

**The University of Hull**

**Slave Rebellions in the Discourse of British Anti-Slavery**

**being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**in the University of Hull**

**by**

**Gelien Matthews – BA – History**

**September 2002.**

## **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to many individuals in bringing this body of scholarship to the stage at which it presently stands. First, I must express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor at the University of Hull, Professor David Richardson. His unfailing concern for my well being, his support of every academic adventure I embarked on during my three years at Hull, his patient, candid and useful criticism of the preparatory drafts of the thesis and his astute suggestions for surmounting the challenges that I faced as a research student have been noted and deeply appreciated. I am also grateful to the meticulous scrutiny with which my second supervisor, Professor David Eltis of Queens University Canada, perused the early drafts of chapters that form the basis of the present thesis. To the two secretaries who served Professor Richardson during my stay at Hull, the ever-efficient Gill Craig and the very pleasant and helpful Vikki Magee, I say thank you.

I am also indebted to the University of Hull for the Black Diaspora Scholarship that maintained me financially during my three-year studentship and to the School of Economics, University of Hull, which also contributed to my financial support. I say thanks also to the Phillip Reckitt Trust Fund for sponsoring part of my research trip to Barbados, Jamaica and Guyana at the end of my first year of postgraduate studies in 2000 and to Arnold Matthew Publications who also contributed generously to that research trip. My gratitude goes out as well to the trustees of the David Nicholls Memorial Trust Fund who awarded me a bursary in 2002 making it possible for me to conduct research for the thesis at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the Angus Library at Regent's College, Oxford. I am also thankful to Dr. Diana Paton, Mrs. Majorie Davis and other personnel of the Society for Caribbean Studies who offered me two bursaries that enabled me to attend and present papers at their seminars and

conferences of 2000 and 2001.

For the families who accommodated me in their homes during the field trips I made to conduct research for the thesis, thank you very much. These families are Margaret and Owen Minnot of Hope Pastures Jamaica, Margaret and Anthony Christy of St. Phillip Barbados, Janice and John Woolford of Demerara Guyana, Dr. Christine Ayorinde of Jack Straw Lane of Oxford, England and Chris Essilfie of Hillsborough Court London, England.

Finally, I am especially thankful to Professor Bridget Brereton of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus who believed in my ability to make some useful contribution to this body of scholarship and who took the first steps in making my studies at Hull a reality. And of course, I must say thanks to God Almighty, my constant help and companion. He is the one who orchestrates from the beginning to the end my every endeavour. I give him the highest praise for the favours he has bestowed on me.

This study is dedicated to Aisha, Tewana, Coreisha, Abiola, Sabrina, Orlanda, Avril, Kizzy and also Fana Zulu; 1997/1999 5c students of the Success Laventille Composite School of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.



<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGES</b>
<b>Section 1/ Chapter 1</b>	<b>6 - 46</b>
<b>Context and Approach</b>	
<b>Section 2/Chapter 2</b>	<b>47 - 88</b>
<b>Agitating the Question</b>	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>89 - 135</b>
<b>The Other Side of Slave Revolts</b>	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>136 - 186</b>
<b>Loaded With Deadly Evidence</b>	
<b>Chapter 5 /Apocalyptic Warning</b>	<b>187 - 246</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>247 - 251</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>252 - 277</b>

## **Section 1**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Context and Approach**

The title of this thesis is “Slave Rebellions in the Discourse of British Anti-Slavery”. The study is located within the broad history of British West Indian slavery and its two central themes are the British anti-slavery movement and the major nineteenth century slave revolts in the English colonies. Immediately, a study of this nature bears on the long-standing historical debate concerning the primacy of various agencies in achieving slave emancipation.<sup>1</sup> This thesis, however, while it focuses on British abolitionists and West Indian slave rebels, does not set up rival camps between Anglo-centrism and Afro-centrism in its investigation of abolitionism in Britain. Its primary focus is neither on the dynamics of slave rebellions nor on the quintessential ideologies of British abolitionism. Essentially, it is not an exploration of the factor or factors responsible for the emancipation of British West Indian slaves. The thesis is a study of the links that abolitionist discourse established between anti-slavery in Britain and slave revolts in the colonies. The thesis fills a gap left in mainstream narratives on the history of anti-slavery in Britain by demonstrating that slaves in

---

<sup>1</sup> This debate has emerged from the works of Reginald Coupland, Frank Klingberg, G. R. Mellor, Seymour Drescher, Roger Anstey, C. L. R. James, Eric Williams, Richard Hart, Hilary Beckles, James Walvin, among other historians who insist that either religious and humanitarian factors, economic interests or the self-liberating efforts of the slaves themselves were primary in achieving the abolition of slavery. A more detailed discussion of this debate will be presented in the historiographical section of the thesis.

rebellion commandeered humanitarian attention. Slave rebels led abolitionists to carve out a narrative in history best defined as the slave rebellion discourse of British abolitionism. The experiences of the colonised on one side of the Atlantic shaped a significant chunk of the discourse of the colonisers on the other side. The hypothesis here is that British abolitionists to a significant measure, though sometimes reluctantly, could not but respond to the fact that they were conducting an agitation against slavery on behalf of slaves who continually opposed enslavement. Within the ideologies they formulated about the servile regime, British abolitionists deposited a mass of ideas that reflected their sensitivity to the slaves' rebellion. They certainly denounced the slaves' violent solution to the West Indian question. However, the abolitionists went beyond denunciation to redefine and exploit the slaves' overt resistance so as to advance the objectives of the various phases of the slavery campaign they conducted in Britain. By so doing the abolitionists did not minimize their own role in the struggle but emphasised that slave rebels were active contributors in shaping the abolitionist slavery debate. Thus it was that the most depressed of subjects in the slave plantation colonies provided a most distinguished group of metropolitan spokesmen with a discourse, which, while shielded from history, ought to be regarded as another dynamic episode in the making of the Atlantic world.



## **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

### **Chapter One -**

This chapter provides an outline of the entire thesis. It identifies that this study lies within the context of British West Indian slavery history and the current historiographical debate concerning attempts to integrate the study of British anti-slavery and West Indian slave revolts. The chapter asserts that the thesis is really a study in Atlantic history and that its central contribution to this body of knowledge is its examination of the slave rebellion discourse of British abolitionists; a hitherto unexplored aspect of nineteenth century British West Indian slavery history. An outline of the chapters is laid out here, a statement of the problem is given, the methodology is presented, the parameters are set and the expected outcome of the study is stated. Chapter one also provides a historical review of two hundred years of overt slave resistance and of the British anti-slavery movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Additionally, the chapter presents a historiographical assessment of the state of the debate concerning attempts to integrate slave rebellion and British abolitionism.



## **Chapter Two - Agitating the Question**

This chapter is central to the theoretical framework of the thesis. It is a launching pad for exploring abolitionists' responses to slave rebellions. It probes the defensive arguments put forward by the abolitionists to dismiss pro-slavery propaganda that anti-slavery activities were stirring rebellion in the colonies. Through this examination, the foundation for integrating the study of slave rebellions within the broader theme of the British anti-slavery movement is established. The chapter underscores, however, that it was the rebellious conduct of the slaves themselves that engendered both the pro and anti-slavery offensive and defensive propaganda concerning slave revolts.

## **Chapter Three- The other side of slave revolts**

This chapter articulates the manner in which British abolitionists conceptualised the attempt of the slaves to free themselves through rebellion. The discussion here is a progression from the issues raised in chapter two where it has been shown that the abolitionists responded to slave revolts largely by attempting to shield themselves from the blast of planter accusation. The juxta-positioning of chapters two and three, consequently, is to demonstrate how the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse performed different functions. The self-serving commentaries of abolitionists' counter arguments discussed in chapter two gives way to a more slave-centred analysis of the rebellions presented in chapter three. Chapter three underscores that in depicting slave

revolts the abolitionists focused less on defending themselves and they also ignored the losses of the planters and the planters' condemnation of the action of slave rebels. Abolitionists presented another, more sympathetic account of revolts; an account that reflected the perspective of the alleged rebels and even gave esteem to their conduct and to the significance of their attempts at self-liberation.

