very differently administered colonies, to enable us to reach conclusions that are applicable in some comparable form across the British Caribbean. Barbados was the only colony to retain its legislative assembly right up to independence in 1967. Thus, the control exercised in the House by the sugar oligarchy in Barbados was never successfully challenged. By contrast, Jamaica’s assembly was abolished in 1865, allowing the British government to legislate directly through the appointed governor and council. These differences accounted for some divergence of poor relief provision and practice, and affected the other territories which were a mixture of locally represented and directly ruled colonies.

Jamaica was among the largest territories with some opportunities existing for making a living through different trades, while the situation in Barbados was diametrically opposed, with intense sugar cultivation leaving little room for other industries and professions to thrive. In Jamaica there was inward migration chiefly from India, while Barbados experienced outward migration throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Both experienced the largest and second largest migrations to Panama from 1881–1889 when France undertook its ill-fated canal digging attempt, and again when US canal construction began in 1904. But the migrants’ experiences of poor relief while in Panama varied according to their governments’ approaches. Comparing these two islands’ experiences of poverty and poor relief both within the colonies and among their migrant populations can assist us to see the ‘bigger picture’ – to move from an inwardly focused study of what was happening within the Caribbean to how what went on outside affected colonial subjects’ perceptions of empire, their place within in, and the potential for future change.

The reason for taking this study up to 1938 is to allow for a fuller picture of how philanthropy shifted from being the domain of white women of the upper classes to that of black middle class women who, among other initiatives, set up Jamaica Save the Children (JSC) in 1938. The 1930s

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<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of Indian migration to Jamaica, see Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica 1845–1950* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1994) and Verene Shepherd, ‘Gender, Migration and Settlement: the indentureship and post-indentureship experience of Indian females in Jamaica 1845–1943’, in Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey (eds) *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995) 233–257. For a discussion of both Chinese and Indian immigration across the British West Indies, see Walton Look Lai, *Indentured labor, Caribbean sugar: Chinese and Indian migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004). For post-emancipation migration from Barbados, mainly between 1861 and 1921, see G. W. Roberts, ‘Emigration from the Island of Barbados’, *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1955, 245–288.

were turbulent years across the British West Indies and for its migrants in Central America due to poor living and working conditions and inadequate pay. Strikes had occurred sporadically, most notably after World War I, but between 1934 and 1938 numerous disturbances flared up across the region causing serious alarm in Britain. The response was the hasty appointment and despatch of the Moyne Commission whose first port of call was Jamaica in November 1938. Because black women had begun to be influential in the field of welfare, their views were sought by the Commission as part of its evidence gathering, and reported interviews were published in the Jamaican newspaper the *Gleaner* in 1938. Though it is not in itself the focus of this thesis, the labour unrest is contextually important as it highlighted through the flashpoint of direct action the deplorable conditions under which people in these colonies lived. The Moyne Commission's report was not published until after World War II, so this thesis rests with the events leading up to its appointment.

Chapter 1 provides the legislative context for what is, primarily, a study of pauper agency. Comprehensive poor laws were established in Barbados in 1880 and Jamaica in 1886, but the groundwork was laid with the passing of two acts in England during August 1833 and 1834. The first was '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.' The second act was the English Poor Law Amendment Act, known as the New Poor Law, entitled 'An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales.'

The Abolition Act which came into effect on 1 August 1834 occasioned the need for a poor law in the British West Indies, and the new English Poor Law was the most accessible model to hand. But the wording of both acts indicates more than a mere coincidental passing of two separately conceived pieces of legislation. The Abolition Act aimed at promoting the industry of the manumitted people, and the New Poor Law was for the better administration of the poor laws. Thus, promoting industry became the clarion call not only directed at the manumitted populations of the West Indies but also to the poor in England, placing responsibility onto the individual rather than any authority. The New Poor Law's objective was to administer a restrictive provision of poor relief, not devise schemes to assist paupers out of their poverty. The two acts were therefore ideologically bound and were to inform the pace and manner of the

development of poor laws for the West Indies which would not be formalised for another fifty years.<sup>63</sup>

The chapter follows the debates which began at Abolition and ends with the passing of the 1880 Poor Law in Barbados and the 1886 Act in Jamaica, setting the stage for an intimate exploration of the experiences of the poor under these acts.

Chapter 2 looks at the case books that the inspectors of poor used to record all applications for relief. This material is richest in the Barbados parish of St. Philip where some paupers' application letters have survived. I sampled 182 applications from the Inspector of Poor's Case Books between 1880 and 1895, by sampling the first page from each half-year period, containing an average of 10–12 cases. I collected all letters found within that sample, and also scanned the volumes in their entirety to find cases which included detailed letters by or about the applicant. I omitted letters which were short notes, for example from a clergyman simply asking the inspector to attend 'a person reported destitute'.

By reading the letters in conjunction with the inspector's notes, one can build up a picture of the applicant's background and circumstances. Their intention was the same in every case – to persuade the Board of Guardians to provide them with relief, but the methods of persuasion varied according to the applicant's social status. Some invited sympathy, some warned of the consequences if they were not assisted, and others merely stated facts. These analyses reveal the applicants' awareness of the likely judgement of their characters by the poor law authorities, and the strategies they used to exploit such judgements for their benefit. Although I found no letters in other parishes, I have included the St. Michael parish Inspector's Case Books to enable comparison with an urban parish where different circumstances prevailed.

In Jamaica where no letters have survived, I have used data from the less detailed case notes to quantitatively support conclusions drawn from the Barbados cases. A far richer evidence source in Jamaica is the Report of the Commission on Poor Relief (1879), which includes detailed appendices of interviews with clergy, planters, magistrates, poor law officials, businessmen and

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<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of how race and class were mutually constructed in relation to the development of poor relief in both metropolitan and empire spheres, see O'Connell, Anne, 'Building Their Readiness For Economic "Freedom": The New Poor Law and Emancipation', *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, Vol. 36, Issue. 2, 2009, 85–103.

shopkeepers on the state of poor relief and the condition of the juvenile population. By contrast, Barbados' commission of 1875 was far briefer, with very little supporting evidence from respondents. Thus, between the two colonies, there is sufficient information to build an accurate picture of the experience of poverty and relief.

Community support and activism were vital to the survival of the poor and there was an informal but deeply engrained network of co-dependence not only amongst paupers but between classes as well. Women might supplement their salaries by fostering children from poor families, since women's employment prospects beyond service or needlework were severely limited.

Chapter 3 looks at the causes and extent of urban women's poverty, and how urban philanthropy was curtailed by the Poor Law in Barbados, but flourished in Jamaica with government support. The imperial agenda was to establish and maintain industrial schools to facilitate and perpetuate agricultural wage labour. The plan faced resistance from parents who had different ambitions for their children and did not want to send them to school to learn how to labour in the fields as they themselves had done. For the plan to work, colonial governments needed the cooperation of black women who were willing to be trained as teachers, hitherto an exclusively male dominated profession. This is one way in which women became co-opted into the imperial 'civilising mission', while also retaining their own personal career ambitions and aspirations for lower class mobility.

Chapter 4 charts the development of charitable institutions such as orphanages, which began with religious missionaries in the 1850s and diversified into the secular arena. By the 1930s, middle class black women were challenging the racial hierarchies within this field which was formerly the exclusive domain of wealthy white women. The chapter discusses women as reinforcers of patriarchy and also catalysts for reform, arguing that the decolonisation process began with women's social mobilisation. Greater opportunities for travel exposed women to different ideas, such as movements for racial equality, women's rights and suffrage, and pan-African ideologies, all of which impacted their world view and their work back in the Caribbean.

Chapter 5 returns to the topic of legislation and government accountability. A major theoretical question which unfolded at the turn of the century in England was who was morally responsible for the plight of the poor. The notion of government responsibility was gaining traction, since the problem was too vast to be solved by private charity alone, and the expanded working class

electorate expected government solutions.<sup>64</sup> While these reforms and debates progressed within the metropole, the sudden catastrophe which struck the West Indian workers in Panama highlighted the disarray of extra-territorial relief. By following official correspondence from notification of the bankruptcy of the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique (French Panama Canal Company) in February 1889 to the resolution of the crisis in June 1889, this chapter highlights the divisions between government departments – the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Treasury and the Admiralty which delayed the relief effort until the people's slender resources were exhausted and starvation ensued.

Though this chapter takes us back to the nineteenth century, it is important to reveal the attitudes of authorities to colonial subjects abroad because this served to highlight to the migrants the injustices under which they were being governed. A similar realisation would occur among migrants to the US canal zone circa 1905, many of whom remained permanently in Panama but did not enjoy the rights of Panamanian citizenship, nor could they rely on the protection of the British or colonial governments. World War I veterans returning to the Caribbean had also experienced unequal treatment while serving abroad, and these interactions fuelled the discontent which would lead ultimately to decolonisation, but which also served to strengthen benevolent and fraternal organisations.

The final chapter discusses these organisations through which the people strove to help themselves financially and lobby for rights. Although females were proportionally dominant in friendly societies, the leadership was male, so examining the activities of friendly societies complements the chapter on female-led organisations and helps build a rounded picture of how the message of fraternity, unity and self-help was spread across the West Indies and the diaspora.

Overall, the study will show the complexities of aid given the different agencies involved, and how development was therefore limited until colonial subjects were able to take charge of relief independent of government sanction. This local activity, a collaboration between the labouring and middle classes, rather than any imperial policies was the real driving force behind change. As much of this work was carried out by philanthropic and socially conscious women in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who organised cooperatives and self-help initiatives, this study

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<sup>64</sup> See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London A Study of the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).



theorises that nationalist movements were in part enabled by women's organising around social and economic development. In particular, it is my suggestion that the twentieth century decolonisation process began, at least partially, with women's social mobilisation around welfare.

## CHAPTER 1

### **The Poor Laws: from theory to implementation, 1839–1880/86**

In 1839 the colonial office circulated an Order in Council for its Caribbean colonies to implement poor laws.<sup>65</sup> However, it was decades later under continued government pressure that formal and comprehensive poor laws were enacted. In this chapter I will argue that the poor laws, because of how they were conceived and executed, were doomed to failure and would never adequately provide for the aged and sick or for the able-bodied unemployed. To understand why this was the case, the chapter provides an overview of other laws enacted immediately after emancipation, establishing the clear theoretical thread which bound them and which underpinned the framing of the poor laws.

Developments in poor law policy in England, perceptions of the black labouring population and the role of women, and the structure and workings of colonial governments and parochial administration will all assist us in understanding why few if any changes occurred at ground level and why reforms had little effect on the people they were intended to assist. This sets the stage for an intimate exploration of the lives of poor relief applicants after the poor laws came into effect in Barbados in 1880 and Jamaica in 1886, when more written material pertaining to poor relief was by law generated, enabling an understanding of the behaviours and strategies employed by poor people, and providing a deeper insight into their lives and agency.

#### **Limiting freedom: post-emancipation acts**

The main anxiety surrounding emancipation from the point of view of colonial authorities and planters was that former slaves would cease to work the estates, leading to a serious labour shortage with damaging economic effects. Downing Street issued a circular in response to these expressed fears, which outlined the policies to be pursued to minimise the changes that would inevitably follow emancipation and try to ensure that order was maintained and that mercantile interests would be safeguarded.<sup>66</sup> The issuing of Orders in Council were measures deemed urgent due to the early ending of apprenticeship and perceived need for laws to ensure public order amid fears of rebellion and disturbances. Thus, the first three Orders concerned the rights and

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<sup>65</sup> CO 854/2, 1839 Circular Despatches.

<sup>66</sup> CO 854/2, 1839 Circular Despatches.

duties of Masters and Servants, the punishment and suppression of Vagrancy and the Marriage Law. These were followed soon after by laws to establish or expand a Militia and a Police Force and to suppress the Occupation of Crown Lands. They were sent from Lord Glenelg, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with instructions for their speedy implementation.<sup>67</sup> Orders in Council had the force of law in the crown colonies (those ruled directly from Britain), while allowing for the local variations and amendments that each governor and legislative council might consider prudent. Accompanying despatches were sent to specific groups of colonies by virtue of their joint administration or similar administrative structure. In September 1838 several despatches were sent jointly to British Guiana, Trinidad, Saint Lucia and Mauritius, these being among the earliest colonies governed by direct crown rule, and thus obliged to implement the Orders as directed.<sup>68</sup> Those colonies which were governed by local assemblies accepted Orders as guidelines for the development of legislation which would be locally debated, voted upon, and bills drawn up for final approval. This lengthier process was prolonged further in the event of opposition from local oligarchs to particular pieces of legislation, and/or their resentment of colonial office interference in local affairs. The relationship required diplomacy, as the British government relied on the colonial governor to persuade the legislature to incorporate the Orders into law.

When it came to control and punitive legislation the crown colonies of Trinidad, British Guiana and St Lucia all promptly implemented the Orders to establish and regulate a police force and to punish idle and disorderly persons through anti-vagrancy legislation.<sup>69</sup> Tobago, though not a crown colony, followed the lead of its larger neighbour and was commended by the Colonial Office for its adoption of the Vagrancy Order.<sup>70</sup> Those with their own assemblies (Barbados, St. Kitts, Antigua and Jamaica) were no less assiduous in legislating to pre-empt the anticipated labour shortage and civil unrest after emancipation. Antigua legislated to appoint rural constables and amend and continue the police force, and St. Kitts to punish larceny and prevent the 'clandestine deportation of labourers', but Barbados was by far the busiest in legislating to maintain the status quo in the coming free society.

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<sup>67</sup> Parliamentary Papers, 1839 (107-1) vol.35. 337p Glenelg to colonies (F) 4–6: Copy of a Circular Despatch addressed by Lord Glenelg to the Governors of British Guiana, Trinidad, and St. Lucia, and Mauritius.

<sup>68</sup> The unification of British Guiana in 1831 and rule by Orders in Council led it to be considered a crown colony for administrative purposes, though its political structure differed in many ways.

<sup>69</sup> CO 300/50 Blue Books, Trinidad, 1838 & CO 300/51 Blue Books, Trinidad, 1839. CO 116/207 Blue Books, Demerara & Essequibo, 1838 & CO 116/208 Blue Books, Demerara & Essequibo, 1839. CO 258/34 Blue Books, St. Lucia, 1838 & CO 258/35 Blue Books, St. Lucia 1839.

<sup>70</sup> CO 287/8 Tobago Acts, MS. No. 304 of 1838 and No. 321 of 1839.

In 1838 Barbados passed the following six acts: an act for ‘the better governing of the island and preventing bastardy’, an act to ‘punish and suppress vagrancy’, to ‘prevent and punish tumults and riotous assemblies’, to ‘appoint rural constables’, to ‘consolidate the militia’, and to ‘regulate the hiring of servants and ease wage recovery by them.’<sup>71</sup>

The following year Antigua legislated to prevent and punish larceny, Jamaica to punish idle and disorderly persons, ‘restrain and punish combinations amongst masters and servants’ and to organise a police force.<sup>72</sup> But Barbados again was the most active, enacting seven laws including the appointment of additional police magistrates, amendments to the militia and police laws, summary redress for trespass, an amendment to the marriage laws, and two laws to hinder the emigration of labourers.<sup>73</sup>

The evidence indicates that variations in content and timing of laws between the colonies were not to do with the different political systems but with the populations. Nigel Bolland's article on the formation of peasantries points to Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad as territories where peasantries were able to form, not on account of a lack of legislative zeal to deter them, but due to the patterns of movement between plantations, and peasants' ability to farm land on their own account.<sup>74</sup> Barbados, St. Kitts and Antigua fell at the opposite end of the spectrum, due to the monopoly of fertile land under the control of sugar planters and consequently more people seeking labour.<sup>75</sup> This reduced the bargaining power of labourers and allowed planters to keep wages low by taking steps to prevent what was termed the ‘clandestine deportation of labourers’ but was in fact meant to prevent free movement of persons to other colonies where labour was in demand and higher wages offered. Vagrancy and other public order ‘transgressions’ were prosecuted more vigorously in those colonies.

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<sup>71</sup> CO 33/49 Blue Books, Barbados, 1838.

<sup>72</sup> CO 10/23 Blue Books, Antigua, 1839; CO 142/53 Blue Books, Jamaica, 1839.

<sup>73</sup> CO 33/50 Blue Books, Barbados, 1838.

<sup>74</sup> O. Nigel Bolland, ‘Systems of Domination after Slavery: the Control of Land and Labour in the British West Indies after 1838’ in Beckles, Hilary and Shepherd, Verene (eds.) *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996) 107–123.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of different scholarly opinions on population densities and the formation of peasantries, see William A. Green, ‘The Perils of Comparative History: Belize and the British Sugar Colonies after Slavery’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1984, Vol.26 (1), 112–119; and O. Nigel Bolland’s ‘Reply to William A. Green’s “The Perils of Comparative History”’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1984, Vol.26 (1), 120–125.

The Orders in Council were issued in September 1838, one month after the emancipation declaration, and by the early 1840s all the colonies had promulgated them into law along with punitive laws such as summary prosecutions for larceny and trespass. The Masters and Servants Act was deemed crucial as the terms upon which labour was offered for wages was new. Planters needed a secured workforce with tenancies tied to labour; labourers wanted better wages, secure tenancies or their own land, and the freedom to withdraw their labour as and when they might wish and to seek labour elsewhere for better wages, or to labour on their own account. The Order covered not only plantation labour but any task for which wages were offered. Although labourers tried to exercise their right to bargain for wages, as discussed by Swithin Wilmot in his article on wage conflict between 1830 and 1840, the Masters and Servants Act criminalised the breaking of work contracts and judges' subjective biases invariably favoured the masters.<sup>76</sup> This and other acts to regulate the duties of apprentices anticipated these conflicts and aimed first and foremost to protect the rights of the master against the 'caprices' of the servant, whose position would always be more tenuous.<sup>77</sup>

The Vagrancy Order fulfilled the joint function of suppressing public meetings where exchanges of ideas and grievances could take place and discontent turn into planned 'disturbances'; and also deterring labourers from quitting their neighbourhoods in search of better paid work elsewhere. In spite of Glenelg's stating the clear difference between a vagrant and someone travelling in search of work, he admitted to some ambiguity of definition, and there would be many recorded cases of people being taken up for vagrancy while travelling about their lawful business.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the first bills were rejected by the British government due to objectionable clauses such as the extension of the legal definition of vagrancy, the extensive powers given to police and even citizens to arrest suspects with little or no evidence, and the fact that the onus of proving innocence was upon the accused.<sup>79</sup> Even under the amended bills, 'innocuous activities

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<sup>76</sup> Wilmot, Swithin, 'Emancipation in Action: Workers and Wage Conflict in Jamaica 1838–1840' in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Freedom*, 48.

<sup>77</sup> For the development of the Masters and Servants Act in the Caribbean see Mary Turner, 'The British Caribbean, 1823–1838: The transition from slave to free legal status', in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds.) *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 303–322. And for a comparison of its reform around the British empire see Mandy Banton, 'The Colonial Office, 1820–1955: Constantly the Subject of Small Struggles', in *Ibid.*, 251–302.

<sup>78</sup> PP, Papers Relative to the West Indies, Circular Instructions, 1839: 'If by the word Vagrancy be understood the moving from place to place of persons in search of labour, or actuated by any other useful or blameless motive, the prevention of it would be entirely foreign to the views of Her Majesty's Government.' Schedule F, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, *Commonwealth Caribbean Law and Legal Systems* (Routledge-Cavendish: Oxford, 2008) 23.

such as loitering were criminalised', and the balance was still stacked against the accused and clearly aimed at keeping people at labour.<sup>80</sup>

Operating in conjunction with the Vagrancy Order was the Order to Prevent the Unauthorised Occupation of Crown Land sent to the crown colonies in October 1838.<sup>81</sup> It is a subject that has understandably received great attention in the historiography of agricultural economies. Those colonies with sparse populations and sufficient labour were less assiduous in the prosecution of squatters than those in which the supply of cheap labour was very high and where urban police force and rural constables were establishment to oversee and enforce the new public order. The labour shortage notwithstanding, it was the availability of land and not any apathy on the part of authorities that enabled a peasantry to establish itself on crown or purchased lots in Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana.<sup>82</sup>

These hurried enactments immediately after emancipation indicated a nervous plantocracy quick to take steps to secure their future interests against any possible dissension and against the interests of the free population. The combined effect of these pieces of legislation upon the labouring classes was deeply oppressive. It did not allow the space needed to negotiate wages or work patterns. It stifled peasant agriculture and entrepreneurship and placed restrictions upon labour mobility – a result that Glenelg had warned against in his 1839 despatch. Yet, minor changes notwithstanding, vagrancy legislation remained virtually unaltered in the majority of colonies into the twentieth century. Furthermore, the Vagrancy Order established the relationship between vagrancy and poor relief,

...every person being able...to maintain himself or herself, or his wife, or his or her children or child...who shall wilfully refuse or neglect to do so and thereby become burthensome...upon any parochial or other public funds set apart for the relief of the poor...shall be deemed an idle and disorderly person.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> David Trotman, *Crime in Trinidad: conflict and control in a plantation society, 1838-1900* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986) 208, 21.

<sup>81</sup> PP, Papers relative to the West Indies, Part I: Circular instructions, 1839, Schedule K., 24.

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of further reasons for the success or failure of peasant settlements, see Bolland's comparison of Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados with Belize. Nigel Bolland, 'Systems of Domination after Slavery' in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Freedom*, 111.

<sup>83</sup> PP, 1839 (107-I) vol.35 – Circular Despatch, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1838, Enclosure 2, in (F) 7<sup>th</sup> September 1838.

By this Order, not to work to maintain one's family was an act of vagrancy and the implication was that only someone with no relatives and clearly incapacitated through sickness, disability or age could be eligible for parish relief. The point at which infirmity rendered a person incapable of performing any sort of work was a question open to interpretation, and which led some poor law guardians to err on the side of caution. Establishing wilful neglect or distinguishing it from not being able to find work or sufficient work to support the family was not straightforward. British Guiana and Trinidad had a labour shortage, and this coloured their officials' views of why a person would choose not to labour for wages, and how such a person ought to be deterred. In response to the 1839 despatch, acting governor of Trinidad Colonel Mein wrote,

There is no part of the world which stands in less need of any provision for the poor than the island of Trinidad. The wages of the lower classes are extremely high, the demand for labour very great, and their supply exceedingly scanty, so that no difficulty exists to obtain livelihood; ... the people of this island have no industrious habits....all legislative enactments should be made with a view to create industry, and a spirit of accumulation, to provide against want ... every legislative enactment which tends to lead the working classes of this colony to look for support to any other source but themselves, ... should be approached with great caution.<sup>84</sup>

The accusation of 'no industrious habits' and no 'spirit of accumulation' were common and oft repeated sentiments common at the time towards blacks. A similar attitude of blame had already formed the basis of poor law reform in England in 1834, more specifically that legislation ought to deter 'pauperism' (dependence) and that relief to able-bodied persons would encourage it. It was into this spirit of *laissez faire* that the Marriage Law was sent to the colonies. Though it may appear to have nothing to do with the concurrent control legislation, it should be properly understood as a measure to regulate affiliation and population movement. Solemnising existing unions could save the parish money by establishing kinship and encouraging people to bind themselves in traditional family units legally responsible for the care of one another. While it is true that unmarried parents (along with married) were made liable for the support of their children and vice versa, marriage cut out the arduous process of identifying and pursuing putative fathers. It also explains a further possible reason why the order for establishing a poor law was delayed. First, promote marriage to oblige husbands, wives, children and grandchildren

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<sup>84</sup> PP, 1839 (107-I) vol.35 – Trinidad No.139, Despatch, March 1839.

to support their poor relatives out of their small wages. Second, prosecute transgressors through a stringent vagrancy law, and the effect was to close down avenues of eligibility for poor relief. Then, and only then, could a poor law be introduced to cater for a minority of unfortunates without fear of encouraging pauperism.

### **The Poor Law Order of 1839**

The colonial secretary concurred with Trinidad's governor on the point of the abundance of work and small needs of labourers, and consequently that the need for a poor law was not very urgent.<sup>85</sup> This was a broad and clearly untrue generalisation of West Indian experiences, in view of the vastly different opportunities available and wages obtainable in the different colonies that may not have been apparent at such a distance. The report of the Poor Law Commissioner for England whose opinion had been sought before sending the final Order to the colonies recommended the principles of the Irish Poor Law model of workhouse relief only, ensuring that the condition of a relief recipient was rendered less desirable than the poorest labourer, and subject to inspection and control.<sup>86</sup> While Glenelg lauded the principle, he felt in the West Indies it would only be a deterrent on the statute against a future state of pauperism that did not at that time exist and that the chief recipients would be, as the commissioner also believed, orphans, the chronic sick or disabled without relatives, and aged ex-slaves who had had no opportunity to save for their future.<sup>87</sup>

It was commonly believed that an able-bodied man could always find subsistence and that if he was out of work it was entirely due to his laziness rather than a lack of opportunity or insufficient wages. This might have proved true if Glenelg's vision of social mobility had been allowed to develop unhindered. He envisioned the free movement of labourers within and between territories, following the ebb and flow of supply and demand.

provided no obstacles be placed in the way of labourers emigrating to those colonies where the demand for labour is highest, then for years to come all able and willing persons will be secured adequate subsistence.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Schedule R, 36.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 'The Final Order'.



This was not to be. Planters would not allow wages to be driven up in this manner. In Antigua and Barbados, they held onto their labourers with excessive zeal, enacting to prevent their 'deportation'. The result was overpopulation and competition for work which planters exploited to keep wages below subsistence levels. Poverty was therefore rife and severe and the need for poor laws more pressing than ever. In England, although the aversion to assisting the able-bodied undoubtedly exacerbated hardship at times when industries were threatened, no legislative obstacle to the movement of free persons seeking work existed.<sup>89</sup> In the West Indies, however, the Vagrancy Law already had the potential to criminalise persons moving about seeking labour, while anti-immigration laws prevented them from moving between neighbouring colonies in search of work.

At this stage, impoverished labourers unable to make ends meet were not considered to be among the deserving poor. Poor relief was only designed for the sick, aged, orphans and destitute without friends. This is reflected in the low amounts spent on poor relief from the outset. For example, in 1838 Demerara and Essequibo spent £357 on poor relief, which was 0.38% of a total annual spend of £94,064. St. Lucia spent £113, or 1.09% of a total of £10,352.<sup>90</sup> In both these colonies, 'Funds for the Relief of the Poor' came out of the treasury and not parochial spending. Trinidad spent just £8,17/8 on coffins and graves for the poor. £1578 was the annual total house tax collected and spent, which is 4% of the total annual spend of £38,339. A proportion of the house tax may have been spent on the poor, but without figures to indicate how much or how little, the figure of 4% is probably generous.<sup>91</sup> Both Demerara and Trinidad only made available very limited funds for the maintenance and burial of paupers. Trinidad's was specifically for emergency medical relief but disbursement of funds was erratic, and only those in the direst need – i.e. at death's door were assisted.<sup>92</sup> In 1839 the Port of Spain municipality spent £532 on 'charity' but no detail was given about the type of charity.<sup>93</sup> In 1838 Demerara spent £1,142 on district constables, a staggering £10,567 on the establishment of a new police force, but just £357

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<sup>89</sup> Great Britain, *An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales London* (George Eyre and Andrew Spottiswoode, 1834).

<sup>90</sup> Blue Books of Statistics for Trinidad, Demerara and Essequibo, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Barbados, 1838.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> David Trotman, *Crime in Trinidad* (1986) 108.

<sup>93</sup> CO 300/51 – Trinidad, Blue Books, 1839.

in aid of the poor's fund,<sup>94</sup> while Berbice's Board of Poor's Fund expenditure was a meagre £127.<sup>95</sup>

The patchy returns show that some colonies set aside very small sums specifically for pauper services while others may have used a proportion of their revenue for the poor but had as yet no proper system for accounting for these funds. In Table 2 below we can clearly see parochial systems in place in Jamaica in 1838, as six out of the nineteen parishes specified pauper services, a further four/five did not provide a breakdown of expenditure, while the remaining eight parishes did not appear to have spent anything at all on the poor. Antigua too had a developed parochial relief system in place and spent a much greater percentage of parochial revenue on the poor than Jamaica. Thus, a pauper would fare very differently from parish to parish, as well as from colony to colony; and this lack of uniformity of system was something that the colonial office was keen to eradicate, as later commissions of enquiry would show. Table 1 shows the proportion of annual revenue expended on paupers in each parish of Antigua and Jamaica:

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<sup>94</sup> CO 116/207 – Demerara and Essequibo, Miscellanea, 1838.

<sup>95</sup> CO 116/186 – Berbice, Miscellanea, 1839.

Table 1

Antigua 1838	Jamaica 1838
<p><b>St. Peters</b>            13 paupers @ 3d/day: £59            Total spending: £580  <b>10.2%</b></p>	<p><b>Portland</b>            Paupers: £101            Total spending: £2,565  <b>3.9%</b></p>
<p><b>St. Georges</b>            5 paupers: £45            Total spending: £450  <b>10.0%</b></p>	<p><b>Port Royal</b>            Paupers: £135            Total spending: £1,658  <b>8.1%</b></p>
<p><b>St. Mary's</b>            Paupers: £106            Total spending: £519  <b>20.4%</b></p>	<p><b>St. Andrew</b>            Paupers: £216            Total spending: £4,894  <b>4.4%</b></p>
<p><b>St. Paul's</b>            Paupers: £287            Total spending: £699  <b>41.0%</b></p>	<p><b>St. Elizabeth</b>            Paupers: £240            Total spending: £5,394  <b>4.4%</b></p>
<p><b>St. John's</b>            £983            Total spending: £2,029  <b>48.4%</b></p>	<p><b>Westmoreland</b>            Paupers: £520            Total spending: £14,810  <b>3.5%</b></p>
<p><b>St. Phillips</b>            Paupers: £86            Total spending: £486  <b>17.7%</b></p>	<p><b>St. James</b>            Transient poor: £1080            Burial: £36  <b>Total: £15,425</b>  <b>7.2%</b></p>

Source: Blue Books, Antigua, 1838. Blue Books, Jamaica, 1838.<sup>96</sup>

It is not clear how many paupers were being relieved in each parish except for St. Peters, nor whether the amount spent on burials in St. James represented an additional cost or whether the other parishes simply included it within their figures for total spend. While satisfying colonial office requirements to provide statistics of poor law expenditure, the usefulness of the information is hampered by the lack of detail. A further eight Jamaican parishes appeared to have spent nothing at all, St. Thomas in the East was 'unstated,' and the parishes of Clarendon, Manchester, Kingston and Trelawny only provided figures for total annual spending, without a breakdown for paupers.

<sup>96</sup> CO 10/22 Blue Books, Antigua, 1838. CO 142/52 Blue Books, Jamaica, 1838

Overall, gaps in the returns across the colonies further suggest reluctance to comply with colonial office directives. Information for St. Kitts was not supplied despite repeated requests, and as for Barbados whose assembly was to have an ongoing thorny relationship with colonial authorities and a reputation for recalcitrance, the governor could only state that 'there is no possibility of making a correct return of the Local Revenues, as either the Right of the Colonial Secretary to demand such a return is not recognised or his requests are disregarded.'<sup>97</sup> By 1839 Barbados had begun to comply, and all colonies eventually accepted their obligations to submit fully completed annual blue books of statistics, but the resentment felt by parish authorities towards both central and colonial governments at what they deemed interference in parochial affairs remained as we will see further on. Going forward, poor relief was patchy and did not cater for all the poor. The able-bodied unemployed were only included in exceptional cases of temporary relief due to sickness. There was no uniformity of practice between colonies and none even between parishes in the same colony. Orders in Council were not sufficiently robust in detail, and the mere fact of their being law did not guarantee that they would be workable.<sup>98</sup> For this reason the colonies managed to 'muddle through' for the next few decades without any real commitment to relieving poverty.

### **Jamaica and Barbados: the road to enquiry and legislation**

Jamaica came under direct crown rule in 1865, while Barbados was the only colony to retain its legislative assembly right up to independence in 1967. Jamaica was one of the largest territories with some opportunities existing for making a living through different trades, while the situation in Barbados was diametrically opposed, with intense sugar cultivation leaving little room for other industries and professions to thrive. In Jamaica there was inward migration chiefly from India, and a large 20<sup>th</sup> century emigration to Panama. Barbados had out migration throughout the nineteenth century and also a large 20<sup>th</sup> century emigration to Panama. Comparing these two colonies' experiences of poverty and poor relief can aid our understanding of how different legislative, geographical, demographic and other factors impacted the pace of poor law development and the well-being of the people.

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<sup>97</sup> CO 243/26 – Blue Books, St. Kitts, 1838. CO 33/49 Blue Books, Barbados, 1838, 34

<sup>98</sup> Hansard 1832 Colonial Policy – Orders in Council. HC Deb 04 June 1832 vol 13, cc387–8. Mr. Irving to Lord Althorp. Commons Sitting. Mr. Irving was commenting on another topic, but his statement holds true in this case also: '...those Orders were now law in the Crown colonies, but, though they were the letter of the law, they were nowhere carried into effect, and for this reason—that they could not be so carried. They might remain the law, but they would be a law wholly inoperative...'

## Barbados

so great is the demand for labour, and so few and readily supplied are the physical wants of the poorer classes of the Colonial society that it would be difficult to find among them an able-bodied man, really incapable of self support.<sup>99</sup>

Written on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1839, just six months after emancipation and shortly before the release of a Poor Law Order, this Downing Street circular encapsulates a number of ideas that merit further exploration. The demand for labour and the ability to self-support bore some truth in the more sparsely populated sugar colonies such as Jamaica where wages were among the highest in the Caribbean,<sup>100</sup> but it did not take into account variation across the region, and as the century progressed, wages decreased, and poverty became more acute, such a view could no longer be applied anywhere in the British Caribbean. Nevertheless, this picture of a paradise of abundance and ease for the supposedly simple needs of the African Creole became the oft repeated trope of policy makers seeking to avert censure for the pervasive poverty, sickness and mortality found in their colonies. This 'blindness' to the extent and true causes of poverty hindered poor relief efforts throughout the nineteenth century, and was foremost among the planter oligarchy of Barbados. It was asserted that poverty resulted not from low wages but from a lack of 'habits of industry' among the labouring people, such that they refused to work continuously. However, the demand for labour in Barbados was not high due to the population density and lack of alternative sources of income for estate workers. The Barbadian planters did not need 'continuous labour' out of the sugar crop season. They needed a landless proletariat whose labour they could demand when needed for the lowest possible wages, and in this they succeeded, making wages in Barbados the lowest in the entire British Caribbean. Far from living in a paradise, visitors described the estate houses as 'wretched dwellings swarming with vermin'.<sup>101</sup> Governor Francis Hincks in 1856 observed that in most colonies increased profits would be shared between landowners and labourers but that in Barbados 'so abundant is the supply of labour in the colony

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<sup>99</sup> Downing Street Circular, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1839 enclosing Report from the senior member of the Poor Law Commission of England containing his recommendations to the West India Legislatures for the relief of the Destitute Poor.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (USA: John Hopkins, 1992) 126: Holt estimated 1 shilling 8 pence in 1838 and up to 2s 6d in 1840.

<sup>101</sup> John Chester Grenville, *Transatlantic Sketches* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869) 53. Grenville also includes part of Edward Pinder's *Letters on the Labouring Population of Barbados* (1858, published 1990 by Barbados: National Cultural Foundation).

that wages have not advanced...' and that the landed proprietors contributed so little to the support of public institutions and the social and moral improvement of their tenants and labourers.<sup>102</sup>

Until 1846, wages were about 1/6 a day for a male cane cutter, but with the Sugar Duties Act which abolished preferential duty for West Indian sugar, planters reacted by implementing a 50% wage reduction. Thus, a male worker could expect a daily wage of 10d maximum but averaging 5–7d per day. Further retrenchment continued over the next two decades, with the misery of the labouring classes compounded by the cholera epidemic of 1854 which killed 20,000 people. From 1859 rising prices were followed by shortages of basic imported food stuffs when the American Civil War began in 1861.<sup>103</sup> These rises and wage cuts were not accepted passively but were invariably accompanied by looting of provisions such as potato fields and burning of cane and trash but there was little else the workers could do to persuade their employers to raise wages. Colonial policy makers and observers repeated the tired refrain of 'continuous labour', claiming that labourers would only work enough to satisfy immediate wants instead of working to secure savings against sickness and for future provision. The sight of labourers languishing for three or four out of seven days clearly evoked unease in those imbued with values of classical economy – the concept of self-promotion and social development through one's own endeavours, regardless of economic realities. As late as 1936, the 'continuous labour' myth was still being propagated and refuted; B.S. Platt in the Report on Nutrition stated his belief that the lack of continuous labour was 'the result of fatigue and insufficient nutrition, not laziness or simple gratification.'<sup>104</sup> In the nineteenth century, poor nutrition was certainly a factor but the obvious cause lay with the employers. In the 1870s planters themselves reduced the working week, meaning in effect that a daily wage of 8d was in reality around 2/- a week. In a further squeeze, many estates reduced the working day to midday but employed more cane workers so each worker's earning power was further reduced.<sup>105</sup> Planters were able to do this because competition for work was high and labourers' bargaining powers consequently low. Despite market depressions, planters realised increased profits. The total value of yearly exports

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<sup>102</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838–1900', 176: Report on Barbados Blue Books 1856, 36, 43.

<sup>103</sup> Henderson Carter, *Labour Pains: Resistance and Protest in Barbados, 1938-1904* (Ian Randle, 2011) 46.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Chamberlain, *Empire and nation-building in the Caribbean: Barbados, 1937–66* (Manchester University Press, 2010) 55.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

climbed annually from £659,073 in 1848 to £1,468,449 in 1858 but this success was not reflected in rising wages.<sup>106</sup>

It was asserted that a labouring man could live on 3d per day for food; however, official sources never seemed to include working women or families in considerations of pay and dependents.<sup>107</sup> Since many households were headed by women, and since women outnumbered men both in the population and the labour force, it is their earnings that it is more important to focus on in order to correctly understand the extent of poverty, as they raised children and grandchildren on their smaller incomes. The cost of food was estimated to be 3d per day, or 1/9 a week and rent 10d per week.<sup>108</sup> So even if a labouring woman was able to work four full days at 6d per day, her weekly pay would amount to 2/-, out of which she would need to pay a total of 2/7 a week for seven days' food and rent, without taking into account the number of children to feed in her family. Tax was shifted from land to commodities so that in 1876 the retail value of foodstuffs from the USA which formed much of the staple diet was 50% higher than in the previous decade according to the Auditor General.<sup>109</sup> Children were likely to fall sick often and a doctor's visit cost 2/- and the education of a child was 2d per week.<sup>110</sup> Clothing was another expense upon which duty was high, and inspectors of poor reported seeing children with little or no clothing. Clearly a labouring mother could not manage on her wages alone, but would need to supplement them by begging, setting her children to work when old enough, or applying for parish or charitable relief. This was the situation in 1875 when the Commission on Poor Relief commenced its inquiries.

### Jamaica

the upper classes say that the people do not labor as they ought, and the people say that they don't get as much wages as they ought to get, and that is the reason why they don't work. There is not that good feeling that there ought to be between the employers and the employed.

Mr. Orgill McKenzie, Maroon shopkeeper, Bath, St. Thomas<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. (check).

<sup>107</sup> 'Barbados. Report of Commission on Poor Relief' (Bridgetown, 1875-1877) 7.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>111</sup> In evidence before the Commission of Enquiry on the Juvenile Population of Jamaica (see Footnote 71).

Clearly the same working pattern and dissatisfaction existed in Jamaica as in Barbados and labourers could refuse to work at the rate and to the standard demanded for the wages offered, in a move reminiscent of resistance forms during slavery. The main difference with Barbados was the size and population of the island and amount of land under sugar cultivation. In Barbados, those seeking a livelihood away from the plantations turned mostly to trades due to scarcity of agricultural land, whereas in Jamaica the availability of uncultivated land or land sold through planter bankruptcy gave an additional alternative to those seeking an alternative livelihood. Those reliant upon estate labour could seek work on the estate offering the highest wages. Between 1838 and 1840 wages as high as 2/6 were reported, but after 1840 wages fell to a daily average of 1/-.<sup>112</sup> As time went on and fewer estates remained in operation the wage rates fluctuated far less, and the labourers' bargaining power was adversely affected by competition from indentured East Indian labourers.<sup>113</sup>

In July 1865, ministers of the Jamaica Baptist Union responded to the governor's circular inquiring into living conditions. In support of their detailed descriptions and explanations, they provided data on the rising cost of living summarised as tables. Extracts tell us that, for example, the price of osnaburg – a coarse cotton used for working people's clothing – had risen from 4½d – 9d per yard for the 'flimsiest' and 'most unendurable' quality fabric. The price of food had increased while the quality had decreased and herrings, for example, formerly 1½d–2d for three, had risen to 1–1½ d for one. Salfish had risen from 14-18 shillings to 25 per cwt, and cornmeal rose from 20 shillings a barrel to 28–32.<sup>114</sup>

Subsistence farmers faced a precarious existence at the mercy of droughts and hurricanes, and those who attempted export found it unprofitable due to the prohibitive tax on agricultural equipment for which the sugar planters paid a vastly reduced sum. For example, the duty on a donkey was 3/6, 10/- for a horse, 11/- for a mule and 1/- for a licence. But a planter was required to pay only 6d for each working animal.<sup>115</sup> Poverty created the conditions out of which the Morant Bay uprising emerged in 1865, though the reasons for the uprising are varied and much

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom* (1992) 126–127.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Edward Bean Underhill, 'Dr. Underhill's Letter: a letter addressed to Rt. Hon. E. Cardwell, with illustrative documents on the Condition of Jamaica and an Explanatory Statement' (London: Arthur Miall, 1865) Schedule F, 74.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.



discussed elsewhere.<sup>116</sup> The crisis brought the condition of the island to the forefront, highlighted poverty and contributed greatly to its increase in St. Thomas, where thousands lost heads of family to summary executions under martial law, and livelihoods and homes were burnt. But along with the uprising and its aftermath it was the rising taxes, lowering wages and the needs of the ageing population of first generation freed people which combined to bring the topic of proper poor relief sharply into focus and urgency. Morant Bay stimulated the change in governance which might otherwise have let it continue down the path which the Barbadian people were forced to suffer. Crown rule allowed laws to be implemented with minimal debate, and in 1868 governor John Peter Grant introduced Law 5 of 1868, the House Tax, amending it a year later by Law 27 of 1869 to make it exclusively for relief and medical attendance upon the poor.<sup>117</sup> However well-intentioned, this tax was not without drawbacks. It was an amendment of Law 10 of 1867 which extended taxable properties to include the dwellings of the poor. The reason in 1867 was not to finance poor relief but to contribute to relieving the £63,000 deficit.<sup>118</sup> Response from the public was dismay. The Falmouth Post complained of the heavier burdens on the impoverished,<sup>119</sup> and the chair of the Trelawny board felt that the measures were calculated to aggravate distress.<sup>119</sup> He stated at a public meeting that,

the governor and advisers might have enacted more wisely had they first travelled through the several parishes and made themselves personally acquainted with the condition and prospects of all classes of the population...<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The Morant Bay 'Rebellion' began as a petition for the law to be justly applied to black subjects, and as such it was part of a common pattern of behaviour among post-emancipation subjects. People called on the law to uphold their rights as free people and tried to hold the judiciary to account if it did not do so fairly and without bias. The Morant Bay demonstrators were appealing to the law rather than attempting to overturn it, and therefore it was not a rebellion at all. Common debates around Morant Bay concern its ideological foundations, organisation and planning, and whether it was a conscious or spontaneous demonstration which escalated into violence when it was met with military force. See Clinton Hutton, *Colour for Colour Skin for Skin: Marching with the Ancestral Spirits into War Oh at Morant Bay* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2015), Devon Dick, *The Cross and the Machete: native Baptists of Jamaica – Identity, ministry and legacy* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2009), Gad Heuman, *'The Killing Time': the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica* (London: Macmillan, 1994). And for the role of women as key participants in post-emancipation struggles, see Swithin Wilmot, "'Females of Abandoned Character?'" Women and Protest in Jamaica, 1838–65', in Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey (eds.) *Engendering history: Caribbean women in historical perspective* (London: James Currey, 1995) 279–295.

<sup>117</sup> Vincent John Marsala, *Sir John Peter Grant, Governor of Jamaica, 1866-1874: an administrative history* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1972) 44. See also James Minot, *Laws of Jamaica 1869 – 72; 1868, No. 5, S.14*, (Jamaica: De Cordova, McDougall and Co., 1872).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>119</sup> Falmouth Post, 22nd February 1867 (quoted in Marsala, 47).

<sup>120</sup> Falmouth Post, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1867 (quoted in Marsala, 47).

Resolutions sent from Trelawny and St. Ann were respectfully received and forwarded, but it seems Grant was a man unwavering in his decisions. He toured the island in April 1868, a month *after* the introduction of Law 5. In spite of or maybe because of the conditions he witnessed he amended the law in 1869 to 'A Law for Converting the Taxes on Houses into a Tax for the Support of the Poor.' But at the same time this amendment reduced the value of taxable properties from 8/- to 6/-, thus placing an even heavier burden on the poor and middling classes.<sup>121</sup>

The law set out the duties of relatives and in a departure from English norms and in recognition of the different family structure in Jamaica it specified that every man should maintain his children whether legitimate or illegitimate to age fourteen or beyond if needed; and every woman whether married, widowed or unmarried was required to fairly contribute toward their support.<sup>122</sup> The law did not, however, set out the duties of the parish officials in respect to poor relief or detail what form of relief should be taken. Nevertheless, it guaranteed a certain amount of spending and provided a framework for poor relief going forward. Barbados by comparison had no such legislation or minimum required spending on poor relief. Through the Poor Rate, the financial burden of relief fell squarely on the shoulders of tax payers, many of them poor smallholders, and not the treasury even though Grant's fiscal policies meant that the treasury realised a surplus for the financial year 1868–69 of £58,896.<sup>123</sup> It would be another ten years before further scrutiny occurred in the form of the Commission of 1878 launched by Sir Anthony Musgrave, governor of Jamaica from 1877–1883.<sup>124</sup>

### **Towards Centralised Legislation: the Commissions of Enquiry**

Governors newly arrived in Barbados could not help being struck by the visible signs of misery and destitution around the island, and they received strong reports from the clergy corroborating their own observations.<sup>125</sup> It did not take these governors long to realise that the oligarchs were

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<sup>121</sup> CO 139/100 Law 27 of 1869.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 1869, No. 31, S1. 'Parents and Children', 66.

<sup>123</sup> Vincent John Marsala, *Sir John Peter Grant, Governor of Jamaica, 1866-1874* (1972) 59: 'Report of His Excellency Sir John Peter Grant, K.C.B., on the Condition of Jamaica, for the year 1867' (Kingston: Colonial Standard Office) 2.

<sup>124</sup> CO 137/491/61, 18th December 1879, Forwards the report of a Commission of Enquiry on the juvenile population of Jamaica, No. 365, 495–507.

<sup>125</sup> Letters from Wesleyan ministers Rev. William Cleaver and Rev. Hothersall to Acting Governor Sanford Freeling both commented on extreme poverty caused by unemployment and less than subsistence wages. See Leonard Fletcher, 'Evolution of Poor Relief', 1992, 178–179.

immured against the sight of poverty and left to their own devices would never take steps to improve the lot of the poorer classes. Acting governor Sanford Freeling faced little opposition when he called for the formation of the Commission in 1875, and two reasons have been put forward for this. Richard Carter's view is that fear of social unrest was the greatest driving force behind the Commission. His statistical analysis of convictions for praedial larceny shows a 30% increase in 1870 following the crop failures of 1869; standards of living in the 1870s were perhaps worse than at any time since emancipation, and the newspapers hinted at the likelihood of rebellion.<sup>126</sup> The Confederation Riots of April 1876, summarised further on, compounded this fear. Leonard Fletcher put forward a further argument that the perseverance of the Commission through the tenure of two successive governors and the Assembly's acceptance of the poor law bill was the result of a further fear: Freeling's successor John Pope Hennessy had proposed reasonable amelioration to assist the poor labourers – longer notice to quit period, replacement of the 1840 Masters and Servants Act with a fairer one, and grants to assist poor labourers to emigrate.<sup>127</sup> The assembly refused and instead called, successfully, for Hennessy's removal. However, the colonial secretary was sufficiently concerned by extensive criticism from those governors about the wretched conditions of the poor to consider crown rule for Barbados.<sup>128</sup> Fletcher argues that while this threat existed the assembly promised to make the reforms in social care demanded by the colonial secretary, one of which was the acceptance of the poor law of 1880.<sup>129</sup>

### The Barbados Commission (1875–1877)

Formed of 16 prominent men under the leadership of Mitchinson, bishop of Barbados, the Commission on Poor Relief was appointed on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1875. Their proceedings were interrupted by the Confederation Disturbances in 1876, which were triggered by the colonial office's wish for Barbados to become federated with the other Windward islands. This would have enabled labourers to move freely between the islands for work, but it would have lessened the planters' stranglehold on wages. When the people heard that Hennessy was being attacked and threatened with removal over his support for a move that would have greatly benefited them, they rebelled, attacking planter property and seizing provisions before order was restored on 27<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Richard Carter, 'The Almshouse Test', 141.