#### **Chapter Four- Loaded with deadly evidence**

The issues raised in chapter four move the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse even further away from the defensive strategy from which this discourse emerged. The chapter presents a third dimension of abolitionist response to slave rebellions. Chapter four stresses the abolitionists' dual depiction of alleged slave rebels as victims and agents of the attacks in Britain on slavery. The chapter demonstrates that the abolitionists used accounts of the suppression of slave revolts as a propaganda tool through which they converted the slaves' suffering to useful anti-slavery material. In this dimension of their commentary on West Indian slave rebellions, it is unquestionable that abolitionists recognised and appropriated the value of the slaves' overt resistance to their metropolitan campaign. By taking note of the content and range of abolitionists' reflections on how each of the revolts was suppressed, the chapter shows how the campaigners esteemed the comparative value of each rising to their struggle. To some extent, the chapter also puts into perspective the abolitionists' estimation of the relative value of persecuted missionaries and defeated slave rebels to the anti-slavery cause.



## **Chapter Five - Apocalyptic Warning**

The culminating chapter of the thesis focuses on how the major nineteenth century slave revolts in the British West Indies intersected chronologically with abolitionist activities in Britain and impacted on abolitionist discourse. This chapter illustrates how the abolitionists progressively reversed the moral that the planters drew from slave revolts to reinforce support for the movement. It is argued here that the issue of servile violence had become so integral to the anti-slavery argument after the Demerara revolt of 1823 that abolitionists dared to warn of its lessons framed in the form of dangerous risks and threats. Anti-slavery activists warned that slave rebellion threatened the property of West Indian proprietors and undermined the continued existence of this portion of the British colonial overseas empire. The chapter also demonstrates that the role of slave revolts was critical in the shift from the abolitionist policy of non-interference in colonial affairs after 1807 to the policy of demanding the British Government to enforce slave reform measures in the colonies. Finally, the chapter shows that in reinforcing a relatively more aggressive anti-slavery position through their slave rebellion discourse, abolitionists revised and even recanted some of the earlier apprehensions they held regarding the rebellion of the slaves.

## Historiographical Context

Eric Williams provided one of the earliest indications that the historiography of British West Indian slavery was faulty in its discussion of the movement against slavery conducted in Britain. Williams has commented, “Most writers on the period of slavery have ignored the slaves.”<sup>2</sup> He himself does not explore in depth the role that the slaves played. His brief observations of their role, however, have added fuel to the current controversy among historians regarding the appropriateness of widening the discussion of the British anti-slavery movement to include slave rebellions. The most telling of Williams’ comments on this subject is “In 1833, ... the alternatives were clear: emancipation from above, or emancipation from below. But EMANCIPATION.”<sup>3</sup> The theory of ‘emancipation from below’ has its shortcomings in articulating how abolitionists responded to slave rebellions. The theory, nevertheless, has usefully suggested that some link existed between anti-slavery campaigners and slave rebels; a link that is explored in this thesis.

The historian, Michael Craton has written extensively on slave resistance and revolt. He esteems slave revolt as a dynamic force in the local plantation scene. He confidently asserts, “One of my basic assumptions is that the slave system was shaped largely by the slaves. But one must not underestimate the complexity of that shaping.”<sup>4</sup> While Craton postulates that slaves shaped the slave system in the colonies, he cannot reconcile himself to the notion that the rebel slaves helped shaped abolitionist commentary on slavery in Britain. In objection to Williams’ suggestion

---

<sup>2</sup> WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1964, *Capitalism and Slavery*. London: Andre Deutsch, p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 208.



that emancipation may very well have come from below, Craton writes “It would be perverse to claim that slaves actually achieved their own emancipation by resistance.”<sup>5</sup> Craton claims “Slave rebellions were counter productive to the anti-slavery cause.”<sup>6</sup> He notes too that with each fresh outbreak up to 1823, “No one dared to defend in public the action of the slaves.”<sup>7</sup> He also highlights at this stage of his argument anti-slavery’s abhorrence of revolutionary methods when he observes, “Slave rebellion was never to be condoned, least of all by the emancipationists and the missionaries.”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, after the Barbados rebellion in 1816, Craton notices that the ‘saints’ thought it best to “... rest on their oars.”<sup>9</sup> The merit of Craton’s interpretation is that it underscores the denunciatory dimension of the abolitionists’ response to the slaves’ violent attempts at self-liberation. It also draws attention to the tendency of the British Government to withdraw its support from the abolitionists when slaves revolted. Craton gives the misleading impression, however, that the revolts retarded the abolitionists’ commitment to the anti-slavery cause. Abolitionists’ attitude to slave revolts was far more complex than Craton seems to appreciate. It was a double-edged attitude consisting both of fear and denunciation as well as renewed and expanded attacks on the servile regime. It is interesting to take note of how Craton interprets the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831 - 1832, which almost coincided with the abolitionists’ adoption of immediate slave emancipation. Craton explains his position in this way, “... in the early phase of British anti-slavery, slave resistance was intentionally resisted

---

<sup>4</sup>CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982. *Testing the Chains Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. London: Cornell University Press, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 242, 295.

<sup>6</sup>CRATON, MICHAEL. 1997. *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean*. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, p. 309.

<sup>7</sup>CRATON, MICHAEL. 1985. “Emancipation from Below? The Role of the British West Indian slaves in the Emancipation Movement 1816-1834” in Jack Hayward (ed.) *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., p. 119.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 115.



by humanitarians ... in the latter phase, slave resistance and emancipation were clearly intertwined.”<sup>10</sup> Craton’s general analysis of the two themes suggests that the abolitionists succeeded in ignoring the rebels for the greater period of the struggle against slavery. This thesis presents the alternative interpretation that while abolitionists were discomforted by the slaves’ rebellion, from the outset they had little choice but to accommodate it in their campaign.

The idea that the abolitionists were discomforted by evidence of slave agency and were thus incapable of providing a discourse to counter the planter’s negative depiction of slave insurrection is emphasised in the work of Clare Midgley. Midgley insists that Elizabeth Heyrick, the provincial female abolitionist from Leicester, was earliest, most forward and stood alone in delineating an alternative anti-slavery vision on the rebellion of the slaves. Midgley comments that while other abolitionists shrank back from the violence and destruction of slave revolts, Heyrick boldly portrayed slave rising as “ ... self-defence from the most degrading, intolerable oppression ...”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Heyrick distinguished herself in stoutly opposing from as early as 1824 the conservative policy of amelioration and gradual emancipation espoused by the vanguard of the ‘saints’.<sup>12</sup> Among the abolitionists, however, Heyrick was not alone in challenging the negrophobic planter commentary on slave rebellions.

A panoramic survey of the secondary literature reveals the common perception that revolts have been deemed to occupy no value or a nuisance value to the emancipation

---

<sup>10</sup> CRATON, MICHAEL. 1985. op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> MIDGLEY, CLARE. 1992. *Women Against Slavery The British Campaigns 1780 - 1870*. London and New York, pp. 105 - 106.

<sup>12</sup> Heyrick, wrote in addition to *Immediate and Not Gradual*, two pamphlets reinforcing her opposition to the main anti-slavery support for gradual slave emancipation. These were HEYRICK, ELIZABETH. 1824. *An Enquiry Which of the Two Parties is Best Entitled to Freedom? The Slave or the Slave Holder?* London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy; HEYRICK, ELIZABETH. 1826. *Letters on the Necessity of a Prompt Extinction of British Colonial Slavery*. London.



cause.<sup>13</sup> Lowell Ragatz believes that “... slave revolts were minor setbacks to be expected, though nevertheless, severely suppressed.”<sup>14</sup> While he admits that later episodes of outbreaks were questioned in the motherland, he does not examine the nature or value of that questioning. His account of slavery in *Fall of the Planter Class* focuses on the economic and social factors that led to the decline in wealth, influence and power of the ‘West India Interest’. For him, as for several historians of the British anti-slavery movement, the subject of slave revolts is a passing concern. Ronald Kent Richardson makes a statement which epitomises the marginal role of revolts vis à vis the attack of slavery in Britain. He states, “The British humanitarians did not step forward to implement a social programme put forward by the Afro-Caribbean slaves; nor did they consult black people when formulating their anti-slavery programme.”<sup>15</sup> This might be true but what is certain is the fact that had it not been for the slaves and their experiences in slavery, the British anti-slavery campaign would have been a non-existent historical phenomenon. The divergence in the methods and objectives between black and British anti-slavery do not justify the dismissal of the claims that the one obviously held for the other. The revolts of the slaves arrested the attention of the abolitionists and were mirrored in anti-slavery speeches. Richardson later mentions, “It was the slaves who by their behaviour created the problems of slavery with which the abolitionists grappled.”<sup>16</sup> If he is suggesting here that slave rebellions

---

<sup>13</sup> GOVEIA, E. 1977. *Amelioration and Emancipation in the Caribbean*. St Augustine: University of the West Indies. p. 34; COULPLAND, REGINALD. 1933. *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*. London: Thorton Butterworth, Ltd., p. 130; COUPLAND, R. 1923, *Wilberforce. A Narrative*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. p. 456; GEGGUS, DAVID. 1985. “Haiti and the Abolitionists: Opinion, Propaganda and International Politics in Britain and France, 1804 - 1838” in David Richardson (ed.) *Abolition and Its Aftermath The Historical Context, 1790 - 1916*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., pp. 113 - 114.

<sup>14</sup> RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963. *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763 – 1833 A Study in Social and Economic History*. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., p. vii.

<sup>15</sup> RICHARDSON, RONALD K. 1987. *Moral Imperium-Afro Caribbeans and the Transformation of British Rule, 1776-1838*. New York: Greenwood Press, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 98.



impeded the pace of the abolitionist programme, then he has missed the fact that the conservative feature of British abolitionism was primarily a direct reflection of British political and social culture. The general tone of the British anti-slavery movement would not have been less gradualist if slaves had not revolted. Indeed, had slaves not revolted, the pace of the anti-slavery programme might have been slower than it was. Like Ragatz, however, the bulk of Richardson's work on slavery history is not the revolt of the slaves. His focus is on the antagonism that existed between the colonial legislature and the British parliament.

James Walvin, Andrew Lewis, Richard Hart and Hilary Beckles have made partial inroads into the scepticism of the critics who have rejected Williams' construct of emancipation from below and into the narrow context in which slave revolts have been traditionally considered. The interpretations of Walvin et al have emphasised the way in which the self-determining slaves made themselves allies of the humanitarians.<sup>17</sup> James Walvin takes the examination of the issues a little further. He is certain that planter hostility to the rebel strengthened the humanitarian argument of the moral evils of the system. Walvin concludes that "Slave revolts with their tales of persecution, reasonable slave claims and savage planter repression were grist to the abolitionist mill."<sup>18</sup> Walvin also explains that "Anti-slavery became the most popular political issue in these years."<sup>19</sup> Through the thousands of lectures abolitionists held

---

<sup>17</sup> LEWIS, ANDREW. "An Incendiary Press: British West Indian Newspapers During the Struggle for Abolition" in *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 16, No. 3, Dec. 1995, pp. 348, 351; BECKLES, HILARY. 1987. *Black Rebellion in Barbados: the Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838*. Bridgetown, Barbados: Carib Research and Publications Inc., pp. 3, 9; BECKLES, HILARY. 1999. "Emancipation by War or Law? Wilberforce and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion" in David Richardson (ed.). *Abolition and Its Aftermath. The Historical Context, 1790 - 1916*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., p. 81; WALVIN, J. 1985. "Freeing the Slaves: How Important Was Wilberforce?" Jack Hayward (ed.) in *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., p. 30; HART, RICHARD. 1985. *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery: Blacks in Rebellion*. Vol. 2, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, p. 335.

<sup>18</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1977. *Questioning Slavery*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, pp. 122, 165.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 35.



throughout Britain between 1787 and 1833 crowds in the thousands thronged to the “...town halls, guild halls, music halls, chapels, churches and the Leeds Coloured Cloth Hall.”<sup>20</sup> Walvin, however, demonstrates that anti-slavery was thronged by “...forces which Wilberforce did not like, could not control and of which he would not approve.”<sup>21</sup> Walvin denies that the leaders of the movement established a direct and crucial link between anti-slavery and slave revolts. Walvin argues that it was the support of a vast number of Britons who came to view slavery as an unacceptable evil in an age of social reform that sustained the anti-slavery struggle.<sup>22</sup> Walvin’s focus snatches the initiative from the leaders and establishes a more direct connection between revolts, their outrageous suppressions and the British public. He is convinced that “The slaves themselves were effectively ignored by Wilberforce and other humanitarians.”<sup>23</sup> Walvin distrusts the efforts to lodge the slaves’ rebellion in the parliamentary campaign against slavery because, like Ronald Kent Richardson, he realises that the slave rebels’ radical anti-slavery methods were contrary to the respectable conservatism of the leading ‘saints’. What Walvin has perhaps overlooked, however, is that timing and expediency, not policy and principles, were the factors that bound the campaigners and the rebels together. The slaves’ rebellion forced itself upon the attention of the abolitionists. Anti-slavery campaigners did not enthusiastically champion the rising of the slaves. Walvin believes, nevertheless, that “There is a powerful case for arguing that the conduct of the slaves from the late eighteenth century helped shape and direct the debate about black freedom.”<sup>24</sup> He

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1985. op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1983. *Slavery and the Slave Trade. A Short Illustrated History*. The Mac Millan Press Ltd., p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



admits, however, “It is difficult to know what priority to give to black resistance.”<sup>25</sup>

Walvin’s suggestion for further investigation in this area echoes the claim of other historians that in general a more thorough analysis of slave resistance history is needed paying particular attention to the dialectic between slave rebellions and anti-slavery in Britain.”<sup>26</sup>

A few historians have taken the hint to assess the rebellion of the slaves within the broader context of the British anti-slavery movement. These historians, however, have restricted their discussions to chapters or paragraphs within works with other foci or to articles in historical journals. Almost invariably, these brief commentaries have also been limited to the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831 - 1832. Higman, for example, has commented that “In the political arena in which the legislative decision to abolish slavery was made, ... the rebellion [the Baptist War] strengthened the hand of the humanitarians and their supporters.”<sup>27</sup> Pointing less directly to the abolitionists themselves, Curtin makes a similar but more general observation. He notes, “The slave revolt impressed Britons and Jamaicans alike with the difficulty of keeping a people subject against their will.”<sup>28</sup> Gad Heuman notes that the Jamaican rebellion has also been called the Christmas Rebellion or Baptist War. It “... was a crucial event in the abolition of slavery.”<sup>29</sup> W.L. Green made the bold assertion that “It was the Jamaican rebellion, not the new vigour of the anti-slavery movement that proved a

---

<sup>25</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1983, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1964, op. cit., p. ARGOSAH, K. (ed.) 1994. *Maroon Heritage-Archaeological, Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives*. Barbados: Canoe Press. p. xii; DRESCHER, SEYMOUR. 1985. “The Historical Context of British Abolitionism” in David Richardson (ed.) *Abolition and Its Aftermath. The Historical Context, 1790 - 1816*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd. p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> HIGMAN, BARRY. 1976. *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 230.

<sup>28</sup> CURTIN, PHILLIP. 1968, *Two Jamaicas The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony 1830 - 1865*. New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> HEUMAN, GAD. 1996. “A Tale of Two Jamaican Rebellions” in *The Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. XIX, p. 1



decisive factor in precipitating emancipation.”<sup>30</sup> Mary Turner is also convinced that the fear of rebellion fuelled abolitionist conviction of the need for immediate abolition but that this conviction was cushioned by the persecution of sectarian missionaries.<sup>31</sup> While these observations are useful, abolitionists’ extensive commentary upon and utilisation of slave revolts, however, makes it mandatory to devote more than cursory attention to the subject.

The polemical nature of the state of the debate concerning the connection between slave revolts and British anti-slavery is aggravated by the separate esteem that has been reserved for the persecution of the missionaries and the relative value of that persecution to anti-slavery. The angle from which missionary persecution has been assessed diminishes the influence of slave revolts on anti-slavery. Phillip Wright calls the elevation of the missionary factor the act of “stealing the martyr’s crown”<sup>32</sup> but makes no attempt at reassessment of this one sided view. Cecil Northcott reinforces Brougham’s opinion that he finds no fault in christening John Smith, the martyr of Demerara.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the abolitionists did make deliberate and generous use of the persecution of missionaries in the West Indian slave plantations. It must not be overlooked, however, that the abolitionists saw missionary persecution as one part of a much larger question. The abolitionist Henry Brougham himself declared in 1824 that “... no man can cast his eye upon this trial [The Trial of the Reverend John Smith] without perceiving that it was intended to bring an issue between the system of the

---

<sup>30</sup> GREEN, W. L. 1976. *British Slave Emancipation 1830 - 1865*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> TURNER, MARY. 1982. “The Baptist War and Abolition” in *The Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. XIII, Sam Sharpe Rebellion 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue, pp. 31 - 41.

<sup>32</sup> WRIGHT, PHILLIP. 1973. *Knibb, ‘The Notorious Slaves’ Missionary, 1803-1845*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson.