<sup>127</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'Evolution of Poor Relief', 1992, 182–183.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 183, Strahan to Carnarvon, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1877, C. 2645, No. 1, Encl. No. 1, 4–6.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

April. The Commission resumed its enquiries on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1876 with renewed vigour. Their aim was to ascertain 'the extent of poverty and bastardy'. They sent written sets of questions to rectors, churchwardens, parochial treasurers, clergy, medical officers, magistrates, and proprietors and attorneys. This last group was felt to be the most important in ascertaining the condition of the labourers but the returns were disappointing. Of 163 sets of questions sent out only 18 were returned, improperly completed.<sup>130</sup> It was thought that proprietors found the questions inquisitive and the peasantry may have been suspicious of the intentions and fearful of eviction should they complain.<sup>131</sup> The Commission also took oral evidence from the categories of persons listed above and from 'persons newly emerged from the peasant class', but notably no peasants or labourers themselves, so it was destined to be a very top down approach.<sup>132</sup>

The report defined poverty as threefold: 1) destitute, no friends, unable to work, 2) willing to work but cannot find, 3) temporary poor. By including the able bodied who were willing but unable to find work, Fletcher felt that it was light years removed from official attitudes of just a few decades earlier where planters were determined never to assist the able bodied black poor whom they believed were indolent by nature and would worsen should any assistance be afforded them.<sup>133</sup> The report also estimated the number of deserving poor at 5,905, over 2,000 more than were currently in receipt of relief.<sup>134</sup> The causes were attributed firstly to redundancy of population and insufficient work. In crop time there was believed to be enough work for everyone but that out of season 'many feel the pinch.'<sup>135</sup> Sickness was cited as an affliction which turned the industrious labourer into a pauper, and the Commission's opinion was that it was essential to widen the beneficiaries of statutory relief.<sup>136</sup> After such a promising beginning, sympathy seemed to decrease as the report went on not to discuss ways to ease overpopulation or increase the work available, but to deny that the low wages consequent to overpopulation were a cause of poverty; and stating that raising wages would not alleviate poverty.

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<sup>130</sup> 'Barbados. Report of Commission on Poor Relief' (Bridgetown, 1875–1877) 3.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>133</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'Evolution of Poor Relief', 1992, 185.

<sup>134</sup> 'Barbados. Report of Commission on Poor Relief' 6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

It is very questionable whether a general rise in wages would benefit the labouring class, with their present habits and disposition. More money per day would, in by far the majority of cases, probably mean more idleness per week.<sup>137</sup>

The report complained that labourers would not undertake to work continuously, after having earlier stated that work was not available. Other causes of poverty were said to be the thriftlessness of the population and the gravitation of vagrants to the town where they existed by begging.<sup>138</sup> The solution posed was a central workhouse where paupers who supposedly loved repose and being supported by others might be sent to work to contribute to their support, and this workhouse test would distinguish the able bodied from the malingerers and deter mendicancy.<sup>139</sup> A work regime was not part of the almshouse system, but it was proposed that paupers in the parochial almshouses be employed breaking metal for roads, and that 'refractory paupers' be sent to the central workhouse which was to have a regime 'stricter and more deterrent than the Almshouses'.<sup>140</sup> It was hoped that the workhouse would in some measure support itself through the labour of inmates and free up more funds for the category of destitute paupers incapable of work.<sup>141</sup> The basic principle was to hold the victims of poverty to account for their condition, rather than their employers or the government.

The central workhouse proposal had another purpose, one aimed less at the pauper and more at the vestries. Taxation and vestry spending were found to be unequal across the parishes.<sup>142</sup> The central workhouse proposal can therefore be seen as part of a wider plan to restrict the total power of individual vestries to organise and administer relief within their parishes.

To summarise, the Commission's recommendations were to establish a Central Poor Law Board (CPLB) and locally elected Boards of Guardians of the Poor consisting of three vestrymen; make a large extension of almshouses to be paid for by loans from the legislature; build a central workhouse financed by central government and contributed to by parishes; scale back outdoor

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 37. Note that in the Caribbean the word 'almshouse' was another name for the poorhouse. Both terms were used interchangeably in Jamaica, while in Barbados 'almshouse' was more common.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 37–38.

<sup>142</sup> CO 31/68 Minutes of Assembly, Session 1877–78, 'Report of the Commission on Poor Relief', Appendix B, 118.

relief and refer any new cases to the CPLB; expand medical services to be paid for by central government; withdraw subsidies to private charities; strengthen Friendly Societies; facilitate outward emigration; and finally to establish an industrial school to check juvenile vagrancy and a reformatory for criminal children.<sup>143</sup>

On this last point, the education of workers ran counter to planters' long term interests. Government never invested in schools, leaving it up to the churches to undertake, and only modestly contributed from the 1850s towards an education that was religious and moral in focus to raise a new and more tractable generation of labourers.<sup>144</sup> All attempts to make education compulsory were resisted, so that planters could retain child labour. Less than a third of primary aged children were enrolled in schools, and about 59% of those enrolled actually attended.<sup>145</sup> The 1870 and 1880 Education Acts in Britain which made education compulsory between the ages of five and ten, raised the question of education in the colonies where there was low attendance and no compulsion. Industrial schools were intended for orphans and pauper children whose parents could not maintain them, while reformatories were for children convicted of crimes. But the Industrial Schools Act in Barbados which would have enabled these institutions to be built was considered a dead letter, as to date none had been established in the island.<sup>146</sup>

### The Jamaica Commission (1877–1879)

Unlike Barbados, the Jamaican Commission did not grow out of any immediate fears of unrest, but seems to have emerged from an ongoing dispute between the colonial government and the parishes as to the nature of relief, the deservingness of recipients, the efficiency of the parochial machinery and last but not least the cost, a concern shared by both commissions. Educational reforms in England and the shift in focus from punishment towards prevention of delinquency no doubt also played a role. While Barbados' Commission on Poor Relief did not centre children and young people, leaving that to a separate commission on education, Jamaica's Poor Relief Commission was launched with a primary focus on the juvenile population; poverty was also examined fully but as a secondary and contributing factor to juvenile well-being. Through the

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<sup>143</sup> 'Barbados. Report of Commission on Poor Relief', 30, 39–40.

<sup>144</sup> Henderson Carter, *Labour Pains* (2011) 80.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 81; Edward Pinder, *Letters upon the Labouring Population of Barbados* (1858) 20; 'Report of the Commission on Education, 1875'; Blue Books, 1892–1919.

<sup>146</sup> *Report of Commission upon the Condition of the Juvenile Population of Jamaica with the Evidence Taken and an Appendix, 1879* (National Library of Jamaica) Herein after referred to as 'Jamaica. Report of Commission on the Juvenile Population', 10.

Industrial Schools Act of 1857 a government reformatory had been established to which, through laws of 1869 and 1872, both pauper children and 'criminal' children were to be sent. But there was a general feeling against the mixing of these two types of children within the one institution, and its management was 'so notoriously disgraceful' that magistrates disliked to send children there.<sup>147</sup> The Commission therefore wanted to explore the best way of tackling the large problem of juvenile vagrancy, that is to say, large numbers of children not in education or employment who spent their time 'idling, begging and stealing.' The reformatory at that time did not serve more than a minority of children.

The Commission was made up of five prominent men with a remit to 'devise means for the protection of the destitute, the training of the ignorant, and the reclaiming of the idle and criminal.'<sup>148</sup> As such it was more progressive and ambitious in scope than the Barbados Commission. The respondents were largely comprised of proprietors and attorneys, members of the judiciary and clergy, medical officers, civil servants and parochial officers; but included two black men – one a Maroon shopkeeper and the other an elderly farmer with ten acres, and two women – one a shopkeeper and foster carer and the other almoner for the paupers of her district. The Commission spent several days in each part of the island and produced a thirteen-page report and 167 pages of appendices of evidence taken at Kingston; Montego Bay, Falmouth & St. Ann's Bay; and Morant Bay & Bath. Respondents from all parts of the island were invited to attend the Commission's sitting at these places and submit their evidence, thus coverage of all parishes was pretty thorough. The enquiries did not begin from an unbiased position, but rather with the premise that parochially managed poor relief was wasteful and inefficiently administered. This comes across in some of the questions which appear guaranteed to elicit a certain response. For example,

Do you approve of Poor Relief being bestowed upon parents without any condition ensuring corresponding provision for their children, and without reference to whether there are relatives able to assist such persons?<sup>149</sup>

The implication is that the present system was carried on in this manner. Further leading questions are posed at intervals during the enquiry. The Commission's report thus concluded that

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<sup>147</sup> 'Jamaica. Report of Commission on the Juvenile Population', iv.

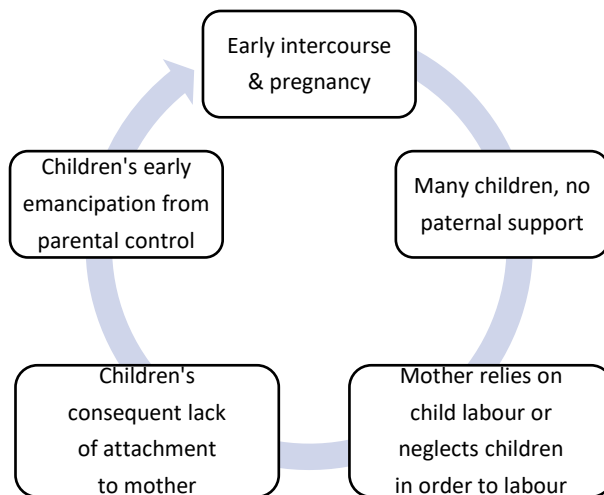
<sup>148</sup> 'Jamaica. Report of Commission on the Juvenile Population', Appendix A, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. Question 3. (3) Precis of Answers, Portland, 19.

indoor relief was preferable; that people were idle and improvident; that illegitimacy was the cause of poverty; and that family ties were weak.<sup>150</sup> The respondents' answers show more of a variety of opinions than that which comes through in the report itself and they were by no means unanimous on every point. Nevertheless, a pattern of social ills emerges, which were largely put down to 'bastardy, ignorance and idleness'; a lack of family cohesion leading to infant mortality, vagrant youth, and unemployment and poverty in adulthood.

The perceived problems can be looked at under three headings: family, employment and infrastructural provisions. Table 2 presents the summarised responses regarding family.

Table 2



The employment aspect of the problems identified by the respondents can be summarised as:

1. Transient work patterns, with labourers moving from parish to parish for task work.
2. The seasonal nature of plantation labour, with not enough work available throughout the year.
3. Insufficient wages.
4. A low demand for trades unconnected with sugar production.
5. Insufficient availability of affordable land for agricultural subsistence.
6. The migration of men, while women remain constrained by children.

The infrastructural problems were identified as:

1. Education is largely unaffordable and does not lead to employment.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., II–III.



2. Religion: some areas are without a church to promote family and community cohesion and to undertake charitable projects. Lack of suitable clothing discourages paupers from attending church.
3. Healthcare is unaffordable, with no access in remote areas. Poor quality and quantity of diet, unclean water, and epidemics.

Thus, the causes of poverty and juvenile vagrancy were a combination of failings in three main areas as shown above. The prevalence of single-headed families coupled with the lower wages of women made it almost impossible for labouring women to maintain their children without outside support. For this reason illegitimacy was repeated as the source of all social ills, and of juvenile vagrancy in particular. Trash house gangs were groups of young workers who moved from estate to estate performing tasks for wages but with no settlement or attachment to that location. It was reported that young men and women would sleep 'herded together in a promiscuous crowd' in the trash house if no accommodation was provided by the estate; and this was a situation seen to encourage licentious intercourse and the birth of children whose parents were too young to care for them.<sup>151</sup> Dr Major, General Medical Officer (GMO) reported that there were young people living together from the age of twelve and that he knew a girl of 12 years old living with boy of 15 or 16.<sup>152</sup>

But these behaviours were not through some innate moral failing of blacks, as was sometimes implied. In fact, one respondent commented that the African immigrant labourers did not have such problems and that they maintained authority over their children,

‘Many of them remain on the estate and they are the best and most reliable laborers I have. Their children grow up willing and obedient. At Duckenfield, the Africans have some kind of law by which they can control their boys and girls at any age. The natives cannot do this...there is little or no discipline among the Creoles.’<sup>153</sup>

Thus the problem was not racial but social and economic, as column two shows. While there was some truth to the assertion that parents struggled to care for their children, the wider community seems to have been overlooked in this analysis. Relatives would help a struggling mother and

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., V.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Evidence Taken at Bath, 26.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. James Harrison Esq, resident proprietor and attorney. Evidence at Bath, 14.

assist children where they were able. Thomas Witter Jackson, former stipendiary magistrate for thirty-three years, stated that he did not know how children survived when their mothers had no means of supporting them and they were too young to earn their own livings. He was asked, 'But is it not a fact, that all those vagrant children about the streets get food and some kind of clothes and shelter from their relatives?' He replied, 'Well, I suppose so, or else they would die.'<sup>154</sup> Jackson was next questioned as to why these vagrant children could not be picked up by a magistrate and sent to a reformatory, to which he replied that the mothers would then come forward and say that they could support their children.<sup>155</sup> Such evidence shows that people wished to retain parental and community control over their own affairs and that of their youth to the extent that they were able and that they viewed with suspicion attempts to institutionalise them through compulsory education.

As far as the education of girls was concerned, needlework and domestic skills were wholly inadequate to enable a woman to make a living. Rather they stemmed from an ideal of family life that was largely unknown and impractical among the labouring population.

Q: What field for labor is there for girls about 13 or 14?

A: I am afraid very little. Needle-work but it isn't remunerative. There is much misery and destitution as there are too many of them.

Q: How do they live at all, then?

A: It is hard to say. A little needlework and huckstering which is precarious. Vagrancy and idleness are increasing since days of slavery.

Q: Could the seamstresses do other work?

A: Only agricultural and many are not adapted to that.<sup>156</sup>

Jackson's evidence pertained to Spanish Town, but it was not only in urban centres where women struggled to make a living. Jacob Jackson Esq., Attorney of Copse Estate in St. James said, 'I generally find that the girls that have been to school, and been taught needlework, etc., are the most immoral, they are the first to fall.'<sup>157</sup> This suggests that they turned to prostitution because their scant education did not provide them with the necessary skills to make a living.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. Evidence at Kingston, 79.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. Evidence of Thomas Witter Jackson, 77.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. Evidence at Montego Bay, Falmouth and St. Ann's Bay, 18.

Aside from education, the other solution posed was an expanded almshouse provision and the reduction of outdoor allowances. Both islands' commissions appear to have commenced with the idea already firmly engrained that parochial poor relief was inconsistent and wasteful and that the entire system would be more efficient if centred around a central almshouse or workhouse only. The mode of questioning reflects this. For example, 'From your knowledge of the poor do you think that if...it was made a condition of obtaining relief that the applicant should enter a poor house...it would reduce the number of applicants?'<sup>158</sup>

This question did not seek to know which option would be the more beneficial to the pauper, but which would reduce the number of applicants and thus reduce costs and combat 'pauperism'. Answers varied but tended to favour indoor relief. Miss Simpson, the almoner for the Morant Bay paupers, responded, 'I certainly think so, because the people are prejudiced against a poorhouse. Only real paupers would go there.'<sup>159</sup> This extract from her response does not make clear whether or not she is merely agreeing that poorhouse admission would reduce the pauper roll or if she feels it is better for the poor. However, she does go on to say, 'I daresay there would always be a few who would require outdoor relief, but my impression is that the majority could do without the 1/6 a week...There are some who receive relief and go begging.'<sup>160</sup> Since begging was an act of criminal vagrancy, the Commission was keen to uncover its extent and explore ways to prevent it. However, simply criminalising beggars or using them to show that relief was being wasted on those who received it and then went begging without necessity, was not going to be possible. Michael Solomon, former parochial board member for St. Ann Parish explained, 'The allowances to paupers are too limited to give support, while it tends to encourage begging. One shilling a week is wholly inadequate.'<sup>161</sup> And from Trelawny Parish George Wooldridge Strickler, almoner for the Trelawny parish paupers said that he had 360 outdoor paupers on his roll and there was no poorhouse in Trelawny,

One boy aged 8 was struck off able to work but no employment was found for him. Here in Falmouth none of the paupers on the roll are able to work. After paying a room for 1/3 a week, a pauper has nothing left so has to beg.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., Evidence at Bath, 11.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., Evidence at Montego Bay, Falmouth and St. Ann's Bay, 28.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 22.

Given the concurrence that allowances were inadequate, the Commission might well have felt funds would be better directed towards indoor care. The respondents who were against an almshouse either did not give reasons or their reasons were not printed, for example Reverend Thomas Griffiths of St. Ann is briefly recorded as having said, 'An almshouse would be a worse thing.'<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, those who were strongly in favour of indoor relief tended to be the more affluent and influential members of society, and tended to advert on the topic at greater length, such as Henry J Burford Hancock, esq., district judge and later chief justice, who said 'Outdoor relief is not required by the circumstances of the country. Almshouses are the proper plan. Outdoor relief is a mere supplement to begging.'<sup>164</sup> However he also said that he was not in favour of stopping relief to the casual poor and that quarterly board meetings prevented the churchwarden from giving on the spot relief. 'For outdoor relief to be effective it must be speedy.'<sup>165</sup> Thus he made a distinction between those who were rendered poor by temporary illness or circumstance and those who were long-term pensioners, e.g. elderly, chronically ill and able-bodied unemployed. W. Bancroft Espeut, esq., proprietor of Spring Garden estate in Portland, went further to include the casual or temporary poor. On being asked whether the poorhouse should be a requirement he replied,

Unquestionably. Even the temporary poor can be better cared for indoors. The system now is too loose....The Poor Rate is levied to the limit in my parish, I favour the almshouse where certain remunerative labour can be done. Everyone who wants to work can except maybe in Kingston but those in Kingston who cannot work are no use to anyone. The almshouse test would eliminate paupers except for a few old people. Abolish the outdoor relief system.<sup>166</sup>

That a poorhouse would diminish the pauper roll appealed to the Commission's remit of saving funds, while the more influential respondents expressed vehement preference for indoor relief with a view to 'eliminating paupers'. This seems to have been uppermost in the analysis of the commissioners and the answer they latched onto in framing the Bill. The phrase used by Espeut, the 'Almshouse Test' echoes the English 'Workhouse Test' which was part of the 1834 amendment, stipulating that all relief for the able-bodied had to be within the workhouse.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>166</sup> 'Jamaica. Report of Commission on the Juvenile Population', Evidence at Kingston, 118.

Although it proved impossible to entirely implement the policy, the idea which was deeply ingrained in poor law history found itself being called for in the Caribbean, to the detriment of paupers in Jamaica and to devastating effect in Barbados, as the Poor Laws of 1886 and 1880 and their aftermaths will show.

To summarise, the Jamaica commission's conclusions and recommendations which were similar to those of Barbados were to renew the currently inactive vagrancy laws; establish a central Board of Supervision to oversee parochial poor relief operations; employ a salaried Inspector of Poor, relieving officers and Poor Law Guardians; abolish outdoor relief (with the possible exception of Kingston and Spanish Town) except temporary relief for exceptional cases of sickness or other definite and rigorously recorded purpose. The report stated,

...the Poor House, and the Poor House alone, should be offered...If willingness to enter the House were made the test of poverty, we are satisfied that the pauper lists would be very materially reduced.<sup>167</sup>

Unlike the recommendations in Barbados, in Jamaica there was no suggestion of building a central workhouse, and no new almshouses were to be built or expanded without the Board's assent. Power was given to the relieving officer to commit a pauper child to an industrial school, and the gradual introduction of compulsory education was commenced.<sup>168</sup>

Apart from a more developed education system in Jamaica for disposing of pauper children and the decision not to build a workhouse – by no means the unanimous decision of all commissioners – the two colonies' reports largely concurred in their conclusions and recommendations. Given that these two islands at opposite ends of the administrative spectrum were facing similar challenges and drawing similar conclusions, it is safe to assume that a comparable state of affairs existed elsewhere in the region.

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<sup>167</sup> 'Jamaica. Report of Commission on the Juvenile Population', IX.

<sup>168</sup> The commission informed Law 34 of 1881, The Reformatories and Industrial Schools Law, which eventually separated the two types of institution and made provision for girls. Barbados had a separate education commission in 1875.

## **Theory without Practice: Centralisation and the Poor Relief Acts of 1880 and 1886**

While vestries and parochial boards would continue to undertake the day to day running of poor relief, there would be a Central Poor Law Board (CPLB) in Barbados and a Board of Supervision in Jamaica, with authority to oversee the provision through the appointment of a paid Poor Law Inspector charged with inspecting almshouses, asylums and lazarettos, auditing accounts of these institutions, and checking any records pertaining to persons receiving relief. Each parish was to have a Board of Guardians of the Poor chosen from among the vestrymen/parochial board members, and a relieving officer (also known as Inspector of Poor) salaried from the poor rates to visit the paupers, authorise and/or dispense emergency relief and report to the Board of Guardians. The aim was to ensure that all applications were received through one person rather than any member of the vestry having power to authorise relief, as previously.

### Barbados

The vestry was to appoint the three-man Board of Guardians out of their number, with the churchwarden as chairman, and pay them out of the parochial revenue. Thus a conflict of interest could arise from the role of paid guardian and unpaid vestryman, in charge of both the interests of ratepayers and paupers. Although the poor law makes reference to a central workhouse, the Assembly never authorised its building. No measure which even remotely challenged the balance of power between local and central was ever going to be accepted.<sup>169</sup> Instead they approved the Almshouse Test, the effect being that anyone who could not enter an almshouse, whether from refusal or lack of space, would not be offered outdoor relief and would be left entirely unaided. It was reported that in St. Philip, the day after the Almshouse Test was introduced, the pauper roll was reduced from 125 to 45, with only two paupers accepting almshouse admittance.<sup>170</sup> In St. Michael, the total was reduced from 1,614 to 801.<sup>171</sup>

The Commission had estimated that in addition to the estimated total of 3,571 relief recipients, a further 2,834 persons were deserving.<sup>172</sup> Yet the new poor law clearly championed the concerns of economy over those of humanity, as this dramatic reduction in recipients shows.

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<sup>169</sup> Richard C. Carter, 'The Almshouse Test', 142.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 153: St. Philip Guardians, PLI 6.

<sup>171</sup> For a table of all parishes, see Leonard Fletcher, 'Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838–1900' 193.

<sup>172</sup> 'Barbados. Report of Commission on Poor Relief', 6.

An aggrieved person could complain to the local inspector or the Board of Guardians if they felt they had been denied relief, and if that was unsatisfactory, to the vestry.<sup>173</sup> But as the Board was made up of members of the vestry it is unlikely that the complainant's appeal would be favourably received. There was no further avenue for individual complaints written into the law. Through a mandamus the new CPLB could compel any parish to fulfil its legal obligations, but the slowness of the process rendered it unhelpful to the sufferer, for whom the remedy would arrive too late.<sup>174</sup> To all intents and purposes the CPLB was powerless to act to enforce its recommendations. It formed no working part of the machinery of poor relief and was head of a system over which it could not exercise any direct authority.<sup>175</sup> Thus its efficacy was reduced to the point of nullification. It was unable to ensure relief was being implemented fairly across parishes and so inconsistent relief practices continued. 'The only remedy in the opinion of the Board was that the eleven separate systems then in force should be united for the purpose of general management, and treated as part of an entire system.'<sup>176</sup>

Fletcher lays the blame for the defective system at the door of the imperial government for failing to follow through on its threat to the local rulers. He stated, '...while the threat of Crown Colony government existed, the Legislature displayed less stubbornness in resisting progressive reform.'<sup>177</sup> Fletcher's opinion is based on the fact that urgent improvements suggested in 1886 and 1895 which were rejected might have had a more friendly reception if pressure from imperial government had been maintained.<sup>178</sup> This argument can be tested by looking at the situation in Jamaica where the imperial government ruled directly.

### Jamaica

Whereas the vestries in Barbados had the power to block the Bill at the legislative stage (as legislatures were largely made up of vestrymen), in Jamaica the dissenting parish councils did not have the power to block a Bill passed by the house. They could only register their opposition and urge further debate. When this failed, they felt so strongly aggrieved that twelve of the

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<sup>173</sup> CO 30/29 Clause XXXI, 'Appeal to Vestry by Person Aggrieved', 10.

<sup>174</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'Evolution of Poor Relief', 1992, 188.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

fourteen parishes opted to petition the queen herself, spearheaded by the Kingston council which had first circulated its points of objection. The councils feared an erosion of their democratic rights as elected parish officers. This feeling was no doubt particularly acute given the removal of all forms of democratic process in 1865. They took exception to the implication that they could not be trusted to carry out their duties with integrity and effectiveness – duties which they had been carrying out without remuneration. They also objected that the salary of the new inspectors of poor would come out of the rates intended for relieving the poor directly, and that far from saving money, the new law would be more costly to implement.<sup>179</sup>

Nevertheless the Bill was carried into law in Jamaica in June 1886. Their fears were groundless as in practice interference from the Board of Supervision was minimal. Annual inspections of almshouses and record keeping were made, and three-man Boards of Guardians nominated by the parochial boards met quarterly to review the pauper rolls. Outdoor relief continued to be offered as offering only indoor relief would have meant urgent and extensive building and upgrading at considerable cost given the deplorable state of the existing almshouses and wholly inadequate space. At that time, Trelawny and Manchester did not have almshouses, St. Thomas had three, but other large and populous parishes only had one. Poor relief remained a highly subjective system, with no fixed grounds for one person being offered the poorhouse while another was granted outdoor relief. Relieving officers in the different parishes were not all equally diligent.

Looking at the children's application books for St. Thomas and St. Mary, a schedule was provided for each child with certain details to be filled in and columns below for recording further particulars. The relieving officer of St. Thomas visited at regular intervals to note the progress of the child:

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<sup>179</sup> CO 137/526/28, 6 May 1886, Despatches from Henry Wylie Norman, enclosing copies of the parish petitions. 'List of Petitions and Resolutions relative to Law for Relief of the Poor', 36–54.



1<sup>st</sup> January 1887

Page	No.	Name	Age	Family	Condition	Health	Residence
4	24	Patrick Gordon	10	Orphan	good	Ulcer on foot	Dawes Pen
Details: Mary Graham, grandmother. Baptist. Baptist School, West Prospect. June 1887: no change August 1887: Public Hospital for treatment of foot January 1889: discharged to Morant Bay Hospital February 1889: discharged at request of grandmother and his own desire. Died.							

Source: St. Thomas Children's Book, 1887 – 1910<sup>180</sup>

In St. Mary, the relieving officer only inserted the child's personal detail on the date of becoming chargeable, and recorded the date of being struck off:

18<sup>th</sup> Feb 1887

No.	Name	age	family	condition	religion	
11	Joanna Fasse	8	Orphan	fair	protestant	6 <sup>th</sup> Sept. 1888: Struck Off

Source: St. Mary, Children's Separate Register, 1887–1921<sup>181</sup>

Between February and September no visits were recorded, and no information about whether Joanna Fasse was able to support herself, though her attaining the age of 12 would have been sufficient reason for her to be struck off. After 1888 the level of detail fell, and entries became even briefer so it would have been difficult for the Poor Law Inspector to use these records to judge the standard of care being given to these children.

Spending on relief had been unequal across parishes. Figures for 1872 and 1887 show that inequality persisted after the introduction of the Poor Law:

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<sup>180</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/15/18 St Thomas, Children's Application Book 1887–1910.

<sup>181</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/16/69, St. Mary, Children's Separate Register, 1887–1921, 1–257. First 11 cases of 1887.

Table 3

Annual spending on paupers in 1872	Annual spending on paupers in 1887	Number of paupers 1872	Number of paupers 1887	Increase of paupers	Spending increase
Kingston 3629	Kingston 6487	499	601	20.4%	55.9%
St. Andrew 1374	St. Andrew 2335	161	217	34.8%	58.8%
St. Thomas 659	St. Thomas 1830	130	180	38.5%	36.0%
Portland 598	Portland 1532	249	207	-17%	39.0%
St. Mary 996	St. Mary 2016	310	253	-8.4%	49.4%
St. Ann 1131	St. Ann 3475	284	295	3.9%	32.5%
St. Catherine 1826	St. Catherine 3591	331	293	-11.5%	50.8%
Clarendon 975	Clarendon 2705	249	418	67.9.5%	36.0%
Manchester 1119	Manchester 2155	317	465	46.7%	51.9%
St. Elizabeth 1247	St. Elizabeth 2010	345	65	-81.2%	62.0%
Westmoreland 1448	Westmoreland 2486	303	441	45.5%	58.2%
Trelawny 1144	Trelawny 1787	301	317	5.3%	64.0%
St. James 906	St. James 1397	259	192	-26%	64.8%
Hanover 1078	Hanover 1811	292	186	-36.4%	59.5%

Source: Blue Books, Jamaica, 1872, C10; and Blue Books, Jamaica, 1887, C30.

The figures show some unaccountable fluctuations, such as parishes with decreased pauper rolls and increased spending, and parishes with increased pauper rolls spending less than another parish with a smaller increase. St. Elizabeth's 81.2% decrease in the number of paupers was due to its effectively abolishing outdoor relief.<sup>182</sup>

It is to be expected that Kingston and St. Catherine would have the highest expenditure, given that the poor gravitated towards the capital and that Spanish Town – the former capital – was left extremely impoverished when the seat of government removed to Kingston in 1872. However, the low spending of populous parishes such as St. Thomas and Clarendon cannot be easily accounted for. The increase in spending in some parishes can be attributed to the cost of sending lunatics to the Kingston asylum and pauper children to industrial schools. The Commission's

<sup>182</sup> Enquiry into the Workings of Parochial Boards, 1898, 10.

recommendations on education led to Law 34 of 1881, the Reformatories and Industrial Schools Law, which undertook to build a reformatory for girls in addition to the boys' reformatory at Stony Hill, and industrial schools for girls and boys in Kingston and Montego Bay to serve children from all parishes. The schools would be centrally maintained with parishes contributing an allowance for each child they sent. Many schools and orphanages which had been built and maintained by religious organisations became industrial schools, such as the Alpha Cottage in Kingston established in 1880 by three local Catholic women. Alpha Cottage became an industrial school in 1889, run by the Sisters of Mercy and financed through charitable subscriptions and a government grant.<sup>183</sup> Without the efforts of religious organisations, not only could schools not have thrived, but poor relief also would have foundered, as will be discussed in later chapters dealing with self-help and mutual aid.

In spite of the different systems of government, both islands' parish authorities deeply resented government scrutiny into their affairs and the erosion of their authority which the proposed reforms seemed to engender. Nevertheless, parishes continued to control the management of poor relief without obstruction from the Boards. The only difference was that Jamaica continued with both outdoor and indoor relief, while Barbados curtailed (though not entirely abolished) outdoor pensions, as the Almshouse Test was overall a test of *willingness* to enter rather than a de facto admission to the almshouse. Fairness and equality between parishes and across colonies was never fully achieved.

In terms of discovering how the paupers actually fared, and how they registered their complaints, the poor law in Barbados provided no real form and procedure for dealing with this. In Jamaica it was one of the duties of the Board of Supervision 'to hear and decide appeals from poor persons who have been refused relief, or who may consider the relief offered them inadequate.'<sup>184</sup> The relieving officer was to give the person a form or fill it in on their behalf if requested. However, without surviving evidence it is difficult to know what effect this may have had. In England and Wales thousands of letters from paupers to the Poor Law Commission have survived, indicating that paupers did not only confine their complaints to the local board of guardians or regional unions but were prepared to take their cases to a higher authority if need be.<sup>185</sup> In the Caribbean it

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<sup>183</sup> Mary Bernadette Little, RSM, *You Did It Unto Me (Matthew 25:40): The Story of Alpha and the Sisters of Mercy in Jamaica* (Ohio: Beyond the Trees, LLC, 2012), 14.

<sup>184</sup> CO 139/105 Poor Law of 1886, 6/93, Clause 10.

<sup>185</sup> See Stephen King, 'Negotiating the Law of Poor Relief in England, 1800–1840', *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 2011, Vol. 96, No. 324, 2011, 410–435.

cannot be established that paupers took similar actions firstly because the CPLB in Barbados was not mandated to hear pauper complaints and neither the governor nor the colonial secretary involved themselves with individual cases. In Jamaica if any paupers did pursue the option to write to the Board of Supervision, their letters have not been preserved. The survival rate of documentation from this period is low compared with that of England and Wales, and extant letters from paupers are very scarce. Nevertheless, the poor laws required the documenting of relief applications fully and transparently, and this new age of producing written evidence daily, quarterly and annually enables us to see detailed descriptions of applicants at the point at which they became chargeable, and in some cases for the entire time that they remained in receipt of relief. A lot of the evidence of this nature concerns the temporary poor for whom on-the-spot relief could not be denied. The line between temporary and permanent was subjective in that people could be classed as temporary but for an indefinite period of time due, for example, to chronic or recurring medical conditions or childbirth. Through their letters which have survived in St. Philip, Barbados, and through inspectors' reports and application books, we are provided with sufficient evidence upon which to build a picture of their condition over time and upon which to base an in depth study of the ways in which they tried to stay out of the almshouse and prolong their relief, and the extent to which they were able to influence practice through protest or non-engagement at the parish level.

## CHAPTER 2

### Pauper negotiations with the Poor Law authorities, 1880–1895

Since the dawn of emancipation, elite emphasis had been on the promotion of marriage and the nuclear family structure as the ideal; on the condemnation of unmarried unions and illegitimate births; and on the theory that the plantation slavery culture continued to influence the formation of black families in the free society.<sup>186</sup> Anthropologists, historians and social scientists have been drawn to the multiplicities of Caribbean kinship patterns particularly evident at the lower end of the social spectrum. From the 1980s feminist theories, women's history and gender history emerged which questioned the tendency of the earlier generation of researchers to approach the Caribbean family through a structural functional lens – essentially on the premise that other family formations are deviations from the normative nuclear family form. Even the exploration of the continuity of African kinship traditions surviving enslavement and beyond which emerged to counter the narrative of dysfunction, still fell within the theoretical scope of structural functionalism. Patricia Mohammed provides a short discussion of the debate between the anthropologists Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits on this topic of plantation or African-derived forms.<sup>187</sup> Both A. Lynn Bolles and Fred J. Hay have written comprehensive historiographical reviews of the literature on the Caribbean family including the limitations of each school and suggestions for the future direction of such studies.<sup>188</sup> Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Barrow have been among the foremost in developing feminist theories which centre women formerly marginalised in the historiography of kinship, and have sought to highlight both the *coexistence* of different family forms beyond the stereotypes, and the realities of women's lives outside of their reproductive and nurturing functions.<sup>189</sup>

Sidney Greenfield and Edith Clarke, through fieldwork in Barbadian and Jamaican communities in the 1960s put forward a third argument: Greenfield concluded that the Barbadian family was neither African nor plantation derived, but a continuation of an inherited English family model

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<sup>186</sup> 'Barbados. Report of Commission on Poor Relief' (Bridgetown, 1875–1877) 7.

<sup>187</sup> Patricia Mohammed, 'The Caribbean Family Revisited' in Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd (eds.) *Gender in Caribbean Development* (Canoe Press, UWI, 2000) 164–175, 166.

<sup>188</sup> A. Lynn Bolles and Fred J. Hay, 'The significance of Caribbeanist Anthropology: A bibliographic history, *Reference Services Review*, Vol. 23 Issue: 2, 1995, 51–60.

<sup>189</sup> Christine Barrow, 'Men, Women and Family in the Caribbean: A Review' in 'The Caribbean Family Revisited' in Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd (eds.) *Gender in Caribbean Development* (Canoe Press, UWI, 2000) 149–163.

distorted by an income spectrum related directly to access to land.<sup>190</sup> As a result, family dynasties tended to form among the land holding classes, nuclear families developed in the middle where there was less land but a reasonable income, while diminishing access to land and wealth on the part of those located toward the lowest end of the income spectrum generated a host of family forms where fathers tended to be absent, marriages became less central, and children were more dependent on mothers.<sup>191</sup> In other words, variations in access to land and wealth could drive away fathers, necessitating a variety of alternative family forms for survival. According to Greenfield, plantation conditions in Barbados eliminated much chance for African survivals in family forms following emancipation, and post-emancipation families were shaped by access to land and income. Consequently, the black family has been considered out of context according to his analysis.<sup>192</sup> Edith Clarke's study of three Jamaican families in 1957 also attributes variations in family and household to economic differences, particularly emphasising land tenure and ownership as a significant factor in determining 'the constitution and stability of the household group and on the behaviour pattern between husband and wife or concubine.'<sup>193</sup>

While my research concurs that single families were prevalent, I argue that married families existed within the poorest segments of society to a far larger extent than has been realised.<sup>194</sup> In Barbados where poverty was widespread, and most acute in the urban centre, my sample of 157 paupers between 1881 and 1889 showed 39 unmarried, 39 married and 5 reputed married. An unknown proportion of the unmarried would have been in stable unions and could be placed under the 'reputed married' category. There were also 30 widows and 4 widowers which, when combined with the married category raises the figure to 73.<sup>195</sup> Excluding the widowed, we are actually seeing a roughly equal rate of applications for relief among the married and unmarried, contrary to expectations. A larger sample is needed to confirm this observation, but it suggests that economic realities and aspirations did not affect or dictate family type at the pauper level,

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<sup>190</sup> Michael Rosberg (reviewer) *English Rustics in Black Skin: A Study of Modern Family Forms in a Preindustrialized Society*, Sidney Greenfield (author), (Bridgetown: Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 2011). *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, Vol. 17, 22 July 2012, 380–382.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Edith Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Family in Three Selected Communities in Jamaica* (London: George, Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970) 31.

<sup>194</sup> See similar discussion in Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920*, 103, acknowledging that the nuclear family was not uncommon among enslaved communities according to the research of Barry Higman and Michael Craton.

<sup>195</sup> The marital status was not noted in the inspector's report for 40 out of the 157 cases.

which then questions some of the theories and assumptions that have become generally accepted. A larger sample is needed to confirm this observation.

The high proportion of marriages evidenced in my samples suggests that scholarly acceptance of the preponderance of single-headed families and non-married unions may have been reliant upon official sources and statements. Barbados did not introduce a civil registration system until 1920, so statistics for marriage were *estimated* based on information provided voluntarily to government by the clergy from their marriage registers, and could therefore be incomplete. Thus, while acknowledging prior and current approaches to examining Caribbean family life, this is not a study of family type. Rather, it seeks to discover what survival strategies were employed by all types of poor families irrespective of the motivating forces behind their formation. How did they endeavour to maintain family cohesion and support one another in the face of extreme and pervasive poverty? How did they respond to legislative decisions, economic realities, social policies and elite moral judgements upon their personal interrelationships? In what ways does the evidence support or challenge contemporary elite views of the causes of poverty, illness and mortality?

This chapter is a history of women insofar as it seeks primarily to learn more about the experiences of women, who dominated the pauper rolls. But the study as a whole aims to build a more complete picture of the role of both sexes including the challenges typically faced by poor men, and thus it is more firmly situated within gender history. Bridget Brereton has lamented the fact that women are largely absent from archival sources, and expressed the hope that more work can fruitfully be done on oral history to compensate for this omission.<sup>196</sup> Mary Chamberlain has integrated oral testimony into her history of the development of nation in Barbados, while Erna Brodber has made it central – i.e. used the testimonies as a primary source upon which to situate her study of Jamaican society in the first generations after enslavement.<sup>197</sup> While I have also included oral testimony where possible, my study rests mainly upon the analysis of rare archival sources produced by women along with reports which reveal much about their thoughts, feelings and actions. The letters written by women allow for a degree of ‘speaking’ through the language

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<sup>196</sup> Bridget Brereton, ‘Gender and the Historiography of the English-Speaking Caribbean’ in Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd (eds.) *Gender in Caribbean Development* (Canoe Press, UWI, 2000) 129–144, 131.

<sup>197</sup> Mary Chamberlain, *Empire and nation-building in the Caribbean: Barbados, 1937–66* (Manchester University Press, 2010); Erna Brodber, *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica, 1907–1944* (University Press of Florida, 2004).

of their writing, and can help us to discover their agency when combined with their application reports.

The theories that underpinned the delivery of relief were very similar in both colonies as we have explained in Chapter 1. I have relied heavily upon the Barbadian records to demonstrate the voice and agency of the poor because of the level of detail in the inspectors' notes along with the survival of pauper letters. Similarly, in the latter part of the chapter dealing with the community beyond the family, the balance shifts towards the Jamaican records because of the Commission's discussion surrounding the non-institutional care of orphan children by local women, but evidence from Barbados is also used. The discourses on poverty were almost identical in the two colonies and the application books and case reports reflect very similar treatment – or rather a similarly diverse experience, given that inconsistency was inherent between parishes in the same colony as well as between colonies. But the same biases and discriminatory practices applied to each – the use of the Almshouse Test to determine deservingness, the preferential treatment of 'respectable' families, and the disadvantage faced by women in particular who struggled to make a living from the narrow range of occupations open to females.

When the Barbados Commission published the 'average' wage for an agricultural worker, it was misleading because it first stated the wages of a male followed by that of a female and a child,<sup>198</sup> giving the erroneous impression to outsider observers that this was a combined family income, when in fact many men were single and many women were single mothers on smaller incomes with more dependants. Childbirth and childrearing, as well as widowhood and the gendered expectations of society's organisation affected women's economic well-being and hindered their earning capacities. Therefore poverty was, as Mary Chamberlain states, 'gendered and generational.'<sup>199</sup> This chapter will explore the ways in which poor women tried to navigate these challenges. Blame often fell on them for hastening the demise of their infants through ignorance and neglect, by resorting to superstition, and by not seeking medical attention until it was too late.<sup>200</sup> Using letters written by poor women themselves alongside the inspector's case notes, we can conclude that mortality was not due to the ignorance of the people as authorities opined, nor

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<sup>198</sup> Average maximum daily wage: 1/- for men, 10d for women, 4–6d for children. 1875 Barbados Commission, 7. Evidence from the 1879 Jamaica Commission indicates a similar figure.

<sup>199</sup> Mary Chamberlain, *Empire and nation-building in the Caribbean*, 53

<sup>200</sup> Evidence taken at Bath, 26, Dr. Major states, 'Children are seldom brought to the doctor till the case is hopeless – till they are dying, in fact;'



was it only due to a scarcity of doctors as Patrick Bryan and other scholars have stated.<sup>201</sup> Rather, it was the medical and parochial system itself which contributed just as much to mortality as anything the people themselves did or did not do. The letters evidence that the inspector tried to deal with matters 'on the spot' but that the board sent sufferers to the almshouse to their detriment. The letters also explore the subtle ways in which the writers sought to influence the parochial boards' decisions in their favour. They also show evidence of closely knit family and community groups who tried to care for their sick relatives at home and maintain family cohesion.

## **Methodology**

For the parish of St. Philip, Barbados, I sampled 182 applications from the Inspector of Poor's Case Books between 1880 and 1895. There were 6 volumes covering the period 1880–1889, containing an estimated 5,105 cases; and a further 3 volumes for the period 1892–1897. My method was to sample the first page from each 6-month period, containing an average of 10–12 cases. I collected all letters found within that sample, either glued onto the report or found loose between the pages. I also scanned the volumes in their entirety to find noteworthy cases which included detailed letters. Letters requesting help on behalf of paupers have been omitted except where they included personal details about the applicant that could be linked to either a letter written by the pauper or to detailed case notes by the inspector. In other words, I have included letters that indicated personal knowledge of the applicant and particulars about their situation, but not, for example, a note from a clergyman simply asking the inspector to attend 'a person reported destitute'. The following tables show a breakdown of the sampled applicants by colour, gender and occupation.

### St. Philip Relief Applicants by Colour between 1880 and 1895

Black	78	43%
Coloured	30	16%
White	30	16%
Unstated	44	24%

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<sup>201</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: race, class, and social control* (Macmillan Caribbean, 1991) 166.

Two of the ‘unstated’ were labourers indicating they were black, as whites as a rule did not undertake plantation labour. Further research would be needed to definitively ascertain the colour of the remaining 42, but it is likely they were mostly black.

#### St. Philip Relief Applicants by Gender

Women	111
Men	51
Children	20

I included 3 children aged 15–16 in the adult category because they were considered old enough to work, and so could be classed as adults for the purposes of their relief applications. The legal duty to support children in Barbados was until the age of 12, but the two 12-year-olds in my sample were treated as children in their reports. The rest of the children were of all ages from birth to 11 years of age.

#### St. Philip Relief Applicants by Age

Aged 19 – 45	82
Aged 50 – 85	44
Age unstated	31
Aged 0 – 12	22

#### St. Philip Relief Applicants by most common Occupations of Females

Unstated	58
Labourers	39
Seamstresses	13
Servants	10

The unstated category could include housewives, the elderly and people with no calling. Thirty-five of the labourers were black, 3 coloured and 1 unstated.

### St. Philip Relief Applicants by Occupations of Females

Unstated	43
Labourers	28
Seamstresses	16*
No occupation	7
Domestic servants	5
Cooks	5
Midwives	2
Hucksters	2

\*This figure includes skilled seamstresses, unskilled ‘coarse needlewomen’, and women who were principally housewives but who did a little needlework when available.

### St. Philip Relief Applicants by Occupations of Males

Unstated	14
Labourer	12
Assistant overseer	2

The remaining 23 applications showed a range of occupations that only occurred singly, such as saddler, tailor, cooper, herdsman, vagabond.

Although no letters from paupers were preserved in the parish of St. Michael, Barbados, the inspector’s notes were equally as detailed as those for St. Philip. I sampled 157 applications for relief from the Inspector of Poor’s Case Books between 1881 and 1889. Each of the 11 volumes comprised an approximate 3-month period. There were on average 12 applications per page, and an average of 400–500 pages in the volume, giving an overall rough estimate of 4000–5000 applications per quarter. However, this figure does not reflect the actual number of persons relieved as not all applications were successful and the same people could appear several times across volumes, as they made repeated requested for aid as their circumstances change. Where this has happened within my sample, I have counted it as one case.

### St. Michael Relief Applicants by Colour between 1881 and 1889

Black	53	34%
Coloured	23	15%

White	6	4%
Unstated	75	48%

Although the inspector tended not to record the colour of the applicant, the vestry minutes indicate that for the month of September 1884 he saw twenty-one new applicants for medical relief, all of whom were black. If this reflected other months, then it is safe to assume the majority of the unstated category were black.

#### St. Michael Relief Applicants by Gender

Women	127
Men	24
Children	6

The small numbers of children is due to the fact that in most cases they were relieved as part of a family unit, where the mother was listed as the applicant. But occasionally the child was listed separately as the applicant, even though the relief was still paid to the mother or guardian.

#### St. Michael Relief Applicants by [most common] Occupations of Females

Unstated	79
Domestic servants	16
Seamstresses	13
Labourers	6

There were far fewer agricultural labourers than in St. Philip, reflecting the urban setting. Within the sample were also beggars, people of no particular trade, washerwomen, hawkers and prostitutes. Occupations of men were too varied to tabulate, being a mixture of carpenter, cooper, coachman, boatman, fishmonger, saddler, shoemaker, soldier, porter, tailor, unknown.

#### Number of persons in receipt of relief in 1871<sup>202</sup>

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>In receipt of relief</u>
St. Michael	48,587	1,752

<sup>202</sup> 'Barbados. Report of the Commission on Poor Relief' (Bridgetown, 1875–1877) 14.