<sup>33</sup> The title of Northcott’s work in this area of scholarship is NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976. *Slavery’s Martyr John Smith of Demerara and the Emancipation Movement 1817 - 1824*. London: Epworth Press.

slave law and the instruction of the Negroes.”<sup>34</sup> The abolitionists’ perception of the missionaries’ role in the slave rebellions needs to be reassessed and is examined to some extent in this thesis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The major problem in the efforts made to date to integrate slave revolts and the British anti-slavery movement is that the angles from which these efforts have been made have been faulty. Firstly, the focus has been oriented too narrowly towards assessing the value of slave revolts in the achievement of slave emancipation. This objective, while useful, has confined the historical research to a limited space. The opportunity to assess how the abolitionists’ slave rebellion discussions emerged and reflected various dimensions is, consequently, squandered. It was not until 1830 that abolitionists called for the immediate emancipation of slave children and not until 1832 that they moved their first motion for general, complete and immediate abolition of slavery. It is obvious then that straining the research in this direction would be productive of very little in the way of integrating the two themes. Yet, there is some merit in this approach and it should not be discarded altogether. When slavery activists finally came to the decision that slavery ought to be abolished, slave rebellions acted to strengthen their resolve. Still it is necessary to trace and investigate not merely the final outcome of the association between anti-slavery in Britain and slave rebellion in the colonies but also the form of that association itself. Historical explorations tracing cause and effect relationships are indeed interesting and often rewarding. It is equally the task of the historian, however, to investigate and analyse historical discourses shaped in less dramatic modes by those who have made history.

---

<sup>34</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series Vol. XI, 1 June 1824. p. 996.



Another hindrance to understanding the relationship between anti-slavery in Britain and slave revolts in the colonies has been the focus given to the incongruent conservative reform methods of the former and the violent, destructive activities of the latter. This fundamental difference between the 'saints' and the rebels should not be regarded as a stumbling block but as one of the factors that abolitionists absorbed in spite of their aversion to mass popular rising. Abolitionists denounced and lamented the occurrences of slave revolts but could not wash their hands clean of the slave rebels. The slaves seemed to make a point of identifying their overt resistance with the debates taking place in Britain on their behalf by timing their rising to follow on the heels of each wave of abolitionist activity. Abolitionists succumbed to the pressure that slaves in rebellion exerted on the metropolitan campaign in ways that were most advantageous to their movement. Renouncing violence as a means of effecting social change in the British West Indian slave plantation societies was neither the final nor the most significant abolitionist pronouncement on slave rebellions. In fact, slaves in rebellion forced British abolitionists to adopt to some extent the very revolutionary ideas of the age in which they lived that repulsed them. The image of the suppliant slave of the Wedgwood medallion also promotes the notion that abolitionists saw slaves essentially as suffering objects to be pitied not individuals from whom they could draw source materials for their attack on slavery<sup>35</sup>. Consequently, it seems impossible that they could have ever contemplated a campaign against slavery in which they could advance some kind of useful and sympathetic case on behalf of rebels. The fact is, however, that by rebelling against slavery, slaves defied the docile perception that abolitionists had of them and stretched the angles from which the metropolitan campaigners were prepared to fight the slavery cause.

---

<sup>35</sup> TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1972, op. cit., pp. 3 – 4.

It is striking that the histories that have been written on slave rebellions and the anti-slavery movement in Britain have unfolded in two distinctly opposite worlds when such an impression misrepresents the essence of the last era of slavery. The rebels made it no secret that they regarded abolitionists' activities as fuel for the servile warfare they waged. Of this fact there is sufficient historical documentation and discussion<sup>36</sup>. Conversely, British anti-slavery activists were engaged in a struggle on behalf of slaves especially prone to rebellion during the era of their campaign. It is highly improbable, therefore, that in conducting this campaign, the abolitionists could have consistently and successfully ignored slave rebellions. Abolitionists' response to and utilisation of the rebellion of nineteenth century slaves in the English Caribbean is the missing volume in the history of British abolitionism that this thesis provides.

## **Methodology**

To defend the hypothesis of this study, to a degree, a relativist position is taken. The relativist position emphasizes the element of interpretation, subjective perspective or approach in engaging with the facts of history so as to unearth hitherto unexplored or overlooked historical truths. The relativist methodology of history also engages with existing historical perspectives to reinforce, re-position or reject and replace altogether existing historical perspectives.<sup>37</sup> To expose to the light of history the slave rebellion discourse of British abolitionism, this thesis engages both in the processes of re-

---

<sup>36</sup> See footnote reference No. 17 above.

<sup>37</sup> CARR, E. H. 1961. *What is History?* England: Mc Millan, pp. 13 - 14, 16, 22; JENKINS, K. 1991. *Rethinking History*, London: Routledge.



positioning and rejecting and replacing existing perspectives on the anti-slavery/slave rebellion dialectic.

To an extent, the thesis builds on the Williams/ Hart theory of 'emancipation from below'.<sup>38</sup> This theory presents two foci. First, it sets up the agency of the slaves against the agency of the abolitionists in its analysis of the struggle against slavery. Secondly, the theory emphasizes that the major historical significance of slave rebellions was the achievement of emancipation. These foci, the thesis argues, are neither the only nor the most productive perspectives from which to gauge the relationship between slave revolts and the British anti-slavery movement. One shortcoming in the theory of 'emancipation from below' is the error it makes in ignoring that slavery was practically ended by British parliamentary legislation. The theory erroneously elevates the conduct of slaves in rebellion above that of other factors in the achievement of emancipation. This thesis, however, operates on the premise that multi-dimensional factors (humanitarian, economic, social and political) rather than the primacy of any one agency effected the abolition of slavery. Another fundamental weakness in the theory of self-liberating slaves is that it concentrates the whole of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, twenty odd years of abolitionism, into the final act of emancipation. Such a concentration ignores significant dimensions of the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse; a discourse that was shaped not just on the eve of slave freedom but long before the abolitionists were prepared to demand slave emancipation. In this study, therefore, the theory of self-liberating slaves is reshuffled. The thesis accepts the claim that though hidden from the history of the struggle against slavery in Britain, slaves in rebellion contributed to the metropolitan attack on colonial slavery. The thesis takes the broader view,



however, that abolitionists took into account West Indian servile warfare and that such an account reinforced rather than superseded the role of the abolitionists in the slavery struggle. Furthermore, the thesis argues that the slaves' rebellion impinged not only upon the achievement of emancipation but also helped to shape the content of nineteenth century anti-slavery narrative.

Another route through which the hypothesis of the study is established is by its rejection of the opinion that abolitionists treated slave rebellions as a taboo subject that brought in its wake nothing but a nuisance value to the metropolitan campaign.<sup>39</sup>

These claims ignore the abolitionists' counter arguments designed to refute the allegations of pro-slavery advocates that anti-slavery activities exerted an incendiary influence upon the slaves. The abolitionists' counter arguments act as a primary tool of the thesis. By focusing on their need to contradict their opponents' accusations, the thesis proves that anti-slavery activists could not and did not remain mute on the slave violence issue. Additionally, by following this defensive abolitionist strategy, the thesis demonstrates that the campaigners realised that it was in their best interest to structure their defence in such a manner so as to eliminate the nuisance value perception of slave revolts. While the thesis follows and builds upon the line of the abolitionists' defensive arguments, however, it underscores that pro-slavery accusation was only the proximate cause of these arguments while the rebels' conduct fed both the pro and anti-slavery positions.

Using the counter arguments of the abolitionists as an investigative instrument of the thesis expands the research even further. These arguments raise the important question

---

<sup>38</sup> WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1964, op. cit., p. 208; HART, RICHARD. 1985, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> See the section on the historiographical context of the thesis that makes reference to the views of Michael Craton, Reginald Coupland and Elsa Goveia on the attempts that have been made to date to integrate studies on slave rebellion in the broader context of the British anti-slavery movement.



as to whether commentary on slave rebellions was merely an abolitionist mechanism of defence. By following this inquiry the thesis reveals that abolitionists did not solely attempt to refute pro-slavery allegations but also challenged their opponents' depiction of the nature of slave rebellions. The inquiry reveals that to some extent, the abolitionists sympathized with, justified and positively conceptualized and esteemed the slaves' overt resistance to enslavement.

While the thesis claims that the slave rebellion discourse of the abolitionists extended over the entire period of the major slave uprisings of the English colonies in the nineteenth century, it recognizes that the discourse changed over time. To highlight and describe these changes, to an extent the thesis shapes the discussion of the research along a chronological pattern. By mapping the chronological stages of the British anti-slavery movement to abolitionists' reflections upon various aspects of each of the major nineteenth slave revolts in the English colonies, the thesis reflects the differing dimensions of the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse.