The provision of poor relief was underpinned by three administrative challenges: that of providing adequate medical relief and that of suppressing illegitimacy and enforcing parental – in particular paternal – support of children. The Barbados Commission summed up the medical challenges as too few doctors to administer to the needs of the labouring population on terms they could afford; a want of district infirmaries and dispensaries to relieve the general hospital of many cases which could be treated elsewhere; and difficulty of gaining admission to the general hospital for patients living at a distance from Bridgetown. It also referred to the inability of the labouring poor as well as the class immediately above them to bear the costs incident upon sickness.<sup>203</sup> In Jamaica an additional cause of fatal illness was identified as a preference on the part of the black population for their own ‘superstitious’ remedies and a reluctance to seek medical attention until the illness was too far advanced for a cure.<sup>204</sup>

The members of the Jamaica Commission considered illegitimacy to be a significant contributing factor to poverty and juvenile delinquency, as stated in the report and highlighted by the leading part of the first question they asked to respondents: ‘How far is juvenile delinquency traceable to the illegitimacy of children and the repudiation of parental obligations...?’<sup>205</sup> Most replies concurred with the implicit suggestion, but some such as R. McEnery of St. Thomas parish stated he was not aware that juvenile delinquency was any more attributable to one class than the other, and several of the respondents interviewed in Portland parish did not think illegitimacy was the main problem but reported social problems of youth among all classes. A. Escoffery of Portland said, ‘Legitimate as well as illegitimate offspring of some are neglected by their fathers, and the mothers can’t support them.’ The planter W.B. Espeut said he could distinguish no difference whatever in children who were illegitimate, orphans or of well-to-do parents.<sup>206</sup> However, this more balanced voice that did not single out one class for criticism seems not to have been heard. The final report called for the enactment of a stringent Bastardy Law to fix affiliation and enable a Maintenance Law to operate.<sup>207</sup> Law 2 of 1881, the Bastardy Law stated that the mother of an illegitimate child could make a claim of paternity against the putative father

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>204</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: race, class, and social control* (Macmillan Caribbean, 1991) 166.

<sup>205</sup> *Report of Commission upon the Condition of the Juvenile Population of Jamaica with the Evidence Taken and An Appendix, 1879* (National Library of Jamaica).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., *Precis of answers*, pages 1–77, see under parish headings.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. Report, 6.

of her child before a justice, where previously it was only in the event that she became chargeable on the parish that the Guardians could pursue the claim to defray the expenses of her care.<sup>208</sup> Law 16 of 1881, the Maintenance Law made a man responsible not only for his legitimate children but obliged him to fairly contribute to the support and education of his wife's children, those of any woman with whom he cohabited or those he was judged to have fathered, until the age of fourteen.<sup>209</sup> Widows and unmarried women were similarly ordered, and grandmothers were further obliged to maintain their grandchildren if the parents were unable. Children of married unions were obliged to support their parents and grandparents; children of unmarried unions to support their mothers and the man cohabiting with her at the time of their births.

Meanwhile in Barbados the Commission also tied poverty to illegitimacy and made some suggestions as to its cause,

Another prolific cause of poverty and general distress is the prevalence of bastardy. Whatever the cause, whether the unabandoned traditions of slavery, when marriage was unknown, or the overcrowding of cottages, which renders difficult any attempt at purity of life, it is a patent fact that, despite the efforts of the ministers of religion...there prevails a general preference for concubinage, more or less permanent, to lawful matrimony...<sup>210</sup>

What stands out from the Commission's statement is the omission of any acknowledgement of the direct responsibility of estate managers, employers, and those responsible for parochial or island infrastructures to improve the general standard of living. The use of the word 'preference' ascribes a choice to the people where likely none existed. The report further complained that the Bastardy Law was a dead letter, as in that year there were only twenty-four complaints by mothers against putative fathers and even in the event that a man was ordered to make a payment for the support of his child, he would simply abscond from the neighbourhood or island altogether.<sup>211</sup> The reality was that the legal process was costly and time consuming for the parish authorities and so not pursued with any vigour because even when successful it was insignificant

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<sup>208</sup> CO 139/104, Law 2 of 1881, Bastardy Law.

<sup>209</sup> CO 139/104, Law 16 of 1881, Maintenance Law.

<sup>210</sup> Barbados Commission, 6.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

in reducing the burden of the support of children on parish funds. My sample of poor relief applicants in St. Michael found only seven complaints against fathers occurring between 1881 and 1888. A further Bastardy Act was passed in 1888 and a Poor and Bastardy Act in 1890, but to little effect.

## **Healthcare and Poor Relief**

### Women as child-bearers: birth to burial

The majority of applicants sought medical relief in the form of tickets dispensed by the inspector for specific purposes – home visits from the doctor, visiting the doctor at the almshouse, acquiring free medicines and nourishment, and midwifery services. Cases requiring hospitalisation were problematic, as the general hospital in Bridgetown was privately run and it was expensive for parishes to send paupers there and so they avoided it except in exceptional cases.<sup>212</sup> Paupers who did gain admittance were those who came in off the streets of Bridgetown and could not in humanity be turned away, though many of them were in fact almshouse cases rather than hospital cases.<sup>213</sup> Simultaneously, hospital cases among the sick poor of the other parishes were sent to the parochial almshouses to be treated by the medical officer who visited twice weekly. Thus, the almshouses were supposed to act as clinics and dispensaries, as well as places to which orphans and the children of incarcerated persons were sent, along with aged, incurable and destitute adults.<sup>214</sup> The Barbados Commission regretted that the island's hospital, lazaretto and asylum were all colonially supported while there was nothing parochially for 'the indigent blind, idiots, common "sore leg", sick or crippled children and orphans.'<sup>215</sup> All were sent to the almshouse alike. There was also no lying-in hospital and as a result many homeless women gave birth in the street.<sup>216</sup>

In Barbados, only St. Michael parish established a small lying-in ward at its almshouse in the late 1880s with 12 beds and only 19 women gave birth there between 1902 and 1916.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>214</sup> Fletcher notes that three years after the passing of the Poor Law four out of the eleven parishes had not complied with the requirement to establish dispensaries at their almshouses, so access to medicine remained a challenge. 189.

<sup>215</sup> Barbados Commission, 14.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>217</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender and Population Politics after Slavery* (Oxford, 2015) 77, 87.

Similarly, Jamaica established the Victoria Jubilee Hospital in Kingston in 1888 with 16 beds. Neither institution was of much use to poor women in the rural parishes. Such women might seek admittance to the parochial almshouse for deliveries of their babies if they were desperate, but there were no special facilities there for childbirth and no guarantee of admittance. The almshouses were invariably full, and St. Andrew parish in Barbados and Manchester parish in Jamaica did not have almshouses at all for the accommodation of the destitute of their parishes. Besides, the sanitary condition of these institutions and the lack of separation of different categories of patients and inmates could pose more of a risk than giving birth elsewhere. If the woman had young children to care for, temporary almshouse admittance was rendered even more impractical.

In spite of the inadequate provision of healthcare, poor diet and squalid living conditions endured by the poor, authorities continued to attribute illness and mortality to the neglect associated with being the illegitimate child of irresponsible parents.<sup>218</sup> Fathers were condemned for deserting their children leaving mothers unable to cope, while mothers were blamed for the improper feeding of infants through ignorance and for leaving their children with irresponsible governesses – women paid to look after children while their mothers worked.<sup>219</sup> Families were charged with not caring for the sick properly, specifically with not seeking medical attention until the illness was too far advanced for a cure.<sup>220</sup> And overall, weak family ties and weak social structure were blamed.

Mortality in Barbados was extremely high, and child mortality highest in the British Caribbean region. Between 1882 and 1894, the statistical returns did not present data for infant deaths and stillbirths separately from the data for all deaths. But from looking at a compilation of contemporary reports, Richardson has deduced that between 1881 and 1890 the death rate of children under 5 was 270/1000 live births. In 1895 it was 221.5, compared to 121.8/1000 in neighbouring St. Lucia. As late as 1921 it was 270 compared to 82.9 in the UK and 70 in Trinidad & Tobago.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Henderson Carter, *Labour Pains: Resistance and Protest in Barbados 183–1904*, (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2012) 79.

<sup>219</sup> Concerns over the quality of care of children residing with governesses, see Jamaica Commission, 1878, 'Evidence of Dr. Gayleard, Government Medical Officer for Kingston', 20–21.

<sup>220</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, 166–170.

<sup>221</sup> Bonham C. Richardson, *Economy and Environment in the Caribbean: Barbados and the Windwards in the late 1800s* (Barbados: UWI, 1997) and CO 31/107, 1920–1921, Minutes of Legislative Council and Assembly.



Local women known as ‘granny midwives’ commonly attended expectant mothers, and this tradition of relying on untrained midwives was highlighted by medical officers as a main cause of infant deaths. Advances in obstetrics had been accelerating from the middle of the century when sepsis was discovered as the cause of puerperal fever.<sup>222</sup> But it was towards the end of the century that this ‘professionalisation’ began to extend to midwifery in Britain, and consequently to maternity services in the colonies.<sup>223</sup> Charles Mosse, superintending medical officer for Jamaica reported ‘the unskilful treatment of ignorant women who profess some knowledge of midwifery.’<sup>224</sup> Charles Hutson, poor law inspector in Barbados 1896 reported ‘the gross ignorance, ... culpable carelessness and neglect of the so-called “midwives”’<sup>225</sup>

Though such sentiments were not unheard of in England, the 1893 Select Committee on Midwives Registration conceded that there was no evidence of actual harm caused by medically untrained midwives in cases of ‘natural’ childbirth, and that they had an important role to play within their local communities.<sup>226</sup> Similar discussions were taking place in the Caribbean, yet the ‘ignorant midwife’ trope persisted, and midwives were convenient scapegoats for infant and maternal mortality, along with the accusation that the poor were averse to seeking medical attendance.<sup>227</sup>

My evidence suggests that in cases of ‘difficult’ childbirth the poor did not hesitate to seek medical assistance, while in cases of natural childbirth the local midwives sufficed. I refer to my samples of pauper applications in the parish of St. Michael parish. The poor gravitated towards the town from the rural parishes in search of work, in the hope of being admitted to the general hospital and to seek a better source of income through begging and the kindness of shopkeepers who sometimes gave food to the poor.<sup>228</sup> The urban segment of the population was disadvantaged in not benefitting from access to land, and in greater unemployment, homelessness and destitution than elsewhere. Paupers newly arrived in town did not benefit from the support of

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<sup>222</sup> J. Drife ‘The Start of Life: a history of obstetrics’, *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 2002, 78:311–315, 313.

<sup>223</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 74.

<sup>224</sup> CO 140/194, Blue Books 1885–86, 1886–87, ‘Annual Report of the Island Medical Department for the Year Ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 1886,’ 159–176. 155 – 185 (1886 – 1887)

<sup>225</sup> Barbados Archives, ‘Thirty-fourth Report of the Poor Law Inspector, January– June 1897, 21.

<sup>226</sup> Sarah Fox and Margaret Brazier, ‘The Regulation of Midwives in England, c.1500–1902’, *Medical Law International*, Vol. 20, No.4, 2020, 308–338, 1–31, 25–26.

<sup>227</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 72–73, illustrates how the denigration of black midwives was rooted in the slavery period and persisted after emancipation.

<sup>228</sup> Barbados Commission, 17.

extended family who were still in the countryside. There was a higher proportion of young single women without family nearby, with evidence of some among them working as prostitutes, but also a significant number of persons living in family groups.

My sample of 157 relief applications between 1881 and 1889 shows 127 women, 27 men and 5 children.<sup>229</sup> The table below shows the number of childbirth-related applications within that sample.

Childbirth and pregnancy-related applications for relief between 1881 and 1889

Women married and reputed married	8
Vagrant women*	8
Unstated	7
Women residing with their mothers	4
Women residing with their fathers	1
Total number of applicants for childbirth-related relief	28

\*The term ‘vagrant midwifery’ referred to women of no settled abode, forced to give birth in the open or beg admittance to a stranger’s house.

Of these 8 married pregnant women, two were the wives of men who had migrated. Case 1 asked the inspector for a midwife as her migrant husband had died leaving her unable to afford one. Case 2, one Harriet Griffiths, had become ill after delivering her third child and her husband in Demerara had not yet found work. Cases 3 and 4 concerned desertion and non-support: the former of these suffered a miscarriage and the latter who was 5 months pregnant was granted 1/- relief and a doctor to attend her. Case 5 was for a woman reputed married, in labour for 4 days in a dangerous condition.

Cases 6–8 revealed more information about the husbands: Case 6 concerned a 32-year-old woman who worked as a washer and scrubber. Her husband worked on the wharf but his wages were not enough to support her, so she could not afford a doctor when she miscarried at 4 months. This case illustrates the problem faced by labourers in that even when both husband and wife were employed, the cost of a doctor’s visit and medicines was prohibitive. The Poor Law

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<sup>229</sup> Inspector’s Case Reports, St Michael October 1884 – June 1885. There were 423 cases in total for the half-year.

required doctors to attend the labouring poor for a sum not exceeding 4/-, and while this may have helped some, clearly there were cases where medical attendance plus the cost of medicines ate up a family's meagre resources and rendered them paupers. Consequently, women were disadvantaged biologically due to the medical needs associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

In Case 7 a man applied to the inspector for relief for his wife while she was in labour. And Case 8 concerns one Alexander Clarke, the husband of Jane Smith, who was so agitated by his wife's condition that, according to the inspector, he was unable to explain her case coherently. She had gone into labour at 7 months, and by the time the inspector arrived had been delivered of a stillborn child.

These cases show that marriage was no guarantor of prosperity, even when the husband was supporting. In all cases seen, the person was forced to wait until the final moment before seeking relief, as a midwife could not easily be afforded for any care in advance of delivery. This is shown by the man in Case 7 who sought relief while his wife was in labour, and not before, and the Case 8 where the man tried to get help. If a family was seeking free medical attendance, the doctor would not attend unless requested by the inspector, who in turn had to answer to the Board of Guardians who had to be satisfied the person was a pauper and that the case was urgent, otherwise they would seek a refund. So the poor took their chances and prayed nothing would go wrong, not from indifference but simple lack of means. 3 out of the 8 cases resulted in infant deaths. The husband in the final case was clearly deeply distressed at his wife's condition. It is reported that he went first to the guardians then to the inspector showing that he did not know the correct procedure and lost crucial time. A similar thing happened in the case of one Louisa Cricklow, whose distressed father tried in vain to get help for her. He visited the inspector at 4am. His daughter had been delivered at 12am but had not spoken since and was bleeding profusely. The man had not known where to apply for aid and had lost much time going to the hospital to ask the doctor's name and going to the doctor before the inspector. The inspector wrote in his report that as it was an urgent case, he thought it his duty to give the order for the doctor to attend without first visiting himself. At 6.15am the father returned saying that his daughter had died before the doctor arrived, and asking for burial relief.

These tragic cases suggest that the father of Louisa Cricklow and the husband of Jane Smith had not previously applied for relief or they would have known the correct procedure; they were poor families trying to get by without assistance except in an emergency. There was no lack of

emotion or care from these worried husbands and fathers. The cases also highlight a flaw in the system which obliged the inspector to attend the applicant's home before sending for the doctor. In Cricklow's case, the inspector wrote, 'I think that in cases of this sort of urgent midwifery when the applicant goes direct to the doctor, he should be allowed to visit without an order.'<sup>230</sup> The system wasted time and endangered mothers and infants who might otherwise have been saved through prompt action. So even in what was considered to be the most favourable circumstances possible for a labouring family, i.e. married cohabiting parents with two incomes, these 8 cases showed 3 miscarriages, 1 stillbirth, 1 maternal death, and one 'dangerous condition'. One can therefore conclude that labouring women, whether married or not, struggled to afford doctors or midwives. In fact, a woman's income could stop altogether due to her pregnancy. In St. Michael the inspector reports on one Roberta Garner, a 28-year-old coloured servant earning 5/- a month who was forced through pregnancy to leave her employer.<sup>231</sup> In other cases women managed from necessity to work right up to the moment of delivery but would inevitably have to take time off afterwards.

In October 1880 the St Michael Vestry met to discuss fees for medical officers in the light of the new Poor Law which stated they be paid by the case and not by the visit unless it be an extreme and difficult case requiring many visits. The vestrymen went on to say that in midwifery all cases must be considered extreme and difficult otherwise the medical officer would not have been called.<sup>232</sup> In both Jane Smith and Louisa Cricklow's cases, delay was fatal. In humanity, the inspector sent the doctor to Louisa Cricklow without first visiting himself, as he felt the urgency of the case; yet she died in 1884, four years after the vestry deliberated on the topic. Such discussions clearly did nothing to affect infant mortality rates but eventually paved the way for some steps towards modernisation after 1900. In 1902 the St. Philip Vestry resolved to give fresh or condensed milk to poor mothers for babies, to employ nurses to visit mothers immediately after confinement to advise on feeding, and to establish inexpensive day nurseries as an experiment.<sup>233</sup> It is unclear whether or not these resolutions came to pass, but in 1912 a similar scheme introduced in St. George to hire two nurses to distribute milk to malnourished babies was abandoned the following year as the vestry withdrew its grant.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid. Case of Louisa Cricklow, December 1884.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. October 1884.

<sup>232</sup> St Michael Vestry, 5th August 1878 – 26th April 1883, 146: scale of fees for Medical Officers for approval of vestry, 14th October 1880.

<sup>233</sup> For a full list of their resolutions, see 'St. Philip, Poor Law Guardians Minute Book, 1902, 6th March 1902, average deaths for past 5 years of children under 1: 31.59% or 2111 children', Barbados Archives.

<sup>234</sup> Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados 1900–1920* (University of Tennessee Press, 1985) 79.

The midwifery cases show that whatever the Poor Law Inspector or Senior Medical Officer may have thought, parish authorities employed the local midwives, as did families themselves because there was no alternative. Giving birth at home was the only realistic option, where a pauper woman could get a midwife whom the board would remunerate after attendance. Even for women not on the pauper roll, and so not entitled to the services of a midwife gratis, the local poor law inspector could still send for one in an emergency, such as in the case of Elizabeth Drax of St. Philip who delivered her child in the street near the hospital and was taken to the yard of the police station. Oscar Crawford, the inspector of poor for St. Philip, secured a midwife and sent the mother by cab to a room at a cost of 1/6 week.<sup>235</sup> Or the case of a 20-year-old black woman who, even though she managed to work as a domestic and washer right up to the moment her labour began, could not afford a midwife. Crawford employed a midwife and gave her 2/-.<sup>236</sup> These were unlikely to be trained midwives because the training of midwives was a new initiative which did not begin the final decade of the nineteenth century, after which few practised in rural areas.<sup>237</sup>

The injustice of blaming the midwives for unacceptable levels of mortality and suffering can be clearly shown by looking at the midwifery traditions of the middle classes and comparing them to the poorer classes. I conversed with Mrs. D Mullings, an 87-year-old retired nurse born in rural Manchester, Jamaica. I asked her about who delivered her and her nine siblings, the eldest of whom was born in 1922. She told me there was an old woman known as Sister Sis who delivered thousands of babies for the whole district, and that she was self-taught. Mrs. Mullings spoke of Sister Sis and midwives in general in glowing terms, ‘These midwives cut the cord. They were very clever. They stayed with the mother for nine days. Sometimes they did a better job. They had a better feeling for it and experience than the trained.’<sup>238</sup>

Only her last two siblings were delivered by a trained midwife as Sister Sis was by then too old and Nurse Macadam arrived in the district in 1945. Mrs. Mullings further stated that there was only one doctor in Mandeville which was at a distance of approximately thirty miles from their home. This doctor was the only doctor for the entire parish of over 50,000 residents and 308

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<sup>235</sup> Records of the Board of Poor Law Guardians, Inspectors' Case Reports, St. Michael 1881–1883.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, St. Michael 1887–1889.

<sup>237</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender and Population Politics*, 77. A midwifery training college was established in 1902 located at the maternity ward of the St. Michael Almshouse.

<sup>238</sup> Reminiscences of Mrs. D, Mullings (personal communication, 7 October 2017).

square miles.<sup>239</sup> Although the personal memories of Mrs. Mullings born in 1929 fall outside my approximate period of study, the information she provided on midwifery practices in the 1920s must have come from her mother or other elders, and the age and length of practice of the midwife points to a continuity of practice extending from at least the turn of the century.

Mrs. Mullings went on to say that she was sixteen years old when the first doctor came to Christiana, their nearest town. Before the widespread use of the motor car, this would have had enormous implications for the health of the poor who could not access a doctor due to cost and distance.<sup>240</sup> There is also evidence that poor women struggled to afford the fees of the trained midwives. Juanita De Barros writes that their fees were determined by government policies, and had to cover the cost of their equipment, and so many trained midwives preferred to work in the towns where they could get more work, and did not return to their rural parishes after gaining their qualifications.<sup>241</sup>

Tracing families through baptism records and oral research shows large family sizes, high numbers of live births and children thriving to adulthood among the rural middle classes of Jamaica who were delivered by untrained midwives at least up to 1945 in Manchester parish and doubtless in many other parishes. Yet in 1920 J.A.L. Calder, District Medical Officer for St. Elizabeth, Jamaica described midwives as 'hopelessly ignorant, horribly dirty and appallingly incompetent' and said they were the cause of deaths amongst the infant poor.<sup>242</sup> This scapegoating of the poor due to their supposed obstinate use of untrained midwives shows that while certain behaviours were condemned in one class, they were in truth the only option or the favoured options among the higher classes, but the poor were spotlighted as complicit in their own suffering. It also averts blame from male doctors, vestrymen, assemblymen and councilmen and places it instead on the shoulders of women – on the midwives who were an easy target for the criticisms of men in authority, and whose livelihood and independence were threatened by such accusations. In St Philip a midwife named Mary Frances Maughn applied for poor relief for herself and her elderly mother who was also a midwife, saying she could not get much work because the doctor preferred to work with trained nurses.<sup>243</sup> The case points to the precariousness

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<sup>239</sup> Blue Book, Jamaica, 1907, 2R.

<sup>240</sup> The first motor care was driven in Black River, St. Elizabeth in 1903, and by 1925 an estimated 2,000 motor vehicles were on the roads. See *The Gleaner*, 'A history of firsts', Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and the website of the Jamaica Automobile Association, 'History of the JAA' both accessed online 07/03/18.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 87.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>243</sup> St. Philip, Cases of Paupers Inspected, Volume 3, June 1885.

of female professions, even one such as midwifery which was provided by women for women, but over which men exerted increasing control.

The whole debate over the professionalisation of the service rested on the objectification of poor women as ignorant receptacles awaiting the instruction of their superiors to educate them on proper birthing practices and infant care.<sup>244</sup> Poor women's bodies became a contested site. What, therefore could these women themselves do to assert ownership over their bodies and birthing traditions? De Barros points out that the 'poor choices' of which commentators accused poor women were not choices at all. Both the limited availability and the cost of using trained medical personnel were discouraging. The granny midwives were certainly cheaper, and De Barros suggests they might have accepted alternative forms of payment to cash.<sup>245</sup> But it cannot definitively be asserted that poor women purposely resisted professionalisation in a conscious effort to retain control over their own bodies. Whether or not continuing with the grannies was a deliberate strategy of resistance, a preference for the familiar or merely an economic necessity cannot easily be known. However, evidence of strategic thinking can more clearly be shown in how women sought aid from the parish for their ongoing care after delivery of their babies.

#### Poor Women's Letters: The Language of Persuasion

Childbirth related periods of incapacity were eligible to receive casual relief, meaning a mother could be immediately relieved with medical attention, nourishment or cash by order of the inspector. But this relief was temporary and did not mean they fared better in the long-term, as their status as poor single mothers left them at the mercy of parsimonious officials who, rather than give a shilling, would first attempt to prosecute fathers, find other relatives 'able' to care for them, or even withhold relief as a case reported in 1905 by Richardson where an infant in St. George parish died because, according to the inspector, the parish board had instructed him to give fewer hospital tickets to single women.<sup>246</sup>

Except where an applicant was known to the board and perhaps well-known in the district, the inspector was careful in his reports to note the particulars. For example, in a report on an 18-

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<sup>244</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 87.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 74. Case found in 'The Half-Yearly Reports of the Poor Law Inspector, July–December 1904', Official Gazette 15<sup>th</sup> May 1905, 808–809.

year-old black prostitute whose attending midwife reported she had been in labour and great pain for a full day, the inspector noted that the father of her child was in Demerara.<sup>247</sup> And the report on the 20-year-old domestic noted that her child's father was a clerk but that he left the island six months prior, her father was dead and her mother had deserted her.<sup>248</sup> These details served to demonstrate to the board that he had been thorough, and that there were no parents or father of the child able to support. While these careful measures allowed the new mother to be eligible to receive a few shillings or nourishment, when she was deemed strong enough and the temporary relief ceased, she would find herself in an even more precarious position with an extra mouth to feed. Her health might be damaged by post-natal complications requiring further medical treatment and so a longer period of time incapacitated. Furthermore, given the high mortality rates a poor woman's next burden was likely to be the burial of her child and the expense of providing a coffin, hearse and burial plot.

What, then, did these women do to help themselves and to draw favourable attention to their plights? To ease their financial distress they needed to get the temporary relief to continue as long as possible to cover these as well as their ongoing expenses for medical attention and food. Both the emotional and the financial strain of the high death toll can be seen in some of the more shocking cases reported in St. Philip, but the examples also show the women's persistence in trying to secure the continuance of their small allowances. Poor rates paid for a coffin and burial of the poor but the decision lay with the Board of Guardians and poor mothers could only petition and petition hard for assistance with this and assistance with medical relief and nourishment for the time of their confinement and recovery. In September 1889 Mary Marshall, a parish pensioner, wrote to the inspector thus,

Dear Sir

I beg to say to you that my child is dead. I have no means whatever of burying it and humbly beg you will take notice of my condition and put the same to the Guardian of the Vestry and assist me in doing so, as without some assistance it must remain to be offensive it died at 11 o'clock today.

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<sup>247</sup> Inspectors' Case Reports, St. Michael, 1884–1885.

<sup>248</sup> Inspectors' Case Reports, St. Michael, December 1888.



Yrs obedient servant

Mary Marshall, Content Cottage.<sup>249</sup>

At first the tone suggests detachment in the wording ‘it must remain to be offensive’. This dehumanises and objectifies the deceased child, which could be a means of coping with her loss but which also shows knowledge of how the letter might be received by a board of guardians that had the reputation of being the most parsimonious in the entire island.<sup>250</sup> She avoids sentiment or a plea for humanity and instead gets straight to the purpose of her letter, in effect saying that her deceased child will be a public health hazard if she is not assisted in the burial. If seen in this light it illuminates the heartlessness of the board rather than of the mother. Crawford stated, ‘I know her to be utterly destitute and unable to provide [a coffin]’,<sup>251</sup> thereby supporting her plea with his own endorsement.

Another illuminative case is that of Rachael Pindar of Blades Hill. Her case was brought to the attention of the inspector by a letter of 20<sup>th</sup> August 1885 from the Reverend Bennett requesting him to instruct on the burial of her twins.<sup>252</sup> Crawford reported that the young woman had buried her stillborn twins in the ground but dogs dug up one, leading to an inquest. Crawford ordered a hearse and instructed the rector to arrange a grave. Both would be paid for by the parish poor fund. The board awarded the mother 36 cents a week in cash for two weeks (just over a shilling). When her allowance ceased after a fortnight, Rachael Pindar wrote to Crawford on 14<sup>th</sup> September asking for a continuation and some medical assistance,

You are aware, Sir, that it is contrary to human nature for me to go to work so soon after delivery. Indeed, the pains about my left side are so great that it is a matter of bare necessity which forces me to stir from my bed. I shall be doubly thankful to you would you kindly see to the continuance of the allowance made me, and also procure a little ointment from the Doctor for my side and hip joints.<sup>253</sup>

Crawford subsequently visited and found that she had gone into town, and the board allowed her 1/- a week in food for two weeks longer. Although clearly able to move about, Rachael Pindar

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<sup>249</sup> St. Philip, 279, 18 Sep 1889.

<sup>250</sup> Richard C. Carter, ‘The Almshouse Test’, 154.

<sup>251</sup> St. Philip, 279, 18 Sep 1889.

<sup>252</sup> St. Philip, Records of the Inspector of Poor, Cases of paupers inspected: vol. 3, 318.

<sup>253</sup> St. Philip, Records of the Inspector of Poor, Cases of Paupers Inspected, 58.

was trying to get her relief extended for as long as possible by making both a physical and a moral case for not being able to work yet. She was no doubt engaged in attempting to secure other sources of food and income, since one shilling could hardly suffice. Miss Simpson, almoner for the paupers of Morant Bay, Jamaica, mentioned two old women who got only 1/- and that they sometimes asked for additional help, and Michael Solomon, former member of the board of St. Ann, Jamaica, said in his testimony that ‘The allowances to paupers are too limited to give support, while it tends to encourage begging. One shilling a week is wholly inadequate.’<sup>254</sup>

The outcome of a woman’s appeal depended much upon the personal judgment of others. Thus, it remained a subjective process, as much as it had been before the 1880 Poor Law, and which the commissions and the poor law boards sought in vain to stamp out. The personal judgment of inspectors, clergy and guardians affected the outcome of women’s appeals. The reverend described Rachael Pindar as a bad character and the father of the child ‘a stubborn fellow...[who] has treated the woman very badly.’ Single mothers were particularly vulnerable to unfavourable judgments, as the nuclear family with a male breadwinner was strongly encouraged. Labouring single black mothers and families in non-marital unions could fare very poorly when seeking relief. Their letters suggest they were aware of this, just as women differently and more respectably circumstanced were aware of how their situations were viewed and were able to exploit those expectations.

The Barbados Commission expressed particular sympathy for ‘poor gentlefolk’ – those fallen through adversity from a higher sphere and described their plight as ‘the most distressing of all’.<sup>255</sup> This segment of the poor was largely white widows, but the concession extended to coloured families who mostly lived above the status of labourers. The letter below from a Mrs Harding, a coloured woman, is an appeal of a married woman whose husband is too sick to work.

Respected gentlemen,

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<sup>254</sup> Jamaica Commission, 28.

<sup>255</sup> Barbados Commission, 4.

With feelings of bitter distress I have written this asking your kind hearts to help me in this my great necessity. Mr Harding is on his back sick and unable to do any thing to help myself nor children, and there is no way of my obtaining any daily support for them. Oh have mercy on me and help me for charity covers a multitude of sins. You may conjecture what my feeling must be, the grief of a sick husband and children around me looking for daily support and no means of obtaining it. Oh I must ask you to pity my distress and God's hope and trust will shower his blessings on you large measure.

I am your obedient servant,  
Mrs. John B Harding

Mrs. Harding makes a religious appeal in saying 'charity covers a multitude of sins' and 'God's hope and trust will shower his blessings on you'; and an emotional appeal in saying 'have mercy on me'. The board granted her 1/- a week for food for herself and two young daughters for as long as her husband remained under medical care. Mary Marshall who sought burial relief for her child resorts to stark realism, 'I have no means whatever' and 'it must remain to be offensive'. There is no emotion in her tone, and no appeal to mercy or humanity. The board provided her with a coffin. Both women make sure to point out they have no means, in order to pre-empt that question and the delay of their relief. Rachael Pindar whom the rector had described as a bad character, appears clever and determined. Her appeal is both physical and moral, as she refers to pains in her side and hip joint and that it is 'contrary to human nature' for a woman who has just given birth to be expected to be up and about. In essence, she is implying that a gentleman cannot ignore these delicate facts of nature. She also invokes necessity: 'it is a matter of bare necessity which forces me to stir from my bed'. She was no doubt engaged in attempting to secure other sources of food and income, and so cleverly lets it be known that she can get up but only out of extreme necessity. Even allowing for some exaggeration on her part, she clearly needed the allowance though she was not entirely 'deserving' in their eyes, as recognised by the board which granted a shilling a week in food for only two weeks longer.

Although differently circumstanced, what is shown clearly through these written entreaties is that women understood how to pen their appeals to best effect and that even though the allowances were tiny, they were necessary and diligently claimed even as they tried to find additional funds to make ends meet. It is reasonable to conclude that these letters also mirrored the verbal entreaties of the unlettered majority who came to the notice of the inspector via other means and

thus represent the general awareness and techniques of negotiation which characterised the daily operations of poor relief.

Though these women were without visible means of support – indeed, this was a prerequisite for eligibility for parish relief – they lived in close proximity to others, particularly in densely populated Barbados where relatives and neighbours formed a vital mutual support network. Women continued to rely on their mothers in times of sickness or confinement. Many appeals for aid were made on their behalf by their mothers. Often three generations of women and children formed the family unit. Its structure was in no way weaker than a married nuclear family – in fact, cases of desertion of husbands appear far more frequently than desertion of children by their mothers. This seems not to have been recognised or appreciated by poor law officials. I will argue that these families were not inherently weak and that it was the poor relief system which drove black families apart.

Women, whether married or single, commonly returned to their parents' home to deliver their babies. This practice continued into the twentieth century for as long as women continued to routinely have their babies at home rather than in hospital. The 20-year-old black cook whose case was mentioned in the previous section was staying with her mother while the father of her baby was away. Emily Seely, a 30-year-old married needlewoman with five small children, the youngest a few days old, was taken to her parents' home to recuperate. This unfortunately disqualified her for relief, as her parents owned  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre of land and rented another  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and as her husband was working the doctor did not consider them poor.<sup>256</sup> Knowing this, she still went. The mother of Mrs. D. Mullings, a married housewife, travelled a distance of approximately ninety miles from Bluefields, Westmoreland, where her husband worked, to her parents in Coleyville, Manchester so she could be attended by her mother, other female relatives and the local midwife.<sup>257</sup> What many of these cases show is that women continued to be primary caregivers and provide vital care for their adult daughters. Though petitioning the parish board for allowances was important, the closely-knit family and community groups were of far greater importance in the daily business of work, childrearing and coping with sickness. The medicines they used were not condemned by the local inspector or medical officers, neither was the quality

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<sup>256</sup> St. Philip, Records of the Inspector of Poor, Cases of paupers inspected, 1880–1882: June 1881, 118.

<sup>257</sup> For more on the role of 'granny midwives' and the government's drive to professionalise midwifery see Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, Chapter 3: Grannies, Midwives and Colonial Encounters, 67–93.

of care by family questioned, except in rare and exceptional cases.

### Medicine

‘...their [old people’s] sons would do nothing for them until they were in *articulo mortis*, and then they would send for the doctor.’ Dr. Gerrard, GMO at Morant Bay.<sup>258</sup>

‘Children are seldom brought to the doctor till the case is hopeless – till they are dying, in fact.’ Dr. Major, GMO at Bath.<sup>259</sup>

There was little the poor could do in cases of serious illness. Elites remained indifferent until the cholera epidemics of the 1850s after which planters expressed regret over their former indifference to the health of their workers, and boards of health and sanitation were set up.<sup>260</sup> For a short time, public spending increased but the fervour died down and without a proper understanding of the causes of cholera, their efforts were minimal. Smallpox was another epidemic which periodically ravaged communities. Jamaica was assiduous in getting a universal vaccine programme in place, and pushed through the birth registration law of 1878 to assist with it. The Barbados Assembly rejected the registration bill, making it harder to ensure all children were covered. Poor Barbadians themselves were somewhat wary of the vaccine, since they could get medical relief if they contracted the virus, but not if they were made ill by the vaccine itself.<sup>261</sup> There was little that the undernourished poor without access to clean water and sanitation could do to prevent tropical diseases such as cholera, typhoid and dysentery. But there is plenty of evidence that they did their best in the circumstances. Blacks were criticised for ‘preferring’ the services of Myalmen to trained doctors and for not bringing their sick to hospital until the illness was too advanced for treatment.<sup>262</sup> Indeed many who were admitted to the almshouses were in the final stages of disease, but it is the interpretation of this fact which comes under scrutiny. The state of medicine in Victorian times was such that everyone used ‘home remedies’ as a first resort, and these remedies were universal and not confined to blacks. Slave owning white women had often relied on the ministrations of a slave woman versed in plant lore,

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<sup>258</sup> Appendix C, Evidence at Morant Bay and Bath, 50.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>260</sup> ‘I heard more than one proprietor regret in 1854 that he had not cared more for the welfare of his labourers.’ Statement of James Young Edghill, superintendent of the Moravian church in Barbados from 1851–1886, quoted in Richard Carter, ‘Public Amenities after Emancipation’, *Emancipation II* (1986), 49–69, 54.

<sup>261</sup> Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 75.

<sup>262</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People*, 170.

known as the 'negro doctor' or 'doctress', and the medicine they prescribed could be similar or even better than that prescribed by European doctors. In Barbados green tar, also called manjack, was a major international export throughout the nineteenth century and continued to be used in rural areas even after the advent of 'modern' medicine in the treatment of a variety of illnesses, from boils to tuberculosis.<sup>263</sup> As well as forming part of a doctor's remedies, it was something people in the districts where it was found could dig up for themselves.<sup>264</sup>

In July 1894 Elvira Gooding, a 32-year-old black woman, sick since the birth of her infant nine weeks prior, covered herself in the tar to try to reduce the swelling of her face and stiffness of her neck. The inspector did not note anything wrong or unusual in this, merely that in her case it was having no effect and he wished a doctor to visit her.<sup>265</sup>

On 21<sup>st</sup> August 1889, twenty-two year old Delsina Blackman, a black single mother with a four-year-old child, wrote to ask for a doctor to attend her,

Brereton Village, Aug 21st /89

Dear Sir, I have been suffering with fever since today week, I have tried my own remedies and found no relief, and I am not in a position to call a doctor, therefore I now apply for help from the parish, and I shall be thankful if you will come and see me today for I feel ill.

Yrs obedient, Delsina Blackman.<sup>266</sup>

She had been feverish for a week and had tried her own remedies and found no relief. The doctor, who did not attend until 22<sup>nd</sup>, admitted her to the almshouse where she died on the same day. There was no suggestion that she left it to the last minute, having had fever – a common affliction attributable to a range of conditions – for just a week. Rather, she died in the almshouse, the place to which she was sent for care by the doctor. Whether or not she could have

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<sup>263</sup> Blue Books, 1865–1895.

<sup>264</sup> For a discussion on the uses of manjack and its role in the export economy, see Sylvan Spooner, 'The History of Manjack Mining on Barbados, *The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society*, Volume LXIII, 2017, 66–91.

<sup>265</sup> St. Philip, Records of the Inspector of Poor, Cases of Paupers Inspected, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1894–25<sup>th</sup> June 1895, No. 28.

<sup>266</sup> St. Philip, Cases of Paupers Inspected, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1889, letter found on page 262.

survived had she called the doctor sooner, or if the doctor had attended on the day cannot be deduced without a diagnosis of her illness which was not given. But anyone would be expected to try self-help before calling the doctor. In April 1888, a 42-year-old black woman was injured in a fall from a truck and Crawford reports she had been using Canadian Oil and her own remedies. He advised her to go to a dispensary, which she agreed to do on the following day.<sup>267</sup> And in St. Michael 19-year-old Wilhelmina Batson, a needlewoman's apprentice, lived with her mother who had tried her own remedies for her daughter's typhoid for two weeks without improvement. No criticism was recorded.<sup>268</sup> What we see are home remedies used side by side and sometimes indivisible from medically sanctioned remedies.

Like the midwifery practices, I resist the temptation to overstate the case by claiming that using home remedies was a conscious act of resistance. Undoubtedly economic realities had to be faced – there was little or no cost involved in the preparation and application of herbs. But it is not logical that people would blindly adhere to a practice in which they could perceive no benefit, particularly as plant medicine was also used by those who could afford doctors. Nor is it logical that they would accept modern medicines if they were found to be ineffective or even dangerous. In fact, many medically sanctioned remedies had extremely toxic side effects, such as calomel (mercurous chloride) which was commonly prescribed as a laxative and yellow fever remedy. The survival of 'bush medicine' to this day is a testament to its efficacy, as people across the social spectrum continue to use, research and build upon inherited knowledge alongside professional methods for treating illness.

This chapter has shown evidence of people continuing with birthing practices and the care of their sick within a variety of family forms, regardless of censure by the upper classes. It has also analysed some of the paupers' written styles of persuasion and entreaty; but all within the extremely limited space for manoeuvre allowed by the mechanics of the Poor Laws. These limited spaces were inextricably linked to the slightly greater room for manoeuvre of the poor law inspectors immediately above them. Instructions were handed down to the poor law inspectors by the Board of Guardians, and any decision the inspector made was subject to the board's scrutiny. But even within this limited framework, paupers voiced their feelings and inspectors responded in their own way. Direct confrontation with the inspector was uncommon,

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<sup>267</sup> St. Philip, Cases of Paupers Inspected, Volume 6, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1888.

<sup>268</sup> St. Michael, Cases of Paupers Inspected, October 1885.

and obviously inadvisable. Opposing the instructions of the board was also not likely to promote a favourable outcome for the pauper, but inspectors could still use their discretion. And sometimes when out of options a flat refusal was all a pauper had left, as the following section on indoor relief will show.

### No Almshouses for the Sick, No Hospitals for the Poor

The parochial almshouses were places of permanent refuge for the destitute of all ages who were unable to care for themselves. They provided temporary accommodation for the sick poor suffering from conditions which did not, according to the medical officers, require specialised treatment or surgery at a proper hospital. But owing to the expense of sending rural paupers to the hospitals, parish authorities more often sanctioned almshouse admission, which contributed to the overcrowding. On the other hand, hospital staff in towns complained that beds were taken up by paupers with incurable or recurring conditions who ought to be in almshouses.

In the absence of proper poor law regulations, and almshouse accommodation throughout the island, the Kingston hospital is the refuge to which destitute and starving ulcer patients resort from all parts of the island. If refused, they wander about the streets semi-nude without money for food and in pain and end up in hospital anyway. If retained until their ulcers are totally healed, they too often become lazy, impudent and the most troublesome class of patients and the longest resident.<sup>269</sup>

In the parish of St. James, a committee met at the hospital in Montego Bay on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1871 charged with determining which of the 19 patients were paupers and which casual sick.<sup>270</sup> They investigated the circumstances of the patients and summarised their statements. It was not often that the views of patients, in particular pauper patients, were elicited. Their complaint of inadequate food was almost unanimous, and most felt they were not getting any better. The municipal board took their complaints seriously and steps were taken to tighten the system of admission, improve the quantity and quality of food and ensure that patients requiring special diets received it. St. James parish was forced to close its almshouse completely a month later and

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<sup>269</sup> Votes of Assembly 1865–1866: Report of ordinary medical officers, No.15, 51 (Jamaica Archives, 1B/5/1A/73).

<sup>270</sup> Report of the hospital committee on the circumstances of the several patients for the purpose of determining which of them were paupers and which casual sick. (Jamaica Archives, 2/3/4: St James Municipal Board Minutes, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1871–13<sup>th</sup> October 1871).



remove some of the inmates to the hospital, paying for their stay there out of the pauper fund. So in this parish at least, the question of almshouse/hospital provision was not resolved.

After the enactment of the poor laws, the almshouses were to have hospital wards, but as these buildings were small and continued to be funded from the parish poor rates and without resident medical officers, they could never come close to the standards of the general hospitals in Kingston and Bridgetown or meet the needs of the population.<sup>271</sup> The almshouse buildings were dilapidated, overcrowded and notoriously insanitary; the diet was meagre and the regime strict. These problems were widely reported across all parishes in both islands, in the letters of individual doctors, official reports and parochial board minutes. The Barbados Commission recognised the ‘considerable unwillingness manifested by many paupers to go into an almshouse’.<sup>272</sup> It was seen as shameful to be sent there.<sup>273</sup> The whole neighbourhood would witness the person’s removal by donkey cart. Richard Carter tells of a woman who asked the inspector if she could hire her own conveyance, at which the inspector withdrew the offer of admittance on the grounds that if she could afford transport then she could not be a pauper.<sup>274</sup> My samples are peppered with both polite and indignant refusals, emphatic refusals and reluctant acceptances. To this day the almshouse stigma remains. A Barbadian-Canadian researcher recalls visiting her grandmother as a child and having to be taken to the almshouse for treatment after she burnt herself jumping over the cooking fire.<sup>275</sup> She remembers her grandmother walking her down to the almshouse past all the neighbours and that it was public and embarrassing. The almshouse is also lampooned in jibes and music. Upon witnessing vulgar behaviour a Barbadian might say ‘you born in a almshouse?’ while the ironic title of Shani Roper’s thesis “‘A Almshouse Ting Dat’: Development in Poor Relief and Child Welfare in Jamaica during the Interwar Years’ expresses its meaning in Jamaican patois as something foolish or disgraceful.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Though in a better state than the parochial almshouses, the public hospitals were not without their problems. The Barbados General Hospital, founded in 1841, was well funded by private subscription but increasingly overcrowded as the century wore on, with ongoing problems of poor ventilation and sewerage. See Olivia Cetinoglu, ‘A History of the Barbados General Hospital, 1844–1910’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 60:1, 2014, 96–116, 106, 108.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. For a detailed discussion of the conditions of the several almshouse see also Richard C. Carter, ‘The Almshouse Test’, 148.

<sup>274</sup> Richard C. Carter, ‘The Almshouse Test’, 152.

<sup>275</sup> Personal communication, Barbados Archives, 12 August 2016.

<sup>276</sup> Joan Williams, Shawn Grant, *Original Jamaican Dancehall Dictionary: Talk like a Jamaican* (Yard Publications, 2015) 10. and Shani Roper, “‘A Almshouse Ting Dat’: Development in Poor Relief and Child Welfare in Jamaica during the Interwar Years’ (Texas: Rice University, 2012).

Understandably, carers often refused to allow sick family to go to the almshouse. A 27-year-old coloured woman with three children who lived with her mother on an acre of rented land had suffered for two weeks from severe headache, sore throat and constipation. Her mother had dosed her with calomel and oil and as she had no fever, the inspector considered her able to be moved to the almshouse for care, but her mother refused to allow her to go.<sup>277</sup> In another case, a 20-year-old black woman at her mother's house was sick for several weeks with 'a rising in the groin' to which the mother had applied poultices to no effect. The inspector ordered a cart to take her to the almshouse but it was refused.<sup>278</sup> According to the rules of the Almshouse Test, refusal to enter would preclude them from receiving outdoor relief and medical attendance. It meant the poor faced the difficult choice of sending their sick to the almshouse or continuing at home and hoping for the best but with their allowances withdrawn. There were no guarantees either way, hence the notion that they waited until it was too late.

Having accepted almshouse admission, the journey there was perilous to one in poor health, particularly in cases of hernias and fractures. Bonham Richardson tells of the tragic case of Edward Weekes forced to move from the Christchurch almshouse to the St. Philip almshouse because he worked on an estate which straddled the two parishes but resided in the St. Philip portion. He was removed 'via a jolting donkey cart' and died the day after his admission.<sup>279</sup> Hospital patients did not always fare better. In Jamaica, Henry Bent and Juliana Clarke, both hospital patients in St. James, complained of being ordered by the doctor to walk from the hospital to another in the town to be operated on. The report noted that Henry Bent suffered much from the long walk in the hot sun and that on the last occasion he was 'rendered nearly insensible from loss of blood.'<sup>280</sup> The rest of the patients surveyed by the visiting Hospital Committee with a view to discovering which were poorhouse candidates mostly complained that the diet was poor and that they were not getting any better. It was unsurprising therefore that people preferred to stay at home where they could enjoy the care and support of family. It was only those who were elderly and really alone who accepted it, and even then not until they had exhausted all other efforts. In St. Philip, Corridan Sandiford, an 80-year-old man was offered the almshouse. Even though he was described as asthmatic, dropsical and emaciated, he still asked

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<sup>277</sup> St. Philip, Vol 3: 2 Aug 1882–2 Sep 1885 (334 cases) Case 3.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., Case 5.

<sup>279</sup> The Half-Yearly Report of the Poor Law Inspector, January-June 1901, Gazette Nov. 28, 1901, 1981–1982. Quoted in Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 74.

<sup>280</sup> Report of the hospital committee on the circumstances of the several patients for the purpose of determining which of them were paupers and which casual sick. (Jamaica Archives, 2/3/4: St James, 1868 – 1871: 14<sup>th</sup> March 1871–13<sup>th</sup> October 1871).

for time to consider.<sup>281</sup>

The inspectors understood this reluctance and both Crawford and the St. Michael inspector show willingness to assist those who refused the almshouse with tickets for treatment or casual relief. In St. Michael, Francis Preston was a 45-year-old fishmonger living under a boatshed and unable to work much because of rheumatism. The inspector had known him for five years and ordered a vehicle to take him to the doctor, even though he ‘politely refused’ the almshouse.<sup>282</sup> In the same month the inspector revisited the children of Sarah Greaves, a woman in the almshouse, and renewed their food ration for four weeks. The Board objected to his giving relief for so long a period.<sup>283</sup>

In St. Philip, Crawford offered the almshouse to Sarah Anne Hunte, a 55-year-old black widow suffering fever and ague, pain in her side and a swollen foot. He reports that ‘she indignantly refused, saying that she knew all about it having been in there before.’ She argued to be sent to the general hospital, which the inspector could not do, but he finally gave her a letter to attend the medical officer at the almshouse for an examination and free medicines, then return home with a cart to take her both ways.<sup>284</sup> Nine-year-old Florence Gittens got burnt on her hand, bowels and right leg. Crawford offered her the almshouse for treatment but her grandmother refused to let her go, so he went himself to the almshouse to ask for a bottle of carbolic to dress the burns, which the medical officer kindly supplied. He visited many times after that to make sure they had what they needed.<sup>285</sup>

Ultimately though, the doctors’ opinion overruled that of the inspector and the Board had final say on all requests for regular outdoor allowances. In St. Philip a man begged not to be admitted to the almshouse but to have a letter to get out-patient treatment from there instead. Crawford agreed to write the letter, but the man was admitted in the end.<sup>286</sup> In 1888 a 78-year-old black man, married with several grown up children who lived in an estate house and earned 40 cents a week sweeping the yard, had a partial attack of paralysis slightly affecting his left side. He did not want to go into the almshouse, so Crawford gave him a ticket for the doctor and asked the

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<sup>281</sup> St. Michael, Cases of Paupers Inspected, June 1885.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., October 1884.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> St. Philip, Cases of Paupers Inspected, April 1884.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., March 1884.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 1883.

manager of the estate to send him over in a cart. The Board subsequently admitted him to the almshouse.<sup>287</sup> A 57-year-old black labourer, married with no living children, lived in ‘a miserably old wooden house with the roof tumbled’. He had fallen sick with darkness in the eyes and palpitations. Crawford advised him to go into the almshouse, but he begged for a free ticket for the doctor, which Crawford gave him and sent and asked the estate manager to send him over. The doctor then recommended almshouse admittance.<sup>288</sup>

These cases show that there was always negotiation. The inconsistencies within the system allowed some flexibility for conscientious individuals within the poor relief structure to respond and adjust, and applicants could exploit the inconsistencies to negotiate the best outcome for themselves and their families. But ultimately the lack of uniform practices across parishes and the refusal of the Assembly or colonial government to take responsibility for implementing a comprehensive, fair and properly financed system, prevented any meaningful progress or widespread assistance. The cases also show that families tried to stay together, belying the argument that they had weak ties and did not like to care for one another. I argue that it was the Almshouse Test itself which was responsible for dividing poor black families, and that it was used differently with different classes of poor.

Fletcher quotes the observations of William Sewell who noted in 1862 that ‘the distinctions of caste were more strictly observed in Barbados than in any other British West Indian colony’.<sup>289</sup> Barbados was somewhat unique in having not only a ruling class of white planters, merchants and professionals, but also a class of very poor whites, the presence of whom rendered the distinction between elite white and labouring black awkward for elite sensibilities. The Commission observed that ‘difficulties in whites from the former militia classes adjusting to emancipation society’ accounted for their poverty.<sup>290</sup> From the 1700s, whites had benefitted from private bequests and non-parochial charitable organisations.<sup>291</sup> But the same Commission proposed and successfully convinced the legislature to withdraw parochial support from private charities, and so any difficulties of adjustment the whites may have had would have been compounded by this act and caused them to start appearing in greater numbers on the pauper

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 26<sup>th</sup> April 1888.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. 24<sup>th</sup> April 1888.

<sup>289</sup> Leonard Fletcher, ‘The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838–1900’, 172.

<sup>290</sup> Barbados Commission, 11.

<sup>291</sup> Cecily Forde-Jones, ‘Mapping Racial Boundaries: Gender, Race, and Poor Relief in Barbadian Plantation Society’ *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1998, 9–31.

rolls. Within my sample for St. Philip, whites made up 16% of the relief applicants between 1880 and 1895, coloureds also 16%, blacks 43% and 24% unstated.

Common occupations for white men were fishing, shoemaking, painting and tailoring, but their work was not very profitable. Women were mostly housewives and some did a little needlework. Their situation was different to that of blacks in that the accusation of weak family was not levelled at them. The evidence supports Carter's opinion that there was a general desirability to keep these families out of the almshouse so that they could maintain their cohesion and respectability.<sup>292</sup> The women could remain as housewives, as their inability to find work outside the home was not punished by refusal of relief.

The first two pages of the inspector's case notes for 1880 show 15 applicants. Five were white women:

1. White woman, 60, house servant, 17 years out of work for sickness, is a fever ague subject, eyes failing, unmarried, 1 child, a boy of 19 lives with her. Also fever and ague. Wall house not her own.

**Monthly pension 2/6. [Inc to 4/-]**

2. White woman, 63, never worked but at home duties, widow 13 years, no children, in brother's house, good wall house. **Monthly pension 2/-** (Henry Fields' house)

3. White woman, 24, a little needlework, dumb, single, no children, lives with uncle. **Monthly pension 2/-** (in Henry Fields' house)

4. White woman, 58, never worked but for a little coarse needlework about 8 years ago, failing eyes, widow many years, 4 children, 2 married, lives in brother's house (Henry Fields). **Pension 2/-**

5. White woman, 63, needlewoman, cancer on chin, husband dead one month, 6 children all grown with families, 2 in Nevis, lives in son's house, wall, needs patching badly (near Henry Field's house) Mrs Nathan Fields. **Pension 2/- (increased to 4/-)**

Of these women, apparently all related apart from the first, three were living in the house of their relative Nathan Fields and one nearby. All were granted monthly pensions, including the two who had never worked. They lived in a 'good walled house', i.e. a brick house, which was the best class of house. People were refused relief on the grounds they had children able to take care of them, yet some of the women shown here had grown up children but were granted pensions nonetheless. And the 60-year-old woman with a grown up son was granted the highest pension possible of 4/- even though she was a single mother. This evidence of preferential treatment is

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<sup>292</sup> Richard C. Carter, 'The Almshouse Test', 147.

demonstrated more clearly when we consider that the other ten people were all given tickets of 12c or 24c, which could be exchanged for food but these were small casual allowances and the recipients would have to keep reapplying for extensions. There were four elderly widows,

6. Black woman, 70, not worked since slavery, widow, 2 children married, one a widow living with her under a trashed roof on the ground; been living on Mrs. Crawford's bounty many years. **Ticket 12c**

7. Coloured woman, 85, labourer, many years not worked, husband died in the almshouse 3 years ago, 4 children, 3 in Leeward colonies, other with her in board and trashed house. **Ticket 24c**

8. Black woman, 80, labourer, not worked some time, widow 9 years, 2 children grown. Own house, small board and shingle repaired 1 years ago. **Ticket 12c**

9. Black woman, 85, widow 30 years, labourer, not worked 25 years, feebleness and old age, 1 daughter 58 a widow 8 years who has received aid, has 8 children, 6 in Leeward: **24c. Dead.**

Like three of the white women above, the four elderly women shown here had not worked for some time, one for 25 years and one 'since the days of slavery', and they were all widows with grown up children, but unlike the white women they lived in poorer housing – 'under a trashed roof on the ground', 'a board and trashed house', 'a small board and shingle house'. In spite of these circumstances they were not granted regular pensions.

How these individuals were disposed of by the Board of Guardians highlights the different treatment one could expect by virtue of colour. Carter notes that in St. Michael although whites made up only 5.7% of the annual cases seen by the inspector, 29% of the monthly pensions granted went to them, compared to 21% to blacks who made up 70.7% of annual cases inspected.<sup>293</sup> While this was true, it does not mean that blacks never got pensions or that whites never got tickets. In this sample, a 38-year-old black carpenter's apprentice, single with no children, who had not worked for fourteen years due to crippling rheumatism, was awarded a small weekly pension of 24c; and a 46-year-old married white man with two daughters who worked as an assistant overseer was granted a 24c ticket, having been sick for ten months. As for indoor relief, my evidence concurs with Carter's that black families were sent there far more frequently than white families; but it also suggests that the Almshouse Test disadvantaged elderly men and single men without dependents, irrespective of colour. While there was a clear reluctance to send white women to the almshouse, white men do not seem to have been subject to any exemption. In my sample set for St. Philip, five out of the seven white male applicants,

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

aged between nineteen and sixty-six, were offered almshouse admission. One example is that of 60-year-old Thomas Gooding, an assistant overseer who had not worked for nine months, married with a son also out of work, living in his own board and shingle house on land allowed him by brother. He refused the almshouse and died but his widow was offered a pension of 2/- rather than the almshouse.<sup>294</sup> But overall, given the weight of evidence it is fair to say that the Almshouse Test was a threat which poor mostly black families had to contend with in their struggle to keep their families together, and it was this rather than any lack of attachment to one another which drove them apart.

While family type was not the cause of poverty per se, it could affect the type and quantity of relief due to how authorities constructed family: fewer tickets to single mothers, fewer pensions for black families, greater almshouse admission for black labourers, etc. which in turn exacerbated the poverty in which these people found themselves trapped and increased the chances of morbidity.

### Children and the Elderly

The statements of planters and parish officials gave the impression that people were averse to caring for their elderly relatives. This is reflected in the leading questions of the Jamaican commissioners, for example, ‘With regard to the aged and infirm, do you find that they are generally neglected and uncared for by their children?’<sup>295</sup> The Honourable William Kerr, Custos of St. James parish, Jamaica said, ‘There are many poor people that have no children, but if their relations cared for them they would not allow them to go on the parish.’<sup>296</sup> And in 1886, the pauper committee of the same parish said,

We are also painfully aware of the unwillingness of the greatest part of them to do their duty to their aged and indigent relatives – they shirk it in every possible way and will do all in their power to get relief for them from the parish.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Cases of Paupers Inspected, St. Philip, June 1881, No. 507.

<sup>295</sup> Appendix A, Evidence at Kingston, 116, Question 539 addressed to the Reverend George Sargeant.

<sup>296</sup> Appendix B: Evidence at Montego Bay, Falmouth & St Ann’s Bay, 1.

<sup>297</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/3/6, October 1885–September 1888, Parochial Board Minutes, St. James, Special Report of Pauper Committee, 100 (April 1886 or thereabouts).

But we must not be misled by these statements into thinking that abandoning those in need, particularly children and the elderly, was the norm. The records indicate that the vast majority of applicants were relieved in a family setting. What the statements above are really complaining of is not abandonment but that people sought relief from the parish for their relatives when, in the opinion of those in charge, they were able to support them without it. The St James Committee was in favour of abolishing outdoor relief and considered the Almshouse Test a reliable test of real need. Those people they accused of shirking their responsibility would no doubt have refused to let their relative go into the almshouse and instead seek some relief so they can continue caring for them in their homes. Furthermore, there is evidence that people even struggled to look after those they were not legally liable for. In St. Michael, Barbados, one Catherine Phillips, a 50-year-old coloured woman was living with her friend Mary Howell. She used to get 1/6 a week as a needlewoman but was suffering from a cough and had not worked for 3 months. The inspector wrote that when he told her of the Guardians' decision to send all new applicants to the almshouse, she refused to go and Howell refused to let her, saying she would prefer to try and support her.<sup>298</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> November 1880, Reverend J.E. Henderson, one of the poor law guardians in the town of Montego Bay, Jamaica, gave an example of one Sarah Williams, a very infirm woman over 80 years of age, relieved at 1/- a week. He wrote to the municipal board,

A friend pays the rent of a room for her and her great granddaughter 10 or 11 years old, and the daughter of a poor widow with three helpless children looks after her – cannot the allowance of this poor woman be increased? – I do not think she can live much longer...

He said that several of the guardians had written similar letters to his. Unique to the parish of St James was that all the poor law guardians were all clergy. The clergy worked closely among the poor in their communities, so were often more sympathetic than the planters whose opinions were coloured by anxieties at losing control over the labour force. Henderson threatened to resign as guardian if more could not be done to help the destitute. The previous year he had stated to the Commission that '...it is the poorest possible pittance that they get from the Poor Rates...they subsist chiefly by the charity of their neighbours.'<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Inspector's Case Books, St Michael, October 1884.

<sup>299</sup> Appendix B, Evidence at Montego Bay, 7.



Reverend William Griffiths, Minister of the United Methodist Free Church, East Street, Kingston, reported, ‘I have known these old people get help from Port-au-Prince and from Navy Bay, whither their relatives had gone. They are often shown a great deal of kindness by strangers as well.’<sup>300</sup>

Orphaned children were no more abandoned than the elderly. Reverend Josiah Cork, Rector of Westmoreland, Jamaica, stated, ‘orphans and deserted children are cared for by their relatives’.<sup>301</sup> Enos Nuttall, rector of St. George’s Anglican Church and later Bishop of Jamaica and Archbishop of the West Indies, was asked what became of the children of imprisoned fathers. ‘I think there is a remarkable willingness on the part of the very poorest to shew kindness to those who are left destitute in the same yard with themselves.’<sup>302</sup> Yards were dwellings in the town built around a central courtyard where the poorest families lived in one room each without running water or sanitation. ‘They are often mere walls with a roof, an earthen floor, and sometimes a piece of cloth for a door. It is not uncommon for four, five and even six persons to occupy a room of nine feet square’.<sup>303</sup> Within these squalid yards there was a sense of togetherness in adversity, and great efforts made by the poorest of the poor to assist one another, as discussed in detail by Moore and Johnson in “*Squalid Kingston*” 1890-1920.<sup>304</sup> E.J. Goldson, the city inspector, said, ‘when the mother dies, some woman living in the same yard will take the child and take some sort of care of it; for though those people are poor, they are generally very kind.’<sup>305</sup>

My sample from St. Philip, Barbados, only unearthed one case of desertion by a recently widowed mother with five small children, two of them sick, who left them in her father’s house. The board ordered them to be given 2/- week in food then sent to the almshouse.<sup>306</sup> In St. Thomas, Jamaica, between May and December 1897 I found only one case of a deserted boy named Eugene E. Clough, 10 months old, in good health, struck off the pauper roll on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1898, presumably because someone had been found to care for him.<sup>307</sup> And between October and December 1900 I found a further case of one Catherine Wright, a 13-year-old black

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<sup>300</sup> Appendix A, Evidence at Kingston, 55.

<sup>301</sup> Appendix B, Evidence at Montego Bay, 26.

<sup>302</sup> Appendix A, Evidence at Kingston, 9.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., testimony of E.J. Goldson, the City Inspector, 27.

<sup>304</sup> Brian Moore and Michele Johnson (eds.) “*Squalid Kingston*” 1890-1920: *How the Poor Lived, Moved and Had Their Being* (UWI: The Social History Project, 2000).

<sup>305</sup> Appendix A, Evidence at Kingston, 28.

<sup>306</sup> Inspector’s Case Book, St. Philip, September 1880.

<sup>307</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/5/18, St. Thomas, Children’s Application Book, 1887–1910, 76.

servant girl with consumption, brought to the parish from Westmoreland by a Captain Dyer of Savanna-la-Mar and deserted by him. She was taken in by an unrelated woman named Sarah Ford and pensioned at 1/- a week.<sup>308</sup>

Parents were not content to let their children languish in the almshouse where they had been sent on the orders of the medical officer. In December 1897, Joseph Rennie, a 13-year-old boy suffering from ringworm and bad health was sent to the Morant Bay poorhouse. In June 1898 he was discharged at his father's request.<sup>309</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1898, Nathaniel Francis, aged 13, separated from his mother in order to be treated for 'general debility' in the poorhouse was discharged on 18<sup>th</sup> June at his mother's request.

### Juvenile Vagrancy

So far this chapter has focused in on the family, but looking at society through a wider lens shows two important aspects to the care of children, one being the willingness of the higher classes to assist in the raising of poor children, and the other encapsulated in the expression 'it takes a community to raise a child.' The causes of and solutions to juvenile vagrancy were the main focuses of the Jamaica Commission. Respondents were unanimous in condemning the idleness of the youth and the lack of control parents were able or willing to exert over them. Such overwhelming evidence from a wide range of respondents cannot be put down to prejudice alone, though the planters were clearly alarmed at the exodus of strong young men from the sugar estates, and the colonial authorities may well have feared the potential for unrest. The absence of an educational infrastructure and limited employment opportunities must have contributed greatly to the perceived idleness of young people; and there was great unwillingness on the part of parents to allow their children to be trained for agricultural work. They wanted to retain their children's freedom at all costs.

But these children were not left to fend entirely for themselves in spite of appearances. Thomas Witter Jackson explained to the commission that if a magistrate tried to have a child taken up for vagrancy, the mother would come forward and say that she could look after it.<sup>310</sup> Mothers clearly struggled to meet the needs of work and childcare, but children were the collective responsibility

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., Case No. 103.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>310</sup> Jamaica Commission, Evidence of Thomas Witter Jackson, 80.

of the community. This is borne out in oral evidence. Erna Brodber, who interviewed people from all parishes in Jamaica about the period 1907–1944, wrote that it was a strongly held notion among African Jamaicans that the elders in the community had the right to discipline any child.<sup>311</sup> My own parents growing up in Jamaica in the 1940s reported that while they had a lot of freedom especially in the countryside to roam about alone or with older siblings, elders were always watching. If you misbehaved you would get punished by the neighbour and again when you got home, so you were never really out of your parents' sight. Likewise, Mary Chamberlain's interviewees in Barbados about the period 1937–1966 reported that 'Neighbours around...sort of keep an eye, you weren't their children but...you were their responsibility.'<sup>312</sup> My mother said children were everybody's responsibility and they grew up feeling safe and protected. The freedom they had to roam was the very opposite of neglect; they felt free because the community was watching out for them. These community relationships would have been invisible to casual observers.

Brodber's respondents all felt that the young people of the 1970s were not as respectful or hardworking as they themselves had been. Since the respondents to the Jamaica Commission made identical complaints about the youth of the 1870s, we can assume that it was to some extent the natural criticism of an elder generation to a younger. The same methods of caring for children in the wider community existed in the 1870s as in the succeeding generations. The oral evidence from 1907–1966 does not indicate any divergence of practice, so children in the first generations after emancipation were no doubt cared for by everyone and inculcated with the same cultural values.

Community support and activism were vital to the survival of the poor and there was an informal but deeply engrained network of co-dependence not only amongst paupers but between classes as well. During the investigations conducted by Jamaica's Commission on Poor Relief, excessive attention was drawn to the case of an orphan child in the care of Mrs. Elizabeth Donaldson of Bath, St. Thomas. She received 6/- a week which the commission thought was an exorbitant sum, and due to the initial bias in what the commission set out to discover, this case, though rare, was given several pages of testimony by the lady herself and others in an attempt to gather evidence of the great wastage of public money on people who did not need it and were not really

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<sup>311</sup> Erna Brodber, *The Second Generation of Freeman in Jamaica, 1907–1944*, 21.

<sup>312</sup> Mary Chamberlain, *Empire and nation-building in the Caribbean*, 80.

poor. Mrs. Donaldson kept a shop for Dr. Major, the general medical officer, who paid her £16 a year and she had her own house. A 5-day-old baby was given into her charge when its parents were convicted and jailed for abandoning it on the post office steps. Out of the 6/- a week she received for its care, she paid 4/- to a wet nurse and kept 2/- for clothing and in case of sickness. The interviewer asked why she needed to put money aside for sickness for a pauper child entitled to free medicine and attendance. She answered that it was for simple remedies she would not trouble the doctor with. She was then asked what she would do if the allowance were withdrawn. She replied,

I would take the child even if the whole of the relief was withdrawn. The child is able to walk about now – it is a girl. I am going to take it with myself at the end of the year. I will give up the allowance whenever they choose to withdraw it, I never applied for it, and never intended to apply for any; neither would I complain if it was taken away.

Dr. Major, when questioned, said he did not know if a child required 2/- a week for clothing, he simply attended it as a pauper when called, but the commission was clearly outraged that a baby should be allowed six times the sum for a full-grown pauper. Their outrage was furthered by the assistant almoner, Edward Duffy, stating that the baby's parents had been released and were both employed. 'I cannot tell why such a large sum was fixed nor why it should be a burden on the parish at all. I think the people do not recognise it as theirs.' Only Miss Simpson, the almoner of Morant Bay and Bath said she did not think it was a large sum under the circumstances, as Mrs. Donaldson had to pay a nurse. Miss Simpson herself also looked after a pauper child, the 3-year-old child of Isabella Watson, a widow pensioned at 2/6. The widow was a long time sick and could not look after her child, but she provided its clothing out of her relief.

The allowance to Miss Donaldson may have been anomalous, but these cases highlight that women gave essential care to pauper and orphaned children. Only Miss Simpson, who was herself caring for a child, could understand the cost of raising an infant decently. Contrary to the determination of the commission to paint a bad picture of parochial relief, the case seems to show not that 6/- was too much but that 1/- or 1/6 for an adult was woefully inadequate. The dignity of Mrs. Donaldson who would continue to care for the child regardless of whether or not the allowance continued proved – certainly amongst women who were not paupers – that compassion drove their actions. But it also harks back to the ideology of the 'deserving' and the maintenance of respectability. Cecily Forde-Jones' study of poor white women in seventeenth

and eighteenth century Barbados explains elite efforts to maintain a class of women for whom relief was contingent upon good conduct, shunning relations with black men, and placing daughters in compulsory education and apprenticeship.<sup>313</sup> These white women also fostered orphans to supplement their allowances. A century later in St. Thomas, Jamaica, we see a similar phenomenon where, in the absence of a white 'underclass', respectable coloured women were selected to foster orphans and receive allowances for so doing, with which they were able to supplement their salaries.

This chapter has shown the ways in which the system of poor relief militated against black families and perpetuated the theories of laziness and lack of reciprocal care. It has provided a direct view onto the actions of some women to draw conclusions about the ways in which they navigated poverty and accessed relief which contradicted the prevalent view of authorities. There is evidence that people endeavoured to administer to the sick within family and community groups, continuing birthing practices and care of the elderly to the extent that their meagre finances allowed. As poor as they were, they held the almshouse in aversion and there is plenty to suggest that they would try their best before committing a relative or dependant there.

The poor relief system was one which rewarded 'respectability', which in Barbados was linked to colour and dictated different treatment of white and black applicants; and between black and coloured applicants, also evidenced in Jamaica through examples from the Commission's enquiries. This class division between 'paupers' and the 'respectable poor' deeply affected the way they were judged, the sort of relief they might expect, and their ability to improve their prospects. Certain expectations of respectable conduct were applied to women in specific ways, and the type of institutional relief and education provided for girls was prescribed along similar lines, as subsequent chapters will explore.

This chapter has also occasioned a more nuanced look at 'the parish authorities' allowing for variations to be recognised depending on the professions and social position of the guardians, e.g. clergy, magistrates, planters, etc. It has shown the humanity of at least some inspectors of poor, who may have been regarded with affection or at least with a level of informality. One letter writer referred to Oscar Crawford as 'Mr Ossie', and the records note at least one case of Mrs. Crawford supporting a poor family. The same could be said for some of the poor law

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<sup>313</sup> Cecily Forde-Jones, 'Mapping Racial Boundaries'.

guardians, for example the Reverend J.E. Henderson of St. James parish, Jamaica, who complained about the meagre allowances and threatened to resign the board.

The scope of the Barbados poor relief case books is immense and under researched, with many letters written by and on behalf of paupers that are not found within the Jamaican records. With a larger sample and a longer research period, more could be gleaned about the poor through their encounters with the poor law, similar to that which has been achieved by the English project 'In Their Own Write', which has systematically sampled and analysed letters on a much larger scale from the various poor law unions around England, to gain an understanding of how the poor understood, experienced and exercised agency.<sup>314</sup> A similarly in-depth project on the Barbados cases, which this study has only begun to attempt, could aid our understanding of pauper agency in other places where there were similarities of policy and practice, but where such material is scant. Scholars of poor relief in Britain should be encouraged to include empire in their analyses to draw parallels between the treatment of the poor in Britain and its nearby colonies such as Ireland, as well as those in more distant parts of the globe.

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<sup>314</sup> 'In Their Own Write: The Lives and Letters of the Poor 1834–c.1900', <https://intheirownwriteblog.com/>.

## CHAPTER 3

### State, Charity and the Respectable Poor

This chapter will examine the causes of urban women's poverty, along with the restrictions imposed on charities by the Barbados government and their effect on the black poor. This will be contrasted with the Jamaican government's collaborative approach to poor relief and private philanthropy, reflecting the two government's different priorities. The chapter demonstrates how women in particular became increasingly impoverished over time, and how this negative trend when coupled with the Jamaican government's drive towards industrial education for poor children allowed new forms of female-led philanthropy to emerge in Jamaica, while the opposite happened in Barbados.

Relief became an arena of negotiation between the interests of charity and the interests of government. Between these two agencies, the poor were forced into the performance of respectability to be eligible for charitable support, but also were largely resistant to the government's educational policies. The government therefore needed to co-opt middle class black women as enforcers of their educational agenda. These women complied, at least superficially, while simultaneously conceiving and retaining other ideologies and ambitions for themselves and the poor. This chapter establishes the theoretical basis upon which women's philanthropy in Jamaica operated, allowing a more thorough investigation of women's philanthropy to be undertaken in the subsequent chapter.

#### **Urban Women: From Affluence to Respectable Poverty**

The historiography of women in urban centres during the slavery period and the first decades after emancipation shows free coloured and black women as quasi-independent active agents in their financial activities and transactions. Pedro Welch and Richard Goodridge write on free coloured women in pre-emancipation Barbados who were able to prosper in the maritime hub that was Bridgetown which created a demand for services such as lodging house keepers, and an environment where entrepreneurial and skilled women of colour could prosper.<sup>315</sup> These women

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<sup>315</sup> Pedro Welch, Richard Goodridge, *"Red" & Black Over White: Free coloured women in pre-emancipation Barbados* (Carib Research and Publications Ltd: Bridgetown, 2000).

negotiated and maintained business networks with local white men, kin and other businesswomen, as well as with English sea captains and merchants who could assist them with their affairs abroad. By analysing the tax registers, deeds of transaction and individuals' property inventories Welch and Goodridge can document the value of these women's estates and chart their successes. They write of 'the ability of free coloured women to read the possibilities for self actualization which were present in the urban port environment, and to use them to their own advantage.'<sup>316</sup> Paulette Kerr also celebrates the tenacity and achievements of female lodging house keepers in urban Jamaica from slavery through to the early post-emancipation period. Though she comments that these free and self-supporting women depended much on white men either as customers of their establishments or patrons investing capital as lovers, fathers, etc., she concludes that they were strategists rather than victims, in a statement similar to that of Welch and Goodridge, 'From a position of male victimisation and marginalisation she emerged independent and powerful, mainly by her own planning.'<sup>317</sup>

What has not been much considered in the wake of these two works is the weakness of the position of urban entrepreneurial women and the precariousness of their hard-won freedoms and successes. What happened when elite patronage was, for one reason or another, withdrawn or when these women suffered an unavoidable downturn in their fortunes? Not only lodging house keepers but urban women variously employed were all at risk of losing livelihoods by the vicissitudes of local policy changes, war and global economic pressures. The respondents to the Jamaica Commission spoke of poverty being acute amongst those who had seen better days, such as women who had once relied on the labour of their slaves or the patronage of wealthy men which ceased when the capital city relocated from Spanish Town. Teachers, needlewomen, shopkeepers, nurses, widows and mistresses faced destitution alike. Middle and lower middle class encounters with poverty are not as clearly discernible as for those of the labouring classes receiving some form of relief, firstly because class was linked to property and property owners were not traditionally seen as poor. In 1857 the Kingston Common Council decreed that property owners deserved no place on the pauper rolls.<sup>318</sup> But as prices rose, unemployment increased and poverty worsened into the 1870s, this view could no longer be sustained. The *Gleaner* describes urban homes in some neighbourhoods as rundown shacks with tumbled roofs that did not shelter

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>317</sup> Paulette Kerr, 'Victims or Strategists? Female lodging-house keepers in Jamaica', in Verene Shepherd et al. (eds.) *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (Ian Randle: Kingston, 1995) 210.

<sup>318</sup> Kingston Common Council, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1857; Janet Speirs, 'Poor Relief and Charity: A study in Social Ideas and Practices in Post-Emancipation Jamaica' M.Phil, thesis, UWI 2009, 81.



the occupants from the elements.<sup>319</sup> Even so, the poor laws of the 1880s stipulated an applicant for relief must forfeit any property to the parish, indicating a view that the mere possession of property, however dilapidated the building or infertile the land, was incompatible with poor relief. Secondly, the ‘genteel poor’ in slightly less pressing circumstances than the group just mentioned were to be relieved as discreetly as possible through private donations rather than poor relief according to the Barbados Commission.<sup>320</sup>

A scarcity of work in towns and the gravitation of country people towards the towns in search of work and aid placed an intolerable burden upon urban resources and neighbourhoods of squalor and wretchedness abounded in both islands’ principal towns. In Jamaica, the removal of the capital to Kingston in 1872 catapulted Spanish Town and its environs into a particularly acute state of poverty.<sup>321</sup> This was over and above the general poverty attributable to high property tax on the poorer dwellings, the tax on essential imports and depression of the sugar industry. Furthermore, the house tax compounded the problem: different types of homes fell into different tax bands, and this deterred the poor from improving their dwellings and was an incentive to downgrade rather than improve. Often, the house itself was the only asset a poor person possessed; with no income to pay the tax, the condition of the house would get progressively worse year on year, as it was stripped of any saleable conveniences. The tax relief roll for 1876 mentions a man whose house was ‘levied on before and now he has got nothing more’<sup>322</sup> and a woman who pulled down her chimney to pay her taxes, leaving her dependent on friends for the coming year.<sup>323</sup> And the Commission recounts a similar case of a man who ripped up the floorboards of his home because a floored house incurred a higher tax than one with an earth floor.<sup>324</sup>

Thomas Witter Jackson, stipendiary magistrate from 1857–1870, diarist, and permanent resident of Spanish Town told the Commission, ‘There is a great deal of poverty in Spanish Town among people who do not belong to the classes generally denominated poor people, but among people who have seen better days.’<sup>325</sup> The word ‘poor’ did not necessarily describe the de facto

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<sup>319</sup> The *Gleaner*, 13 March 1893.

<sup>320</sup> Barbados Commission, 8.

<sup>321</sup> For an account of the rise and fall of Spanish Town, see James Robertson, *Gone is the Ancient Glory: Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1534–2000*, (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2005).

<sup>322</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/6/23 – Kingston Municipal Board Minutes, July 1875–January 1879: ‘List compiled by Tax Inspector’, 5th July 1876, 160.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>324</sup> Jamaica Commission, Evidence at Kingston, 70.

<sup>325</sup> Jamaica Commission, Evidence at Kingston, 77.

condition of a person. Rather, it tended to refer to the ‘pauper class’ and carried with it a certain sense of inevitability. Jackson is emphasising that he is not referring to this class of persons, but to the ‘respectable poor’. Poor relief in Kingston was only reaching a fraction of the deserving recipients, and thousands who had seen better days were now living in a state of wretchedness.<sup>326</sup> The Assembly used to spend half the year in Spanish Town, and a large class of tradesmen who depended on them found their skills no longer in demand due to the exodus of ‘the better class of persons’ who relocated to Kingston and its environs.<sup>327</sup> Consequently, trades currently being taught to boys in industrial schools were going to be of little use to them in earning a living. The commissioners reported that every industry had declined in Spanish Town. Many of the poor women were those who had formerly depended on the labour of their slaves and those who had been the ‘kept women of the assembly’.<sup>328</sup> Rev. C.F. Douet, rector of Spanish Town and keeper of the poor list explained that while some of these women had houses left to them by the men they lived with, the houses were tumbling down and mothers and children were, for the most part, extremely poor.<sup>329</sup>

The clergy usually possessed and articulated a better understanding of their realities of poverty than the landowners or magistrates who tended to take a harsher view. But in the case of Spanish Town, the testimonies of Douet and Jackson were unanimous. Jackson said, ‘With very few exceptions all the people in Spanish Town are poor,’<sup>330</sup> and Douet said, ‘I have never seen anything like the poverty of Spanish Town.’<sup>331</sup> When asked how poverty might be alleviated among women and girls, they both replied that they could only turn to needlework, but that there were too many young girls trained in needlework who could not find sufficient work. Alternatively, a few might take up huckstering which was also insecure, and they further observed that agriculture was the only other option, but one of which many had no knowledge or experience.<sup>332</sup> Douet, who was also the superintendent of the Government Training College, said that he tried to help unemployed women with contracts for clothing for the College. The contracts were worth £300 a year but he described that sum as ‘a drop in the bucket’ as there were about 1,500 to 2,000 needlewomen in Spanish Town.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid. See also article series ‘How the Poor Live’ in the *Gleaner*, 28 February 1893, 1, 2, 4, 9, 13, 16, 24, 28 March 1893, reproduced in Moore and Johnson, *Squalid Kingston 1890–1920*, 22–46.

<sup>327</sup> Jamaica Commission, Evidence at Kingston.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., Statement of Rev. C.F. Douet, rector of Spanish Town, Superintendent of the Government Training College and Keeper of Poor List, 81.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., Evidence at Kingston, Statement of Thomas Witter Jackson, 77.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., Douet, 81.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., Jackson, 79.

This problem was replicated in all the towns; Dr. McCatty, the district medical officer at Montego Bay stated, ‘when business was flourishing the middle class was employed, such as sempstresses and lodging-house keepers.’<sup>333</sup> Inevitably, though, the lodging-house-keepers of Spanish Town were the hardest hit because when the government was in session many persons needed to stay in town but this ceased upon its removal to Kingston, which was done because Kingston with its large harbour was the centre of mercantile activity. No relevant archival material has been preserved for Spanish Town, but by looking at documents for Kingston where a slight improvement could be expected by virtue of its status as capital, the dire conditions in Spanish Town can better be imagined. The Parochial Board of Kingston gathered to consider the city’s annual applications for tax relief. The house tax funded the poor rates, but unaffordable taxation on the poorer home owners led them to seek tax relief and/or end up on the pauper rolls themselves. The Board therefore wished to consider whether each applicant ought to be fully or partially relieved by scrutinising the tax inspector’s report.<sup>334</sup> In 1876 there were 175 applicants in total, 135 females, 37 males, and 3 unstated. The females were mostly widows, needlewomen, Cuban refugees, washerwomen and lodging house keepers. The men were Cuban refugees, clerks, a cooper, storeman, road surveyor, hat maker, tailor, wheelwright, carpenter and baker. Nearly all were broken down with age, hunger or sickness, but a small minority were casually employed. The lodging house keepers and women reliant upon rent from property were as follows:

Widow with 5 children	dependent on rent of a house in King Street at £12
Haytian widow	lives by keeping poor lodgings to Haytians
Widow with 4 daughters	keeping private lodgings for persons
Blind old lady	keeps small private lodgings
Poor and decent woman	the rent hitherto of a room paid taxes – no tenant no that the house is dilapidated. <sup>335</sup>

Tax was levied on both the category of house and the rental value, though the minutes indicate that sometimes the actual rental sum realised upon a particular property may have been overlooked in the tax calculation; many appeals were made on this basis. Although the 1886

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., Evidence at Montego Bay, 15.

<sup>334</sup> Kingston Municipal Board Minutes, 5th July 1876, 153.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. ‘List compiled by Tax Inspector’, 154–159.

Poor Law would oblige a poor relief applicant to make over their property to the parish, this was not enforced in every instance. Discretion and variety of practice continued. Among the 1876 tax relief applicants, three were also classed as paupers,

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Very poor widow out of employment. On pauper list.

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Female, a pauper.

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Widow of a pauper (Mr. Fout) with 4 children – destitute.<sup>336</sup>

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Applicants were from various stations in life, from paupers to the widows of public servants, as can be seen from comparing just a few:

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Widow of inspector Allenga, on pension, large family, no other means.

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Poor widow with 3 children – starving – dependent on needlework.

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Poor old cripple widow, pensioner of the parish church.<sup>337</sup>

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Some were receiving no income or relief, while others were assisted by the church if they were part of the congregation or recommended by the vicar. The widow of Inspector Allenga was fortunate to receive a pension but with a large family this was insufficient. Most of the entries for females mentioned only the destitute state of the applicant without reference to any trade or skill, but where a skill was mentioned, it was invariably needle work (25 women) and washerwomen (3 women). This snapshot of tax relief applicants shows us that poverty was experienced across classes, from the ‘pauper classes’ upwards, and women in particular were vulnerable to falling from a higher station if they had no marketable skills beyond needlework. Twenty-five of the women listed in the tax relief role were listed as needlewomen.

Affluent middle-class women were not accustomed to labouring for a living and were taught only sewing, so when the breadwinner died they were left destitute. For example, the poor relief registers for St. Thomas parish, Jamaica, show that between April and May 1887 two coloured widows applied for aid. The first, Julia Matthews, a 66-year old seamstress, though she owned a house and house spot, was unable to obtain sufficient work, having several dependants – her daughter with 3 children, and her son, an unemployed tailor. The second was a 72-year-old

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 154 no.18, 155 no.16, and 156 no.17.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 154 no 1, no. 20, and no. 21.

seamstress with failing sight. One son was in New Zealand and the other could not earn enough to support his mother. The Board offered them a weekly allowance of 2/- and 1/6 respectively until they or their sons could find work. It was a sum quite inadequate for the needs of these families, and with so many unemployed seamstresses the chances of these elderly women finding work was slim.

The descent into poverty of seamstresses was due to the Depression of the mid-nineteenth century, the increased importation of ready-made clothing and the introduction of the sewing machine. Two visitors to Jamaica in 1866 observed,

The brown female population of the towns, who have been accustomed to live by the needle, find themselves deprived of work and almost of the hope of better times. Such 'cannot dig' and the resources of public and private charity are small. They not only suffer from the general decline of prosperity, but still more, at the present time, from the introduction of sewing-machines, which have led to the extensive importation of ready-made clothing from England. They have neither the means nor the energy to betake themselves to the use of the sewing-machine to enable them to compete on equal terms.<sup>338</sup>

Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith explain that these females were those who had formerly worked as house slaves, were more integrated into the European sexual division of labour and so were familiar with needlework and could make a living as seamstresses within the 'respectable' lower/middle class.<sup>339</sup> French and Ford-Smith also find that from 1871 to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, the numbers of dressmakers exceeded the total number of all male artisans, whose work was more varied and took place away from the home base.<sup>340</sup>

A weekly domestic wage equalled the daily wage of a skilled man, and from 1841–1865 this did not change.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Thomas Harvey and William Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866: A Narrative of a Tour through the Island*, with remarks on its social, educational and industrial condition (London, 1867) 76.

<sup>339</sup> Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944* (unpublished manuscript, Sistren Research, 1986) 143–144. Sistren Theatre Research was founded in 1977 out of a government programme to help impoverished populations improve their job skills. Their dramaturgy focuses on oppression of women, poverty, race and imperialism.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid. See also Gisela Eisner, *Jamaica, 1830–1930: A Study in Economic Growth* (Manchester University Press, 1961).

<sup>341</sup> Joan French, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944*, 143.

Kerr’s description of prosperous urban women presents a different picture. Though most of her subjects were active in the early decades of the nineteenth century, she mentions four women in 1878 who expanded and diversified, owning bakeries and shops as well as several lodging houses.<sup>342</sup> However, those women were from small towns and villages – Porus, Golden Spring and Annotto Bay and without a comparison to Kingston or other larger town it is difficult to make a general statement about prosperity based on these findings. Kerr’s table of ‘Annual incomes attached to various occupations in Jamaica, 1847’ shows that lodging house keepers were fourth in prosperity out of a list of nineteen occupations but the 1876 tax relief roll suggests that those who prospered in Kingston were few and far between and the census indicates a drastic decline in lodging house keepers between 1844 and 1861. The figure remained well below the 1844 figure to the end of the century,

Census showing numbers of hotel keepers

	1844	1861	1871	1881	1891	1911	1921
Hotel keepers, etc.	216	48	98	123	94	270	551

*Source: Decennial census, cited in Gisella Eisner, Jamaica, 1830–1930: A Study in Economic Growth, p.164*

But this descent into poverty of urban women did not just happen without a policy originating in the rural setting. During slavery there was a predominance of female labourers, but Michael Craton’s statistics for the Worthy Park estate 1838–1842 show that while nearly all skilled men retained full time employment on estates, less than half the women who had made up the majority of unskilled labourers were listed by 1842.<sup>343</sup>

The reasons for the withdrawal of regular female estate labour have been critically examined by Bridget Brereton who believes that scholars have over-relied on contemporary assertions of women’s ‘natural preference’ for maternal and domestic duties, which ignored the coercive measures.<sup>344</sup> Joan French describes the first of these coercive measures as the replacement of regular female estate work with seasonal work by ‘stranger gangs’, typically paying 9d per day compared to 4/6d per day for a senior boilerman.<sup>345</sup> The second measure resulting from the first

<sup>342</sup> Paulette Kerr, ‘Victims or Strategists?’, 205.

<sup>343</sup> Of 145 retained during apprenticeship, only 60 remained in 1942. Michael Craton and James Walvin, *A Jamaican Plantation: The history of Worthy Park 1670-1970*, London: W.H. Allen, 1970, 211.

<sup>344</sup> Bridget Brereton, ‘Family Strategies, Gender, and the Shift to Wage Labor in the British Caribbean’, in *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (USA: Duke University Press, 2005) 143–161.

<sup>345</sup> Joan French, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944*, 135.

was the expulsion of women – no longer regularly employed by the estate – from their customary provision grounds. The loss of regular labour and vital land base forced women to towns and to marginal areas of the economy – domestics, washerwomen, hoteliers, etc.<sup>346</sup>

French asserts that the ejection of women did not happen only at the point of emancipation, but that over the next few decades and into the 1930s and 1940s there was a conscious policy of what she terms ‘housewifisation’ designed to avert the ‘revolutionary potential of unemployment in a context of under-developed capitalism.’<sup>347</sup> The revolutionary potential she refers to is the labour protests which occurred across the entire British Caribbean in the 1930s to the alarm of colonial authorities, and the consequent appointment of the Royal West India Commission (known as the Moyne Commission) ‘to investigate social and economic conditions in Barbados, British Honduras, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Windward Islands, and matters connected herewith.’<sup>348</sup> In short, French says, it became expedient to promote an ideology that justified the ‘ejection of women – the majority of the unemployed – from the wage market, and thereby “ease unemployment”’.<sup>349</sup> Wage labour could then be recognised as a male prerogative along with laws establishing male line primogeniture to stave off unrest from returning migrants.<sup>350</sup> As a result, women’s unskilled jobs in towns became increasingly insecure.<sup>351</sup>

Women would labour unpaid in social services ‘to the population placed in destitution by their [the government’s] economic policies’ and ‘care of the elderly and sick devolved upon wageless women.’<sup>352</sup> The Jamaica Commission report stated, ‘the misery and ill-health of old people [cannot] be substantially alleviated until a feeling of family responsibility has been more securely established.’<sup>353</sup> Thus poverty was yet again thrown back upon the people, and French’s succinct statement sums up the fact that the poor were expected to ‘establish the bourgeois family without the bourgeois material base.’<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>348</sup> CO 950, Colonial Office: West India Royal Commission (1938 to 1939).

<sup>349</sup> Joan French, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944*.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 288 Migrants were returning from the USA and Central American and Caribbean republics after 1914, the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Jamaica Commission, 220.

<sup>354</sup> Joan French, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944*.

## The Suppression of Charity in Barbados

Without external opportunities, such as that presented by the Panama Canal construction, or the development of bananas as an export crop, the increasingly impoverished masses had to rely on local assistance. Here we can see the manifestations of colonial policies differently affecting types of poor women in Barbados, compared with Jamaica. There were two types of charities – those which aided the poor with cash, food or medical attendance, typically through church organisation; and those where the applicants themselves were involved in the running and perpetuation of the charity through collaborative and remunerative work. These charities, concentrated in urban areas, did not directly benefit the pauper classes to any significant degree. They were aimed at members of the class above them whose character and conduct could be vouched for by clergy, employer or some other respectable citizen.

Black woman, 54, bottle washer, 15 months ill health, supported by two Friendly Societies, 'Hand of Fellowship' and 'Benevolent' but on account of long illness has ceased to enjoy their privileges. She has some feathered stock, sold, two children abroad, one left her with a child of 8 years. Almost entirely lost speech, appears to have had a fit. Niece visits. Candidate for almshouse. Pays land rent from proceeds of 5 pairs of pigeons, gets 1pt soup from 'Soup House' and 12c from the Offertory.

[Decision of] Board: 3/-.<sup>355</sup>

The case of this woman from St. Michael, Barbados, which the inspector has explained in some detail encapsulates all the ways in which the working poor attempted to help themselves and gives us a clear indication of the types of people who could get help and what degree of help they could expect. Daily Meal Societies were charitable efforts which served cooked food to paupers, and sometimes distributed uncooked provisions. The Barbados Commission lists the most prominent in Bridgetown, the St. Paul's Daily Meal Society, the St. Leonard's Daily Meal Dispensary, and the Ladies Association which, among its other charitable efforts had a Daily Meal Dispensary for anyone approved by the board of ladies, on average 100 persons. The 'Soup House' in the inspector's report was the St. Paul's Daily Meal Society. The church offertory was the donations collected from the congregation and used for whatever purpose the church wished, including distributed to those deemed needy and deserving from amongst them. The offertory

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<sup>355</sup> St. Michael, Cases of Paupers Inspected, February 1886, Case no.6.



also contributed to the meal societies and clothing societies. The Commission's statistical report estimated that £1250 was annually contributed towards poor relief by the church offertories for the years 1873–1875.<sup>356</sup>

The Commission's attitude to charity reflected the anxieties of society over the inability of officialdom to exert control over the organisation of philanthropy which was, after all, a matter of individual conscience and religious feeling. The Commission expressed the desire for greater control over the running of charities and how recipients were chosen, on the basis that the charities were part supported from vestry funds and that they sometimes assisted people already receiving parish poor relief. And yet in reality there was little separating the vestry (parish council) comprising the rector, the churchwarden and lay individuals, from the church vestry (responsible for church and congregational matters) and charities which were all run or overseen by church officials. The whole provision of relief was a tightly knit network that operated through personal knowledge of the poor and personal recommendations for relief for the favoured few. Yet the Commission was hugely critical of voluntary aid, asserting that but a small portion was given for legitimate or commendable purposes such as emergency relief in sickness or some other calamity, and that 'the larger portion is dribbled out in paltry doles ranging from 3d. or 4d. per month to 4s... We do not hesitate to condemn this system as a misapplication of the offertory from its more legitimate use by making it create paupers instead of aid poor persons...'<sup>357</sup>

One of the fears driving the decision to abolish parochial grants to charities was the cost. Subsidies from the parish for the main meal societies in 1875 were:

Name of Charity	Annual vestry subsidy	Annual sum raised from other sources
Ladies Association	£125	£75
St. Paul's Daily Meal Society	£100	£76
St. Leonard's Daily Meal Dispensary	£50	£43

<sup>356</sup> Barbados Commission, 29.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

There were a further 17 clothing societies throughout the island, 4 were receiving vestry aid from £7 to £60.<sup>358</sup> With the vestry funds the charities were able to organise and carry out relief efforts in a way the parish could not. It was the parish that continued to ‘dribble out pittances’ long after the poor law of 1880. But even though the charities were using the funds effectively, the fact remained that voluntary aid was not sufficient to match or exceed the vestry grants, and this was a concern to the Commission. The other concern or bias that the Commission’s report seemed to evince was a fear of paupers going from one to the other to get aid, without an authority to oversee. This struck at what was an important strategy of the poor, a resourcefulness which kept starvation at bay, and one which was threatened by the Commission with its avowed terror of pauperism and perpetual dependence. However, in order to receive relief a person had to be known and recommended and in a small island like Barbados with charities run by many of the same individuals it seems highly unlikely that an undeserving person could carry out such a ‘fraud’ for any length of time. Rather, the decision to abolish grants hints at elite anxieties about the social order: by closing down paupers’ access to charitable aid and reducing them to dependence on parish relief only, they could then be forced back into ‘continuous labour’ and a position from where they could not refuse plantation work when offered for whatever wages were offered, enabling continued and unthreatened planter control over labour and wages.

The Commission was ruthless in its recommendation to abolish subsidies and the 1880 Poor Law adopted the measure which struck a death blow to many of the charities. It affected some white poor who were forced onto parish relief, but its main effect was to force the black majority off the registers of those charities which managed to remain in operation but with drastically reduced functions, and keep philanthropy as it was during slavery – for the genteel (white) poor only, thus maintaining a social distinction between black and white poor, and black and white in general in the minds of people.

Woodville Marshall has scanned charitable trusts before and after slavery showing that testators and vestry clearly identified the deserving poor as white women. From the earliest trusts he discovered in 1736 right through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this attitude was upheld; e.g. the Garnes Trust, established 1864 for ‘poor creditable widows of the white population’, and the Henry Applewaite Williams’ trust for ‘poor deserving white females’ in 1912.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Clothing Societies were organised by church ladies who sewed outfits for distribution to the poor.

<sup>359</sup> Woodville Marshall, ‘Benevolence towards ‘the deserving poor’: bequests in support of parochial outdoor relief’, Barbados Museum lecture, 29 March 2011, 12 (unpublished).