In spite of the relativist element of the methodology, scrupulous attention is given to empirical data. A broad overview of both slave revolts and the British anti-slavery movement has been provided consisting principally of a survey of the printed secondary sources. This overview constitutes the first section of the thesis. The justification for this approach in section one is to demonstrate how historians generally perceive the two major themes of the thesis. In the second section, my interpretation of how an integration of slave revolts and British anti-slavery ought to be perceived is presented. In the second section, a greater reliance on primary resources, both printed material and unpublished manuscripts are evident. The interplay between the secondary and primary materials reveals the extent to which



studies in slave revolts and British anti-slavery need to be integrated. The primary sources that have been consulted include *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* of abolitionists on the subject of British West Indian slavery; *British Parliamentary Papers* with dispatches and other official records of the revolts in the colonies; Anti-Slavery Society pamphlets and other publications; unpublished anti-slavery papers of leading abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, Henry Brougham and Thomas Fowell Buxton; records of correspondence between government officials in the colonies during the time of the major nineteenth century revolts and personnel at the Colonial Office in Downing Street, London; nineteenth century magazines like the *Edinburgh Review* and *Quarterly Review*; *The Times* newspaper of London; the reports of sectarian missionaries who were persecuted during slave revolts such as the Baptists in Jamaica and the London Missionary Society missionaries in Demerara and colonial newspapers such as the *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette* and the *Jamaican Courant*, which published articles on the revolts and on abolitionist activities in Britain. The thesis relies heavily on abolitionist source materials since the aim here is to delineate a particular aspect of British abolitionism.

### **Parameters of the Study and the Theoretical Framework**

The British debates on slavery centred principally among three groups. These were British Government ministers, the West India 'interest' and the abolitionist 'party'. Government personnel such as the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, the Parliamentary Undersecretary and officers serving very much in the capacity of civil

servants from the Colonial Office at Downing Street in London were ministers involved in the slavery debates. Government ministers mediated between the abolitionists and the West Indians in the parliamentary discussions on this question. While the role that the ministers of the Crown played and the views that they held on slavery are evident in the thesis, their position on the slavery question is only of secondary importance here. The second group that staked their claim in the slavery question was the powerful and very influential group commonly referred to as the West India 'interest'. This group represented the pro-slavery position. This 'party' included sugar colony agents and proprietors of West Indian concerns living in Britain. They often sat on the London based West India Committee or the Society of West India Merchants and Planters established in the 1770s. The West India group also included some of the Members of Parliament representing ports in England engaged in colonial trade. In Parliament, they spoke on behalf of their own interests and represented that of their overseas colleagues and dependents; overseers, managers, bookkeepers, resident planters, colonial authorities. Just as in the case of the ministers of the British Government who participated in the slavery discussions, the involvement of the West India 'interest' is not the prime focus here. British abolitionists, the third group dominating the slavery debates and the group with whom this thesis is principally concerned, represented the anti-slavery position. They were called abolitionists because they had advocated and succeeded in persuading the British Parliament of the necessity to abolish the British slave trade. For most of the period when they attacked the system of slavery itself, however, they insisted that the amelioration and not the sudden abolition of slavery was their objective. Nevertheless, even during their campaign to mitigate the evils of slavery rather than abolish the system altogether, they were still referred to as abolitionists. The abolitionists have



also been called anti-slavery campaigners or activists, emancipationists and the ‘saints’. These various terms are used in the thesis in reference to this group. The abolitionist ‘party’ was characterized by a strong religious flavour. Until the abolitionists openly declared that the threat of slave rebellion made it expedient to abolish slavery, the attack on the servile regime was based almost exclusively on religious principles, justice, humanity, and even on commercial considerations.<sup>40</sup>

By 1833 when slavery was abolished, the ranks of anti-slavery supporters had swollen to include an extensive cross-section of British society. Religious men; humanitarian reformers; business men with links in Brazil, Cuba, Mauritius and India who would have benefited greatly from free trade; industrialists and domestic consumers of sugar who cried out for a cheaper supply of that commodity and all those who felt outraged for one reason or the other by the existence of West Indian slavery supported anti-slavery. According to Charles Buxton, the son of abolitionist T. F. Buxton, “...the strenuous efforts of many men, working in very different spheres [were involved in the movement]”.<sup>41</sup> The thesis does not extend its research to include this entire spectrum. The anti-slavery personalities who are given primary attention here are the leading humanitarians who wrote pamphlets, conducted public campaigns, recited parliamentary speeches, made addresses and whose views and principles acted as the voice of the abolitionist party. The study focuses on the leadership of British anti-slavery rather than on its many allies. This approach is taken because the leaders’ conservative, anti-revolutionary dogma has been largely advanced to support the claim

---

<sup>40</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 14, 31 July 1826, p. 197. See also GROSS, IZHAK. 1980. “The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1823 - 1833” in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 1980, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 63 - 85; BUTLER KATHLEEN MARY. 1995. *The Economics of Emancipation Jamaica and Barbados, 1823 - 1843*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, pp. 8 - 9 for a discussion of the three groups that were locked in the debates on slavery.



that no significant relationship could have possibly existed between British anti-slavery and colonial slave revolts. The conservatism of the leading abolitionists, however, did not prevent their frequent reference to slave revolt. They repeatedly raised the issue of rebellion not only to condemn it but also to defend the charge that they were influencing slave rebels, to challenge how revolt was traditionally perceived and to justify and invigorate the anti-slavery position.

The British anti-slavery movement was marked by four recognisable phases. The first phase ran roughly from 1783 when the initial attacks against the servile regime was heard in Britain and included the period from 1787 to 1807, which concentrated on the abolition of the British slave trade.<sup>42</sup> During this period, abolitionists' opponents, the West India 'interest' and their supporters, did charge that tampering with the institution of slavery would lead to rebellion. In the closing years of the eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth centuries, however, the slaves' conduct had not provided a solid enough basis to draw the abolitionists into a significant examination of the subject. Thus, the abolitionists fought the first leg of the campaign without having to be too seriously concerned about the conduct of rebellious slaves. Consequently, the British anti-slave trade programme, the first phase of the metropolitan attack against slavery, is of minor significance to this study.

The thesis is also only marginally concerned with the second phase of the British anti-slavery movement, the years after 1807 to about 1814 when the abolitionists

---

<sup>41</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. (ed.) 1852. *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. London: John Murray, Albermale Street. (preface).

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the early attacks in Britain against the slave system see CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1808. *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave Trade by the British Parliament*. Vol. 1. Reprint Edition. London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968; RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, op. cit., pp. 240, 244 - 248; COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., pp. 42, 45, 56 - 66; TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1972. *British antislavery 1833 - 1870*. London: Longman, pp. 1 - 3; KLINGBERG, F. J. 1926. *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 40 - 41.



determined to allow slave trade abolition to lead naturally to slave amelioration. The abolitionists had calculated that since planters were now dependent on increased birth rate to boost slave populations instead of importation from Africa, slave laws would steadily improve until slavery had insensibly vanished.<sup>43</sup> These ambitions did not materialise. Higman has commented that this policy “... derived from the fallacy that slavery was created and sustained by the slave trade.”<sup>44</sup> By 1814, abolitionists realized that their post 1807 policy of inaction ought to be reconsidered. Slave masters continued to pursue policies contrary to humanity and even to their own interests.<sup>45</sup>

Between 1814 and slave emancipation in 1834, abolitionism entered its third and fourth phases, the phases upon which this thesis concentrates. By 1815, abolitionists advocated that some positive steps should be taken to ensure that the abolition of the slave trade fulfilled the slave amelioration objectives they had anticipated. Abolitionists called on the Ministers of the Imperial Government to enforce a compulsory registration of slaves and to encourage the local colonial governments, both crown and legislative colonies, to ameliorate slave laws.<sup>46</sup> The colonists protested against these abolitionist strategies and it was then that slave insurgents of Barbados in 1816 demonstrated that they too were important participants in the anti-slavery discussions of the West India question. After the Barbados slave revolt, abolitionists

---

<sup>43</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807. *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Addressed to the Freeholders and other inhabitants of Yorkshire*. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, Strand and J. H. Piccadilly, pp. 248 - 251; CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1824. *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies, with a view to their Ultimate Emancipation; and on the Practicability, the Safety and the Advantages of the latter measure*. London. J. Hatchard and Son, p. 1; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864. *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*. London: Patridge and Bennet p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> HIGMAN, BARRY. 1976, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>45</sup> TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1972, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of abolitionist strategies from 1812 to 1820 including the slave registration issue see RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, op. cit., pp. 390 - 393. Ragatz notes that in 1815 James Stephen published a pamphlet entitled *Reasons for Establishing a Registry of Slaves in the Colonies*; MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW. 1926. *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838*. New York: Longman's, Green and Co., Ltd p. 27; BURNS, SIR ALAN. 1965. *History of the British West Indies*. Revised Second Edition, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. pp. 611 - 612; COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., pp. 114 - 115. These sources will also provide some insight into the



found themselves unable to further their discussions on the slavery question without making reference to the rebellion of the slaves.