The Barbados Assembly was not going to let the Poor Law, grudgingly enacted, interfere with the social order. Blacks would labour and poor whites would behave. Those white women fortunate enough to be beneficiaries of trusts had their lifestyles closely scrutinised by vestrymen and any ‘slippage’ was liable to be punished with expulsion from their cottages and a withdrawal of support. The term ‘slippage’, explains Cecily Forde-Jones, meant the socio-economic down-sliding of white people, and associated with that was the fear from an elite perspective that common marginality and social proximity might tempt white women into sexual liaisons with black men.<sup>360</sup>

So the abolition of parish subsidies to charities catering to the wider classes of poor was a retrograde move, disguised as progression, to try to reassert the social order threatened since emancipation. Its success can be measured in the fate of the charities.

All the soup kitchens closed apart from St Paul’s which was only able to feed 25 instead of the 80 persons fed previously.<sup>361</sup> The Ladies Association since its founding in 1823 had supported 12 white widows with accommodation. By 1877, two years after the Commission, its pensioners had increased to 26 women.<sup>362</sup> It was able to do this because while grants to all other charities were gradually withdrawn, the grant to the Ladies Association alone remained untouched, an indication of the esteem in which it was held and the perceived importance of its work in supporting poor white women.<sup>363</sup>

If, in the light of these policy changes, we re-examine the case of the 54-year-old black woman whose relief request was outlined above, what does her case show? In 1886, six years after the new poor law designed to end this sort of overlap, the woman was supported by parish relief, a soup dispensary and the offertory, aside from her own industry and thrift. If this case was an indication of common practice, it would suggest that nothing had changed. But she was not typical of the majority of people claiming relief. The weaning off of relief to foster self-reliance and industry was not applied equally to all types of poor. This woman was church-going,

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<sup>360</sup> Cecily Forde-Jones, ‘Mapping Racial Boundaries’, 22. Woodville Marshall, ‘Charity for the undeserving? The Carpenter Trust and the Creation of the Parish Land Tenantry in St. Philip’, *JBMHS*, 49, 2003, 167–191.

<sup>361</sup> Richard Carter, *The Development of Social Assistance Policy in Barbados since 1875* (MPhil Thesis, UWI, 1986) 95.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, Report of the Inspector of Hospitals and Asylums, 1877.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

industrious and could evidence her efforts at self-support, but was hindered through illness, so the board dealt with her ‘sympathetically’ without criticism of the multiple avenues of support she was already receiving. In other words, the black poor could receive ‘generous’ parish support if they could show themselves to be respectable, such as through church attendance, and have their character vouched for by church and parish authorities. In other words, a ‘good’ black woman could get aid if she went to extraordinary lengths to prove her industry and respectability, but this case was not typical of the masses. Rather it was typical of the cronyism and distinctly class-based attitude that characterised poor relief: she pays land rent and has (had) feathered stock, setting her apart from the labouring classes.<sup>364</sup>

The 1880 Poor Law did not change the way things were done. It could not break the vestries’ stranglehold on relief practices, even though governors Freeling and Hennessy had called for overhaul and centralisation when they inaugurated the Commission. Both black and white poor women remained vulnerable for different reasons, the black disadvantaged by racism, the white privileged at least in theory. The inspector considered the black woman a candidate for the almshouse. Despite her multiple efforts at self-support and having a dependent grandchild, the spectre of the almshouse was not far from her door. Having sold her livestock and continuing ill, how long could she continue on the outside? The almshouse was the final destination of the aged and black, as the system continued to privilege white women of a certain social class. The inspector’s report on a white woman names Jane Abel Grant states,

[She is] getting one of the highest pensions of 4/- but I felt duty bound to present her case. Ill in bed, she had been a lady of affluence. Now an old woman 70 years. But by some misfortune or other lost her all, being brought up in that grade of life, where unfortunately honest labour is considered degrading – at the loss of her wealth she became entirely helpless...

[Decision of] Board: leave it to the inspector to relieve her casually.<sup>365</sup>

Despite her lack of effort at self-support, she was receiving one of the highest pensions and a recommendation for discretionary casual relief, supporting our findings in Chapter 2 that white

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<sup>364</sup> In order to help the Board to assess the applicant’s case, the Inspector of Poor was required to note the presence of anything which could be sold, particularly any livestock that could bring in an income – the sale of eggs, chickens, cows’ milk, etc.

<sup>365</sup> St. Michael, Cases of Paupers Inspected, May 1885.

women were rarely if ever sent to the almshouse and a genteel pauper never. The Commission stated, 'This class of poor, perhaps the most distressing of all, lies beyond the reach of legislative succour; their case must be met by voluntary effort...'<sup>366</sup> On the other hand, leaving it to the inspector to relieve her casually left her vulnerable to the inspector's discretion without a formal and transparent agreement for a certain sum or regularity of aid. It reduced aid to a 'favour' in return for which a certain conduct would have been expected of her.

The policy of the new poor law can be summarised as discreet aid to a select few white women as long as they behaved, and aid to blacks restricted to foster 'self-reliance', i.e. coercion into plantation labour. Undoubtedly the suffering of the poor increased after the Poor Law and continued to the close of the century as sugar prices remained depressed and the markets uncertain.<sup>367</sup> As Leonard Fletcher states, 'the main preoccupation of public policy was not about improving the poor relief system, but how to stave off economic disaster.'<sup>368</sup> Even the favoured Ladies Association, with no increase to its grant, eventually closed its soup kitchen which catered to the poor blacks, and in 1913 reported that it was discontinuing outdoor pensions.<sup>369</sup>

### **State and Charity Collaborate in Jamaica**

While charity languished in Barbados after the 1880 Poor Law, the Jamaican experience was different. The Jamaican government realised the need to cooperate with charity, but not the sort of charities dispensing direct aid, which the authorities in Barbados so disliked. Charity had to evolve to fit the government agenda: it was to be for the respectable poor; to promote self-help; to direct female labour into suitable channels; and to train juveniles for useful labour befitting their station in life. Thus, the advantage that the respectable poor had over the labouring poor in terms of access to these new avenues of relief is strongly evident in Jamaica where programmes developed to assist this class to stave off destitution.

Jamaican authorities had similar moral concerns to those of Barbados about the prevalence of pauperism and the fostering of respectability, but its social structure bore certain key differences. Though there was no significant class of white poor, there was a pigmented class structure

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<sup>366</sup> Barbados Commission, 4–5.

<sup>367</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838 – 1900', *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1992, 200.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>369</sup> Richard Carter, *The Development of Social Assistance Policy in Barbados since 1875*, 95.

nonetheless: genteel poor (a few white widows), coloured poor (middle class declining in prosperity), black poor (labouring classes). These classes were not as rigidly delineated as in Barbados, and did overlap – there were middle class blacks and labouring coloureds, for instance. Respondents to the Commission expressed particular sympathy with those whose fortunes had declined, but this could apply to once-wealthy coloured persons as well as to white. It would not have been practicable to restrict relief to whites only.

Compared to Barbados, Jamaican planters were less able to control the workforce. Little could be done to stem the desire of former plantation slaves to work their own land. With little to incentivise them to return to the plantations, the government brought in East Indian labour, though not in sufficient numbers to prevent the severe decline of the plantation system. The reclaiming of black labour was therefore extremely important, and the main thrust of the Commission was how to bring in a compulsory education system with agriculture as the core subject. Respondents reported that parents disliked their children to be raised for agriculture, considering it akin to slavery and a form of coercing them back to the estates.<sup>370</sup> The Commission's respondents also acknowledged that urban residents were not necessarily suited to agricultural labour and that the government would need to come up with more forward-thinking policies to fit the circumstances. With this intention in mind, church and state collaboration would be needed to establish industrial schools, training and employment schemes, as well as hospitals and asylums. Like Barbados, pensioners received a miserable pittance from Poor Relief but the colonial government's aim now was to see what steps could be taken to improve the system especially through the establishment and development of longer term centralised forms of relief like orphanages, schools and public hospitals rather than direct relief to the destitute. This could only be achieved by working in conjunction with church and charity, so criticism of charity was more muted and no prohibition of parochial grants to charities made its way into the 1886 poor law, perhaps because the burden of subsidising charities was far less great in Jamaica than in Barbados. Enos Nuttall, bishop of Kingston and one of the foremost philanthropists of the day, commented that all the denominations gave a lot of alms, as did private individuals,

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<sup>370</sup> Jamaica Commission, 24ff.

Indeed, I think that, taking into consideration the comparatively limited means of even the wealthiest of the community, there are few places with such a population in which so much is given away in private charity as there is in Kingston.<sup>371</sup>

This is in stark contrast to Barbados whose commissioners lamented,

It is assuredly a matter of surprise that in a wealthy community, surrounded by an alarming amount of destitution, so little should be given by so few to a well-established and carefully supervised institution.<sup>372</sup>

Conscious of the need to organise charity in a way that would gain government approval and support, Nuttall reported to the Commission that urban charity genuinely suffered from a want of organisation in the way the different charities carried out their work.<sup>373</sup> He felt that funds were wasted for want of organisation and that the more clamorous applicant got help from many sources while the more timid but possibly more deserving got nothing.<sup>374</sup> Barbados' Commissioners were of the same mind.<sup>375</sup> But while Barbados' solution was to separate out the different classes of applicants and disengage private charity from poor relief, Nuttall recommended private charity combined with public relief.<sup>376</sup> He wanted to start a Kingston Charity Organisation Society (KCOS) along the lines of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) established in England in 1869.

The English COS was to halt the supposed 'flood of charity' to the undeserving; to manage funds, vet applicants and direct them to the most appropriate charity. It aimed to 'rehabilitate' the poor. After rigorous investigation into their personal circumstances, the applicant could be directed to the appropriate charity. Those deemed unworthy would be directed to the poor law authorities whose overworked relieving officers could not take on the detailed case work undertaken by the COS.<sup>377</sup> Cooperation across the Poor Law Unions was patchy and many

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<sup>371</sup> Jamaica Commission, Evidence at Kingston, 6.

<sup>372</sup> Barbados Commission, 26, in reference to the Ladies' Association.

<sup>373</sup> Jamaica Commission, Evidence at Kingston, 6.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Barbados Commission, 19.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 5–6.

<sup>377</sup> See Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930*, 115; and Robert Humphreys, *Poor Relief and Charity 1869–1945: The London Charity Organisation Society*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) 1.

charities refused to recognise the COS's authority.<sup>378</sup> But it seems that in Jamaica with its smaller population and interrelated charity organisations, a COS could achieve its objectives more readily. The KCOS started in 1882, declined, revived in 1900 and has worked continuously ever since. It was nothing if not thorough in its investigations; in 1915, 189 cases involved 160 business calls, 252 home visits, 395 letters and 797 people interviewed.<sup>379</sup> It was time consuming and limited in the extent if not the quality of its provision, as were all charities to the 'deserving', though there were many of them in Jamaica. By contrast, only one commissioner called for a COS in Barbados but received no support for the idea. Charitable donations declined drastically in Barbados between 1880 and 1920 but flourished in Jamaica under elite patronage.<sup>380</sup>

The limitation of the KCOS was that it could not take on long term cases. Its focus was on rehabilitation, not the care of the chronic sick or elderly who inevitably exhausted the benefits owing to them from membership of a medical club or friendly society the longer they lived or the longer their infirmity continued. The case of the 54-year-old bottle washer illustrates this reality. The inspector said she had been supported by two friendly societies, but on account of her long illness had ceased to enjoy their privileges. Many charities focused on healthy people of working age who could enter the workforce productively. The aged and chronically infirm invariably ended their days in the almshouse or as destitute outdoor paupers.

Philanthropy operated, or at least appeared to operate within a certain imperial context. Nuttall has been described by contemporary biographers as a 'keen imperialist' and was said to embody the ideals of imperial paternalism, which Bryan explains as a system of fundamentally conservative ideas which sought to foster 'progress' within the framework of empire by maintaining social hierarchies.<sup>381</sup> People would remain within their ascriptive spheres but be encouraged towards productivity and self-reliance through 'moral renovation'.<sup>382</sup> In spite of the obvious flaws in this philosophy, there is no doubt that Nuttall made an enormous contribution to welfare in almost every area. Women's philanthropic organisation also fell within this conflicted sphere. How the government co-opted women into furthering empire interests while maintaining

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Patrick Bryan, *Philanthropy and Social Welfare in Jamaica*, 36.

<sup>380</sup> Richard Carter, *The Development of Social Assistance Policy in Barbados since 1875*, 90.

<sup>381</sup> Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class, and Social Control* (UWI, 2000) 50 and *Philanthropy and Social Welfare*, 24.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.



women's ascriptive spheres, and how women affirmed or challenged these values, is the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### Women and Philanthropy

Chapter 2 was largely concerned with state provision of poor relief and the attitudes of the state towards the labouring poor. Beliefs about weak family ties, juvenile vagrancy and the prevalence of single women with illegitimate children to a large extent dictated relief practices. Relief was routinely refused to those who had offspring deemed capable of caring for them; and in all cases relief was restricted to the bare minimum, intended to coerce the able-bodied into labour; labour that simply was not available or adequate in most cases.

The poor laws were not concerned with reform. Barbados' numerous poor law amendments were minor. The Central Poor Law Board which produced annual reports, lost the vigour it started with in 1880, and by the 1890s it had given up making recommendations.<sup>383</sup> In Jamaica, the Board of Supervision also acquiesced. The poor laws, as they stood, were never going to raise living standards or enable economic self-sufficiency. We touched briefly on the mixed economy of welfare – of paupers seeking multiple sources of aid to get sufficient sustenance. But what must be explored fully is the role of private individuals and organisations in aiding the poor and in shaping the form, type and future direction of relief. Philanthropic endeavour served to highlight social inequalities and also played an important role and influence in the movement for social and political change.

In nineteenth century England, charitable giving far exceeded the sums spent by the poor law unions.<sup>384</sup> Furthermore, by the end of the century the majority of subscribers to charitable organisations were women – between approximately 57% and 77%, depending on the type of charity.<sup>385</sup> F.K. Prochaska also informs us that the traditional women's auxiliaries gave way to 'an explosion of charities managed exclusively by women' taking place in the nineteenth century.<sup>386</sup> This phenomenon has been largely overlooked in the historiography of philanthropy in the Caribbean, and consequently the influence of this sector on reshaping social stratification has also not been sufficiently recognised.

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<sup>383</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838–1900', 198.

<sup>384</sup> F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)

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<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–31.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

This chapter will show that in addition to assisting the poor, women's philanthropy was part and parcel of a growing consciousness of the social and economic inequalities being faced by all colonial West Indian subjects, and hence charity to the poor was integrated into the aid workers' own struggles for self-determination in a gendered and racially stratified society. This fed into a nationalist and pan-Africanist consciousness which gathered strength after World War I. It is my argument that the national politics of the 1940s was rooted in women's activism of the 1920s and 1930s. They had done the groundwork among the poor, promoting self-respect and racial pride, and encouraged the support of politically motivated men of their class. The question the chapter seeks to answer is how women organised for change, especially when limited by church and state patriarchy, which took effect in gendered roles, limited employment options, lesser pay and the overarching need for a woman to maintain her respectable reputation in the eyes of society. To answer this question, the chapter will consider the roles of religion, race and class in both promoting and hindering social change, and explore ideological influences from outside the Caribbean.

The identified sources will bring to light the ways in which different types of women organised for social work and development. I have restricted my sources to documents and publications either produced by women or directly quoting from them, so as to be able to evidence their feelings and opinions as sympathetically as possible.

Charities were set up by local wealthy white women; by religious sisters from local Catholic minorities and abroad; and by local middle-class black women. These women's organisations sometimes worked in tandem, but inevitably tensions arose around the issue of hereditary privilege and black mobilisation, raising questions of who should do social work, who should be in charge, and who should decide the fate of the poorer classes. The age old 'habits of industry' refrain faced an emerging counter rhetoric stressing that it was not habits of industry that was wanting among the poorer classes but opportunities denied them by capitalist control of material resources.

Women's Self-Help was an organisation of elite white women, established in Jamaica in 1878 under the patronage of Lady Musgrave, the governor's wife. Their regular column in the *Gleaner* gives a sense of the outlook of charitable women towards their own role in society and to those they assisted.

The Annals of the Religious Sisters of Mercy (RSM) written by Mary Higgins, a novice who travelled to Jamaica with a small group of sisters, records their charitable activities from 1890 onwards. Though Catholic Jamaicans were in a small minority, the structural reach of Catholicism was great, as the religious sisters established and ran many schools across the island and relieved the parishes of their orphans who would otherwise have been fostered out or reside in the almshouse.

Little is known about how black and coloured women organised for aid in the nineteenth century. The infrequency with which middle class women appear in the written record renders it difficult to gain an intimate understanding of their lives during this period. Bridget Brereton's use of memoir and letters has allowed us glimpses into the lives of Caribbean women whose experiences, though they cannot be described as typical, nevertheless aid a gendered analysis of women's roles in both the public and private spheres.<sup>387</sup> The pauper letters from St. Philip, Barbados, have shown us a slice of life at the other end of the spectrum but there is a scarcity of written sources by women of the 'middling sort'. The memoir of the celebrated Mary Seacole published in 1857 is rare and exceptional.

Melanie Newton, writing on gender and philanthropy in Barbados, states that middle class women of colour operated as auxiliaries of male-led organisations and suggests that they chose to remain subordinate to patriarchal structures in order to appear respectable and credible through their marriage and family connections, and dissipate the notion that they could be a threat to the social order supposedly embodied by the lower class lodging house keeper and unmarried independent woman.<sup>388</sup> Newton's opinion seems equally applicable to Jamaica where individual philanthropy was more common among this class than any form of organisation.<sup>389</sup> By the end of the century, women were increasingly apparent in the public sphere, outside of the confines of the church. Linette Vassall has published a collection of women's letters, speeches and articles drawn from various newspapers and magazines, from 1898–1939. The women are from a variety of black and white, religious and secular backgrounds, which facilitates comparison.

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<sup>387</sup> Bridget Brereton, 'Rethinking Caribbean Difference', *Feminist Review*, No. 59, 1998, 1–5; and 'Gendered Testimonies: Autobiographies, Diaries and Letters by Women as Sources for Caribbean History', *Feminist Review*, No. 59, 1998, 143–163.

<sup>388</sup> Melanie Newton, 'Philanthropy, Gender and the Production of Public Life in Barbados c.1790 – c.1850' in Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (eds.) *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (USA: Duke University Press, 2005) 225–246, 233.

<sup>389</sup> Jamaica Commission, multiple testimonies on the fostering of orphans undertaken by this class of women.

Reports of the Child Saving League and Child Welfare Association between the years 1914 and 1925 show how elite-run charities in Jamaica were trying to lower child mortality and mould the lives of poor black families into models they deemed proper. In this respect, they largely rejected the opinions and efforts of the emerging black middle class whose activists had their own methods and attitudes. Evidence given before the Moyne Commission by black women in 1938 and discussions in the *Gleaner* throw light on the main points of contention, as well as similarities.

Finally, the online archive of the collected interviews and speeches of the pioneering teacher, activist and social reformer Amy Bailey gives valuable information covering every area of public life.

Charitable giving has long been a feature of most Christian denominations, but how such charity work was organised and the roles played by women have not been much considered in the Caribbean. Patrick Bryan's short book documents the most well-known charity organisations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with brief analyses of the roles of church and state, as well as the entrance of women into social work in increasingly autonomous ways. Sistren's unpublished manuscript details many of the same organisations and fleshes out the underlying government agenda in giving verbal, if not financial, support to women's social work.

### **Early Women's Philanthropy**

Women's Self-Help was a charity which targeted women of working age in Jamaica. It differed from the Barbados-based Ladies' Association for the Relief of the Indigent Sick and Infirm which began in 1823 and relied on a vestry grant, an annual bazaar and voluntary donations in order to carry out its services.<sup>390</sup> Women's Self-Help relied entirely on the subscriptions of its members and the income it generated through its activities. It was founded in 1879 under the patronage of Lady Musgrave, the governor's wife, and Mrs Campbell the wife of Dr. Charles Campbell. Though it was a distinctly elite-run charity, it relied on cross-class collaboration in order to achieve its objective which was 'the improvement of the people in industry and self-

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<sup>390</sup> Barbados Commission, 26.

dependence'.<sup>391</sup> Women were selected to make crafts which were sold to support the maker and the organisation, and a regular column in the *Gleaner* advertised the sales to the general public. They also took orders for plain sewing and any woman who wished to sew for them had to report to one of the ladies of the committee with credentials and references from ladies for whom she had previously worked.<sup>392</sup> They also started a weekly fine needlework class, for which an applicant had to bring a recommendation from her clergyman and 2/- for six months' instruction.<sup>393</sup> Women from Anglican congregations were given priority, followed by other denominations.

It therefore served two objectives: finding occasional employment for distressed needlewomen of the 'humbler class', and enabling self-help among 'industrious women' who, though belonging socially and educationally to a higher class, needed to provide for themselves through craft making or fine needlework.<sup>394</sup> It also enabled charitably disposed ladies to work for others and set an example through their 'cultivated taste...artistic grace...and refined education.'<sup>395</sup> The distinctions of class were very clear, and the society carefully selected women they deemed morally upright to participate and set an example to one another. While its values were top-down, its collaborative nature meant that the cooperation of its recipient members was crucial and integral to its success. In as much as it sought to promote habits of industry, the *Gleaner* commended it for acting on its own principles, as it was practically self-supporting.<sup>396</sup> The only time it asked for public donations was in 1886 to purchase permanent premises, which it was able to achieve very quickly and pay off a debt of £100 by the following year.

Public institutions had always endeavoured to create this model of self-support, convinced that the poor only needed to be taught how to help themselves. It followed the understanding that people should remain within ascriptive spheres, and that the work of training them (to be better domestics, for example) be carried out by appropriate white superiors. If the organisation could be supported by the labour of its residents or members, then it could increase in efficiency without expensive grants. This view was widely evinced in both government and philanthropic circles, and guided the form of aid well into the twentieth century. This was not controversial

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<sup>391</sup> *Gleaner*, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1883 – Parting address of Lady Musgrave.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1880.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1881.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1883.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

when aimed at adults confined to jails or almshouses. It was even suggested that hospital patients whose cases were not life-threatening might beneficially engage in light gardening. The controversy arose where children were involved. The notion of compelling children to labour for their support was not new: children in Jamaica were struck off poor relief at the age of fourteen and sent into service, and could even begin at a younger age. But the drive to establish compulsory education brought the different wishes of parents and legislators into sharp contrast. As explained in Chapter 3, parents were against the teaching of agriculture in schools, as they expected education to afford their children opportunities other than manual labour. Furthermore, it was illogical to many parents that they be obliged to pay fees for their children to labour at school for the benefit of the institution, rather than stay at home and labour on behalf of the family.

But colonial governments were wedded to the idea of industrial education in order to ensure a steady supply of plantation labour and servants. However, they lacked the funds with which to put these aims into practice and so looked to the charitable sector to aid them in these proposals. Some, such as Mico College, which was established in 1836 as a Christian non-denominational teacher training facility was theological and academic, and remained so in spite of the Jamaican government suggesting it include agriculture in its curriculum. Other charity schools were less able to ignore the government's recommendation of the half time system – i.e. lessons for half a day and agriculture for half. As attendance expanded and funds fell short, many had to turn to the government seeking grants, meaning the relationship became characterised by a degree of compromise.

One of the main discussions of the Jamaica Commission 1878 had been whether or not education ought to be made compulsory, and in the absence of such legislation, how families could be persuaded to see the benefit of educating their children. Since the governments' aims in this area were invariably greater than their financial means, it was the charities who were most active in this area. Parents could not be compelled, but paupers and orphans had little or no bargaining power. Catholic women religious were the pioneers of sustainable education to the poor, and the self-supporting model was, of necessity, adopted.

The earliest organised female-led charity came with the arrival in 1857 of four Scottish Franciscan sisters who established several preparatory schools and academies for the children of fee-paying Catholic families. Others continued to arrive from the motherhouse until they were

joined by the US Allegany Franciscans from 1879. Up until this point, Catholic charity had not made inroads into relieving the poor on an organised level. But in 1880, a small group of Jamaican Catholic women began the process. The Ladies of Charity are organisations of lay Catholic women dedicated to serving the poor. In Jamaica, the Ladies of Charity were volunteers who worshipped at Holy Trinity church in Kingston. The most well-known was Jestina (Jessie) Ripoll who ran a poor relief centre at her home. From there, provisions which had been gathered through begging were distributed to the poor. Along with her friends Josephine Ximines and Louise Dugiol, Ripoll purchased a 43-acre property with a five-room cottage on South Camp Road with her own money and donations. There she opened the Alpha Home with just one orphan girl. It then developed into separate girls' and boys' homes. The boys' home opened with nine boys as a Farm School, while the girls' school taught needlework.

The aim of the sisters was to promote Christian values and stable families. Alpha Centenary publication states, 'The high rate of illegitimacy and unstable family life contributed greatly to the pool of children in need. Adult migration...left many children without proper care and supervision...'<sup>397</sup>

So the sisters endeavoured to create a home atmosphere and institute a programme of work, study and discipline to equip the girls to re-enter the work-a-day world as responsible self-respecting adults.<sup>398</sup> Home economics had a high profile throughout the existence of the school. 'All the girls were exposed to formal and informal training in this area to prepare them as future homemakers.'<sup>399</sup> They cleaned the school, did their own laundry as they got older, made their beds and helped in the kitchen. 'All these chores were important in contributing to character development and to the acquisition of homemaking skills.'<sup>400</sup>

Thus far Alpha's aims appeared to coincide with the government's aims of promoting a strong nuclear family unit, with the woman as homemaker. Like Women's Self-Help, Alpha became known for its handcrafts. It was the place to buy Maltese lace or embroidered table linens, dresses, baby layettes, etc. But the market for these items was not great enough to sustain the running costs, so the sisters organised fundraising concerts to which they invited the governor

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<sup>397</sup> *Alpha 100: 1880–1980* (Kingston: Alpha Institution, 1980) 19.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*



and other prominent people, they laboured themselves, and they begged for donations. Jessie Ripoll would say to the boys, ‘You have had some tea, there is something for dinner, now pray. I am going out to beg for supper and tomorrow’s food. Work hard in the garden to produce what you can.’<sup>401</sup> She petitioned merchants and traders but could not cope with the growing costs so applied to the government for a grant. For this, Alpha would have to register as an industrial school, and therefore adhere – at least in principle – to the education required by government which had a strong agricultural and domestic skills focus.

The expansion of charitable schools coincided with a solidifying of government plans for education and the black population. Plantation economies needed obedient, labouring subjects who, since they could no longer be forced through enslavement, had to be coerced through education. However, parents were opposed to compulsory apprenticeships and wished their children to receive an education that would equip them to escape agricultural work.<sup>402</sup> This exposed a tension between the hopes and expectations of the first generation of free people for their children’s future, and the planter class’ need for tractable agricultural workers who would not seek to rise above their station.<sup>403</sup>

From the time of the commission in 1878, the question of what to do with juvenile delinquents was discussed, and how to distinguish between them and poor and orphaned children. The Stony Hill Reformatory and Industrial School educated both ‘delinquent’ and pauper children, and the two categories of children mixed together.<sup>404</sup> It was therefore decided that to avoid the pauper inmates becoming stigmatised and badly influenced, they would need to be sent somewhere else.<sup>405</sup> The fact too that this class of children was committed to industrial schools by the parish authorities made it easier for education reformers to dictate the curriculum without fear of resistant parents withdrawing them.

The schools themselves had to make compromises to their curricula and come under the authority of the Board of Education if they wished to secure government grants. Alpha Boys, after its first year of operation as an industrial school did not perform well. This was put

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> On parental opposition to apprenticeships and compulsory education, see Jenny Jemmott, *Ties that Bind: the Black Family in Post-Slavery Jamaica, 1834–1882* (Kingston: UWI, 2015) 127.

<sup>403</sup> M.K. Bacchus, *Education as and for Legitimacy: Developments in West Indian Education Between 1846 and 1895* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994).

<sup>404</sup> Shani Roper, ‘Creating Good Colonial Citizens: Industrial Schools and Reformatories in Victorian Jamaica’, in Timothy Barringer and Wayne Modest (eds.) *Victorian Jamaica* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018) 190–208, 191.

<sup>405</sup> Jamaica Commission, 1878, ‘Evidence of Henry John Bicknell, police magistrate for Kingston’, 19.

down to its being miscategorised as a Farm School when in reality the gardening the boys did was not agriculture as such. The sisters were then able to have it recategorised and to abandon the half-time system. As for the girls' school, the sisters introduced a range of subjects including science, in effect providing the basis of a grammar school education. They supported their girls to become teachers and nurses, and much later as secretaries, civil servants and businesswomen. The options for female employment at the time were extremely limited. Teaching was opening to women because the government wanted respectable native women to act as role models to girls. Nursing was also developing as a profession at the turn of the century. Nurses were recruited from England to formalise the profession and 'native nurses' were sought for the same reason – to be able to go into homes to teach the 'ignorant'; to bridge the gap between English and poor black. Regardless of this aim, both professions undoubtedly gave young women greater opportunities for self-support and progression than domestic service. Alpha, among other charitable schools, was perhaps able to provide a more visionary education that the government had in mind.

Although the life of a religious is founded upon obedience and humility and the erasing of personal identity through the adoption of saints' names, Catholic sisters in Jamaica and indeed the world over have spearheaded charitable and developmental initiatives through the force of character of some individual women.<sup>406</sup> In many ways, the sisters in Jamaica were able to exercise a greater degree of autonomy than secular elite wives and daughters. Though they were subject to the formal rules of their order, secular women were under informal social rules and relied upon the influence of their husbands' or fathers' social standing. The sisters were under the authority of the bishop and in the early days this was keenly felt. The annals tell us that they kept in close contact with their motherhouse in Bermondsey, and wrote to the superior there complaining of the bishop's unkindness to them, and the annals reveal several instances of his autocratic methods and his harshness towards the superior in Jamaica whom he ordered her to return to work when she was in fact mortally ill.<sup>407</sup> But as the order developed and grew in numbers and the bishop passed away, their confidence appears to have grown immeasurably. They were, on the one hand, trapped in wageless labour, and on the other hand liberated by their

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<sup>406</sup> For an account of naming ceremonies and identity, including first-hand accounts through history, see Danielle Rives, 'Taking the Veil: Clothing and the Transformation of Identity', *Journal of The Western Society for French History*, Vol. 33, 2005. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0033.028>

<sup>407</sup> Mary Bernadette Little, *The Story of Alpha and the Sisters of Mercy in Jamaica* (Cincinnati: Beyond the Trees, 2013) 48.

vocation, their supportive community life and independence from family.<sup>408</sup> They had opportunities for leadership and professional roles such as accountants and administrators, and could travel and study for degrees, courses of action highly unlikely that married or single women would be able to pursue.

While the RSM in Jamaica did not come out in opposition to class distinctions, they quietly challenged gender stereotypes through the curriculum they made available to girls, and through their international connections to RSM in the USA where they mostly went to study. The activities of the RSM are relevant to our understanding of how poor relief changed the social and political landscape of Jamaica because, as Mary Bernadette Little writes in her history of the RSM in Jamaica, ‘religious communities could be considered, in one sense, social sub-systems within the whole frame work of the social fabric of the island...’.<sup>409</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century tensions would emerge between the traditional white elite charity organisers and black women of the emerging middle class who started to see charity to their people as their responsibility. What was happening within the convents reflected and was influenced by what was happening in the wider society, so it is essential to include the religious life in an analysis of race, class and social development.

### **Race, Class and Women’s Philanthropy**

Religious orders in Jamaica were led by British, American or other white women, and so the influence and opinions of black Jamaican women was not heard even though they must have been present working in practical and supportive roles such as domestics. But no black Jamaican women were accepted into the order.

In the 1880s the vicar apostolic was making overtures to the RSM to come to Jamaica to run the fledgling Alpha school and establish a mission in Jamaica through which the three Jamaican women could be enabled to take their vows. The alternative would have been to send them to a convent in Britain or Ireland to serve their novitiate and return as professed sisters; but this would take them away from the charity work for those years and their passage, food, clothing

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<sup>408</sup> The religious life is invariably described as extremely difficult, and the idea of ‘community’ is often challenged in literature. However, Sister Mary Paschal Figueroa who joined the order in 1931 after completing her schooling with the Mercy sisters expressly said, ‘We were a community’ and she drew strength from that. Sister Mary Paschal Figueroa, interviewed 13 August 2018.

<sup>409</sup> Little, *The Story of Alpha*, 214.

and care at the host convents would have to be paid for. In a letter to the vicar from his friend and fellow priest in England, the writer advised, ‘Several Fathers who know the West Indies say it would be a mistake to let the Creole ladies suppose that they are never to be Superioresses, but always to be under European ladies.’<sup>410</sup> However, the small numbers of Jamaican women who joined the RSM between 1890 and 1942 were from white or ‘high brown’ Catholic families and remained subordinate to a European superior.<sup>411</sup> He advised the bishop that if he could not find suitable hosts he should start his own order and give them rules and a habit. But this suggestion does not seem to have been seriously entertained by the vicar, himself a Scot, who persevered in his efforts to bring European sisters to run the convent. In 1890 six finally answered the call and the process started.

The RSM remained overwhelmingly comprised of white women. Jessie Ripoll was not typical. In spite of being the revered foundress and known as Mother Claver, she was never superior, and the order remained under white leadership well into the mid twentieth century. Within the Franciscan order, this failure to facilitate ‘native’ women to take up vocations was raised by Sister Humiliana of the Allegany Franciscans in 1928.<sup>412</sup> Born in Kingston of ‘French Jamaican ancestry’, she began forming a Native Congregation by gathering a group of interested young women. Father Francis Kelly, Superior of the Jesuits in Jamaica, in his 1929 request to Rome for sanction of a Native Congregation wrote,

It must be said with sorrow, that considering the place and the customs of the people, it is almost impossible for native Jamaican women to be admitted into these Religious Institutes [Franciscans, RSM & Dominican].<sup>413</sup>

He therefore deemed it necessary for a separate congregation to be established that would admit principally the native women of Jamaica, with a duty to instruct young people in schools, visit the sick, and direct homes for women, especially working girls.<sup>414</sup> The new congregation was to be governed for five years by a Franciscan Allegany sister, then a native sister if deemed ready,

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<sup>410</sup> Rev. Peter Chandlery to Bishop Gordon, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1890, quoted in Sister Mary Bernadette Little, *The Story of Alpha and the Sisters of Mercy in Jamaica* (Cincinnati: Beyond the Trees, 2013) 8.

<sup>411</sup> The colloquial term ‘high brown’ designates a person of light brown complexion and more European than African features.

<sup>412</sup> Stephen Maria Miles, *History of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help of Jamaica, 1929-1995* (Kingston: Franciscan Missionary Sisters, 1996) 10.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

or for another five years by an Allegany if not. The first convent was the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, facing Holy Trinity Church in Kingston.

The relevance of this discussion to the question of race, class and social development is to highlight that there were two strands of charity – the one in authority, European run, and the other for the ‘natives’ carefully selected and overseen by competent Europeans. This was the way charity and philanthropy were conducted in general, by those who saw themselves as responsible and suitable to do it. This was mirrored in secular life not just by Women’s Self-Help but by newer charities established in the first quarter of the twentieth century. But debates which emerged between white and black charities as well as wider political upheavals in turn affected the religious sisters’ outlook and future path of the order itself and how it ministered to the population.



Mary Xavier (Frances Bryson), standing, and Mary Peter Claver (Jessie Ripoll), seated, outside the Alpha Home.<sup>415</sup>

Courtesy, Alpha Historical Society.

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<sup>415</sup> Date unknown, but Mother Xavier died in 1948 and Mother Claver in 1949 at the age of 97.

## Secular Women's Philanthropy

The very existence of women's voluntary aid was in part due to the social stigma of ladies working and supporting themselves independent of a male breadwinner. Women struggling on their own behalf were considered 'not nice' so they found release from domestic life within the ambit of charities.<sup>416</sup> Anglicans established Mothers' Union in 1876 to promote Christian family values, and by 1925 it had 750 members and 12 branches linked to branches in England. Women's Self Help, founded in 1878, aimed to provide employment by self-help for poor craftswomen.<sup>417</sup> Moravians started the Upward and Onward Society in 1903 'in promotion of womanly virtue, pure family life and healthy public opinion on moral questions.'<sup>418</sup> These are a small sample of the many female-led charities operating in Jamaica at the end of the nineteenth century, and their main concern was the bettering of the poor. As the twentieth century progressed more and more women began to establish charities outside of the organisation of the church. Judith DeCordova, wife of the *Gleaner's* editor, was an active member on several charitable committees. She and Nellie Latrielle – the daughter of English parents residing in Kingston, founded the Child Saving League in 1916. They founded the Women's Social Service Association (WSSA) and the Child Welfare Association in 1918; both organisations were intended to centrally coordinate relief efforts. Among the records of these organisations are petitions to government for grants in which they sought to influence the decision by evidencing the work of similar associations in other parts of the empire.

These were 'lady bountiful' organisations that believed in leading by example – of setting before the poor a superior mode of living, believing in the prevailing theories that moral improvement would lead to material improvement. Miss Mills, interviewed about the Upward and Onward Society, said,

[It] does not aim at giving charity and so pauperising people by robbing them of their self respect. It aims at helping and directing women in the formation of their character and in

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<sup>416</sup> Rhoda Reddock, 'Women, Labour and Struggle in 20th Century Trinidad and Tobago, 1898–1960', PhD Amsterdam 1984, 36. Referenced in Joan French, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900–1944*.

<sup>417</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 1 October 1965, 3.

<sup>418</sup> 1910 Commercial Directory, Associations, Clubs and Lodges, Benevolent Institutions. <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1910d13.htm> accessed 13 October 2018.

the bettering of their circumstances. It aims at putting before them a higher standard of home life, impressing on them that the claims of the home must come first.<sup>419</sup>

This sentiment characterised secular charities to the same degree, and governed their interventions in family life and in education. The first was to promote health and hygiene, marriage and the support of children; the second was the education of children and the training of young women in domestic and marketable skills. Through these key areas we can see how the ideologies of imperialism and an emerging nationalism both overlapped and conflicted.

The ever-present question of infant mortality and how to lessen it was at the root of the establishment of DeCordova and Latrielle's Child Saving League (CSL) in 1916. The mayor of Kingston was president and the CSL operated from rooms lent to them by the government. There, they set up a nursery for working mothers and looked after around twenty babies under the care of two trained nurses for a fee of 2d per child. Presumably the four smaller centres in poorer quarters were able to accommodate even fewer babies.<sup>420</sup> Certain ladies periodically inspected the centres, distributed gifts and reported to the committee. The nurses also visited and advised mothers at home, and the CSL pushed for legislation for the early registration of births so they could visit new-borns quickly. It is unclear how they selected the babies, given that capacity was limited and urban poverty so widespread. It is probable that through their visiting policy recipients were personally vetted for suitability based on prevailing criteria of respectability.

Overall, the CSL had a top down approach aimed at 'providing the State with healthy citizens'.<sup>421</sup> This was the concern of every colonial government across the empire, so it is understandable the governor of Jamaica would be interested to know how this was being effected in other colonies. Prompted by a suggestion from the colonial secretary's wife, the government of the Singapore Straits provided a detailed account of the operations of their health service and the funding it received. Although these colonies were very far apart geographically, methods could be easily shared through colonial office networks and also through conferences such as the 5<sup>th</sup> English-Speaking Conference on Maternity and Child Welfare to be held in London in July 1929, a

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<sup>419</sup> Miss Mills, 'Upward and Onward Magazine', Vol 1, No. 2, October 1905.

<sup>420</sup> Jamaica Archives, 1B/5/77/118 – Work of the Child Saving League. Minutes, 1926.

<sup>421</sup> Jamaica Archives IB/5/77/73 – 1929, Lady Stubbs, Child Welfare Association, Requests Annual Grant.

report of which the colonial secretary forwarded along with the Annual Report from Singapore.<sup>422</sup>

The child health service in Singapore received \$2000 a year (about £560) and free medicines and dressings from the government. It paid its own matrons and health visitors out of annual donations of \$50,000 raised by the Chinese community. In 1918, the Jamaican Child Saving League of Jamaica only received £50 from government, so the inclusion of the Singapore report in the CSL's correspondence was part of an effort to persuade government to raise that figure by showing how well the service was working elsewhere. The Jamaican government responded by requesting the CSL to show the measurable success of their operations in Jamaica, a difficult task given the extent of poverty and deprivation in the towns, and the challenge of proving definitively that any improvement in child health was down to their work. Nevertheless, the CSL provided mortality tables backed up with statements directed at the government's main concerns.

Deaths of Children under 1, Kingston, January to December 1925<sup>423</sup>

<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
58	50	50	58	58	40	37	32	25	35	30	23

Lady Stubbs, wife of the governor, wrote, 'We aim at providing the State with healthy citizens, and the better we succeed in our efforts, the more we are relieving the Hospitals and Poor Houses from cases which would otherwise come to them.'<sup>424</sup> She went on to say that the value of such work was recognised throughout the world and hoped Jamaica would follow other governments by granting financial assistance. This conservative tone succeeded in securing the necessary aid. The grant of £50 in 1918 rose to £100 in 1920 and £250 in 1929, in addition to £192 for the salaries of two nurses.

Whether or not the members of the CSL and other social work organisations wholeheartedly embraced the ideals of empire cannot be known, but their sideways approach was in keeping with a class-based attitude to colonial citizens which excluded women beneath them in class from equal participation in these endeavours. Instead, they looked to their peers in other

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<sup>422</sup> IB/5/77/80 – 1929, Government Aid to Child Services Association. Straits Settlements: Colonial secretary, Singapore 30th April 1929, enclosing 5th Annual Report of Singapore CWS and Report on 5th English-Speaking Conference on Maternity and Child Welfare.

<sup>423</sup> Jamaica Archives, 1B/5/77/118 – Work of the Child Saving League. Minutes, 1926.

<sup>424</sup> Jamaica Archives IB/5/77/73 – 1929, Lady Stubbs, Child Welfare Association, Requests Annual Grant.



colonies. Simultaneously, they were exploited by the voluntary nature of their work, which also had the potential to be manipulated by wider political movements emerging at the turn of the century. One of these was in the area of birth control and limiting the growth of the pauper class, a subject which harked back to debates in London and the social imperialists of the 1880s who saw the weak physical condition of the poor as a threat to the health and viability of the empire.<sup>425</sup> The debate revived during the Boer War of the early 1900s due to concerns over the low quality of recruits and ‘physical and racial degeneration’.<sup>426</sup> Fabian social reformers of the 1890s pointed out with alarm that the unfit were reproducing themselves at a more rapid rate than the fit, and ‘sterilization of the failures’ was advocated.<sup>427</sup>

Birth control movements in Jamaica grew out of the rhetoric of ‘overpopulation’ but gradually embraced a more feminist maternal rights stance.<sup>428</sup> The Jamaica Women’s League (JWL) established in February 1936 by Ivy Woolley and Judith DeCordova falls more into the former category.<sup>429</sup> The JWL proposed the introduction of affordable birth control, to address ‘the most vital questions of the day: illegitimacy and the alarming increase in the population.’<sup>430</sup> They saw birth control as a means to address the perceivably insolvable problems of poverty. However, fewer than half of the JWL’s branches favoured the idea, so some counter proposals were suggested which reveal much about how these women understood the root causes of poverty.<sup>431</sup> Some of the proposals had been talked of since the mid nineteenth century, such as amending and tightening the Bastardy Act and Maintenance Law, and compulsory registration and taxing of the fathers of illegitimate children. Other proposals stemmed from pre-emancipation prohibitions of African Jamaican religion: ‘Check pocomania and other pseudo-religious sects which undermine the moral sense of the people in an alarming manner;’<sup>432</sup> and long-held suspicions of the subversive activities of ‘aliens’: ‘Restrict activities of Aliens and check influx.’<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London, A Study of the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 297.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>428</sup> Nicole Bourbonnais, ‘Class, Colour and Contraception: The Politics of Birth Control in Jamaica, 1938–1967’, *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 2012, 11–12, fn.20.

<sup>429</sup> Patrick Bryan, *Philanthropy and Social Welfare in Jamaica* (Kingston: UWI, 1990) 40. The purpose of the JWL was to take responsibility for all forms of social work.

<sup>430</sup> Jamaica Archives 4/108/1450 – Jamaica Women’s League, Circular, 10th August 1938.

<sup>431</sup> Jamaica Archives 4/108/1451 – Resumes of answers from country committees, 10th November 1938.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*

Those branches in favour of birth control saw it as a panacea, not a cure, and all branches were unanimous in wanting better moral conditions. The KCOS evinced the prevailing belief that poverty was treatable through elevated moral standards, and this view was widely embraced by women's organisations. The JWL, concerned that one-room housing was leading to the sexual awareness of children, advocated the appointment of inspectors to 'visit and point out the dangers' and moral and social hygiene officers to instruct in schools and homes 'advising them to have better living conditions'.<sup>434</sup>

The investigations of the life and conditions of the poor in London's east end carried out by the social reformer Charles Booth between 1889 and 1903 led him to conclude that the improvement of housing for the poor was the responsibility of government and not charity.<sup>435</sup> Furthermore, the extension of the franchise to the working classes put pressure on politicians to commit to state rather than charitable solutions to poverty.<sup>436</sup> This was against the ethos of the COS which maintained that the promotion of self-sufficiency and thrift would enable the poor to improve their own lot independent of government intervention. Although the COS had lost much of its credibility by the end of the nineteenth century, the words and actions of elite women in Jamaican charities show both a commitment to the ideals of the COS (or KCOS in Jamaica) *and* an acceptance of government responsibility. They urged government to 'hasten the improvement of housing and establish more vocational schools', the former recognising the responsibility of the government and the latter the idea that the poor could be 'saved' by education which would inculcate 'habits of industry'.<sup>437</sup> It harks back to schemes proposed more than thirty years prior to forcibly deport the English urban poor to farm colonies: 'The object of these colonies would not be to provide employment but to provide training in habits of industry and to inculcate rudimentary agricultural skills.'<sup>438</sup>

The most severe proposal was for the sterilisation of male and female 'incurables' which they regretted was not possible under British rule, so settled for requesting enlarged VD clinics and 'insisting on the fullest use'.<sup>439</sup> All branches were unanimous in their opinion that the government's attempts at Land Settlement would fail if they could not raise the standard of life

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 328.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Jamaica Archives 4/108/1450 – Jamaica Women's League, Circular, 10th August 1938.

<sup>438</sup> Samuel Barnett, 'A scheme for the unemployed', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 24, November 1888, 755, cited in Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 304.

<sup>439</sup> Jamaica Archives 4/108/1451 – Resumes of answers from country committees, 10th November 1938.

and thought.<sup>440</sup> The JWL attributed the condition of the poor partly to ‘hereditary taints’.<sup>441</sup> Yet, circumstances in England had shown this to be untrue: the Victorian reformers Sidney and Beatrice Webb admitted that the lifestyle of the poor had not been due to any hereditary taint ‘but the simple consequence of the offer of poor housing, inadequate wages and irregular work.’<sup>442</sup> This reality was reflected upon after the ‘casual poor’ found work through industries generated by the first world war. The fact that the conversations in London up to 1914/1918 were still current in Jamaica well into the 1940s suggests a residue of outmoded forms of thinking, that new ideas had not filtered through, or that they did not think they applied to colonial subjects. Eugenics was still alive and active in Caribbean colonial thought.

Nevertheless, it would not be fair or accurate to suggest that organisations such as the Child Saving League and Jamaica Women’s League did not go any good work; they clearly did. But their efforts were limited by the ambit in which they operated and the ideology which they embraced. *Planters Punch*, an annual magazine founded in 1920 by H.G. DeLisser, divided Jamaican society along British lines, making the upper echelons into a kind of royalty, with woman as empire builder.<sup>443</sup> The 1929 edition featured a front page address by the Duchess of Atholl in which she reminded the lady readers of Jamaica that the sacrifices of empire-building were to be borne cheerfully and that no state could be built without women to set the proper standards of home life and promote a better understanding of health and hygiene to the people.<sup>444</sup> Thus, elite women were encouraged in their lady bountiful ways and to feel they were the most suitable for social work, in spite of the social distance between them and the poor. This doubtless contributed to tensions with the emerging black middle classes whose social and cultural proximity to the poorer classes was enabling of more direct forms of social assistance.

### **Black Women’s Philanthropy**

The three women this section will focus on are Amy Bailey, Mary Morris and Una Marson. Within black communities, the most highly respected people in the districts were ministers and teachers. Therefore it is no coincidence that these three pioneering women came from such

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Jamaica Archives 4/108/1450 – Jamaica Women’s League, Circular, 10th August 1938.

<sup>442</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 336.

<sup>443</sup> L. Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 77. DeLisser was also a long-time editor of the *Gleaner*.

<sup>444</sup> ‘Message of Her Grace, the Duchess of Atholl to the Women of Jamaica’, *Planters Punch*, vol.11, no.3, 1929, cited in Linnette Vassell, *Voices of Women in Jamaica, 1898-1939* (UWI, 1993) 15.

backgrounds. Amy Bailey was born in 1895 to a family of teachers, Mary Morris (later, Morris-Knibb) born in 1886 was raised in the Moravian Church, and Una Marson, born in 1905, was the daughter of a Baptist minister. Furthermore, Bailey and Morris were both graduates of Shortwood Teachers College. Shortwood had been established in 1885 as a fee-paying college ‘for the women of “quality” to be trained as teachers’ in order to influence ‘the minds and manners of young children [and] be salutary for the development of the people.’<sup>445</sup> It was endorsed by Bishop Nuttall and the governor who sanctioned full government funding. Thus, the ideas voiced by some of the Commission on Poor Relief’s respondents were finally coming to fruition.<sup>446</sup> It opened with eighteen students and by 1889, bolstered by a new grant of £1,200, accepted sixty students and expanded the curriculum to include ‘practical subjects such as agricultural science, domestic training, gardening, cookery and laundry.’ In 1916 a new Nuttall Scholarship was awarded to the highest achieving student who showed herself to be ‘simple, honest, industrious, womanly, helpful and God-fearing.’<sup>447</sup> The ethos of the school is important in aiding our understanding of the background of women like Bailey and Morris, who were taught conservative values at home and at a school which endorsed the state agenda to train women to disseminate such values to the female population.

One of the initial areas of impact in which the three women became involved was in family life and childcare, as DeCordova and Latrielle were already doing with their Child Welfare Association, but with different underlying ideologies and intentions. They began Jamaica Save the Children in 1938 after Marson and Bailey travelled to England to fundraise, and met with Planned Parenthood and the Women’s Suffragette Movement, from whom they gained the idea that overpopulation was Jamaica’s problem.<sup>448</sup> There is evidence that Bailey faced objections to her stance, as she found herself accused of being a traitor because ‘she bring white woman here to tell our women not to have any pickney.’<sup>449</sup> The eugenics debate was in full flow at the time, with newspapers reporting the ‘reckless irresponsibility’ of the poor, predicting dire consequences ‘if the less intelligent...sections of the people were to swarm the limits of their ability, while the others steadily diminished’, and proposing both birth control and

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<sup>445</sup> Thomas Capper, Superintendent of Schools, 1880. [Stcoll.edu.jm/about/history](http://Stcoll.edu.jm/about/history) accessed 31 March 2019

<sup>446</sup> Commission on Poor Relief, 1878.

<sup>447</sup> [Stcoll.edu.jm/about/history](http://Stcoll.edu.jm/about/history) accessed 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

<sup>448</sup> Jennifer Brown Macleavy, ‘Amy Beckford Bailey: A Biography’ *Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol 18, 1993, 31–39, 34.

<sup>449</sup> ‘Amy Bailey with Yvonne Grinam’, *Gleaner*, 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> February 1990. Retrospective interview about the first public meeting on birth control in 1938. ‘Pickney’ is patois for ‘child’ or ‘children’.

sterilisation.<sup>450</sup> The distrust of the poor was not, therefore, unjustified. But Bailey was not adopting the stance of upper-class scaremongering. For her, the issue was the wellbeing of the poor people themselves. She talked of large families that men were not able to support, and the burden being placed on grandmothers who could hardly manage to care for themselves.<sup>451</sup> She wanted to see her people ‘go forward’ and ‘uplift’ themselves, ‘but they can’t do this if they have five, six pickney about them. They won’t be able to lift themselves up if they have so many children.’<sup>452</sup> JSCF gave island-wide talks ‘teaching women the value of themselves and of having respect for their bodies,’ and its members went into working class areas of Kingston to explain to the women how they could have control over their child-bearing lives.<sup>453</sup>

The event at which the accusations had been voiced was the official launch of Birth Control at the Ward Theatre in Kingston. Amy Bailey had persuaded Norman Manley to chair the function. Though he went on to become the ‘father of the nation’, this was, according to Bailey, his first public appearance. Bailey said, ‘We all told him that he was an eminent lawyer, but his country wanted him otherwise... From ’37 we were at him to come out in public life.’<sup>454</sup> Manley’s People’s National Party was established in 1938, so from the outset women and the issues being raised by women were brought to bear upon national and nationalist politics.

The JSCF opened play centres for working mothers, and their daily operations were similar to that of the Child Saving League. The difference, explained Morris-Knibb, was that rather than recruiting other women to go into the homes of the poor, they were prepared to go themselves to demonstrate good hygiene practices and encourage mothers to send their children to the creche.<sup>455</sup> This effectively collapsed the distance between social worker and recipient, allowing them a greater insight into the realities of their lives and struggles.

During her stay in London, Marson gave evidence to the Moyne Commission which highlighted these class divisions within social work. While applauding the inspiration given by the wives of

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<sup>450</sup> Nicole Bourbonnais, ‘Class, Colour and Contraception: The Politics of Birth Control in Jamaica, 1938-1967’, *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 2012, 10, 11, fn.11. See also ‘It Does Interest You - Birth Control’, *Gleaner*, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1938, 16; and De Lisser, ‘Editorial’, *Gleaner*, 4th November 1929, 12.

<sup>451</sup> ‘The Illegitimacy Problem’, *Public Opinion*, 9 July 1938, 10–11.

<sup>452</sup> ‘Amy Bailey with Yvonne Grinam’, *Gleaner*, 8<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> February 1990.

<sup>453</sup> Jennifer Brown Macleavy, ‘Amy Beckford Bailey: A Biography’, 34.

<sup>454</sup> See Erna Brodber, ‘The Pioneering Miss Bailey’, *Jamaica Journal*, (May–July 1986, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, 10–11).

<sup>455</sup> ‘Reply of Mrs Morris-Knibb to Letter of Chairman of the Child Welfare Association’, *Gleaner* 21<sup>st</sup> November 1938, 44.

the two previous governors, she commented that most social work was being done in an honorary capacity by ladies of that class but ‘because a women in wealthy or the wife of a Custos of the parish, it does not necessarily follow that she is the woman to put her back into uplift work for the peasantry.’<sup>456</sup> She stressed that the work should be paid in order to enable those of humbler origins who were willing but too poor to give their time for nothing. She further alluded to ‘a dark lady’ who had been discouraged from joining an organisation assisting children.<sup>457</sup> The identity of the ‘dark lady’ was Mary Morris-Knibb whose own evidence before the Commission earned the indignation of Judith DeCordova for stating that she had been refused admittance to DeCordova’s Child Welfare Association because of her colour. DeCordova denied it, accused black women of historic indifference and apathy and, somewhat bizarrely, claimed there was no such thing as a ‘Colour Question’ in Jamaica.<sup>458</sup>

Morris-Knibb’s reply was published in the subsequent edition, standing by her evidence to the Commission and explaining that poverty not apathy deterred black women from undertaking such work,

The emergence of my Race from financial dependence to a moderate independence is so recent that Mrs. DeCordova’s comment is ungenerous and her indictment unjust, and I feel it is to our credit that so soon as we found our feet we were ready to help the less fortunate ones. Apathy and indifference towards the sufferings of those of our own blood cannot possibly exist in a people who have known suffering and have borne it with fortitude and infinite patience.<sup>459</sup>

The exchange reveals a gulf of understanding between wealthy white women who performed social work from positions of privilege and middle-class black women who needed to work to support themselves and their families before they could undertake work amongst their poorer sisters. ‘As Morris-Knibb suggested, DeCordova’s interpretation underestimated the financial obstacles that prevented black Jamaican women from becoming involved.’<sup>460</sup> Yet black and white social workers were not always at loggerheads. There were more points of agreement than departure; they both accepted a distinction between permanent and promiscuous unions, and that

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<sup>456</sup> ‘Jamaica’s Social Problems Before Royal Commission’, *Gleaner* 14<sup>th</sup> October 1938, 10

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>458</sup> *Gleaner* 19 November 1938, 12.

<sup>459</sup> *Gleaner*, 21 November 1938, 12.

<sup>460</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 119.

men should be legally obliged to care for their children (Marson light-heartedly suggested a tax on bachelors<sup>461</sup>). Both gave prominence to the work of visiting homes and both recognised the urgent need for improved housing and laid that responsibility at the government's door. Bailey did in part support DeCordova's opinion that more women could take the trouble to involve themselves in social work, and she worked closely with white women such as the philanthropist and reformer May Farquharson, who was a founding member of the JSCF, and with whom Bailey maintained a close friendship.<sup>462</sup>

The daily operations of JSCF and other similar initiatives appeared on the surface to differ little in outlook from their white counterparts. Though 'uplifting the race' was their primary care, the claims of empire were not, at least publicly, abandoned. A. Robinson, a poor woman of St. Thomas beseeching aid for her community through a letter to the editor of a newspaper, wrote, 'We want upright, honest intelligent men and women to build up our British Empire. We want the prison and the poor houses to be less filled. But how must these things happen without money?'<sup>463</sup> And Marson, speaking at the British Commonwealth League Conference in London, said, 'If the British Empire is to have colonies of which I could be proud it will have to take more interest in these colonies and do something to ensure better nutrition of the people.' Such statements were critical but loyal, and their conservative, diplomatic approaches earned them government acceptance and vital support for their projects. Women's social work combined palliative measures operating within the existing economic system with cultural challenges to the social system, which in turn influenced political reforms and fed into nationalist politics. In many articles, Bailey challenged the restricting role of 'respectability' and how it was being interpreted by women of her class,

Our respectability weighs us down. We are afraid to have an opinion, or air it, or stick to it, lest we be thought 'not respectable'. Believe me, we pay a heavy price for it, often, even to the extent of our manhood and womanhood, and the progress of the country.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> *Gleaner* 14<sup>th</sup> October 1938, 10.

<sup>462</sup> 'Wanted: Part II', *Public Opinion*, 26 March 1938, 8, 15.

<https://sites.google.com/site/amybaileyjamaicawriting/gender/wanted-voluntary-social-workers> accessed 11<sup>th</sup> October 2018. May Farquharson was a founding member of the Birth Control League.

<sup>463</sup> 'Woman's Plea for Women': Letter of A. Robinson to the Editor. *Plain Talk*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1937.

<sup>464</sup> 'What Price Respectability?' *Public Opinion*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1937, 10, 13.

She criticised the pigmented class structure which hindered beneficial growth, and the embarrassment people felt at acknowledging its existence because ‘such things are not to be talked about’,<sup>465</sup>

Why, there are places where it is impossible to start a club and keep it going because of the prejudice there is between the different factions, where Miss X would not dream of associating with Miss Y because they are not of the same shade; where Miss A takes good care not speak to Miss B if the former happens to be in the company of Mrs. Bumble-bee; where the various members of one family have different kinds of friends according to the shade of each member; where a dark shade is a natural handicap to getting a job, however efficient the individual may be.<sup>466</sup>

Bailey strove to end the respectable reluctance of her class to getting involved in matters of national importance, impressing on women in particular the need to consciously throw off the divisions of colour deliberately imposed upon them to prevent their uniting, and to get behind the People’s National Party (PNP) launched in 1938 for ‘the betterment of the masses and of the middle class of this country by means of progressive reforms.’<sup>467</sup> A few years later, Bailey used £100 out of her personal savings of £105 to purchase a property from Latrielle to found her Housecraft Training School, to provide cheap accommodation to women on low incomes, and training in domestic service for girls who were not pursuing higher education or had been unable to pass their technical school exams.

The position that black middle-class women inhabited was paradoxical, enmeshed as they were in ‘nets of imperial power’.<sup>468</sup> They both emulated and resisted the social and cultural mores of colonial society and contributed to the politics of nationalism and independence. They did not break away from imperial ideas towards the poor, neither were they mere vehicles of elite colonial agendas. They accepted that it was the lot of the masses to labour, primarily in agriculture, and the females as domestics, so they assisted the poor to improve their employment prospects through perfecting their trades, gaining certifications and learning useful business and money management skills. The social change they wanted for the poor was greater (self) respect

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<sup>465</sup> ‘Wanted: An End to Prejudice – Part III’, *Public Opinion*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 9 1938, 8.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>468</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 96.



for black people, particularly in industries which preferred to promote 'whiteness' such as in shops, advertising and offices. Bailey asked one store manager who claimed he had black girls working upstairs, 'Why can't they be downstairs in the front serving me?...I want to see everyone downstairs serving...' <sup>469</sup>

The racial and cultural proximity of the middle class to the poor was obviously greater than that of elite women philanthropists, enabling a far greater reach. By effectively relieving the government from much of the organisational and financial responsibility for welfare, since they were not paid for their work, they were in a strong position to negotiate rights for the poor and for themselves. As Jennifer Macleavy says, 'Miss Bailey and her group must be seen as part of the self-mobilisation of the middle class as leaders of the poor and the labouring masses.' <sup>470</sup> The challenge for their own class was in achieving equality with men in the professions and civil service, an end to the compulsory resignation of married women, and, ultimately, women's political suffrage.

In spite of differences of race, class and outlook these different women's organisations were linked by several common ideas and practices, one of which was the movement of ideas. Elite women used their networks to see how relief work was carried out in other parts of the empire. In 1907 Lady Gertrude Gilbert Carter, the American wife of the governor of Barbados looked to the success of the Women's Self-Help Organisations of Jamaica (1879) and Trinidad (1901) as a template for establishing her own in Barbados. <sup>471</sup> In 1929 the wife of the colonial secretary requested the governor to seek advice from a child saving organisation in Kuala Lumpur, and received very detailed information by return. <sup>472</sup> These women looked outside their colonies for ideas rather than to the local blacks who felt themselves excluded from involvement in these social projects. <sup>473</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> *Gleaner*, 8 and 15 February 1990 and 'The Pioneering of Miss Bailey', *Jamaica Journal*, Vol 19, No.2, 1986, 14.

<sup>470</sup> Jennifer Brown Macleavy, 'Amy Beckford Bailey: A Biography', 40.

<sup>471</sup> Barbados Museum & Historical Society, 'Women's Self Help Association Price List' accessed 11 March 2017. <http://www.barbmuse.org.bb/web/?portfolio=womens-self-help-association-price-list>  
For more on the Trinidad Association see Rhoda Reddock, 'The early women's movement in Trinidad and Tobago, 1900–1937' in Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive women: historical experiences of gender and resistance*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995) 101–120.

<sup>472</sup> Jamaica Archives IB/5/77/80 (1929), Memo on the topic of government aid to the Child Saving League.

<sup>473</sup> De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 118, citing evidence to the Moyne Commission; letter of Mary Morris-Knibb to the *Gleaner* 21<sup>st</sup> November 1938.

The religious sisters also drew their support from outside the colony, first the Scottish Franciscans, then the RSM from England, augmented by many sisters joining them from a variety of European nations. In 1879 the Franciscans became affiliated with the Allegany Franciscans, a congregation in the United States where all congregations were racially segregated in line with US policies at the time. This undoubtedly influenced attitudes to and interactions with Jamaicans. The establishment of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters in 1929 was their way of including black women but not integrating them, rather like the women's auxiliaries to men's charities, or the separate organisations recommended for 'native women' remarked on by Marson,

It might be said that they ['the native women'] should start their own organisations. Indeed, this was told to a dark lady who desired to serve with an organisation assisting children; and others have told me that they have been made to feel that this work is a social privilege.<sup>474</sup>

The RSM remained non-inclusive for an even longer period. Mary Bernadette Little notes in her history of the RSM in Jamaica, that the political foment of the 1940s would have been a cause for reflection among some of the sisters. The sisters were benefitting from increased travel opportunities and some felt that the Jamaican RSM were too isolated from developments in other parts of the world.<sup>475</sup> A priest exhorted the RSM to recognise that if they did not admit Jamaican women to their ranks, they would face extinction.<sup>476</sup> The first Chinese postulant, Irene Chen See, entered in 1942, and the first black Jamaican postulant, Thelma Althia Williams, described as one of Jessie's 'own people', entered in 1943.<sup>477</sup> During this decade segregationist policies in the USA had begun to change, and it is possible that this issue was discussed by sisters travelling to and from the USA and that it influenced the change in admission practices. In the 1930s the Vatican exerted mounting pressure on US Catholic hierarchies to desegregate. A combination of Vatican encyclicals, pressure from African American Catholics and sympathetic religious communities working among them, and the racial atrocities committed by the Nazis in World War II combined to usher in a new era in the 1940s promoting the constitutional rights of black citizens. The Catholic Church began to embrace civil rights from a former position of

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<sup>474</sup> Interview with Una Marson in the *Gleaner*, 14 October 1938.

<sup>475</sup> Mary Bernadette Little, *The Story of Alpha*, 234.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

acquiescence to white power structures.<sup>478</sup> While there was no legal segregation policy in Jamaica, the unspoken practices separating whites, Jews and a handful of well-off browns from the rest of the population were carried on within these religious congregations as well as in the general society. Over time, through awareness of the growing voices of Jamaica's black women, religious orders were urged to rethink and allow reforms to filter into religious life. Little wrote, 'given the cultural context of that time, this would have far reaching implications – a sign that Jamaican girls were welcome.'<sup>479</sup>

Whereas philanthropy organised by members of the ruling classes, as well as by religious sisters, could be perceived as a one-way process of ideas and aid flowing from them to the labouring classes,<sup>480</sup> the role of the middle classes both as part of this process and as separate agents is complex to distil and examine. Some scholars have asserted that the middle classes absorbed and disseminated elite Eurocentric values of respectability in the formation of the modern Caribbean through elite-run health initiatives. Juanita De Barros writes of the midwife training programmes launched in the 1890s which recruited white English nurses seen as inherently respectable, and intellectually and morally superior.<sup>481</sup> These women then trained local midwives recruited for their apparent respectability, and De Barros believes that these local midwives may have been seen as foreign by the communities among whom they worked due to their Christianity, temperance, chastity and monogamy – qualities required by their white employers, but setting them apart from African or South Asian practices.<sup>482</sup> Thus, De Barros presents these qualities as culturally different to those of the patients, while the literacy of the midwives set them apart in terms of class. A similar claim could be made of the teaching profession, which recruited women such as Bailey and Morris along similar principles.

However, the picture is more complex than De Barros' 'indigenous versus imported values' which reduces the middle classes to mere vehicles of elite colonial agendas. If, as she quotes, the English nurses were 'enmeshed in the nets of imperial power'<sup>483</sup> then the black and coloured

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<sup>478</sup> See Mark Newman, *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945–1992* (University Press of Mississippi, 2018) 13–16. See also Shannen Dee Williams, 'Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World War I', doctoral dissertation, (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2013) 111 ff.

<sup>479</sup> Mary Bernadette Little, *The Story of Alpha*, 218.

<sup>480</sup> T. S. Simey, *Welfare and Planning in the West Indies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946) quoted in Patrick Bryan, *Philanthropy and Social Welfare in Jamaica*, 54.

<sup>481</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics after Slavery*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2014) 96.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. De Barros quotes from Sheryl Nestel, '(Ad)ministering Angels: Colonial Nursing and the

nurses would be even more firmly enmeshed, yet it is my argument that since Christianity and monogamy were as prevalent among the labouring classes as other beliefs and family arrangements, the distance between them and the middle classes working among them was neither so great nor so foreign. And though black and coloured women and men were undoubtedly shackled by colonial racial interpretations and paternalism, they also acted on their own initiatives, aiding their poorer brethren through child welfare programmes, education and work training schemes.

They were able to utilise the colonial structures to assist in establishing some of these programmes, attracting church backing and securing government grants. This put them in a strong position to negotiate on their own behalf on issues such as equal opportunities for black college graduates and professional women. Bailey, during her time as teacher at Kingston Technical College, was able to use her influence to bring about a significant change in the career prospects of the graduates. It had previously been the case that grammar school boys who were mostly white had the opportunity to sit the civil service exams, while technical school boys, mostly black, were not accepted in to the service regardless of talent. When the governor, Edward Denham, visited the college, Bailey pointed this injustice out to him, which he was not aware of, and he promised that things would change.<sup>484</sup> After that, technical school graduates also started to be accepted into banks and then businesses. ‘Now times are different and I felt really proud that I was able to do for the students. I didn’t do it for myself because I got nothing out of it,’ said Bailey.<sup>485</sup>

Their experiences in London in 1938 – the observations of what was possible, and the alliances they made and encouragement they received, gave them the confidence to return to Jamaica and continue their own campaigns. In London Bailey had been invited to speak at the Suffragette Fellowship and Birth Control Worldwide, two organisations run by the activist Edith How-Martyn, where Bailey chided British women on their lack of interest in the plight of Jamaican women.<sup>486</sup> How-Martyn then decided to visit Jamaica, and Bailey spoke to May Farquharson about her worries over finding appropriate accommodation for her, whereupon Farquharson offered her own home as official residence. During How-Martyn’s visit, Mary Morris-Knibb

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Extension of Empire in Africa’, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1998, 257–277.

<sup>484</sup> *Gleaner*, 8 and 15 February 1990.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> Nicole C. Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930–1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 104.

stood as candidate for the Kingston & St. Andrew Corporation Council and was the first woman to be successfully elected.



This banner from Morris-Knibb's campaign was brought back to England by How-Martyn, who had marched alongside her.

Courtesy The Wellcome Collection.

This is one way in which black Jamaican women formed beneficial alliances outside the colony. The other was through exposure to Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Pan-African thought. Founded in 1914 by Marcus Garvey and his first wife Amy Ashwood Garvey, it carried powerful messages of Pan-Africanism, economic self-sufficiency, political self-determination and racial pride.<sup>487</sup> Though Garvey had relocated his headquarters to the USA by 1918, in 1926 the UNIA had 11 branches in Jamaica, 30 in Trinidad and 52 in Cuba, so the existence of a cross border flow of ideas between Garvey's base in the USA and the islands of the Caribbean was inevitable. Tony Martin states that Trinidad's government took steps to bar Garvey from entering, and he suggests that the Trinidad Working Men's Association (TWMA) was cooperating with the UNIA. The TWMA's white leader, Arthur Cipriani, used his influence to persuade the government to let Garvey visit in 1937, and chapters of both the TWMA and UNIA were founded at the same times and in the same places, suggesting a 'correlation of purpose and, perhaps, membership.'<sup>488</sup>

The members and affiliates forged close ties with the African continent, Central and South America, and anywhere that Africa's diaspora population was suffering injustice and oppression. Amy Bailey, Ethel Collins, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Una Marson and others during the upheavals of World War II used media and overseas travel to challenge white supremacy, seeing the situation of black people in the USA as similar to theirs, and appreciating their oneness as people

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<sup>487</sup> Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018) 13.

<sup>488</sup> Tony Martin, 'Garveyism in Trinidad', 1973 Paper, cited in Emory J. Tolbert, *The UNIA and Black Los Angeles* (Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1980) 124.

of African descent.<sup>489</sup> During the 1920s, Bailey enthusiastically attended Garvey's speeches and was inspired by the American schools which were established to train the black poor, such as Tuskegee, and she wanted the same for Jamaica.<sup>490</sup> This, therefore, was a significant influence on Bailey's decision to open her Housecraft Training Centre, aside from the Jamaican government's own training agenda.

Black philanthropists were conservative in the sense that they adhered to what appeared to be essentially British middle-class values, and they sought reform not overthrow. Although the seemingly radical UNIA called for pan-African unity and the establishment of independent businesses, infrastructure and eventual governance, and involved women at the highest levels of the organisation, its cultural values did not differ, as women were honoured primarily for their role as mother and guardian of the black home.<sup>491</sup> Whether or not women in charity wholeheartedly embraced these ideals, their work had a two-fold effect: it partly supported imperialist ideologies, and progressively empowered the people by affording them a greater degree of personal choice in health, education and work. So in fact these women drew on two opposing political ideologies, both grounded in similar cultural values, to forge their own unique brand of Jamaican activism. What these interactions of different women show is that philanthropy was never a one-way flow of ideas from local elites to poor blacks, but an exchange of ideas flowing across colonies regionally and further afield, between the colonies and metropole, and with the USA.

The second factor that linked women's charity work across classes was that women would carry out work that supported government objectives without payment. Organisations run by elite white women did not formally protest against this reality (though some did so as individuals) no doubt because their family wealth was sufficient. Religious sisters were needed by the church to carry out its work, but placed in such a way that precluded their working for personal financial gain; so it was primarily middle class women who needed an income who argued that voluntary social workers should be respected for the vital work they were doing and be paid accordingly. The lack of pay was linked to elite ideas about the proper role of women as domestic, family oriented and supportive of a male head of household. Even the UNIA which promoted equal

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<sup>489</sup> Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 134.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–145.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.* 222. See also Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900 – 1944* (unpublished manuscript, Sistren Research, 1986) 215.

access for women to positions of influence, encouraged family values and domesticity as paramount.<sup>492</sup> Women could not be seen to be working for wages or needing the small sums they may have been paid. Respectability was a concept which both shackled and released women from the need to conform to specific social patterns. Poor women could access parish poor relief, church aid and charitable projects if they gave an impression of respectability; middle and upper class women could get out of the home and partake in public life so long as they maintained or appeared to remain within respectable limitations of dress, religion and personal life.

Through the work that women were doing gratis or for a token remuneration, charity evolved into social work and the achievements of social work eventually impressed upon politicians the need for legislation to protect and advance that work. Women's active agency and mutual assistance succeeded in getting central support through grants-in-aid – an outcome dreamt of by the Commissioners of the 1870s but frustrated by the poor laws and continued parochial control of pauper funds. The poor could not be relieved so long as black people were kept bound in a system which privileged whites and kept them at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. Women's efforts to relieve the poor became tied to birth control, which was in turn embedded in movements promoting the rights of women within the family and the public sphere, as well as the rights of the entire population to self-determination. Thus, women were key to the way in which nationalist politics were taking shape in the 1930s. This chapter has shown that development became possible in Jamaica through a combination of benevolent paternalism, social workers' philanthropy and campaigning and their manipulation of the ideals of empire.

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<sup>492</sup> Joan French and Honor Ford-Smith, *Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900 –1944*, 222.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Poor Relief in Panama: meeting the international challenge**

This chapter revisits the theme of poor relief explored in Chapter 2 but takes the study away from micro level parish relief to large scale relief in the international arena. While Chapters 3 and 4 centred women as paupers and women as philanthropists, most of the Panama canal workers were men (though women also migrated to Panama). Looking at this migrant male population of canal workers is important to counterbalance the domestic poor relief records in which these men were recorded as simply ‘absent’ or ‘off the island’.

The destitution of Panama canal workers in 1889 due to the collapse of the company highlights the lack of definition in the way that relief of distressed subjects abroad was understood and applied. The want of an efficient system understood and agreed upon by all offices for dealing with emergencies abroad, the costs involved, and prejudice against black subjects all played a part in the colonial governments’ failures to act quickly and decisively. Without a consensus between agencies, island legislatures came under fire from the foreign office, and disagreements raged between the imperial government, the colonial office, the admiralty and island governors. By analysing the voluminous correspondence concerning ‘Destitute West Indians at Panama’ we can better understand the motivations of different offices within the British and colonial government structures rather than being content with a broad-brush approach to a homogenous ‘elite’.

At the same time, reading these sources against the grain reveals the ways in which Panama migrants helped themselves and organised to meet the challenges they faced. This topic of self-help is further developed in Chapter 6 which looks at friendly societies and lodges which, though predating emancipation, gained greater momentum later in the century and helped migrants maintain networks of support while on the isthmus and to reassimilate into their societies on their return.

This chapter focuses more on Jamaica because it had the largest number of workers in Panama and its government was the slowest to react to the crisis, though the sources do include information about Barbadian and St. Lucian workers who made up the next largest groups of West Indians on the isthmus. The Panama migrations provide a focus around which to structure a



study of working class self-help which would apply proportionally to other colonies whose populations also departed for Panama albeit in far fewer numbers than Barbados or Jamaica. To summarise, it is my argument that poor relief, philanthropy and self-help were the cradles of political consciousness, stimulated by government failures to adopt strong measures for the relief and economic advancement of all segments of colonial societies.

### **Colonial Governments' Policies on Migration and Relief: The development of legislation 1870–1905**

Legislation to protect the rights of subjects abroad (outside the British empire) was first developed to assist seamen, and drawn up around the Caribbean territories in the 1870s. An act of 1870 in Barbados protected 'colonial seamen', while an act of 1875 in Jamaica provided for the relief of 'colonial seamen found in distress abroad'.<sup>493</sup> Each colony further tied down the legislation to only apply to their inhabitants and not those of the neighbouring colonies, meaning in effect that a destitute seaman could not land anywhere but the colony of his domicile, even if another colony were nearer.<sup>494</sup> In 1879 the colonial office proposed a bill for new encompassing legislation for the Relief of Colonial Seamen distressed in the United Kingdom, which would allow them to be repatriated to any West Indian colony in the first instance. When the governor of Tobago inquired into the exact meaning of 'colonial seaman', the reply narrowly defined it as a man who had last served on board a colonial seagoing vessel at the time of his request for aid.<sup>495</sup> Even though the act passed into law, the Barbados government declined to take any part in the relief and repatriation of such seamen.<sup>496</sup> They did not want distressed residents of other colonies landing on their shores, even though this particular law only effectively applied to a very small number of men.

West Indians who were not seamen and who fell into distressed circumstances after travelling to the UK were usually referred to the Charity Organisation Society (COS) who would write to

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<sup>493</sup> CO 30/27, Barbados Acts 1866 –72 –3, Act No. 4, 12 January 1870. An Act Relating to Distressed Seamen, natives of Barbados, shipwrecked abroad. CO 139/102, Jamaica Acts 1873–1877, Law 21 of 1875, 'a Law for the relief of colonial seamen found in distress abroad'.

<sup>494</sup> CO 30/27, 'The term "colonial seaman" is a native of Barbados who last served aboard a Colonial Registered Ship.'

<sup>495</sup> CO 321/40/25, 23 April 1880, Relief of distressed Colonial Seamen: Transmits report of the Administrator in reply to circular despatch of 12 August 1879; enquires as to the meaning of the term 'Colonial Seamen'. No 41, 334–339.

<sup>496</sup> CO 321/33/38, 11 December 1879, Barbados. Relief of Colonial Seamen distressed in United Kingdom, Board of Trade, 355–360.

inquire about their identities and circumstances and spend whatever was necessary to get them home again, or, if they were able, they would work their passages back. Dealing with applicants on a case by case basis was manageable, but with the increase of large scale movements of labourers to and from South and Central America, the means of processing and financing migrant returns became problematic.

The Barbados government had, from the very beginning of emancipation, displayed a hostile attitude towards labour recruitment agents, legislating against their operating in the island in 1838 and 1839.<sup>497</sup> Recruiting agents complained to the secretary of state of hostile and aggressive behaviour towards them, and in 1840 the people petitioned the British government to recognise their right to take their labour anywhere they wished, and to protest the Barbadian government insisting that poor labourers provide for their aged dependents prior to migrating for work.<sup>498</sup> The British government disallowed Barbados' more draconian bills and instead proposed an amended bill which allowed Barbadians unrestricted travel while also exercising control over the recruitment agents to prevent 'falsehood and fraud'.<sup>499</sup> Barbadian labourers then proceeded to travel all over the world, even as far as Congo, but in spite of the regulation of recruitment agents, Barbadians were vulnerable to falling into illegal indentures akin to enslavement, as their government declined to intervene on their behalf should they fall into difficulties abroad.

The safest and most attractive destinations were Trinidad and Guyana where work for high wages was assured and their passages paid by the planters of those colonies.<sup>500</sup> Land was also available should they wish to settle.<sup>501</sup> The fare to Panama was higher from Barbados and the eastern Caribbean than from Jamaica, and though some Barbadian newspapers were favourable to emigration, others painted lurid pictures of the horrors that awaited those who travelled outside of the 'benevolent British Empire'.<sup>502</sup> There were significant push/pull factors that helped confine Barbadian migration to the surrounding colonies. In 1875, the Commission on Poor Relief had enthusiastically described the benefits to the 'redundant population' presented by emigration, referring to 'abundant fields of labour of a more lucrative kind within a short

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<sup>497</sup> CO 30/22, Barbados, Act No 696, 1839, 'to prevent the clandestine deportation of young persons from this Island'.

<sup>498</sup> G.W. Roberts, 'Emigration from the Island of Barbados', *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, September 1955, 245–288, 248.

<sup>499</sup> CO 28/135/10, Despatch from Governor of Barbados, 26 June 1840, enclosing amended emigration act.

<sup>500</sup> G.W. Roberts, 'Emigration from the Island of Barbados', 246.

<sup>501</sup> Velma Newton, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama 1850–1914*, (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2004) 20.

<sup>502</sup> Velma Newton, *The Silver Men*, 24–25.

voyage’, and ‘fertile soil and plenty of cultivable land to be obtained on the easiest terms’.<sup>503</sup> The fact that the poor did not take wholesale advantage of ‘the relief which nature has so copiously supplied’, was, according to the Commission, down to ‘the greatest reluctance manifested, by even the poorest, to relinquish their squalid and uncomfortable surroundings.’<sup>504</sup> What the Commission entirely failed to recognise were the informal means of coercion exercised by planters towards their labourers and tenants, such as refusing to allow an emigrant’s family to occupy a house-spot on plantation land, or to employ him when he returned.<sup>505</sup>

These were some of the reasons migration to Panama from Barbados in the 1880s was not on as large a scale as from Jamaica. But the situation began to change in 1885 when Guyanese planters stopped actively recruiting Barbadian workers. They had been recruiting them through an assisted immigration scheme, which was proving expensive and increasingly unpopular as Barbadian workers did not always choose to remain on the plantations.<sup>506</sup> Over the next few years Trinidad also became less welcoming to Barbadian workers, with its Committee on Pauper Immigration reporting that a lot of immigrants were becoming chargeable on the public funds.<sup>507</sup> Barbadians seeking a new outlet began to look to Panama where the first attempts at constructing a canal had been underway since 1881, and started to attract Barbadian workers a few years later, bringing the number of Barbadians among the workforce to 1,344 by 1885.<sup>508</sup>

### **Destitute West Indians on the Isthmus of Panama: Whose Responsibility?**

#### 1885: The Burning of Colon

In 1880, Ferdinand deLesseps – famed for conceiving and pushing through to completion work on the Suez Canal – was successful in securing permission and financial backing to cut a sea level canal joining the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of the Isthmus of Panama. By 1882 12,875 men had been recruited, comprising 9,005 Jamaicans, and by 1888 about 20,000 were recruited, nine tenths of whom were West Indians.<sup>509</sup> By 1885 there were 1,344 Barbadians among the

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<sup>503</sup> *Barbados Commission on Poor Relief*, 1875, 31.

<sup>504</sup> *Barbados Commission on Poor Relief*, 1875, 31.

<sup>505</sup> Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 137.

<sup>506</sup> G.W. Roberts, ‘Emigration from the Island of Barbados, 264–265.

<sup>507</sup> G.W. Roberts, ‘Emigration from the Island of Barbados, 266.

<sup>508</sup> Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal* (University of the West Indies, 2014) 75.

<sup>509</sup> Lancelot S. Lewis, *The West Indian in Panama: Black Labor in Panama, 1850–1914* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1980) 22.

workforce and 495 St. Lucians increasing the following year to around 4,000 St. Lucians – 30–40% of the island’s adult men, or 10% of the population.<sup>510</sup> But the vast majority of recruits were from Jamaica.

Contracts were bona fide, labourers were earning and in spite of the heavy death toll due to the danger of the work and the unhealthy climate, this did not deter the steady flow of replacements. All classes were attracted to Panama – labourers, foremen, artisans and administrators for the canal works, and a variety of professional men with their families, and single women in the service industry who settled at Colon, which Olive Senior describes as the New Jamaica.<sup>511</sup> Senior also mentions that canal workers took money home.<sup>512</sup> Taking it in person was the only way to transport it, as there was as yet no remittance system to enable wire transfers. This would have made it harder for the poorer labourer to get money home if he was unable to secure the time off or afford the fare home. There was also no savings bank into which he could deposit his wages. This difficulty was significant as we will see further on, as certain officials accused black workers or ‘improvidence’ when they fell into distress.

Two catastrophic events occurred which marked this migration as an economic disaster for the migrants caught up in it, leading in many cases to destitution and even starvation. The first was more contained and short-lived, the second widespread and devastating. On the last day of March 1885, a military uprising between Colombian and Panamanian forces escalated into arson and in a matter of days the town of Colon was burned to the ground. At the time, there were an estimated 200,000 Jamaicans residing on the Isthmus, and ‘several thousand’ in or near Colon.<sup>513</sup> The British vice-consul reported that thousands of Jamaicans had been left destitute and homeless and that starvation would follow unless they could all be returned to Kingston at government expense. Naturally, the Jamaican government was alarmed about the expense and did not wish to grant permission without consulting the legislative council. The governor sent Major O'Brien, Assistant Director of Public Works, to Colon to report on the situation, and wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies expressing his doubts that provisions would run out before more supplies could arrive. The governor’s further statements display concern over public expenditure and a not uncommon distrust of citizens, ‘The sudden return of several thousand

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<sup>510</sup> Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 75.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>513</sup> CO 137/521/10, 7 April 1885, Governor’s Despatch, Instructions to Major O'Brien, Assistant Director of Public Works, on the action to be taken with regards to the destitute Jamaicans in Panama. No. 126, 78–94.

persons to this Island for whom there would be little or no employment would be a calamity, thirdly, because a large proportion probably have money...<sup>514</sup>

The Secretary of State's telegram to O'Brien concurred with the governor's sentiments, stating his fears that many would claim destitution to get free passage, including non-Jamaicans; that Jamaicans were not the only people in Colon and he found it difficult to believe the whole population would starve or that Jamaicans were worse off than others.<sup>515</sup> He suggested 'a certain number of women and children or disabled men might advantageously leave Colon'.<sup>516</sup> Able-bodied men were to manage without assistance until work could be found. He authorised O'Brien to spend £500 and to 'attend to the interests of humanity and strict economy of the public purse'.<sup>517</sup> He further authorised the vice-consul to aid only those absolutely destitute to save life, echoing the ethos of the poor law service which was to relieve only in extreme cases. This short-sightedness of the poor law which focused on treatment rather than early intervention and prevention generally resulted in greater expense, as doctors sometimes pointed out when forced to turn away patients who were not in the severe stages of illness, and who subsequently wandered the streets until they arrived again at the almshouse completely broken down.<sup>518</sup> As for the plight of the migrants in Panama, the consular officials and others sent to investigate witnessed the crisis first hand, and could not help but adopt a humane approach as they endeavoured to relieve the sufferers, compared to the government officials whose geographical distance and responsibility for expenditure promoted cautious responses. The consuls and doctors therefore took on the role of poor law inspectors and medical officers in a foreign context.

The moral duty of a foreign government towards destitute British subjects was discharged by deporting the person to any part of the British empire, irrespective of domicile. It then became the responsibility of British officials to assist the person to reach their place of habitual domicile, and seek reimbursement from that colony's government. The individual colonies may not have wanted this trouble and expense, but in the absence of any current law forbidding the landing of such persons, they had little choice. Therefore, it was in their interests to prevent the landings in

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<sup>514</sup> CO 137/521/10, 7 April 1885, Governor's Despatch.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Jamaica Archives, 1B/5/1A/73, Votes of Assembly 1865–1866, Report of ordinary medical officers, No.15, 51.

the first place if at all possible. The Barbados government flatly refused to assist any seaman (and by extension any other person), while the Jamaican government – though reluctant to encourage a mass influx – felt compelled to act on behalf of its own citizens providing they were deemed extreme cases, and that none other than Jamaicans were assisted.

The burning of Colon happened on the last day of March 1885. On 4<sup>th</sup> May Major O’Brien reported that the crisis had subsided thanks to the efforts of the Panama Railroad who had relieved the Jamaicans.<sup>519</sup> The Jamaican government could consider itself fortunate that a heavy financial obligation had been averted. O’Brien listed only five persons whom he assisted with free passages home:

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S.M. Cover from St. Ann. Bad night, feeble health, can’t get work as laborer or clerk. Had a small store in Colon. Burnt out.

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Augustus Bennett from Metcalfe, sick, unable to work.

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Theodore Lucano from Spanish Town. Upholsterer in Colon. Burnt out. Sick, unable to work and no means.

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Walter Henriques from Kingston. Sick, unable to work.

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Peter Barrett (white). One year in Colon collecting rents. Properties entirely destroyed, occupation gone. Taylor [sic] by trade; tried for indoor work, as being lame with a twisted foot cannot work on Railway or Wharf.

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Though so few in number, the variety of occupations evidences the range of people found in Colon, all rendered destitute by the same fire. Since O’Brien had to justify every penny spent on relief, his assisting a well-employed white man might have raised some eyebrows. The detailed information he gave in the case of Peter Barrett seems designed to pre-empt this. O’Brien also felt compelled to point out that repatriating sick men was cheaper than sending them to the canal company’s hospital which required a deposit of \$300 for each sick person sent there. Although he only repatriated five men, he stated that the consul would likely send up more sick men from time to time.

O’Brien raised the question of the want of a savings bank or system to enable the migrants to make remittances to Jamaica. He felt such a system would ‘facilitate Jamaican agency’ especially as the works would likely continue for another twenty years, but the governor was not

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<sup>519</sup> CO 137/521, 7 May 1885, Governor’s Despatch, *Jamaicans at Panama*, 237–247.

prepared to entertain the suggestion at the current time, or to consider ‘any question of officially looking after Jamaicans at the Isthmus on ordinary occasions...’<sup>520</sup> By implication, they would look after Jamaicans in extraordinary circumstances. This was about to be put to the test along with the Barbados government’s apparent indifference. There is no correspondence in despatches to suggest that the Barbados government took any particular interest in the burning of Colon. Barbadian workers were principally employed along the canal works and not settled in Colon in large numbers. But the government would soon be called on to intervene in their affairs.

### 1889: The Demise of the French Canal Company

International relief in the wake of natural disasters such as hurricanes, was swift, effective and generous. For example, when on 30<sup>th</sup> September a hurricane struck the Turks and Caicos Islands, relief poured in from many sources. Within the region, Demerara, Danish St Thomas, Bermuda, Antigua, the Bahamas and Haiti had all sent relief by December.<sup>521</sup> Into the following year reports detailed further assistance by private companies and individuals in countries such as Scotland, the USA, Barbados and Nova Scotia.<sup>522</sup> The British government also sent supplies. However, my research suggests that disaster was narrowly understood, and that a sense of urgency was slow to filter through from the location of the disaster to the powers that be. Colonial governments’ reactions to the humanitarian disaster which unfolded in Panama were slow and unwieldy, and reflected the dynamics of the domestic poor laws. I argue that this was partly due to the conception that any hardship encountered by black workers was in some way a direct result of their own improvidence and therefore not an obvious case for state intervention and relief. It was also parsimony, as well as indifference and disbelief due to the distance from the scene of events.

In December 1888, the Panama Company declared itself bankrupt, and by January of 1889 the foreign office began to warn of the worsening situation among Isthmian canal workers, entreating the colonial governments to intervene to relieve and repatriate their citizens. What ensued over the course of the year shows that the colonial governments, and that of Jamaica in particular, put the concerns of economy over those of humanity and delayed acting for as long as possible, to the chagrin of the consuls at Panama and Colon who wanted and needed to act

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<sup>520</sup> CO 137/521, Despatch 7 May 1885, Jamaicans at Panama, 237–247.

<sup>521</sup> CO 301/45 and CO 301/46, Despatches from President Moir, Turks and Caicos, 1866 and 1867.

<sup>522</sup> CO 301/46/28, Despatches from President Moir, Turks and Caicos.

urgently to relieve the destitute and starving.<sup>523</sup> Captains of ships in port added their observations on the unfolding catastrophe as they awaited orders to take the stricken people away. But the colonial office would not undertake to reimburse the foreign office, and so the foreign secretary could not authorise his consuls to act. All awaited instruction and funds from the colonial governments who dragged their feet.

According to Mr. Joel, the consul general at Panama, there were an estimated 15,000 British subjects on the Isthmus, of whom about 9,000 – 10,000 were Jamaican, and possibly 800–1,000 were Barbadian, though the Barbadians had never registered with the consulate and were dispersed along the line so could not be counted. St. Lucians and other Windward and Leeward islanders made up the remainder.<sup>524</sup>

The Treasury declined to pledge funds, and urged the Secretary of State for the Colonies to prevail on the colonial governments to repatriate without delay, but conceded that Jamaica and Barbados would likely be unable to authorise a large expenditure without a vote of their legislatures. It advised that ‘the constitutional course would be for the governments to authorise the consuls to spend what may be absolutely necessary to prevent the workmen from starvation, leaving the question of repatriation for another time.’<sup>525</sup>

This was the course which the Barbadian government attempted to adopt, stating that ‘any native of Barbados...should receive such aid as is necessary to prevent their death from want of the necessaries of life,’<sup>526</sup> but reminded the consul that the legislative council had not yet agreed anything, so he should not spend except in individual cases to prevent death. The governor wished to know how many Barbadian labourers were there, what plans were being made, how much it would cost, and what the other colonies had pledged to do. His enquiries reflect the disadvantage of not keeping records of emigrants’ destinations, so that a reserve such as that used to relieve natural disasters might have been employed swiftly to assist the government in meeting the challenge of relieving its destitute emigrants. The Barbados legislature finally passed a resolution on 22<sup>nd</sup> January authorising a sum not exceeding £500 to be used ‘in cases in which the withholding of all relief would result in the death of the distressed person’. There was no

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<sup>523</sup> Panama was the city on the Pacific coast, and Colon on the Atlantic.

<sup>524</sup> CO 137/541 7 February 1889, Lewis Joel, British Consulate General, Panama, 248–250, and 16 February 1889, 263–265.

<sup>525</sup> CO 137/541, 11 March 1889, Treasury to Colonial Office, 184–185.

<sup>526</sup> CO 137/541, Barbados, 52, 263.



mention of repatriation.<sup>527</sup> The consul's indignant comment was, 'How is it possible that I could judge whether death would ensue in the event of relief not being afforded?'<sup>528</sup>

Even after confirmation from the governors of the Leeward and Windward islands to repatriate, the Barbados government would not yet commit to that course, and the Jamaican government alone gave no firm instructions for either relief or repatriation, yet workers were being laid off daily and hope of resumption of works was fast dwindling. Both colonies hoped that the railroad company of Limón, Costa Rica might provide an outlet for the workers preferable to their returning home.<sup>529</sup> Though the Port Limón railway company of Costa Rica took away 600–1000 West Indian workers, the Admiralty warned the Jamaican government not to seek to send more workers there, as the labour market was becoming saturated and there would not be enough work for more. Italy had already recalled 500 of its workers from Limón, and the Jamaican government would only be faced with the same problem again.<sup>530</sup>

Jamaica also held out hopes that canal works might resume. On the same day that the consul received a telegram from the governor of the Leeward Islands authorising him to relieve *and* repatriate, he received one from the governor of Jamaica asking if in view of the formation of the new company it would be necessary to relieve at all. Though the consul replied immediately, he received no answering instructions.<sup>531</sup>

The new company referred to had bought the old and was continuing skeleton works on a very small scale, but it was not expected to prosper, merely hanging on until the venture could be entirely bought out. By placing any reliance in this second French company, the Jamaican government was clutching at straws. Their proposal was to make over a small sum for relief until new canal works could begin. But as Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades*, recently returned to Panama from Jamaica pointed out, this would be costly as there were 9–10,000 Jamaicans there and it would be impossible to tell how many of them would become destitute when all work finally stopped in the next few days.<sup>532</sup> The captain also warned that riot might ensue leading to loss of

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<sup>527</sup> CO 28/226, 2 February 1889, Relief of Destitute Barbadian Labourers at the Isthmus of Panama, 46–50.

<sup>528</sup> CO 137/541, Consul Joel to Foreign Office, 16 February 1889, 263.

<sup>529</sup> CO 137/541, 25 January 1889, Lewis Joel, 236.

<sup>530</sup> CO 137/541, Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades*, 15 March 1889, 40.

<sup>531</sup> CO 137/541, 25 January 1889, Lewis Joel, 236.

<sup>532</sup> CO 137/541, 7 February 1889, Lewis Joel, 248–250.

life, and advised that a commissioner be sent from Jamaica to organise relief, who would be better placed to judge cases of destitution.