The slave rebels' presence in abolitionist discourse mounted in proportion to the degree of pressure that the humanitarians exerted on the servile regime. By 1823 anti-slavery activists stepped up its activities. In that year the London based Anti-Slavery Society was formed and soon Thomas Clarkson led the campaign to establish branch societies throughout the kingdom. Many anti-slavery pamphlets were published and for the first time the abolitionists stood up in the House of Commons and called for the gradual abolition of slavery.<sup>47</sup> The advocates of slavery bitterly opposed the new direction that the campaigners were taking in the West India question. Meanwhile, Demerara slaves in that same year ensured that the momentum of the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse begun seven years ago by the slaves in Barbados did not lag into oblivion. Notably, it was after the rebellion of slaves in Demerara that the abolitionists insisted that slave reform in the colonies should no longer await the co-operation of the colonists. The British Parliament should enforce from above the laws the abolitionists suggested to improve the servile regime.<sup>48</sup> Slave rebellion was significant among the factors influencing the abolitionist policy of parliamentary intervention in colonial affairs. Demerara slave rebels widened the dimension of the already newly revised agenda of the 1823 abolitionist programme.

The fourth and final stage of the attack on slavery in Britain, also central to the concerns of the thesis, began by about 1830 when the abolitionists abandoned their

---

constitutional arrangements between Britain and her crown and legislative colonies.

<sup>47</sup> For an insight into the growth of abolitionist support and activities by 1823 see TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1972, op. cit., pp. 9 - 10; MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW, 1926. op. cit., p. 118; RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, op. cit., pp.409 - 410; The full debate of the 15 May 1823 in which the abolitionists for the first time called for the gradual emancipation of the slaves is recorded in *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., pp. 257 - 360.

<sup>48</sup> MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW. 1926, op. cit., p. 140.



policy of reform and gradual abolition of slavery. They now demanded complete and immediate freedom for the servile labourers. The decision of slaves in Jamaica to rise in rebellion just at the juncture of the abolitionist change in policy from gradualism to immediacy reinforced the bases upon which the campaigners demanded emancipation. Abolitionists argued in this final phase that in addition to their view that slavery was repugnant to religion, humanity and the British Constitution, slave revolts demonstrated the expediency of abolishing a system fraught with danger to the well being of all parties concerned.<sup>49</sup>

It is important to note that while the thesis seeks to integrate two sub-themes in British West Indian slavery, it does not propose to focus its analysis on the ways in which slave revolts were sparked in the colonies as a result of abolitionists' activities in Britain. Of course this discussion surfaces in the body of the work. Incisive research, noted in the historiographical context section of the thesis, has already been conducted in this area. It is thus appropriate only to acknowledge and not duplicate this scholarship in the present study. My examination of the relationship between slave revolts and British anti-slavery, consequently, gives attention to that neglected aspect of the connection between anti-slavery and slave revolts. This scholarship concentrates on how the abolitionists assimilated into their campaign the rebellions of the slaves and not how the slaves fed off events taking place in Britain on their behalf. Throughout the two hundred years of British West Indian slavery, slaves continually opposed the servile regime. The thesis is not concerned with the entire history of resistance but with the major slave rebellions of the nineteenth century. Contemporary studies on slave resistance history, nevertheless, have amassed a considerable and

---

<sup>49</sup> See BUXTON, CHARLES (ed.) 1852, op. cit., pp. 286 - 292; STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971. *Anti-Slavery Recollections in A Series of Letters Addressed to Mrs. Beecher Stowe*. Second edition.



interesting body of scholarship. Very interesting themes about the slaves' opposition to their enslavement have emerged. Firstly, historians have divided the slaves' struggle against slavery into the two categories of passive resistance and active resistance. Passive forms of resistance to slavery were neither open nor direct and seldom included violence. Slaves practised passive resistance almost on a daily basis and it was certainly far more frequent than overt acts. Passive resistance included such behaviour as suicide, infanticide, feigned laziness and stupidity, careless yet deliberate mishandling and destruction of plantation property, malingering, or working slow, stealing and self-mutilation.<sup>50</sup> While it is useful that historians have defined and analysed the nature of the slaves' passive resistance, this study throws no light on the abolitionist reflections on the slaves' active opposition to their enslavement. Perhaps because of its deceptive dimensions, abolitionists overlooked the slaves' passive resistance to slavery. Consequently, passive acts of resistance, though a significant aspect of the slaves' resistance is not given attention in the thesis.

Active resistance to slavery, the type of resistance with which this thesis is concerned, as opposed to passive resistance was open, direct, violent and destructive. Rebel slaves engaged in strike action against the labour regime, burnt plantation buildings and works, looted their masters' property, took up arms against their masters with which they sometimes wounded and killed the managers and owners of the slave system. Far more slaves, nevertheless, were hurt or killed and executed during and

---

London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd. (First edition, 1854) p. 121 for a discussion of the abolitionists' adoption of the policy of immediate emancipation.

<sup>50</sup> For discussions on passive slave resistance, see CRATON MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., pp. 24, 53; SCHULER, MONICA. 1973. "Day-to day Resistance to Slavery in the Caribbean During the Eighteenth Century" in *African Studies Association of the West Indies*, Bulletin 6, Dec., 1973, pp. 57 - 77; LEWIS, GORDON. 1983. *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492 - 1900*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, pp. 175 - 180; MARSHALL, BERNARD. 1976. "Maroons in Slave Plantation Societies: A Case Study of Dominica, 1785 - 1815" in *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, Nos. 2 & 3, June,



after slave rebellions than were whites. The themes that have emerged in the study of overt acts of rebellion to slavery include the endemic nature of the slaves' resistance, which has led Beckles to speak of "The Two Hundred Years War"; the ethnicity and occupational status of the leadership and rank and file of the revolts; the factors that were responsible for and facilitated open slave rebellion and the tactics and objectives of the rebels.<sup>51</sup> Historians have subjected the analyses of these themes to a differentiation between slave revolts in the periods prior to and during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The early slave revolts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and even the later 1739 and 1795 maroon wars in Jamaica and Tacky's 1760 slave revolt of the eighteenth century, fall outside of the formative period of the abolitionist era. They unfolded in the time frame when the international voice of opposition to slavery was scarcely audible. Consequently, it is inevitable that these earlier episodes of open slave resistance have been perceived as events within

---

September, 1976, pp. 26 - 34; WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1964, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>51</sup> BECKLES, HILARY. "The Two Hundred Years War: Slave Resistance in the British West Indies: An Overview of the Historiography" in *Jamaica Historical Review*, Vol. XIII, 1982. Sam Sharpe Rebellion 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue. Kingston, Jamaica, pp. 1 - 10. For other discussions of the constant threat that slave rebels posed to the slave plantation societies of the British West Indies throughout slavery see PATTERSON, ORLANDO. "Slavery and Slave Revolts A Socio-Historical Analysis of the First Maroon War, Jamaica, 1655 - 1740" in *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 1 March 1970. UWI, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, p. 289; PRICE, RICHARD (ed.). 1973. *Maroon Societies Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, p. 2; KOPYTOFF, BARBARA. "The Early Political Development of Jamaican Maroon Societies" in *William and Mary Quarterly*. Third Series, Vol. XXXV, April 1978, p. 287; HERSKOVITTS, MELVILLE. 1958. *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 93; WALVIN, JAMES. 1992. *Slaves, Slavery and The British Colonial Experience*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 75; BECKLES, HILARY. 1990. *A History of Barbados From Amerindian Settlement to Nation State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 35 - 40, 75 - 90. Historians also emphasise the fact that open resistance to slavery began not just on the slave plantation societies of the New World but on the African homeland of the slaves. For discussions of slave resistance in Africa and during the transatlantic crossing, see HERSKOVITTS, MELVILLE. 1958, op. cit., pp. 87 - 89; BOUBACAR, BARRY. 1998. *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 123; THOMPSON, VINCENT BAPEKTU. 1987. *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas 1442 - 1900*. England: Longman, p. 110; GEORGE, FRANCIS DOW. 1927. *Slave Ships and Slaving*. Massachusetts :Maine Research Society, pp. 121 - 131; RATHBONE, RICHARD. 1986. "Some Thoughts on Resistance to Enslavement in West Africa" in HEUMAN, GAD (ed.). 1986. *Out of the House of Bondage Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., pp. 11 - 12; RICHARDSON, DAVID. "Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade" in *William and Mary Quarterly*. Third Series, Vol. LVIII, No. 1 January 2001, pp. 69 - 92.



the narrow confines of the British West Indian plantation setting. The pre abolitionist era of slave revolts has not been considered in any great detail here.<sup>52</sup>

As already indicated, this study is limited primarily to the British West Indian slave revolts of the first three decades of the nineteenth century. This was the only period when there coexisted a well-organised and recognised anti-slavery body in Britain and significant examples of slave revolts in the colonies. It was the only time when the slavery reform campaign of British abolitionists could have embroiled them in the tensions of balancing a conservative programme alongside the conduct of rebellious slaves. Additionally, the three major slave revolts of the nineteenth century, that is the Barbados revolt of 1816, the Demerara revolt of 1823 and the Jamaican revolt of 1831-1832, feature prominently in the thesis for these were the three which most often captured the attention of the abolitionists.