A fortnight later the Jamaican government informally asked a surveyor, a Mr. Harrison who was visiting Panama on business, to report on the situation.<sup>533</sup> His advice, on his return to Jamaica three weeks later, was that something should be done at once. The consul could not have agreed more strongly, but lamented that ‘the Jamaican government however seem to think that procrastination may meet the case.’<sup>534</sup> By mid-February, all the other West Indian islands had instructed the consul to repatriate except for Jamaica.<sup>535</sup>

In an attempt to prevent disturbances breaking out in Colon, the Panama government agreed to repatriate at its own expense vagrants and prostitutes, and persons deemed likely to cause trouble. Several hundred West Indians, mostly Jamaicans, were daily applying at the consulate to be repatriated, and several ships were in port ready to take passengers away. The *Orinoco* took 300, and the Royal Mail Shipping Company offered to take 1,000 persons per trip at a cost of 15/- per person, subject to the Jamaican government’s approval.<sup>536</sup> Mr Mallet, the consul at Colon, received £200 from Jamaica to send away the most urgent cases, and Mr. Joel at Panama received £100; but much more money would be needed to complete the task. Captain Rolfe stated, ‘Serious trouble will be the result of the non-intervention of the Jamaican government to repatriate their subjects.’<sup>537</sup> Finally, on 7<sup>th</sup> March, the Jamaican government despatched Dr. Gayleard to report on the situation, with instructions to spend yet another wholly inadequate sum of £100 to relieve and repatriate the most urgent cases.<sup>538</sup>

The whole event reveals certain governmental judgments mirroring domestic policies and attitudes: do as little as possible for as long as possible, and then only in extreme cases to prevent death; prioritise the relief of the white minority while neglecting the black majority; blame the destitute for their condition, and suspect the people of dishonesty and imposition.

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<sup>533</sup> CO 137/541, Foreign Office, 7 February 1889, 248. Also, *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1889.

<sup>534</sup> CO 137/541, Foreign Office, 7 February 1889, 248.

<sup>535</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, 8 February 1889, Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades* to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8.

<sup>536</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, 15 January 1889, Report of Captain Russell of the *Lily* to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 239. Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades*, 20 February 1889.

<sup>537</sup> CO 137/541, Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades*, 20 February 1889, 17.

<sup>538</sup> CO 137/538/46, 8th April 1889, Despatches of Governor Henry A. Blake, Forwards reports by Dr Gayleard respecting the destitute Jamaican labourers at Panama; 2,197 have been repatriated thus far. Also included are some newspaper reports. No. 104, pages 366–405.

The preferential treatment of white migrants can be seen in, for example, the actions of the Chilean government which offered free passage for all ‘desirable immigrants’ seeking to leave Panama. In particular, they were looking for white mechanics and labourers, with the promise they would be fed and housed in Chile until work could be found for them. They refused to accept ‘coloured people or Asiatics.’<sup>539</sup> While the Chilean government’s decision was in no way the fault of the British government, it ought to have prompted the latter to seek viable alternatives for its black subjects, rather than placing misplaced hope in the longevity of the Limón railway works. The admiralty also prioritised white inhabitants: Rolfe reported that in case of insurrection and Colon being burnt again, he had made arrangements along with the French and American captains to defend the consulate and take on board any white inhabitants who feared staying on shore.<sup>540</sup> Captain Russell of the *Lily* received a confidential communication to afford protection to Italians.<sup>541</sup> The black majority would be left to fend for itself. Even though many of the professional classes resided at Colon, the level of consideration they received or did not receive invariably came down to colour.

France was repatriating its citizens and the US government reported steps being taken for the protection of American subjects.<sup>542</sup> A bill adopted by the senate in secret session appropriated the sum of \$250,000 to protect US interests and property and bring their citizens home if necessary.<sup>543</sup> These requests from foreign governments and confidential agreements ought to have prompted the British to adopt measures for the protection of its own subjects. Instead Britain – both colonial and central bodies – continued to drag its feet. Blaming the destitute for their condition was a common way of evading action. The consul at Panama said, ‘There are some thousands ... British subjects working on the isthmus principally coloured people from Jamaica, who, as a rule, are most improvident...’<sup>544</sup> Rolfe commented on ‘the natural improvident apathy of the negro...’ in reference to the workers along the line facing destitution, and with regards to the future completion of works at Limón, he remarked ‘there is no reason to suppose the Limón gangs are more thrifty than the Colon gangs.’<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, Captain of the *Caroline*, 20 February and 20 March 1889.

<sup>540</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, Captain of *Pylades* to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8 February 1889. 8–9

<sup>541</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, 15 January 1889, 239.

<sup>542</sup> CO 137/541, Despatch, Jamaica, 4 March 1889. enclosing letter from British legation in Washington, USA, 12th February 1889, 243.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> CO 137/541, Consul at Panama, 4 January 1889, 227.

<sup>545</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, Captain Rolfe to Commodore Hand, 3 March 1889 [f.299]. Admiralty, 25 April 1889, Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades*, 372–376.

In addition to blaming the people for their destitution, another evasive tactic was to question their honesty and the true extent of their destitution. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1889, the colonial office stated it could not bear the expense of ‘returning to West Indian Colonies ~~natives~~ persons who allege that they came from there.’<sup>546</sup> One could ask where these black, English-speaking ‘persons’ with West Indian accents came from if not the West Indian colonies! In a further communication, the colonial office criticised the consul at Panama, Mr. Joel, for his dealings with the emergency, saying ‘He would like to have carte blanche to send away wholesale all the West Indian labourers who come to him and allege that they are destitute.’<sup>547</sup>

He’s an alarmist who...does not sufficiently understand the negro character. If Dr Gayleard or Mr Joel made it freely known that free passages were being offered, thousands would claim destitution and return rather than stay and look for work.’<sup>548</sup>

The quote displays a typical approach to poor relief – that having no work was a personal failing even when no work was available. Land and resources in the West Indies, and in Barbados in particular, simply could not support the whole population under the current system, as governments knew very well. Even so, poor relief was based on the assumption that all should be working and that relief should be restricted so as to deter people from claiming it instead of seeking work. Panama was experiencing a mass exodus, so finding work locally was impossible. A particular criticism levelled by Captain Rolfe was that the people were ungrateful and insolent, when the consul was distributing food and allowing them to sleep on his verandah and drink from his well. He wrote,

...now that the West Indian governments have initiated repatriation and relief, by this means placing a premium on idleness and improvidence, repatriation and relief is looked upon as a right... These men know that they have forced the hand of the West Indian governments once and doubtless are prepared, with an even more insolent front, to do so again.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> CO 137/541, Colonial Office, 9 January 1889, 210. (or FO? See photo)

<sup>547</sup> CO 137/541, Jamaica, 20 March 1889.

<sup>548</sup> CO 137/541, FO, Jamaica, 22 March 1889, ‘Repatriation of destitute Jamaicans at Panama. Transmits copies of two letters from Consul General at Panama’, 272.

<sup>549</sup> CO 137/541, Captain Rolfe of the *Pylades*, 25 April 1889, 372–376.

Though written in strongly critical terms, the picture presented by Rolfe can be understood differently. Though the consul undoubtedly went out of his way to ensure the people were provided for in spite of their government's apathy, the people themselves saw relief as their right as subjects, not a personal favour of the consul. Access to newspapers would mean awareness of the criticisms of their governments for failing to assist them promptly. For example, *The Telegram* reported on the gravity of the situation, with eyewitness accounts, and urged the swift resumption of repatriation efforts.<sup>550</sup> They would also have seen their white countrymen assisted to leave, as well as those of other nationalities. By the end of March all distressed white British subjects had been sent to Chile where their labour was needed.<sup>551</sup> Furthermore, their expectations were bolstered by promises made by Gayleard which appeared for a time to be broken when the Legislative Council recalled him on 25<sup>th</sup> March before his humanitarian mission could be completed. The captain of *HMS Partridge* expressed his opinion that the recall was injudicious. 'The people had been reassured by Gayleard's presence and started to come to Colon in expectation of getting help, but now seem doomed to disappointment.'<sup>552</sup> They expected justice and integrity from their own government and on the part of those sent to relieve them, and would no doubt feel resentful if this was not forthcoming.

Yet, even in the face of the looming catastrophe, the people were described as peaceful. Rolfe said that though several thousand Jamaicans would be without the means of livelihood, he did not expect riot.<sup>553</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the captain of *HMS Partridge* reported the total collapse of the company leaving 4,000 destitute men for whom no arrangements were being made, and the majority of whom were expected to drift into Colon. 'These poor people seem mostly of a quiet disposition, but must be provided for in some way.'<sup>554</sup> On board the ship with Dr. Gayleard on conclusion of his first mission were 1,500 people being repatriated. The captain reported that after the starving had been fed, 'they became quite docile, and I have had no further trouble...The conduct of the people have [sic] been most exemplary throughout...'<sup>555</sup>

Far from remaining to impose on charity, many people had in fact been leaving Panama under their own steam. The consul wrote that those affected by the canal were about 5–6,000 in

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<sup>550</sup> CO 137/538/46, 8 April 1889, No. 104, 366–405, 404, enclosing extracts from *The Telegram*, 2 April 1889, 4 April 1889 and 6 April 1889.

<sup>551</sup> CO 137/541, Captain of the *Caroline*, 30 March 1889, 334.

<sup>552</sup> CO 137/541, Captain of *HMS Partridge*, 23 March 1889, 46–48.

<sup>553</sup> CO 137/541, 8 February 1889, Captain Rolfe to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7.

<sup>554</sup> CO 137/541, Captain of *HMS Partridge*, 23 March 1889, 47.

<sup>555</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 19 March 1889.

January, and that large numbers were leaving by each steamer.<sup>556</sup> Another captain estimated about 4,000 had been discharged, many of whom were leaving.<sup>557</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> March, Gayleard reported that about 6,000 had left since the beginning of the year, the majority being Jamaicans, with about 2,000 remaining.<sup>558</sup> The captain of the *Caroline* summarised the situation from January to 23<sup>rd</sup> March, reporting that 5,800 West Indians had left, 1,500 to Limón, 327 to St. Lucia and 50 to Barbados. '1600 paid their own fares and 2302 were repatriated by Dr Gayleard.'<sup>559</sup> A further 2,000 were reportedly settled in clearings made by the canal company, while Colon itself was rapidly depopulating.<sup>560</sup> This all implies that those who could go under their own steam were doing so in large numbers, leaving only the really destitute to be helped should Gayleard be permitted to return.

He regretted on his departure that he had not been able to help or even visit several thousand more. He received reports from a 'well-known builder' named J.D. Macanuff who informed him of some very poor people across the river at a place called Bujio, 'who are not aware of your humane mission to the Isthmus...All are living in huts; some are sick; others are in a state of nudity; all are objects of genuine commiseration.'<sup>561</sup> Though the people may have been, according to Gayleard, 'ignorant and deluded' into thinking they could survive on bananas and canes until the work resumed, he nevertheless was anxious they should not be left unaided on account of their misjudgement, and on account of the difficulty in reaching settlements in the interior. The only help he could give them was through the leading tone and persuasive language of his report to the governor,

However unworthy these people may be, however, will not interfere with the dictates of humanity, civilisation and British Rule. The Government of Jamaica will decline to be made participators in any feeling of resentment towards them. The people of Great Britain with their strong sympathy for human suffering would never assent to their being left designedly to stew in their own juice.

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<sup>556</sup> CO 137/541, Consul Joel, 12 February 1889.

<sup>557</sup> CO 137/541, Captain Wiseman, 12 February 1889.

<sup>558</sup> CO 137/541, Dr. Gayleard, 30 March 1889.

<sup>559</sup> CO 137/541, The *Caroline*, 30 March 1889. My emphasis.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> 'Report on the condition of Jamaicans at San Pablo, Barbacoas, Savanilla and Bohio', Dr. Gayleard, 30 March 1889, 390 ff.

Given that the Jamaican government itself had wanted to hold out in the hope of canal works resuming, one could hardly blame the people for doing the same. Finally, Gayleard expressed his gratitude to the consuls of Panama and Colon, and lauded the great efforts of the latter who was still engaged in the ongoing humanitarian effort. He wrote that the consul at Colon was thronged not only by Jamaicans but by hundreds of St. Lucians and other islanders all anxious to return to their homes. He no doubt hoped, through his report, that the government would continue to support the mission even after his part in it had been concluded.

It was strongly felt by all agencies that Gayleard should not have left while so many were still pouring into Colon and Panama where they would find no one from their government to advise them. Mallet, the consul at Colon, offered to repatriate the remaining Jamaicans if the Jamaican government would pay for the extra clerical and other assistance required. On 12<sup>th</sup> April he reported that the Jamaican money would run out in two days and that the situation was critical with 1,000 people still to be repatriated.<sup>562</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> April the Colombian government, having perhaps been informed that the Jamaican government would relieve no further, deported vagrants to Jamaica. The captain of *HMS Partridge* wrote,

Everyone on the Isthmus thought the Jamaican government's actions were wrong. If Jamaica does not intercede on behalf of its people, the consul general will have to apply to the imperial government.<sup>563</sup>

The Jamaican governor and colonial secretary were indeed supportive, but they had to convince the legislative council to vote more funds. What we see is the clunky system of poor relief played out on an international scale with the consuls acting as relieving officers and colonial governments as parsimonious guardians of the poor with oversight and responsibility for funds. The imperial government, represented by the colonial office, like the Central Poor Law Board in Barbados or the Board of Supervision in Jamaica could only advise and try to insist that colonial governments authorise the release of funds, but had no direct power or authority to compel them to do so.

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<sup>562</sup> CO 137/541, Captain of the *Pylades*, 20 March. Consul Joel, Panama, 22 March 1889. *HMS Partridge* 6 April 1889. Consul Mallet, Colon, 12 and 13 April 1889.

<sup>563</sup> CO 137/541, *HMS Partridge*, 6 April 1889.

The white minority had been provided for, trifling sums had been expended ‘to prevent death’, and Gayleard had been recalled amid fears of imposition and the rising cost of his mission. The decision to continue or abort would come down to a second vote of the legislative council. In the meantime, Mallet went down the line investigating and assisting. His reports give a deeper insight into poverty away from the urban centres of Panama and Colon, showing self-help and charity very much in evidence among the communities he visited. He saw serious cases of destitution and starvation, along with evidence of communities trying to make a living from the soil, and the wealthier helping the poorer to the limits of their abilities.

Six days after Gayleard’s departure, Mallet heard reports that 2,000 persons had been found starving at San Pablo, Barbacoas and Savanilla, three deaths from starvation had occurred and more were expected, and that means of transport were urgently required.<sup>564</sup> The governor released a further £100, but requested exact particulars of the starving Jamaicans with accounts of expenditures by the following day’s steamer.<sup>565</sup> A similar request to Joel from the governor of St. Lucia was met with exasperation. ‘What is to become of the destitute while these cases are being reported...?’ he wrote.<sup>566</sup> Both consuls had their hands full. Mallet was, by his own account, ‘feeding 200 people daily who are camped about the town,’ and planning to visit some two or three thousand more on the line and in the camps.<sup>567</sup> He was also busy dealing with 500 other West Indians trying to get home, and had no time to send accounts of expenses.

At San Pablo Mallet saw 500 men congregating around the shops and camps who, though strong, ‘clearly reduced to starvation and despair.’ For days they had only eaten a few green bananas and cassavas given to them in charity. Many were too weak to leave the camps, while others were led out by friends and laid in the piazzas in the hope of attracting some charity. Across the river in a place called Black Dump, two miles from the station, he found 800–1000 destitute Jamaicans subsisting on bananas in return for half a day’s work for their more fortunate countrymen.<sup>568</sup> Some admitted that they stole food from fields at night, running the risk of being shot. It was impossible to examine each and every one of them. He could only take the names of 51 who appeared worst off. Next he walked through a new town two miles behind Barbacoas Bridge where he found 500 people living in small shanties without any food at all because it was a new

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<sup>564</sup> CO 137/541, Consul Mallet of Colon to Governor of Jamaica, 3 April 1889, 395.

<sup>565</sup> CO 137/541, Consul Mallet of Colon to Governor of Jamaica, 3 April 1889.

<sup>566</sup> CO 137/541, British Consulate General, Panama, to Colonial Office, 20 February 1889, 257.

<sup>567</sup> CO 137/541, Consul Mallet of Colon to Governor of Jamaica, 3 April 1889, 397.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.* 400.



town where cultivation had not yet begun. He reported that two-thirds of those people would walk miles over the hills in search of work and food, many of them women and children.

Further down the line at Savanilla, Mallet counted over 180 persons loafing around the shops in the hope of attracting some charity, and took the names of 56 of the most wretched looking. The shopkeepers there told him they had given away everything they could, until they could now only afford to give away items about to perish. Half a mile behind the station he found a further 1,000 Jamaicans living in the same way, but the farmers who had been supporting them would soon be without provisions themselves. Finally, at San Pablo he found about 19 St Lucians, mostly deserted women, with three children, all in great distress and living by charity.

It is clear from these reports that the consul was placed in a role akin to that of a parochial poor law inspector, close to realities ‘on the ground’ and having to account for the spending of public money, while on the other hand trying with insufficient funds to help thousands of needy and deserving cases. Meanwhile the legislative council in Jamaica, reminiscent of the board of guardians, deliberated whether or not to vote further funds to help those whom the member for St. Thomas described as ‘the scum of Jamaica’.<sup>569</sup> But what Mallet witnessed was a hard-working pauper community and their better off but by no means well off compatriots trying to help them within their own limited means. Their only ‘crime’ was that they had stayed to try to make a living from the land, not knowing about Gayleard’s now concluded mission. Mallet wrote, ‘Shopkeepers declare that they give many the refuse and sweepings of their counters [illegible word] and could help no more.’<sup>570</sup> Mr Smith, a shopkeeper at Barbacoas told the consul that he had a gang of fifteen people working for one meal a day; that he had given away all the perishable articles in his stock to the starving and had had to close his doors for his own protection as people grew daily more desperate.<sup>571</sup> And at Bohio, the rector, a shopkeeper and the depot master reported that there were at least one hundred starving people on the other side of the river, including blind and lame people, surviving off charity alone.<sup>572</sup>

The authorising of relief, whether at the parish level or beyond, was always going to be a slow and ineffective process, and some deaths would be the inevitable result. But industry and charity

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<sup>569</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1889.

<sup>570</sup> CO 137/541, Consul Mallet of Colon to Governor of Jamaica, 3 April 1889, 399.

<sup>571</sup> Consul Mallet of Colon to Governor of Jamaica, 3rd April 1889, 401.

<sup>572</sup> Consul Mallet of Colon to Governor of Jamaica, 3rd April 1889, 402.

are the most strongly represented qualities in Mallet's observations. Here were people who were neither lazy nor improvident. They were prepared to travel several miles to look for work. Those who employed them did so as an act of kindness, but were themselves running out of money and provisions. The situation simply had no long-term prospect of sustainability.

Amid grumblings of imposition and irregularities in procedures, the legislative council reluctantly agreed to vote the necessary funds, and Gayleard returned to the isthmus.<sup>573</sup> By 7<sup>th</sup> May, the consuls reported that all distressed West Indians had finally left.<sup>574</sup> Doubtless some were repatriated who could have financed themselves, and the whole was an expensive operation, costing in excess of £3,000. But fears of returnees falling burden on poor relief proved unfounded. Gayleard furnished the Inspector General of Police with the names, ages, colours and parishes of each and every person he assisted. The inspector reported that most had resumed their old occupations and become absorbed in the general population, leaving only a 'destitute residuum to be paid for if necessary'.<sup>575</sup>

There are several reasons why they were able to resettle so quickly. Firstly, the consuls and Gayleard had the good sense to allow people to leave with their possessions rather than regarding such possessions as indications of means and therefore refusing passage. The domestic poor law was never preventive, it was reactionary in dire situations. It took into account all belongings in assessing a person's level of need, including household items, and did not as a rule relieve unless a person had next to nothing. But allowing the people to return with their possessions, prevented immediate destitution on their return and a greater strain on parochial resources.

When asked to enquire more closely into the circumstances of the St. Lucians who had a lot of baggage, Joel explained that each St. Lucian passenger had signed a bond agreeing to repay the cost of their passage, and that the government of St. Lucia should rejoice that they would have enough to start their lives again rather than being a burden on their neighbours.<sup>576</sup> As Gayleard pointed out, although the people had possessions, there was nothing that could be sold to pay for their travel, as everyone was leaving Colon, and if they were not to be allowed free passage home with their belongings, they would arrive and fall instantly on the poor law.<sup>577</sup> Even the

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<sup>573</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1889.

<sup>574</sup> CO 137/541, Admiralty, 7 May 1889.

<sup>575</sup> CO 137/538/46, Despatches, 8 April 1889. Report of Inspector General of Police, 30 March 1889, 393–394.

<sup>576</sup> CO 137/541, Panama, 20 April 1889.

<sup>577</sup> CO 137/538/46, 28 March 1889, 387–392, 388.

legislative council agreed it would be foolish to ‘stay higgling with them over their miserable trifles’.<sup>578</sup>

The colonial secretary at a meeting of the legislative council spoke about the condition and circumstances of the returning migrants. An inspector of police charged with getting the returned migrants to their homes, informed him that they were the most destitute people he had ever seen. At the same time, the collector general reported that each migrant returned with an average of £12. It is not clear whether or not the two men were referring to the same people, but it is more likely that the collector general meant those who returned at their own expense. According to his calculations, 39,429 had left Jamaica between 1883 and 1885, and many had returned. The colonial secretary’s point, therefore, was that this was having a positive effect on the island’s wealth:

...the accession to the wealth of the island must have been considerable. I believe a great deal of it has been put to good use and I am told that cultivation in some parts of the country shows signs of improvement through this.

His comments were loudly cheered from the public gallery.<sup>579</sup>

The other factor that facilitated easy reabsorption into their societies was their networks of savings and mutual aid founded upon local economic activities, and bolstered by the Panama migration. Though the trope of the thriftless West Indian appeared in so many pieces of correspondence, the Barbadian abroad had a reputation for thriftiness. In Aviston Downes’ thesis on informal survivalist strategies, he quotes the planter Quintin Hog who stated that the Barbadians he took to Demerara to work his plantations were more interested in raising their own livestock.<sup>580</sup> Another observer noted, ‘The Barbadian in Demerara will keep a goat if he has no fodder for it and is forced to graze it at night by the roadside while his less thrifty neighbours are asleep...’<sup>581</sup> This migration had benefitted local economies through the export trade to Panama. Olive Senior places the official annual trade revenue figure at £100,000, but notes that

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<sup>578</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1889.

<sup>579</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1889.

<sup>580</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880–1914: A socio-cultural history*, 72, quoting Parliamentary Papers 1898 (c. 8656) L, WIRC, app. C, 1, paras. 891–892.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 73, quoting George H.H. McLellan, *Barbados Back in Time: The way we were Circa 1900* (Demerara: Argosy, 1909) 61.

official statistics did not include small scale operations which carried a variety of goods to Panama,<sup>582</sup> enabling people to prosper and save in ways which remained free from official oversight.

A simple form of saving, recognisable in many communities worldwide, known in Barbados as ‘turns’, involved a small group of people from one community each paying a set sum to be pooled and given weekly or at agreed intervals to each member in turn. It was known in Jamaica as ‘Pardnas’, in Antigua as ‘box’ and in Trinidad as ‘susu’ from the Yoruba word ‘esusu’, indicating that the practice was carried over from Africa by enslaved persons.<sup>583</sup> The one in charge – ‘the thrower’ – was responsible for deciding the order in which the members received it, ensuring it corresponded where possible with members’ financial obligations, such as rent owed. This form of saving was grudgingly admired by the poor law commission but also criticised it for its lack of formal controls which could allow a dishonest person to abscond with the group’s money.<sup>584</sup> The government wanted oversight, but it remained under informal working-class leadership.

A more sophisticated and equally prevalent form of saving was the friendly societies, organised by the members, mostly labourers and artisans, providing members with medical insurance and funeral expenses. Their existence in the post-emancipation Caribbean can be traced at least as far back as 1834 when the first friendly society was established in the Bahamas by apprentices and free people on Emancipation Day itself.<sup>585</sup> Friendly societies which predate emancipation were set up by members of the clergy.<sup>586</sup>

The spike in prosperity brought about by trade and remittances from Panama could be what enabled greater friendly society activity. When the Barbados Friendly Societies Act passed in

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<sup>582</sup> Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 98.

<sup>583</sup> Bonham Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 89–90. See also Edward S. Maynard, ‘The Translocation of a West African Banking System: The Yoruba Esusu Rotating Credit Association in the Anglophone Caribbean’, *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, 1996, 99–107, 100. For a more expansive discussion on the geographical origins of rotating credit in the Caribbean, see Trevor Purcell, ‘Local Institutions in Grassroots Development: The Rotating Savings and Credit Association’, *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2000, 143–181, 146. See also Brent W. Stoffle, Richard W. Stoffle, Jessica Minnis and Kathleen Van Vlack, ‘Women’s Power and Community Resilience: Rotating Savings and Credit Associations in Barbados and the Bahamas’, *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2014, 45–69.

<sup>584</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 74.

<sup>585</sup> Howard Johnson, ‘Friendly societies in the Bahamas 1834–1910’, *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 12, No.3, 1991, 183–199, 183.

<sup>586</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 10–13.

1880 encouraging voluntary registration, 167 existing societies and a further 2 new ones registered. In 1888 there was a sharp increase to 15 new societies, followed by a further 44 in 1889, then 31 in 1890.<sup>587</sup> Significantly the highest number of friendly societies were set up in 1889. Downes speculates that it was to pre-empt a compulsory registration law that was being contemplated, and which passed in 1891. But as 1889 was the year in which the canal works collapsed, it seems more probable that people were attempting to insure themselves against an uncertain future. The region was in the midst of a deepening sugar depression, yet no societies folded in 1894 when wages were cut by 20%. It would appear, therefore, that in times of hardship, members pulled together more strongly, though inevitably some would be forced into liquidation as the century drew to a close.<sup>588</sup>

This chapter has highlighted both the extreme challenges faced by Panama migrants, and the untidiness of imperial governance; the competing agendas of the various colonial agents, the consequent slowness to act in emergencies, and the regressive measures adopted to limit expense where such expense was not perceived to be beneficial to the profitability of the colony. The individuals who constituted these agencies may have disagreed with certain policies and urged certain courses of action, but the overall system was not one of altruism. The events of 1889 encouraged a change in foreign policy, leading to some destinations including Panama being designated ‘proclaimed’, meaning subject to certain restrictions. A declaration printed in the islands’ official gazettes in 1892 stated that colonial governments would not repatriate any migrants who fell destitute in Panama.<sup>589</sup> Subsequently, the Secretary of State for the Colonies advised the governors to warn the people that they would not be relieved by the imperial government either.<sup>590</sup> The following year, Jamaica passed the Emigrant Labourers Protection Law which required a migrant without a pre-existing labour contract to provide surety in the form of two persons with property over £10 in value who could guarantee to repay any monies expended on assisting him while abroad.<sup>591</sup> Greater contractual clarity was required from labour

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<sup>587</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 77, from ‘Half Yearly Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies’.

<sup>588</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 78, from *Weekly Recorder*, Saturday 20 January 1900, 8.

<sup>589</sup> Velma Newton, *The Silver Men*, 58.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. See also CO 137/584/97, No. 529, 561–562, 30 December 1897, letter from the governor of Jamaica to the Secretary of State for the Colonies: ‘I have the honour to inform you that as the Police Authorities have represented that attempts are being made to engage Jamaicans, as labourers in the Republic of Costa Rica and it appeared to me to be desirable to regulate any emigration which might take place, I have, by Proclamation under the Emigrant Labourers Protections Law, 35 of 1893, declared Costa Rica to be a place to which the provisions of that Law and of amending Law, 16 of 1894 shall apply.’

recruiters, along with an agreement to provide for medical care and repatriate any worker who became too ill or disabled to work.

These measures, though designed to afford both the migrant and the colony's purse a degree of protection, did not protect all migrants from hardships and injustices encountered in Central America. British subjects who returned to Panama for the commencement of the US canal works from 1904, and agricultural workers recruited for the US United Fruit Company's banana plantations in Costa Rica were to find themselves in a peculiar limbo, not entitled to access local services in the countries where they worked, and not enjoying the protection that British subjects might expect from their consular representatives. I will argue that a combination of oppressive labour conditions and low pay, a sense of abandonment by Britain and the growth of friendly societies that transcended national borders combined to encourage a questioning of empire which allowed ideologies such as Garveyism and nationalist to germinate.

The next chapter discusses the role of friendly societies and lodges in working class organisation and mobilisation, and addresses the question of how the Panama migrations affected post-migration development in the Caribbean.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Working Class Self-Determination: West Indian Friendly Societies and Lodges**

The chapter will look at the friendly society movement which was one of the crucial strategies adopted by the people as an insurance against falling into absolute poverty. Friendly societies and lodges provided a means of communication between residents of the West Indies and its migrant populations in Central America and elsewhere. Though avowedly apolitical, their meetings served to inform members about current affairs and the concerns of the labouring people could be discussed and resolutions formed. Black owned newspapers carried notices of friendly society and lodge meetings alongside articles about the working conditions in various places, enabling the labourer in Barbados to know the plight of the labourer in Jamaica, in Panama, in Costa Rica, and so on. People could also read about the injustices faced by black populations in US society which encouraged critical thinking about their own situation as West Indian subjects in the British empire and contributed to the emergence of organisations like the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and nationalist sentiment.

Friendly societies, though popular throughout the colonies, were reputedly more prevalent among the poor blacks of Barbados than in any other colony, possibly owing to chronic landlessness.<sup>592</sup> For this reason, the chapter is slanted more towards activities in Barbados than in Jamaica, though landlessness was experienced in varying degrees across the Caribbean. Antigua, for example, suffered land access limitations akin to that of Barbados and also had a flourishing friendly society movement. A comparative study of the whole Caribbean could confirm this correlation, but it is safe to assume that what was achieved in Barbados with its lowest paid workers and highest mortality was remarkable and applicable to colonies with less severe conditions. By looking at Barbados where the economic climate and socio-political milieu were not encouraging for the development of black social work and where the activities of philanthropic organisations had been severely curtailed, we nevertheless have the opportunity to

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<sup>592</sup> Bonham Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados, 1900-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985) 90, quoting A.F. and D. Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies: report on a survey and a despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the West Indian governors dated 15th May 1952* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1953).

look more closely at what survival strategies the labouring classes were employing, which were applicable throughout the region.

It is my argument that friendly society networks facilitated the exchange of ideas beyond the local and national, and thus contributed to the development of post-colonial Caribbean identity, culture and politics. Along with the Poor Relief Act, Barbados passed its first Friendly Societies Act in 1880, marking the beginning of attempts to bring the societies under official jurisdiction. This allows us to look at the development of friendly societies against the backdrop of official scrutiny, revealing the dichotomy between popular agency and government control, as the friendly societies pushed back and asserted their rights to run their affairs as their members wished.

Friendly societies in the West Indies were started in the early nineteenth century by Anglican, Moravian and Methodist clergy for the black population, and modelled on the older, and well-established system in England. The aim of friendly societies was to provide relief in times of sickness, assist the aged and infirm, and contribute to the funeral expenses of their members by way of a joining fee and monthly subscription. Possibly the earliest was established in St. John, Antigua by the Anglican rector in 1829.<sup>593</sup> Between 1834 when Antiguan slaves were emancipated, and 1836, membership of friendly societies more than doubled, with the Anglican-run society seeing an increase from 1,602 to 4,560 members. In Barbados, the first was in the parish of St. John in 1832, probably for white or free coloured members, but after emancipation it became black dominated.<sup>594</sup> In the Bahamas, the first friendly society was established on Emancipation Day itself and consisted of persons who had been able to purchase their freedom, and some who were still apprentices.<sup>595</sup>

As observers noted, these friendly societies were proof of West Indians' commitment to thrift, industry and all the qualities they were commonly depicted as lacking. Thome and Kimball, visiting the region in 1837, emphasised that friendly societies existed solely among the free black population, and that the monies were raised exclusively among themselves. The text clearly

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<sup>593</sup> James Armstrong Thome and Horace Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months' tour in Antigua, Barbados, and Jamaica, in the year 1837* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p108.

<sup>594</sup> Aviston Downes, 'Constructing Brotherhood: Fraternal Organisations and Masculinities in Colonial Barbados since 1740', in Eudine Barriteau (ed.), *Love and Power: Caribbean Discourses on Gender* (Kingston, Jamaica: UWI Press, 2012) 453–487, 478.

<sup>595</sup> Howard Johnson, 'Friendly Societies in the Bahamas 1834-1910', *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1991, 183–199, 183.



argues against the anti-abolitionist narrative that the people ‘cannot take care of themselves and would ‘squander the earnings of the day in debaucheries at night’.<sup>596</sup> Thome and Kimball further lauded the achievement of friendly societies given that wages were but one shilling a day, ‘less than sufficient...to provide daily food.’<sup>597</sup> Forty years later, the chronicler W.J. Gardner wrote in a similar vein, pointing out that ‘men of African origin are not so devoid of the power of co-operating for their mutual benefit as many have asserted.’<sup>598</sup>

It is significant that this figure of one shilling a day wages for a male agricultural worker remained more or less constant for the next one hundred years, when the condition of labourers came under scrutiny owing to the labour unrest which swept the Caribbean in the 1930s.<sup>599</sup> This was in spite of rapidly rising living costs that devalued the currency. The British government recognised that workers could not endure such ‘terrible exploitation’ and that wages did not meet the costs of living.<sup>600</sup> In spite of such discouraging circumstances, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries labourers managed to operate ‘turns’, and the mostly urban, middle and lower middle classes and artisans also formed ‘affiliated friendly societies’, known as lodges, and dubbed ‘poor man’s freemasonry’.<sup>601</sup>

Both friendly societies and lodges came under the banner of mutual aid organisations, but the lodges were distinguished by their secrecy, rules, uniforms and restriction to male members, though women’s lodges began to appear in the twentieth century.<sup>602</sup> Lodges operated as affiliated branches of lodges elsewhere, usually in Britain, with various orders of Forresters and Odd Fellows prominent. Though regular friendly societies were set up independently within limited locations, they were also trans-national in the sense that members who travelled took their societies with them or set up new ones in the places where they settled.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> James Armstrong Thome and Horace Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: a six months’ tour in Antigua, Barbados, and Jamaica, in the year 1837* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 110.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> W.J. Gardner, *A history of Jamaica: from its discovery by Christopher Columbus to the year 1872* (London, 1873), 423.

<sup>599</sup> Hansard, ‘West Indies’, HC Deb 09 February 1938 vol. 331 cc1038–43; ‘Jamaica’, HC Deb 18 May 1938 vol. 336 cc391–5; ‘Conditions in Jamaica’, HL Deb 02 June 1938 vol. 109 cc877–910.

<sup>600</sup> Hansard, ‘Jamaica’, HC Deb 18 May 1938 vol. 336 cc391–5.

<sup>601</sup> Aviston Downes, ‘Constructing Brotherhood’, 468.

<sup>602</sup> For a discussion of the differences between mutual aid lodges and masonic lodges, see Cécile Révauger, *Black Freemasonry: From Prince Hall to the Giants of Jazz* (Vermont, USA: Inner Traditions, 2016).

<sup>603</sup> Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 278.

This chapter will demonstrate the importance of friendly societies in assisting the working classes to avoid destitution. It will also show how the structures of friendly societies allowed for the dissemination of new political ideologies and gave opportunities for social advancement.

### **Friendly Societies and the Poor in Panama and the West Indies**

In Panama, the first to be set up was the Court Brook Lodge in 1880. Due to the continuous large influx of West Indians to Panama, the consul remarked in 1887, 'Nowhere are friendly societies more needed than here.'<sup>604</sup> This was on the occasion of the founding of the Future Hope Lodge of Good Shepherds which organised a procession and an address to the consul in which they declared their commitment to 'the future good and welfare of our countrymen, the primary object being to assist the widow and orphans and especially the sick and destitute members of the Society.'<sup>605</sup> In 1894 a new branch of Oddfellows opened at Colon for the 'visitation of the sick and relief of the distressed.'<sup>606</sup>

If the demise of the French canal venture in 1889 had taken everyone by surprise, they were not going to be caught unawares a second time. Colonial governments were not going to facilitate the return of migrants on conclusion of the new American canal works. Forty thousand were thought to have remained in Panama, though not all on the canal works. When the canal authorities reduced their employees from 21,500 in 1917 to 17,000 in 1919, they were obliged to repatriate those laid off. But many were unable to find work back in the West Indies and so returned to augment the large numbers of unemployed at Panama and Colon.<sup>607</sup> Those who remained in the employ of the canal company faced great hardships. Salaries fell way behind the cost of living and of white employees. Due to rapid inflation before 1917, white workers (known as gold workers) were given a 55% wage increase, but black workers (known as silver workers) only received a 20% increase on what was, to begin with, a salary way below subsistence.<sup>608</sup> One worker reported that he and his family faced starvation on a daily basis.<sup>609</sup> With the post-war

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<sup>604</sup> George Annesley, British consul. *Daily Gleaner*, 26 September 1887.

<sup>605</sup> Address by the president of the Future Hope Lodge of Good Shepherds. *Daily Gleaner*, 26 September 1887.

<sup>606</sup> *Daily Gleaner* 24 October 1894.

<sup>607</sup> Trevor O'Reggio, 'Between Alienation and Citizenship: the evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama 1914-1964', (PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, 1997) 99. [Chapter 1, Part IV]

<sup>608</sup> Trevor O'Reggio, 'Between Alienation and Citizenship', 100.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. Interview between an elderly man and Kenneth Goldsberry, author of 'The Strike of 1920: A Study of the Black Labor Movement in the Canal Zone', unpublished paper, Panama Canal Collection, Panama Canal Commission Library, 1976).

recession of 1921, the canal company discharged a further 7,000 West Indian workers to form part of a destitute community numbering 20,000 in the two principal cities.<sup>610</sup>

On a visit in 1960, George Westerman noted that several organisations were established that undertook work which should have the duty of the Crown's local representatives, and that some of these societies were over fifty years old, having been established in the heyday of canal construction.<sup>611</sup> The aim of these societies was to help their communities to try to endure the harsh conditions they faced on the isthmus where they felt the hostility of the Panamanian government and indifference of their own. During the 1919 labour strikes of Caribbean banana workers in Central America, their petitions to the foreign office include statements such as, 'There is no Consul here for coloured men...[but] we are all British subjects...', and 'Hoping that Britain has not forgotten her subjects...'<sup>612</sup> There were no local municipal services for which people were eligible through the Panamanian government, and no British structures of support beyond appealing to the consulate in times of emergency, such as for intervention in cases where people felt they had been wrongfully incarcerated or discriminated against by Panamanian officials.<sup>613</sup> Lady Mallet, wife of the British consul, was known for her philanthropy but initiatives by individual white women were difficult to sustain, given the transient nature of colonial appointments.<sup>614</sup>

1919 was a particularly hard year, as labour strikes swept the region, from United Fruit Company workers in Costa Rica and Honduras to Panama Canal Company workers. Every edition of *The Workman* – a popular weekly English-language newspaper by West Indians in Panama, told of ill-treatment, the inability of workers to survive on their wages, and the illnesses and morality they were succumbing to as a result of malnourishment.<sup>615</sup> The lodges and friendly societies

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<sup>610</sup> Trevor O'Reggio, 'Between Alienation and Citizenship', 123. See also John Major, *Prize Possession: The United States and the Panama Canal, 1903–1979*, (Cambridge, 1987) 94.

<sup>611</sup> George Westerman, 'Historical Notes on West Indians on the Isthmus of Panama', *Phylon*, Vol. 22, No.4, 1960, 340–350, 347.

<sup>612</sup> Moji Anderson, *Imperial Ideology: subjects, objectivity, and the use of empire in the 1918–19 banana workers' strike in Costa Rica and Panama*, (Institute of Social and Economic Research. Series: Working paper, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica. No. 43, 1998), 46. For a discussion on the nuances of imperial identity and loyalty, see also Philippe Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: divided labor on a Central American banana plantation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 94–95.

<sup>613</sup> Philippe Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work*, 94–95.

<sup>614</sup> *The Workman*, 17 May 1919, 1: thanking Lady Mallet for her charitable activities and her 'motherly kindness to the poor and destitute West Indians.' Detailing her war effort and assistance with founding the British Red Cross.

<sup>615</sup> *The Workman*, 10 May 1919, 4: 'Poor pay by itself is a disaster, but with bad treatment it is misery.'

responded as best they could to these crises by providing soup kitchens and relief homes.<sup>616</sup> Assisting with the cost of burials was also a major part of the services they provided.

When a person died in a poor family, the bereaved would go to neighbours with a saucer of salt, begging for contributions for the burial.<sup>617</sup> The Jamaica Burial Scheme Society was established by Andrew Duffus Mowatt in St. Catherine, Jamaica, on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1901, to relieve the poor from the distress of not being able to afford burial. Before long, there were 160 branches of the society across the island, as well as in Costa Rica, Panama and Cuba.<sup>618</sup> In 1937, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that the chairman of the Port Limon Burial Scheme Society visited the parent society in Jamaica, where the idea had originally been conceived of ‘having a society among Negroes with a six cents per week subscription to provide money to bury the dead decently and for other social purposes. The society now has scores of branches, with tens of thousands of members throughout the West Indies.’<sup>619</sup>

Olive Senior notes that when migrants left the Caribbean they simply took their organisations with them.<sup>620</sup> By the same token, some societies which were first established by migrants in Central America were brought back to the Caribbean when the migrants returned. My research does not indicate a sudden increase in poor relief expenditure on the return of the migrants in 1889. It is likely, as reported by the Inspector General of Police, that the able-bodied took up their old work, while the sick and maimed were afforded temporary care.<sup>621</sup> Furthermore, if affiliated to a friendly society their contributions on the isthmus would have enabled them to gain a little support on their return. The main problem seems to be as those classed as dependents aged and the perceived breadwinner died or did not return from the isthmus. Thus, some cases appeared in the 1890s.

Though my research has been by no means exhaustive, the evidence in the several hundred samples I looked at in all parishes in Jamaica where such data is available, indicate that there was very little direct effect of migration on the numbers and types of people applying for poor

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<sup>616</sup> O’Reggio, ‘Between Alienation and Citizenship’, 72.

<sup>617</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 15.

<sup>618</sup> *The Gleaner*, 11 March 2018, Carolyn Cooper, ‘Funerals Dying a Natural Death?’ <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20180311/carolyn-cooper-funerals-dying-natural-death>, accessed 7 August 2019.

<sup>619</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 August 1937, 14.

<sup>620</sup> Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*, 278.

<sup>621</sup> CO 137/538/46, Despatches, 8 April 1889. Report of Inspector General of Police, 30 March 1889.

relief. The St Thomas Application Books 1897–1902 contain 140 cases.<sup>622</sup> Each page contains an average of 7–8 applications and I sampled the first two pages of every month, giving me an average of 15 cases per month from April 1897 to the end of 1898. This yielded only four relevant cases:

April 1897, Black married man aged 60, labourer, suffering from erysipelas, ¼ acre of land in title of wife Betsy Reid of Georgia, son in Colon, 2 daughters. Poorhouse recommended.

April 1897, Black widower, 60, labourer, suffering from yaws, sores & pains, lived in Colon, recommend 1/6 a week

1898, Thomas McKew, 80 years old, widower, black, labourer, suffering pains and old age, lives in a room given him, son in Colon but nobody heard of him, recommend 1/-

1898, Johanna Dick, 66 year old black single woman, labourer, suffering pains and cramp, alone in a room given to her, only son died in Colon, recommend poorhouse.

In the parish of St. James at a meeting of the parochial board on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1885, the Almshouse Report included among its list of inmates one Mrs. Clarke,

whose husband left her for Colon months ago, now acutely rheumatic and reported by Dr. Cooke and Detective Ellis as having no one to attend on her, or help her. She was sent to the almshouse because there was no room at the hospital.<sup>623</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> July 1889, eight persons were added to the pauper roll, one of whom was,

male, black, 19 years of age, awarded 1/- for 3 months, single, labourer, leg injured at Colon. With mother, struck off [the role], [3 months] expired.<sup>624</sup>

Finally, the applications for the parish of St. Mary in 1891 show just one applicant,

Margery Williams, from Islington, single, female, black, 26 years old, a labourer, good health but lost her right hand, one child 6 years old, father supposed to be dead in Colon. Applicant's father is in a position to support her, recommended 1/-.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/15/17 – St Thomas Application Books 1897–1902 (140 cases).

<sup>623</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/3/5, St. James Parochial Board Minutes 1874–1885, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1885.

<sup>624</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/3/9/53, St. James Poor Relief Register 1889–1897 (802 cases).

<sup>625</sup> Jamaica Archives, 2/16/67, St. Mary Applications 1887–1895.

The cases in St. Thomas and St. James parishes show that the effects of the death of a migrant on his family might not be immediately felt, but as they aged and became less able to support themselves their situations deteriorated. Whenever a woman requested poor relief she was questioned about the whereabouts of the perceived breadwinner, likewise in the case of elderly men or women. Though the poor law authorities had tended to conflate the topics of migration and desertion, fearing that the former would encourage the latter, the evidence from the rescue missions of 1889 was that repatriated migrants returned to their communities and resumed their customary occupations.<sup>626</sup> Records for Kingston, Jamaica, would likely have shown greater numbers, given the greater population and higher percentage of migrants hailing from there, but these are no longer extant. In the absence of this evidence, we can conclude that overall the island-wide return of migrants did not make a large dent in poor relief funding.

The effect of this migration on poor relief in Barbados was even more negligible than in Jamaica, which accurately reflects their much lower numbers on the Isthmus. The Case Books of the Inspector of Poor for St. Michael, Barbados, cover the period 1880–1895. Out of 157 applicants sampled, only thirteen cases referenced migration.<sup>627</sup> Unlike the cases reported in Jamaica, none mentioned Colon or Panama, and though no destination dominated, four mentioned Demerara and Trinidad, reflecting the traditional routes of Barbadian migration.

Bonham Richardson's research shows that lowered wages and the sugar depression were hitting the 'turns' meetings and friendly societies hard at the turn of the century, but that the economy was resuscitated by Panama remittances and the return of those who had done well for themselves, and societies formerly struck off returned with renewed vigour.<sup>628</sup> New friendly societies were established, often by returnees who had formed their own in Panama. In Barbados, each year of the Panama construction saw new friendly societies formed – 58 in 1907, and 51 in 1908. By 1908 the total membership had more than trebled from 1904 when construction began, and Richardson claims it was likely that almost every black family on the island was represented

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<sup>626</sup> CO 137/538/46, 8th April 1889 – Inspector General of Police to the Colonial Secretary, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1889.

<sup>627</sup> Barbados Archives, Records of the Board of Poor Law Guardians, Inspectors' Case Reports, Jan. 1881–Nov. 1891, 11 vols. Sampled from 1881–1889.

<sup>628</sup> Bonham Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 92, 205–206.

on the friendly society roles.<sup>629</sup> ‘The 1921 census found that 156,312 people lived in households belonging to a friendly society. That was 94 percent of the population.’<sup>630</sup>

The distribution of friendly societies in St. Michael parish increased from 57 in 1906, to 78 in 1907 and 102 in 1914.<sup>631</sup> This increase in friendly society activity was occurring across the island, and as it was clearly providing an alternative means of support for the poor, the vestries would, with their customary strictness, expect to be informed of relief applicants’ membership statuses.

The vestries of St. Thomas and Christchurch parishes complained that friendly society members were leaving their aged in almshouses instead of looking after them. While there may have been some instances of this, it is also clear that friendly societies were going a long way to ease poor relief dependence. A Jamaican magistrate may have somewhat overstated the case when he declared that friendly societies in Barbados had reduced pauperism to nil.<sup>632</sup> Nevertheless, the positive effect was clearly noticeable in that they prevented the class above the absolute poor from slipping into dependence. This conclusion is supported by the Case Books of the Inspector of Poor for St. Michael for 1905, 1910 and 1915. The notes for the first 52 cases of 1905 do not mention that any applicant was a member of a benevolent society or receiving support from any other organisation. The same is true of a sample of 56 cases in 1910 and 66 in 1915. Beginning with the September quarter of 1907, the application form was amended to specifically include the question – was the applicant a member of a benefit society? This would indicate that friendly society aid was significant enough that vestries took steps to prevent overlap with poor relief. Of the 593 cases for that quarter, only 13 applicants stated membership, and only those who were found to be in arrears with their dues were afforded some relief. This suggests that friendly societies were able to take care of their members and that members did not need to apply for parish support. There is no way of knowing whether the children of any of the elderly applicants were themselves friendly society members; but given that these societies operated within limited localities, subterfuge would not have been easy to maintain.