Slaves in Barbados rose in open rebellion on Sunday 4 April 1816. The rebellion was centred in the southeastern end of the island and encompassed the four parishes of St. Phillip, Christ Church, St. George and St. John. St. Phillip was the starting point of the rebellion and the slaves most heavily involved belonged to Bailley's and Simmon's plantations in St. Phillip. Colonial authorities identified Bussa, a slave ranger on Bailley's plantation, as the leader of the rebellion. Other 'elite' slaves in the St. Phillip's parish as well as some free coloured men such as Franklyn Washington

---

<sup>52</sup> For an explanation of the term 'marronage' see PRICE, RICHARD (ed.). 1973, op. cit., pp. 246 - 292; BECKLES, HILARY. "From Land to Sea: Runaway Barbados Slaves and Servants, 1630 - 1700" in HEUMAN, GAD (ed.) 1986, op. cit., p. 79. For a general study of the maroons see PATTERSON, ORLANDO. 1970, op. cit.; SCHULER, MONICA. 1970. "Ethnic Slave Rebellion in the Caribbean and the Guianas" in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. III, No. 4, Summer 1970. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; KOPYTOFF, BARBARA. 1978, op. cit.; EDWARDS, BRYAN. 1973. "Observations on the Disposition, Character, Manner and Habits of Life; and a Detail of the Origin, Progress and Termination of the Late War Between those People and the White Inhabitants" in PRICE, RICHARD (ed.). 1973, op. cit., pp. 230 - 245 being an extract from EDWARDS, BRYAN. 1807. *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Vol. I, Appendix 2, pp. 522 - 535, 537 - 545. London. First published separately in 1796. Much of the historical portion of this



and Sargeant assisted Bussa in organising the rebellion. The slave rebels of Barbados 1816 practised arson and looting on a wide scale but there was no deliberate attempt to take the lives of the white masters. Conflicting views concerning the causes of the rebellion arose. These views were polarized along lines that reflected pro and anti-slavery positions. Defenders of slavery charged that the slaves rebelled because of the Registry bill for slaves that the abolitionists had sponsored in the year just prior to the revolt. Pro-slavery advocates explained that the slaves misinterpreted slave registration for slavery abolition and rose to claim by war what the colonists denied them by law. The upholders of slavery argued that Barbadian slaves were fighting for an imaginary emancipation decree; a notion that arose as a result of abolitionists' activities in Britain. The abolitionists, of course, denied these claims. They redirected the accusing finger of the pro-slavery faction away from themselves and back to the planter class and its supporters. Abolitionists insisted that the rumour circulating among the slaves about freedom granted but denied was propagated by the careless talk of the colonists on the events taking place in Britain on behalf of the slaves. Abolitionists also insisted that the slaves in Barbados armed themselves against the regime because of its gross inhumanity. Pro-slavery advocates used the revolt to demand a seizure of the slavery debates while anti-slavery activists used the event to widen their humanitarian and religious attack against slavery as well as to support their demands for measures of limited slave reform. The accusation that slave rebellions would be the natural consequence of tampering with the servile regime had continually been a plantocratic ploy to stave off abolitionist attacks on the system. It was the slaves' rebellion in Barbados in 1816, however, that provided both pro-and

---

account is taken nearly verbatim from Long 1774.



anti-slavery advocates with the first concrete basis for examining the issue of servile warfare within the context of abolitionism in Britain.<sup>53</sup>

Slaves in Demerara rose in rebellion on 18 August 1823. The rebellion was confined to the East Coast of Demerara encompassing the area just five miles outside of Georgetown, the capital, to Mahaica. The slaves most heavily involved in the rebellion belonged to Success and Le Resouvenir plantations. Quamina Gladstone, a slave of Le Resouvenir plantation and his son Jack Gladstone were the principal slave insurgents in the rebellion. Quamina was the chief deacon at Bethel Chapel over which John Smith of the London Missionary Society presided. As was the case in Barbados in 1816, slaves in Demerara in 1823 demonstrated no intention whatsoever to take the lives of their masters in their revolt. The Demerara slaves confined white masters; overseers, managers and bookkeepers, in the slave stocks and parleyed with the governor of the island and with the commander of the troops about their rights to days without labour, wages and freedom. Unlike Barbados, property destruction in Demerara in 1823 was negligible. Despite the relatively peaceful nature of the revolt, nevertheless, the colonists brutally suppressed the rising. Hundreds of slaves lost their lives in the field of the one-sided battle and in the courts martial executions that followed.<sup>54</sup> Again, the revolt of the slaves was not ignored in the metropolis but polarized positions in the slavery debates. Anti-slavery activists were particularly bound to respond to events in Demerara since the revolt came in the wake of measures

---

<sup>53</sup> For analyses of the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 see BECKLES, HILARY. 1987, op. cit.; WILTSHIRE, ANTHONY. 1983. *The Reaction of the Barbadian Plantocracy to Amelioration, 1823 - 1833*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados; CRATON MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., pp. 254 - 266.

<sup>54</sup> For analyses of the Demerara slave revolt see BRYANT, JOSHUA. 1824. *Accounts of the Insurrection of the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Demerara*. Demerara: Guiana Chronicle Office, Georgetown; NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit.; RODWAY, JAMES. 1893. *History of British Guiana from the year 1682 to the Present Time*. Vol. II, 1782 – 1833. Demerara: J. Thompson;



taken by the British Government to meet the 1823 abolitionist call for the gradual abolition of slavery. Abolitionists could not and did not fail to appreciate the bond that linked their activities in Britain with that of rebellious slaves in the colonies in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The slaves of Jamaica staged the greatest of all slave rebellions in the British West Indies. The rising erupted on the night of 27 December 1831 at the Kensington plantation in the parish of St. James. Slaves had held several meetings prior to the revolt to coordinate their plans. These meetings were held not at Kensington but at Plantation Retrieve also located in the St. James district. Most of the slaves' rebellious activities were concentrated in the western region of the island in St. James, Trelawney, Hanover, Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth and in the eastern parish of Portland. Jamaican colonial authorities charged the slaves Gardiner of Greenwich estate in Hanover, Dove of Belvidere estate in St. James, Johnson of Retrieve estate in St. James and, above all, Samuel Sharpe of Craydon estate in St. James for leading the revolt. The slaves killed about a dozen whites during the revolt but the economic devastation they wreaked by the incendiary flames they kindled was quite extensive. The flames dealt a severe blow to the Jamaican economy. The crushing of the rebellion was typically ruthless. Approximately five hundred slaves lost their lives.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile in Britain the abolitionists did not find it possible nor were they desirous by 1830 to remain outside of the fray into which slaves in rebellion had thrown the

---

WALLBRIDGE, E. A. 1848. *The Demerara Martyr. Memoirs of the Reverend John Smith, Missionary to Demerara*. Demerara: Charles Gilpin; CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., pp. 267 - 290.

<sup>55</sup> For analyses of the Jamaica slave revolt of 1831 - 1832 see HINTON, JOHN HOWARD. 1847. *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica*. London: Houlston and Stoneman; BLEBY, HENRY. 1853. *Death Struggles of Slavery*. London; RECKFORD, MARY. "The Jamaican Slave Rebellion of 1831" in *Past and Present A Journal of Historical Studies*. No. 40, July 1968, pp. 108 - 125; JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972. *Am I Not A Man And A Brother? British Missions and the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in West Africa and the West Indies 1786 - 1838*, Uppsala: Gleerup, chapter 8.



parliamentary discussion of the slavery question. Slaves in rebellion in Jamaica succeeded in securing a firm place within British abolitionist attacks on colonial slavery.