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<sup>629</sup> Bonham Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 205.

<sup>630</sup> Noel Maurer, ‘The Friendly Society’, *The Power and the Money: The economics and politics of instability, empire, and energy, with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean*, Author’s Blog, 31 December 2009, <https://noelmaurer.typepad.com/aab/2009/12/the-friendly-society.html>, accessed 13 November 2018.

<sup>631</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 79.

<sup>632</sup> *Daily Gleaner* 10 October 1893, Interview with Mr. Reece, Resident Magistrate for St. Ann, Jamaica.

Thus far, friendly societies were looked upon favourably by colonial authorities, though not without a measure of concern. How could black men and women manage the collective financial responsibility without succumbing to the temptation to defraud the members or, at the very least, make unwise decisions? This was the apprehension which led to criticism of one aspect of friendly society culture, which was the annual distribution of the Christmas bonus. If a member did not make a claim for the year, they received a bonus pay out at Christmas time, enabling them to buy a little extra to celebrate the festive season.

At the time of the second and far larger canal migration (c.1905–1914), friendly societies in the West Indies were in credit and so the tradition of Christmas bonuses increased. Scholars have disagreed over whether or not increased wealth ushered in a period of capitalist individuality to the detriment of the mutual support that had been so vital to the survival of the working classes. It is Bonham Richardson's argument that 'Panama money' as it was styled, destroyed the 'harmonizing' aspects of friendly societies and that the bonus system discouraged members from claiming sickness relief for their dependents when it was needed, while Aviston Downes argues that bonus payments did not negatively affect these services.

The registrar of friendly societies in Barbados condemned what he saw as the diversion of funds from their proper purpose of relieving the sick and distressed and burial, towards more short-sighted and irresponsible purposes. An observer criticised the tradition as being typical of the African's indifference to tomorrow.<sup>633</sup> Authorities felt the surplus should be reinvested, but the media hit back saying that some \$50,000 went into the pockets of the poor and merchants. Shops advertised promotions for 'bonus week' and offered friendly society officers previews of their stocks of Christmas cards, in anticipation that they would buy in bulk for their members. Thus, the activities of friendly societies made a visible impact on their neighbourhoods, which would have encouraged others to join and enjoy the advantages of membership.

If indeed the bonus system was contributing to dependants being neglected in almshouses, the vestries took steps to prevent this by ensuring poor relief recipients were not undisclosed members of friendly societies and by refusing to discharge a deceased person from the almshouse for burial unless the family paid arrears for maintenance if they were friendly society members. Downes' statistics show an increase in burials being performed at friendly society

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<sup>633</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 91.



expense, even as bonus pay-outs increased.<sup>634</sup> However, this does not entirely disprove the accusation that members may have avoided claiming sickness relief for dependents in order to secure the annual bonus. This question can only be answered by looking at the statistics over a much longer period and scrutinising the accounts of the friendly societies in detail. What Downes' research does show, however, is that parents of deceased children were unable to obtain the full cost of the burial from one society, not because of that society diverting its funds to bonuses, but simply because funerals were expensive, so parents strategized by claiming from several societies to meet the costs.

If we look into the history not only of friendly societies but charity and society, we see that Christmas bonus or treat was something normal and accepted, not an innovation due to Panama money. In 1896 the parochial board of St. Thomas parish proposed paying 1/6 to each outdoor pauper in addition to their weekly allowances, and to spend £3 on a dinner for the poorhouse inmates, the total cost being around £13.<sup>635</sup> The Board of Supervision reported, 'we thought that the matter was one which should be arranged for by private charity...'<sup>636</sup> Several church-run charities in the West Indies had always worked to provide a meal and a new suit of clothing for the poor at Christmas time. The idea of friendly societies doing so was by no means unprecedented. Wells noted that this was a long-standing tradition among English societies.<sup>637</sup> The only difference appears to be that friendly societies in the West Indies were operating increasingly free of clerical oversight, and from 1880 onwards the majority were independently run by the members for the members. It is possible that this loss of oversight irritated authorities, who failed to see any benefit in the Christmas bonus system, which one writer described as an irresponsible 'blowout'.<sup>638</sup>

On the contrary, at the height of poverty, post-war recession and labour strikes in Panama, *The Workman* reported very favourably on the Colon Love Chariot Benevolent Society which, though less than two years old, was able to advertise a Christmas bonus for its members. This was reported as unprecedented in the annals of any society on the isthmus, and taken as a measure of the society's success and good management.<sup>639</sup> 'This is a popular movement

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<sup>634</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 92.

<sup>635</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Supervision, Jamaica Departmental Reports, 1896–97, 6.

<sup>636</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Supervision, Jamaica Departmental Reports, 1896–97, 6.

<sup>637</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 50.

<sup>638</sup> Harry A. Franck, *Roaming Through the West Indies*, (London: Blue Ribbon Books, 1920), 370, quoted in Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 91.

<sup>639</sup> *The Workman*, 13 December 1919, 3. Page 5 also carried an advertisement for Christmas cards, in which

springing from the masses themselves, and the people know quite well what they want,' stated a writer for the *Weekly Recorder* in Barbados.<sup>640</sup> Clearly it was not only about wealth, but about conviviality, community spirit and celebration – one day in the year where people were released from the cares of relentless toil, as essential to emotional wellbeing as food and medicine were to physical wellbeing.

The Christmas and New Year processions organised by lodges were described in newspapers as exciting spectacles. An observer in Jamaica commenting on the Anglican and Wesleyan friendly societies wrote,

[they] promote charity and good fellowship, and provide relief for the sick and indigent among a large section of the people. Their annual processions, composed of hundreds of well-dressed men and women, with flags, banners, and streamers, have something solemn and imposing...<sup>641</sup>

In addition to annual Christmas and New Year processions, parades were organised at other times, such as on Emancipation Day. In Demerara, for example, on 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of emancipation, processions of various friendly societies were reportedly held at night, with entertainment and illuminations.<sup>642</sup> When the Future Hope Lodge of Good Shepherds was founded in Panama, they paraded in full regalia to the consulate to toast the queen, address the consul, then proceed to a farm outside of the city for dancing and athletics.<sup>643</sup> These fellowship aspects were an important part of maintaining morale among the poor.<sup>644</sup>

The effect of these networks of friendly societies across Central America and wherever West Indian labourers went, cannot be under estimated. They provided the only formal means of self-

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the company offered previews of stock to secretaries of friendly societies who would purchase many cards to send to their members.

<sup>640</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 95, quoting from *Weekly Recorder*, 2 January 1909, p7.

<sup>641</sup> Henry Breen, 'Fifty Years of Religion in the West Indies' in *The Daily Gleaner*, 1 January 1881.

<sup>642</sup> *The Daily Gleaner*, 3 August 1888.

<sup>643</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, 26 September 1887.

<sup>644</sup> While such processions of affiliated lodges were lauded, there were others such as The Landship which were largely disapproved of and whose activities were curtailed by acts of assembly. See Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 95–98 for a discussion of the distaste in which it was held by the governor and members of the assembly for its quasi-military uniforms and rules, and its exuberant African-influenced music and dances. For a more detailed discussion on the survival of 'landships' in Barbados, see Philip W. Scher, 'Landship, Citizenship, Entrepreneurship and the Ship of State in Barbados: Developing a Heritage Consciousness in a Postcolonial State', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 75, No. 3/4, 2016, 313–351.

help for the poor in Panama, and it is significant that one of the most widespread and long-lived of these was established by a black working man. Wells wrote that it was commonly and erroneously supposed that Andrew Duffus Mowatt's 1901 burial society was the first friendly society set up by the poor for the poor. Research has shown that friendly societies began much earlier, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But the fact that the idea prevailed that none had been independently set up before Mowatt's indicates that scepticism about the abilities of the black working class to unite for their benefit lingered in some quarters well into the twentieth century. The *Pittsburgh Courier* described Mowatt as 'an uneducated black man'.<sup>645</sup> He was a master cooper and, as Wells wrote, appeared to have been a working man all his life and to have enjoyed the utmost respect within his church and his community.<sup>646</sup>

When the current registrar of friendly societies in Jamaica was conducting historical research a decade ago, elders informed him that Mowatt was active across the island encouraging membership in the wake of the 1938 labour unrest which highlighted the poverty-stricken condition of the masses.<sup>647</sup> In fact, Mowatt died in 1934 but had achieved such iconic status that acts performed by the society became attributed to him personally in the minds of elderly members who heard of his work from their elders. It was his initiative and dedication that facilitated others to continue doing what he started. The Jamaica Burial Scheme Society exists island-wide to this day and was the model for many subsequent societies.<sup>648</sup>

Though some friendly societies, and the lodges in particular, were satellites of older established lodges in Britain and the USA, the initiative to reach out to these networks and establish branches among West Indians was entirely the initiative of West Indians. They responded to their abandonment in Panama by tapping into international friendly society and lodges to establish branches which helped them to consolidate their cultural autonomy and would prove important vehicles for the exchange of ideas beyond the benevolent aspects of friendly society activities.

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<sup>645</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 August 1937, 14.

<sup>646</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 15.

<sup>647</sup> Mr. Erroll A. Gallimore, Registrar of Cooperatives and Friendly Societies (personal communication, 5 August 2019). Mr. Gallimore also informed me that a statue was erected to Mowatt in Spanish Town, and a commemorative stamp produced in 2001, facilitated by the fact that the post mistress general's father was the then registrar.

<sup>648</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 16.

## Cultural and Political Functions of Friendly Societies

Friendly societies espoused certain moral codes which, I maintain, were products of a Caribbean cultural set of values rather than a mere imitation of the British values they resembled. This aspect of friendly society organisation was applauded by authorities, but as the societies began to increasingly concern themselves with the wider causes of poverty, anxieties began to surface. The expansion from immediate relief of distress to a greater focus on the causes of underdevelopment and a greater concern over employment rights and social equity, gave rise to anxieties among the ruling classes. This section will show how the friendly societies dealt with these tensions and steered a path of their own determination.

As one writer noted in an English news article in 1893, friendly societies were not mere convivial bodies or insurance companies. Principles were inculcated through rituals and lectures ‘which tend to raise the tone of life...’<sup>649</sup> They acted as a check on the behaviour of the members and as an example and source of guidance to the locality. They were able to ‘strengthen members intellectually’ through the duties required of nominated officers and through encouraging members to take an active role in public life. This, according to the article, had enable some to reach higher positions in life.<sup>650</sup> Although this article originally appeared in the *Bristol Mercury*, the decision of *The Gleaner’s* editors to reproduce it suggests they felt it applied also to West Indian society.

Several points are encapsulated in the observer’s words: the traditions, the leadership and the localised setting. To understand these points, we must look at what these rituals and morals were, how the leadership operated, and thus how friendly societies as a whole contributed to working class cohesion and development and how they were understood and regulated by authorities. Downes’s work covers this topic extensively, so his main conclusions will be summarised below before moving on to discuss wider aspects of politicisation.

The annual bonus already discussed was one of the standing traditions. By not reinvesting the annual surplus in the Savings Bank, money remained in circulation within the black community, and as friendly societies were increasingly run autonomously by the working classes rather than

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<sup>649</sup> *The Daily Gleaner*, 28 October 1893.

<sup>650</sup> ‘Friendly Societies – What are They?’ *Bristol Mercury*, reproduced in *The Daily Gleaner*, 28 October 1893.

by clergy, anxieties mounted among the ruling classes, particularly in Barbados, of the prospect of black financial independence. These anxieties led to criticism and a media debate between the newspaper of the black middle class and that of white interests. The Poor Law Inspector for St. Philip parish praised the church-run friendly society and criticised the rest as ‘bubbles led by dishonest men’, and the *Agricultural Reporter* stated that they lacked insurance and integrity.<sup>651</sup> *The Times* hit back against these criticisms, ‘Church Societies cannot do much; they are handicapped by Vicars...We indignantly repudiate the unfounded remarks by the Poor Law Inspector.’<sup>652</sup>

The 1880 Friendly Societies Act in Barbados appointed an official registrar and encouraged friendly societies to register and submit certified tables of members’ contributions. An amended act of 1891 made these conditions compulsory. A further act proposed in 1904 aimed at forcing smaller societies to amalgamate and to operate from fixed abodes with signs affixed outside to make them more visible to officials and enable impromptu inspections. Amalgamated societies would be more financially secure and easier to audit. The governor felt that two per parish would be quite sufficient and would prevent what he saw as ‘an unnecessary amount of money... frittered away in paying a crowd of office holders’.<sup>653</sup>

The local nature of friendly societies was vital to their survival. They met at night, so the journey to the meeting house had to be accessible and safe. They had their own system of checks for honesty, such as ‘sick visitors’ who could visit unexpectedly to check up on medical relief claimants, but also bring comfort and relief to them.<sup>654</sup> When a funeral was to take place, marshals were sent out to inform the people and members were required to attend in the uniform of the society.<sup>655</sup> They had strict moral codes. Single members could not be promiscuous or living in unmarried unions. Some only admitted married people, and early societies in Antigua would make the gift of a piglet to a couple on the birth of a baby born in wedlock.<sup>656</sup> They promoted temperance, proscribed gambling and expected law-abiding behaviour from their members. Breaking these codes could result in a warning for a first offence and expulsion for

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<sup>651</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 83.

<sup>652</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 83.

<sup>653</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 22. Governor Hodgson, *Official Gazette* 23 January 1901-1902, No.60.

<sup>654</sup> Well, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, 10.

<sup>655</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 94.

<sup>656</sup> Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 109.

repeated or more serious transgressions. It was likely that the fear of ‘losing face’ helped regulate members’ behaviour, as no one wanted to be shamed in front of their neighbours.

The 1904 act, if allowed to stand, would interfere with the members’ ability to meet regularly, to engage in social activities and to oversee the conduct of both members and officers. Friendly societies vigorously petitioned against these moves, arguing that they could not erect signboards on rented rooms, unlike in England where societies tended to own their own buildings. In Panama, for example, *The Workman* openly advertised the meeting places and times of each friendly society, so within the communities concerned transparency of information was quite satisfactory to the members. In Barbados, the government backed down and amended the act. The act had also sought to restrict the remuneration of officers to one tenth of the society’s funds, but this again was resisted and the new act settled on one seventh. Downes suggests this may have been the friendly societies’ first taste of the success of petitioning politics.<sup>657</sup>

The intellectual strengthening of members mentioned in the *Bristol Mercury* was through the accounting and administrative duties required of nominated officers and through encouraging members to take an active role in public life. This, according to the article, had enabled some to reach higher positions in life.<sup>658</sup> In Barbados, the friendly societies were led by upper working class or lower middle class property owners who not only provided administrative and organisational skills but whose integrity was guaranteed by their stake in the community.<sup>659</sup> From the members’ point of view, their chosen leaders gave credence and could be trusted to represent their interests. Downes described it as a symbiotic relationship whereby the leader lent skills and respectability to the society while the fees and special benefits to leaders helped them secure the material base for respectability.<sup>660</sup>

The amended act of 1905 limited property ownership to one acre per society.<sup>661</sup> This would have been a further inducement not to amalgamate. Indeed, nearly fifty years later the secretary of state was recommending steps to curtail the prevalence of ‘diminutive societies’, further to the Wells report that such small societies afforded less security to members, and could neither afford

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<sup>657</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 87.

<sup>658</sup> ‘Friendly Societies – What are They?’ *Bristol Mercury*, reproduced in *The Daily Gleaner*, 28 October 1893.

<sup>659</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 84.

<sup>660</sup> Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 87.

<sup>661</sup> For different scholarly opinions on the reason for this restriction, see Aviston Downes, *Barbados 1880-1914*, 93–94, Bonham Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados*, 208, and Hilary Beckles, *A history of Barbados: from Amerindian settlement to Caribbean single market*, (Cambridge, 2006) 151–152.

good benefits nor withstand a sudden drain.<sup>662</sup> Wells reported that in spite of the efforts of registrars in various colonies to persuade smaller societies to amalgamate, there was considerable resistance to such suggestions. ‘The law does not in any colony give the Government powers of compulsory amalgamation.’<sup>663</sup>

Though friendly societies were avowedly non-partisan, they were not by any means non-political. Each society and lodge traditionally held an annual parade which included an address of loyalty and gratitude to the Crown and governor. In the Bahamas, for example, the lodges used this opportunity to bring concerns to the governor’s attention.<sup>664</sup> In Panama they gave the address to the consul, petitioned the United Fruit Company and met the US governor in person to raise their concerns. In the Bahamas they petitioned against the exclusion of black men from the civil service, as Amy Bailey would do in Jamaica about forty years later.<sup>665</sup>

Therefore, what began as insurance clubs for sickness, distress and burial of poor labourers grew to encompass wider issues of social improvement: fairer pay and conditions; greater educational and employment opportunities, and political equality. Friendly societies shared the duties of the poor law authorities but took the concept of ‘self-help’ to a level never imagined by those who called for self-help, railed against pauperisation but did nothing to materially assist the black poor to attain the ill-defined concept of self-reliance within a system so stacked against them. Opinions were mixed in government circles, but with measures for regulation in place, friendly societies accepted a modicum of oversight and enjoyed grudging respect from some quarters. They were not revolutionary, and in general did not encourage confrontation but rather cordiality and patience. However, no study of them would be complete without a mention of one of the most influential organisations of black self-determination in the twentieth century, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and how its growth was facilitated by the friendly society movement.

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<sup>662</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, ‘Despatch’, 1 and Paragraphs 72–75, 25–26.

<sup>663</sup> Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies*, Paragraph 74, 26.

<sup>664</sup> Howard Johnson, ‘Friendly Societies in the Bahamas 1834–1910’, 187.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

## **The Politics of Self-Determination: Friendly Societies and the Universal Negro Improvement Association**

### Ethos and activities of the UNIA

The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was founded in Jamaica in 1914 by Marcus Garvey and his first wife Amy Ashwood Garvey. He migrated to the USA in 1916 where the movement developed, while she later travelled to London and around the world promoting other pan-African initiatives. The UNIA was, at the most basic level, a friendly society providing insurance for its members and death benefits, but ideologically it went way beyond that in its ambitions for the liberation of black people the world over from white oppression. It set out to achieve self-determination for all of Africa's people on the continent and in the diaspora, with the ultimate aim of being able to repatriate to a liberated Africa.

Social schemes included feeding the poor, founding scouts and juvenile chapters, supporting training opportunities, and hosting religious services, theatrical entertainments and sporting events. But the economic self-reliance which Garvey sought could not be effected through social assistance programmes alone. Thus, the UNIA encouraged investment in black owned businesses and capitalist ventures, in order to keep wealth in circulation within the community and build a solid economic foundation.

In promoting conservative family values and honouring the black woman as mother and guardian of the family, it further coincided with the ethos of other charitable organisations, but it differed in its simultaneous vision of women as equal players in the work of the organisation and their access to the hierarchies of the society. This also set it apart from lodges which did not begin to recognise female chapters until the twentieth century, and from friendly societies which, though numerically dominated by female members, had a largely male leadership.

In line with one of its ten-point founding objectives 'to administer to and assist the needy,' the UNIA established health initiatives such as the Black Cross Nurses who provided health and hygiene advice and care to black communities unable to access equal care from mainstream health services. It also served to promote the nursing profession among black women, and as such it recalls other social initiatives by religious sisters and lay women who found personal and professional fulfilment in the opportunities afforded them via their charitable work.



Women like Amy Bailey, Mary Morris Knibb and Una Marson had been strongly influenced by Garveyism, though they never formally joined the organisation. The Housecraft Training Centre Bailey later established was also a meeting house of the UNIA.<sup>666</sup> The women of the UNIA were central to its operations. Bailey mentioned witnessing a procession in which two women took the lead,

It is a great pity that no evidence has been given of the historic march down King Street on 1st August 1929 when thousands of orderly people lined the streets as the procession headed by Madame Vinton Davis and Madame de Mena on their charges, followed by the officers of the UNIA and its uniformed organizations, marched slowly down King Street, brought up in the rear by the great man dressed in a General's uniform riding in an open car with the dignity and solemnity that befitted the occasion. It is one of the high spots of my memory.<sup>667</sup>

Henrietta Vinton Davis was the UNIA's international organiser and later President-General. When she gave a lecture in Panama in 1919, the seating capacity of 2,500 was reportedly exceeded by an equal number gathered outside the theatre.<sup>668</sup>

The UNIA culture was one of conservative values and sober living. Members wore military style uniforms, suits with sashes, and held parades through major towns and cities. As mentioned, uniformed parades were a facet of friendly societies and lodges, and had an impressive effect on viewers. Likewise, the pageantry of the UNIA, though mocked by Garvey's detractors, was an important tool in enthusing onlookers. Amy Bailey said, referring to the ranks, titles and pageantry, 'I witnessed one such ceremony at Edelweiss Park. It was colourful and exciting and made one feel proud.'<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> *The Star*, 3 February 1988, 'Citation to the Marcus Garvey Award for Excellence' presented to Amy Bailey 29 January 1988.

<sup>667</sup> *The Gleaner* 21 October 1978, 8. 'Moments with Marcus Garvey'.

<https://sites.google.com/site/amybaileyjamaicawriting/history-lessons/marcus-garvey> accessed 7 August 2019.

<sup>668</sup> *Panama Star and Herald* 29 December 1919. 'Crowds listen to Miss Davis.' Reporting the visit of Henrietta Vinton Davis to Panama, where she urged unity. <http://marcusgarvey.com/?p=3719>. Accessed 28 June 2019.

<sup>669</sup> *The Gleaner* 21 October 1978, 8. 'Moments with Marcus Garvey'.

<https://sites.google.com/site/amybaileyjamaicawriting/history-lessons/marcus-garvey> accessed 7 August 2019. Edelweiss Park in Kingston was the headquarters of the UNIA in Jamaica.

## How the UNIA flourished

The UNIA spread its message through its own newspaper *Negro World* but it was founded upon the organisation of churches and friendly societies, described as ‘the historical backbone organizations of the black community.’<sup>670</sup> At its inception in 1914, Garvey called it a ‘universal confraternity among the race’ and in July 1918 the certificate of incorporation said its first goal was to ‘promote and practise the principles of Benevolence, and for the protection and social intercourse of its members...’.<sup>671</sup> The constitution stated that it was ‘a social, friendly, humanitarian, charitable, educational, institutional, constructive and expansive society, and is founded by persons desiring the utmost to work for the general uplift of the Negro people of the world.’

It spread successfully by means of links it successfully established with members and officials of friendly societies and lodges.<sup>672</sup> The UNIA was established in Panama in 1918, and after the USA and Cuba, Panama had the most chapters.<sup>673</sup> In Georgetown, Guyana, in 1919 a meeting was held at the Scottish Flower Lodge to inaugurate a branch of the UNIA. Attendees included a number of clerks, mechanics and porters with the object to ‘establish fraternity among the members of the Negro race in this colony.’<sup>674</sup> July 1920 in Bocas del Toro on the Panama border with Costa Rica, visitors from the Bocas and Bastimentos branches of the UNIA arrived at the Almirante Mechanic Lodge Hall for the purpose of electing delegates.<sup>675</sup> Marcus Garvey’s papers mention the passing of Reuben Bethel of Nassau, Bahamas. He had been a freemason, founding member of the UNIA in the Bahamas, and founder of the Union Mercantile Association – an association to end discrimination in transport against black passengers and to ensure fair transport for perishable goods. The Union Mercantile Association was associated with the

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<sup>670</sup> Quito J. Swan, ‘Bermuda Looks to the East: Marcus Garvey, the UNIA, and Bermuda, 1920-1931’, *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean and Its Diasporas*, Spring 2010, Vol. 13 Issue 1, 29–61, 35.

<sup>671</sup> Robert A. Hill (ed.), Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920*, Universal Negro Improvement Association (Duke University Press, 1983), lxxxiv.

<sup>672</sup> Robert A. Hill (ed.), Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920*, Universal Negro Improvement Association (Duke University Press, 1983), lxxxv, fn.104.

<sup>673</sup> Robert A. Hill (ed.), Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920*, Universal Negro Improvement Association (Duke University Press, 1983), ccxlv.

<sup>674</sup> *Daily Chronicle*, 20 April 1919. Marcus Garvey Papers Volume XI, 197.

<sup>675</sup> *Central American Press*, Bocas, 17 July 1920. Marcus Garvey Papers Volume XI, 775.

prominent Elk's Lodge.<sup>676</sup> These activities show the intersections between lodges, friendly societies, the UNIA and other movements for change.

Garvey personally travelled around Central America where his message gave oppressed labourers a sense of hope and belonging. Though they could ill spare the money, by purchasing shares in UNIA commercial ventures, the United Fruit Company and Panama Canal workers demonstrated that they could visualise a future far removed from the hand-to-mouth existence they currently endured. The UNIA distributed funds to relieve the suffering strikers and their families at Panama, and for distressed women at Colon.<sup>677</sup>



Front page of *The Workman*, 19 August 1919.<sup>678</sup>

<sup>676</sup> Robert A. Hill (ed.), Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910-1920*, Universal Negro Improvement Association (Duke University Press, 1983), cxlv and 707.

<sup>677</sup> Marcus Garvey Papers Volume XI, 703.

<sup>678</sup> Digital Library of the Caribbean, <https://www.dloc.com/AA00027053/00165>, accessed 8 August 2019.

The layout of the front page of this edition of *The Workman* is significant in demonstrating the common and intertwined concerns of West Indians at home and abroad, and of benevolent societies, the UNIA and the general readership. There is a spirit of optimism in the questioning headline ‘Who will help the Negro?’ followed by the answering headline informing readers that the Black Star Line is coming. The Black Star Line was an ambitious UNIA corporate venture to promote economic independence through the purchase of steamships for the transport of goods and passengers around the diaspora and ultimately to Africa. The ships made largely symbolic visits to various ports in Panama, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Cuba, and other countries.<sup>679</sup> This is followed by an article entitled ‘Co-operation vs. Fear: Why not Start Business Enterprises’, by W. Stoute, a Barbadian-born headteacher in the canal zone and leader of the 1920 strikes, explaining that securing small wage increases would not increase prosperity, since they had no control over rising living costs. Rather, he recommended uniting to start businesses thereby gaining real independence. The front page also features ‘Brotherhood News’ from the lodges, news from ‘Our Friendly Societies’, and news about strikes in Jamaica, linking the question of labour rights in the West Indies with that of West Indian labourers in Central America. The whole tone is one of collective self-help, self-reliance and unity of the social, economic and political aspirations of black communities, as expressed through their lodges, friendly societies and UNIA memberships – a collective consciousness from which trade unions and nationalist political parties would emerge.

The UNIA was the first to attempt a revolutionary means not only of ending poverty, but of uplifting an entire ‘race’ from degradation owing to not having any social, national or commercial status anywhere in the world.<sup>680</sup> It did not seek equality in a white system, but a separate system where the two might meet on an equal footing. Friendly societies continue to operate throughout the Caribbean, albeit with greatly reduced impact, and though the UNIA declined after the deportation and death of Marcus Garvey in 1940, in its heyday it boasted over 4 million active members and remains an active organisation today.<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Hannah Foster, ‘Black Star Line (1919-1923)’, 9 March 2014. *Black Past*, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-star-line-1919-1923/>, accessed 8 August 2019.

<sup>680</sup> Robert A. Hill (ed.), Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume XI: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910–1920*, Universal Negro Improvement Association (Duke University Press, 1983), 57.

<sup>681</sup> *Negro World*, 26 February 1921. Quoted in Aminifu R. Harvey, ‘A Black Community Development Model: The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League 1917-19’, *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, Vol. 21, Issue 1, Article 10, 1994, 113–124, 120.

The spirit of cooperation and economic ambition can be seen among the people from the moment of emancipation. Lodges, friendly societies and rotating credit flourished. Adversity caused the demise of many friendly societies but others endured and people established new societies or affiliated lodges and chapters wherever they went. The UNIA which was founded on the principles of a friendly society was influential beyond its membership, looking after the practical interests of the people including that of West Indians abroad, as well as providing ideological inspiration for West Indian political activists of the 1930s.<sup>682</sup> As Keith Hunte states, ‘The development of Black consciousness and identity was an important element underpinning the democratic movement.’<sup>683</sup> Migration certainly had a large role to play in this process. Giving evidence before the Moyne Commission in 1938, the parochial board of St. Catherine, Jamaica, stated its opinion that recent unrest was due in part to the return of several thousand labourers from Central America, Cuba and the USA, amongst whom were ‘many political agitators who had had lessons in those countries.’<sup>684</sup>

Trade unions were illegal in Barbados until 1940, but benevolent societies clearly undertook what would be recognised today as trade union activities. The Lee-Ward Workers’ Association of Barbados stated to the Moyne Commission,

Objectives are to relieve the workers in sickness, death or other distress; provide good housing, nutrition, education, economic security, unemployment pay, good relations between worker and employer, and political expression.<sup>685</sup>

This, along with many other submissions to the commission from across the islands’ public bodies is further evidence that parties advocating self-rule owe their early development to the work of groups which organised around social services and self-help.

Such associations were not confined to the West Indies or the Americas; the spirit, ethos and organising structure was applied wherever the people went. In Britain, for example, the

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<sup>682</sup> Mary Chamberlain, *Empire and nation-building in the Caribbean*, 33–34.

<sup>683</sup> Hunte, Keith, ‘The Struggle for Political Democracy: Charles Duncan O’Neal and the Democratic League’, in Woodville Marshall (ed.) *Emancipation III: Aspects of the post-slavery experience of Barbados*, (Bridgetown, Barbados: National Cultural Foundation and UWI, 1988) 20–38, 21.

<sup>684</sup> CO 950/9450, West India Royal Commission, Working Papers, Written Evidence, Jamaica Vol. 3, Serial Number 137, Memorandum from Chair of Parochial Board of St. Catherine.

<sup>685</sup> CO 950/938, West India Royal Commission, Working Papers, Written Evidence, Barbados: Serial Number 653, Memo of The Lee-Ward Workers’ Association of Barbados, 1.

International Coloured Mutual Aid Association (ICMAA) was set up in 1935 by Caribbean and African seamen in North Shields.<sup>686</sup> It provided for its members in times of need, campaigned for equal employment opportunities for black people, and to effect a change in laws which disadvantaged African and Asian seamen. In a departure from English friendly society norms which were historically single sex, the ICMAA included local white women who took an active role in the society's organisation and activities. Although strictly local in operation, it affiliated to Harold Moody's London-based League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) which was campaigning to challenge the extra-legal but prevalent racial segregation in England's social spaces and in employment. The LCP had a global outlook and was alive to the labour unrest in the West Indies and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, both of which impacted the tone and confidence of the LCP's campaigning.<sup>687</sup>

More research can reveal the extent to which these mutual aid societies of the 1930s, agitating on British soil, filtered into a wider British consciousness around issues of interracial working class solidarity and rights.

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<sup>686</sup> For Vanessa Mongey's research on the connections between West Africa, the Caribbean and England's north east before post-World War II migration, see 'Paths Across Waters: West Indian and West African stories in Tyne & Wear' <https://pathswaters.wixsite.com/tyne>.

<sup>687</sup> David Killingray, "'To do something for the race": Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples', in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian intellectuals in Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) 64.

## CONCLUSION

This study has shown the limitations of parish poor relief; the ways in which the poor negotiated, petitioned and resisted the poor law authorities; and the ways in which they sought to support one another within communities outside of residential institutions. We have looked at how the class above the pauper class organised to stave off poverty through friendly societies; at how women's philanthropy evolved from elite white women's initiatives of self-help for select 'deserving' women, through the interventions of outside agencies in the form of religious orders who organised orphan care on a larger scale and relieved the parishes of the burden of pauper children. And finally, we have looked at the emergence of a black middle class which established training centres and campaigned for equal employment opportunities for black West Indians. The study has also considered the impact of migration on poor relief policies, on black consciousness and the spread of 'radical' ideas, and on the spread of networks of cooperation and upliftment transcending national borders. It has suggested that nationalist politics began with women's organising around relief and self-help.

One hundred years of parish poor relief never went beyond addressing the manifestations of poverty, to addressing its root causes. Since the first almshouses were erected around the 1840s and 1850s, successive visiting committees, poorhouse committees and inspectors periodically attended and reported. Their comments varied little over time: overcrowded, dilapidated buildings, unsuitable locations with inadequate sanitation, no separation of sick and healthy inmates, etc.<sup>688</sup> Some parochial boards requested loans from the central government for improvements, plans were submitted for renovations, but over the course of the century no satisfactory improvements were ever reported. Plans were shelved when loans were not forthcoming, or committees were dissolved and successive committee members were appointed with different priorities.

The reports of the commissions of enquiry of 1875 in Barbados and 1879 in Jamaica seemed to justify foregone conclusions about the poor, and their recommendations were geared towards stricter economy. In Barbados it reinforced the racial hierarchy by removing subsidies for charities which catered to the black masses and by limiting pensions to a small number of white women, while in Jamaica it justified the expansion of a system of industrial schools in an attempt to direct young people into becoming an exploitable source of

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<sup>688</sup> See, for example, Jamaica Archives, 1B/5/1A/73, Votes of Assembly 1865–1866, 84, Report of the Kingston Almshouse Managing Committee. Barbados Archives, St Michael Vestry Minutes, 1878–1883.

agricultural labour. Poverty did not diminish with the introduction of the poor laws because the root economic causes were not addressed. The new laws banned outdoor relief, though it continued in practice partly because the grand central workhouse proposed for Bridgetown, Barbados was never built, and the parochial almshouses remained overcrowded and in a poor condition in both colonies. Refusing all outdoor relief would have been an act of the greatest inhumanity.

The 'Committee on Poor Relief and the Management of Poor Houses in Jamaica, 1938' came to the same dismal conclusions. It reported overcrowding in almshouses in nine out of the fourteen parishes, with an excess of 300 people in Kingston. Almshouses were intended to house the chronic sick and aged, but in fact nearly all inmates were the sick poor, for whom competent treatment was not being provided, as medical facilities were still far from adequate to meet the needs of the poorer classes. The sick poor were forced to travel long distances in some districts, the dispensary was only attended by a doctor once a week, and there were no certified nurses in any of the almshouses.<sup>689</sup>

The Board of Supervision was powerless to enforce change and could only make recommendations and refer a matter to the government as a last resort. Parochial boards were required to meet every quarter but only five parishes were found to have held the required amount of meetings. The committee lamented that increased accommodation and improvement in almshouses rested with the parochial boards who 'are not all willing, or as they would perhaps prefer put it [sic], able, for financial reasons, to face their obligations in this respect.'<sup>690</sup> Overall the cost of administration was judged to be too high. Poor relief absorbed an average of 34.29% of parochial revenue, and up to 59.29% in one parish.<sup>691</sup>

The committee's recommendation was to take poor relief out of the hands of the parochial boards and place it under central administration. The poor relief commissions of the 1870s had made the same recommendation sixty years prior, yet for sixty years there was little change beyond the building of children's homes and lunatic asylums supported by charity and government grants, with a parochial contribution for each child sent there, thereby relieving parishes of poor children who would otherwise have been fostered out or placed, unsuitably, in almshouses. Well-run

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<sup>689</sup> National Library of Jamaica, 'Report of the Committee on Poor Relief and Poor Houses, Jamaica, 1938'.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.



children's homes like Alpha and Belmont were a vast improvement but expensive to run, and reorganisation was recommended.

The poor laws generated a huge amount of written material including letters by and on behalf of the poor, which has allowed historians to read firsthand complaints and entreaties from paupers, as well as the responses of inspectors, medical officers and the board of guardians. Poor families sought ways to mitigate the effects of the oppressive poor relief system upon them, and in some cases their negotiations with the poor law authorities affected individual outcomes, but twentieth century reports such as that by the Jamaican Committee on Poor Relief above indicate that pauper actions did not bring about any policy changes between the 1880s and 1930s. More work needs to be done to analyse the many thousands of cases and miscellaneous letters at the Barbados Archives in order to be able to make more definitive conclusions. But what this study has succeeded in doing is introducing the pauper voice where it was hitherto largely absent, and opening up a field of enquiry in the Caribbean that is already underway in England.

In addition to entreating the inspector and board, paupers sought help from multiple sources, finding individuals and organisations willing to advocate for them. Action on behalf of poor women such as sewing cooperatives, domestic training projects, child welfare and birth control may have been top-down solutions to perceived problems, the success of social projects had to be based on their cooperation, which can be measured by membership numbers and other statistics found in the reports of charities, indicating that those who participated must have derived some benefit.

With non-parochial interventions came a hierarchy of value systems accepted by certain providers and projected onto the poor. This complex topic of the shaping of identity of African Caribbean people cannot be easily defined or untangled. What were African values and what were British values? Which values were Christian and which were middle class? Were values imposed upon and internalised by African Caribbean people, and if so which values did they seek to replace? We have seen that the propensity towards unmarried unions, and the large numbers of illegitimate children provoked criticism from almost every quarter. But there is little evidence to suggest that married unions were exclusively a product of British middle class thinking and alien to all African thought. The research has shown that people sometimes judiciously expressed pious sentiments calculated to appeal to the recipient. Petitioners stressed

their respectability and thus their eligibility for the support they sought.

The black middle classes, while also condemning illegitimacy, challenged social customs in other ways. For example, Amy Bailey openly criticised the hampering nature of a servile adherence to respectability at the expense of uniting to reform society to give black people better opportunities.<sup>692</sup> Bailey and her associates were working from within their class, and their schemes for the improvement of the lives of the poor did not differ much from the suggestions of white women, for example domestic training. But where they differed was in openly calling out the colour bar and calling for talent to be recognised regardless of complexion; for an inclusive civil service, and for appointments, promotions and scholarships to be equally available to black people.

Events in the international arena had a demonstrable influence on West Indian thought, as people were exposed to ideas through travel and migration, and the sharing of information via the media about, for example, the expansion of UNIA appeal beyond the USA. This influence extended to religious life, as, for example, the RSM began to feel their life in Jamaica was too cloistered and that more exposure to developments in other territories was needed. The Union of the Sisters of Mercy in the USA had been formed in 1929, and sisters developed increasingly close ties with a view to eventually joining this union.<sup>693</sup> This was at a time when African Jamaicans were being exposed to the identity politics of the UNIA, and demanding entry into hitherto white reserved domains. If the RSM was to remain a relevant institution it would have to respond to changes in lay society and open up positions within the order and its leadership to all.

While the poor might not have been in a strong position to shape the trajectory of either governmental or non-governmental proposals and measures, strikes are one example of how the working classes made their voices heard. In both the farm workers' strikes of 1919 and the labour uprisings of the 1930s which were pivotal in galvanising social and political change across the Caribbean, the workers allowed middle class men to 'lead', to speak and negotiate on their behalf, but action was taken by collective agreement. For example, official reports state that the strikers in Bocas del Toro were led by a minister, a barber, two tailors, a jeweller and a lawyer, and that they gained some concessions after the consul requested them to write their

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<sup>692</sup> 'What Price Respectability?' *Public Opinion*, 10 July 1937, 10,13.  
<https://sites.google.com/site/amybaileyjamaicawriting> accessed 11 September 2020

<sup>693</sup> Mary Bernadette Little, *You Did It Unto Me*, 233–234.

grievances. Foreign Office correspondence includes the statement that '[They] compromise their case by foolish or erratic measures'.<sup>694</sup> Middle class respectability thus enabled them to campaign and petition on behalf of the poor whose manners and methods were not usually respected or taken seriously.

The leadership of friendly societies operated in much the same way. The leaders lobbied and petitioned in the interests of their members, and through their structures, which began as insurance clubs, facilitated the evolution of new ideologies and the formation of trade unions and political parties. Through these processes, three men have become household names: Marcus Garvey founder of the UNIA, Normal Manley the first Premier, and Alexander Bustamante the first Prime Minister. Their status as National Heroes and fathers of the nation is well known, however their achievements were not effected alone, nor were they the sole accomplishments of men.<sup>695</sup>

I have argued that movements of national liberation began with women's social work intended to ameliorate social and economic disadvantages. Historians concur that friendly societies were the bedrock of black political expression, and they were largely female in membership. Though male dominated in leadership, the friendly societies would not have prospered without the membership fees of women, so women's influence in this case is indirect. However, women's organisations were certainly impactful and intertwined with movements of black consciousness and national liberation. Amy Bailey stated, 'I was very much inspired by the disturbance of '38 because then I was alert to everything that was going on in the country.' They were influenced by the principles of Garveyism as well as British feminism and women's emancipation. To carry out their work effectively they needed to be politically savvy. The Birth Control Association which they began in 1939, was conceived as a means for lower class women to liberate themselves and assert control over their own bodies and reproductive lives. To increase exposure for the organisation they invited Manley to speak at their first convention.<sup>696</sup> Bailey further claims they were responsible for propelling Manley into politics.<sup>697</sup> Later, when Bailey established her Housecraft Training Centre to provide training opportunities for girls going into domestic

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<sup>694</sup> FO 371/3586 no.45696, Correspondence on the 1919 strikes by West Indian banana workers in Boco del Toro, on the Panama/Costa Rica border.

<sup>695</sup> The designation 'National Hero' is Jamaica's highest order of honours, and is held by seven persons. Garvey, Manley and Bustamante are the only twentieth century recipients of the honour.

<sup>696</sup> *Jamaica Journal*, May-July 1986, 10.

<sup>697</sup> Erna Brodber, 'The Pioneering Miss Bailey', 10-11.

service, she invited Bustamante to visit it in an attempt to secure his government's support.<sup>698</sup> This is evidence of charity continuing the methods of its predecessors, petitioning government support for its initiatives – in this case a government of Jamaicans for Jamaicans.

Hence, the groundwork for popular support of Manley and Bustamante in the elections of the 1950s and 1960s was begun decades earlier, as both social workers and friendly societies began mobilising the working classes, articulating new philosophies and social organisation. Thus, both directly and indirectly women as essential and integral players in national movements is clearly established.

The fact that this study has focused on women's mobilisation in Jamaica is not to suggest that it did not happen in Barbados or any other colony. Barbadian women felt just as keen a sense of social responsibility, and set up many charities such as Women's Self Help (1907), the Girls' Industrial Union (1912), the Baby Welfare League (1921), the Women's Social Welfare League (1921), and so on.<sup>699</sup> The key difference was the Barbadian government's resistance to supporting these initiatives and so the pace of change was slower, and only then in response to imperial pressure and the findings of the Moyne Commission. Prior to 1938, public health initiatives were stymied by local objections, for example the Rockefeller Foundation which had done much collaborative work in Jamaica to eliminate hookworm, proposed a campaign to eliminate it in Barbados in 1919, but the governor was forced to turn it down due to a lack of parochial support.<sup>700</sup> While much charitable and benevolent work was undoubtedly carried out in Barbados, this study has aimed primarily to show the intersections of official poor relief and philanthropy during the period 1880 to 1938.

### A Note on Friendly Societies Today

Friendly societies in the early twentieth century were revitalised by the Panama migration. In Barbados, smallholdings increased, as did bank deposits by 88% between 1906 and 1913.<sup>701</sup> This

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>699</sup> For notable women in Barbadian history see Jill Hamilton, *Women of Barbados: Amerindian era to mid 20th Century*, (Barbados: J. Hamilton, 1981). For a discussion on the relationship between philanthropist and recipient, and wider issues around the education and domestic training of children, see Cecilia A. Green, 'The 1938–1939 Moyne Commission in Barbados: investigating the status of children', *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents*, Vol. 11, 2014, Issue 4, 515–535.

<sup>700</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 145. For the work of the Rockefeller in Jamaica see Margaret Jones, *Public Health in Jamaica 1850–1940*.

<sup>701</sup> Noel Maurer, 'The Friendly Society', *The Power and the Money: The economics and politics of instability*,

in turn helped augment friendly society membership from 13,933 members in 1904 to 46,207 members in 1920.<sup>702</sup> Some were able to provide scholarships to the children of their members, and overall literacy was improved to 93% in 1946.<sup>703</sup>

Friendly societies began to decline in Barbados in the late 1940s due to amalgamations and financial unsustainability. While the bonus system remained popular, fewer pay outs were being made for sickness and funerals, which Fletcher attributes to a decreasing need for these services as people looked elsewhere for more remunerative insurance schemes like credit unions and the commercial bank.<sup>704</sup> It may also be due to the introduction of a non-contributory old age pension in Barbados in 1937.<sup>705</sup> One legacy of friendly societies is therefore that they familiarised people with saving schemes giving them confidence to invest in other service providers. Besides banks and building societies, the cooperative model is still important particularly among rural communities. In Jamaica there are 517 Industrial and Provident Societies, 158 Cooperative Societies, and 442 Friendly Societies currently registered.

#### A Note on Poor Relief Today

Today, almshouses have been renamed geriatric hospitals in Barbados, and infirmaries in Jamaica. Poor relief in Jamaica today shares many recognisable characteristics with historic practice, as a conversation with an officer of the St. Catherine Poor Relief Department revealed.<sup>706</sup> Overcrowding is a feature of public institutions and the only way to get admitted to an infirmary is when a resident passes away. Applicants might have to stay in hospital while on the waiting list, but the hospitals are overloaded as well. However, a key departure from historic practice, as articulated by Miss Hanson, the poor relief officer for Spanish Town central, is that the human rights of the applicant are respected and self-determination is key to any decision made about a person's welfare. Hence, the applicant must sign their willingness to enter the infirmary. Resources to help elderly and housebound persons in their own homes is, regrettably,

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*empire, and energy, with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean*, Author's Blog, 31 December 2009, <https://noelmaurer.typepad.com/aab/2009/12/the-friendly-society.html>, accessed 13 November 2018.

<sup>702</sup> Blue Books, Barbados, 1904–1914.

<sup>703</sup> See also *Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006*, UNESCO, 193.

<sup>704</sup> Leonard Fletcher, 'The Decline of Friendly Societies in Barbados', *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1976, 73–85, 81.

<sup>705</sup> See Jeremy Seekings, 'Pa's Pension': The Origins of Non-contributory Old-age Pensions in Late Colonial Barbados, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 35, Issue 4, 2007, 529–547.

<sup>706</sup> Conversation with Miss Clarister Hanson, Poor Relief Officer for Spanish Town Central, St. Catherine Parish Council Poor Relief Department, Jamaica, 23 August 2016.

limited.

Claims for outdoor relief are investigated by a social worker, which involves a visit to the home and in some cases enquiries in the neighbourhood. Relief consists of clothing, food, medicine and a counselling service. The Spanish Town Feeding Programme provides an ‘annual Christmas dinner for indigents’ and meals for homeless people. If a person is willing and able to work, the department will offer them a place on a supervised programme, such as vending or chicken rearing, and encourage them until they are able to set up for themselves.<sup>707</sup>

Home repairs or home building is an expensive request and may only be carried out in an emergency. Otherwise, the applicant may be advised to approach the Catholic charity *Food for the Poor* through the minister of any church. *Food for the Poor* can build them a house, so long as the applicant either owns the land or has a ten-year lease. This stipulation is to prevent landlords from evicting the applicant and seizing the house.<sup>708</sup> This shows us that religious affiliation and practice remain important means of accessing aid, and poor relief continues to function through a collaboration between state and charitable provision, in order to meet the demands of caring for the poor.

Though Catholicism remains a minority faith in Jamaica, its most far-reaching achievement has been in education.<sup>709</sup> Direct relief to the poor began with the establishment of *Food for the Poor* in 1983, which has grown to be the largest charity in Jamaica, providing a variety of essential services and is well supported by people of all classes. Celebrity and corporate sponsorship of local initiatives is also important, but the contribution of local volunteer work should not be overlooked, as it is still an important means of achieving social service objectives. For example, in August 2018 members of the Barbados Defence Force undertook a five-month assignment to assist in the upgrade of the geriatric hospital.<sup>710</sup>

In 1992, Michael Manley, the then prime minister of Jamaica, established Labour Day as a day of volunteering, with three stated objectives: to enhance the dignity of labour, to inspire a spirit of community development, and to encourage solidarity of Jamaicans working, building and

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<sup>707</sup> Ibid. Also leaflet *St. Catherine Poor Relief Department: An Introduction to our Department*.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> Conversation with Archdeacon Peter Espeut, Catholic Archdiocese, Kingston, Jamaica, 22 August 2016.

<sup>710</sup> [www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/renovations-geriatric-hospital-under-way](http://www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/renovations-geriatric-hospital-under-way) accessed 20 August 2018.

sharing together. The 1<sup>st</sup> May had been an existing public holiday throughout the British Caribbean as Empire Day, but Norman Manley had officially changed it in 1960 to mark the first wave of working class strikes in 1938. By taking a colonial era commemoration and adapting it to reflect the national interest, Manley was making a strong public statement, through which we are presented with a very visible example of how, in multiple arenas of public and private life, people utilised the trappings of Empire in modified forms to accommodate the circumstances of a uniquely Caribbean experience.

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