While abolitionists' responses to the nineteenth century slave revolts in Barbados, Demerara and Jamaica are the focus of the thesis, some attention is given to the 1791 slave rebellion in French St. Domingue. British abolitionists' attitude to the St. Domingue slave rebellion laid the basis for the abolitionists' response to later rebellions in the English colonies. Pro-slavery advocates also made it almost impossible for British abolitionists to agitate the slavery question without addressing the issue of the great St. Domingue slave rebellion of 1791.

The terms that have been used to describe the rising of the slaves against their enslavement have been subjected to a puzzling variety of usages. It is evident in the body of the research that anti-slavery activists were particular in the terms they used to refer to the slaves' rising. They were opposed to naming the nineteenth century slave resistance movements 'rebellions' or 'revolts' or even 'insurrections'. They believed that these terms denoted levels of violence and bloodshed that were markedly absent in the nineteenth century rising of British West Indian slaves. They felt that it was more accurate to use the more general and lenient though often vague terms as 'riot', 'commotion', 'disorders', 'disturbances', 'movement', 'transaction', 'events' and 'combination' in their commentary of the nineteenth century overt resistance of the slaves. Historians have also contributed some level of ambiguity in the meaning of the names that have been ascribed to open slave resistance. Sometimes, the term 'revolution', as used in the St. Domingue slave rising of 1791 has been applied to the servile warfare in the British West Indies. The term 'revolution', however, cannot



appropriately describe the events that are discussed in this thesis. David Close and Carl Bridge have pointed out that a revolution includes “ ... rebellions or coups directed against individual holders of authority, but accepting the system through which they rule ...”. Close and Bridge also insist that one requirement of the revolution is that it must involve some large-scale process of change for it to be so considered.<sup>56</sup> Slave rising in the British West Indies did not directly produce this kind of change. In this thesis, consequently, the term revolution is not used to refer to the rising of the slaves. The terms revolt, rebellion and insurrection are used interchangeably to refer to slaves’ action of confronting their masters with arms in a bid for freedom. At the same time, wherever appropriate, it has been made evident that the anti-slavery campaigners did insist in making a clear distinction between the slave revolts that erupted in the era before and during the era of British abolitionism.

It must be emphasised that while the thesis focuses on British abolitionists’ response to active slave resistance, slave rebellion was not the only basis upon which abolitionists attacked the servile regime. Humanity, justice and Christianity were three basic principles upon which the British anti-slavery movement was established. What justifies the focus of this thesis, nevertheless, is the fact that slave revolt was another distinct theme of British abolitionism and yet its full presence is hidden from this historical experience. The thesis, consequently, rescues slave rebellion from the obscurity from which it suffers within historical accounts of the anti-slavery struggle. It is also acknowledged that other factors such as the recalcitrance of the planters towards amelioration; the growth of public support against slavery; persecution of sectarian missionaries in the colonies; the financial difficulties facing the West Indian

---

<sup>56</sup> CLOSE, DAVID 1985. “The Meaning of Revolution” in CLOSE, DAVID & BRIDGE, CARL (eds.). *Revolution A History of the Idea*. London and Sydney: Croom Helm, pp. 1 - 2.

planters as a result of duties paid on sugar exported to Britain; hurricanes in the colonies and soil exhaustion amongst other hardships; and the changing political climate in Britain by 1830 when reform was in the air as well as the culminating effects of slave revolts all contributed to the dismantling of the servile regime. Again, while these other factors have assumed their rightful places as themes in the history of British abolitionism, slave rebellion in the British anti-slavery campaign is still questioned and sometimes even dismissed. This thesis addresses this problem by examining and analysing the varied responses of the abolitionists to the revolts of slaves in the nineteenth century in the British West Indies.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Very little in the events unfolding in and impacting upon Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could explain how and why leading abolitionists in Parliament spoke as extensively as they did on the revolts of Caribbean slaves. This was a period when the ruling classes in Britain felt threatened by the revolutionary ideas and the industrial unrest that swept over the plebeian orders of several European nations. To read only the history of the reaction of the upper and middle classes, the order to which British abolitionists generally belonged, to the assertiveness of the common people in this period will suggest the absurdity of searching for links of slave rebellion with British abolitionism. By 1760, George III had ascended the throne and until about 1790 the monarchy exerted its influence to the fullest to ensure that ministers of the Crown in Parliament secured the royal prerogative and the privileges of the church. The British monarch left little room for his subjects to exercise



increased civil liberties. It was towards the end of George III's reign that anti-slavery organs in Britain were taking shape. The interaction between slave revolts and anti-slavery in Britain was not as yet evident but the king's jealous regard for the status quo exerted some influence in setting the tone for a conservative anti-slavery programme. Britain's war with the thirteen colonies in North America, which ended with the declaration of American independence in September 1783 also, did not augur well for a campaign on behalf of slaves who resorted to arms in a bid to obtain freedom. Britain's loss of America suggested that it was wise not to tamper with age-old institutions like slavery. Consequently, it would have been adding insult to injury to use slave revolts to justify anti-slavery strategies, however moderate, to regulate the master/slave relationship in the colonies.<sup>57</sup> The French Revolution of 1789 and the French and Napoleonic Wars that followed that revolution exerted the most direct and dynamic effects on Britain that militated against any narrative by British abolitionists on slave rebellions. Britain's conflict with France and France's attempt to export the arms and ideas of the revolution triggered a conservative reaction in Britain that attempted to counter the appeal of radical propagandists. In British political and national life, this conservative reaction manifested itself in at least five distinct ways. The Prime Minister for most of this troubled period, the younger Pitt who was regarded as the dupe of George III, harnessed his ministers and resources to defend the royal prerogative, support the privileges of the Church of England, cultivate strong patriotic sentiment in the nation at large, encourage militant loyalists and suppress expressions of radical dissent. These years between 1789 and 1815 were the years when Habeas Corpus was suspended, Combination Acts were passed, governmental

---

<sup>57</sup> See CONWAY, STEPHEN. 2000. *The British Isles and the War of American Independence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; LINEBAUGH, PETER & REDIKER, MARCUS. 2000. *The Many-Headed*



prosecutions of cases of sedition abounded and individuals branded as radicals by the government were continually subjected to unusually harsh sentences. The government was prepared and did take draconian measures to stamp out domestic radicalism.<sup>58</sup> The men who emerged as leaders of the British abolitionist movement, especially the foremost leader William Wilberforce supported the repressive measures taken by the government in the wake of the French Revolution.<sup>59</sup> Whether it was hypocrisy on the part of the abolitionists, their response to radicalism in Europe from 1789 – 1815 did not measure up entirely to their later response to the rebellion of slaves in the colonies. To a certain extent, the same can be said of the abolitionists' response to the plight of the poor and of miserable workers in this period of Britain's industrial development. It was not the case that abolitionists were completely oblivious and indifferent to conditions under which poor children and workers subsisted in the factories and mines of nineteenth century Britain. The humanitarians supported a number of charitable organisations and in Parliament they moved motions to improve the lot of chimney sweeps and cotton weavers. As middle-class reformers, however, anti-slavery activists supported the doctrine that the wealth of the propertied must be protected from the wanton destruction of workers.<sup>60</sup> Had the abolitionists transported

---

*Hydra Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, chapter 7.

<sup>58</sup> For an insight into domestic and international politics in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see DICKSON, HARRY. 1989. "The Impact on Britain of the French Revolution and the French Wars 1789 – 1815" in Harry Dickson (ed.) *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789 – 1815*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd., pp. 1 – 20; *ibid.*, O'GORMAN, FRANK. "Pitt and the 'Tory' Reaction to the French Revolution 1789 – 1815, pp. 21 - 37; TREVELEYAN, MACAULAY. 1937. *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After (1782 – 1919)*. New Edition. London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., pp. 35 – 77; WELLS, ROGER. 1983. *Insurrection The British Experience 1795 – 1803*. Gloucester: Allan Sutton; EVANS, ERIC J. 1999. *William Pitt the Younger*. London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>59</sup> For discussions on Wilberforce's response to the repressive measures of the British Government in the 'age of revolution' see *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England*. Vol. XXXII, pp. 293 – 294; COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1923. *Wilberforce A Narrative*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, pp. 179, 265, 411 – 412; CORMACK, PATRICK. 1983. *Wilberforce, The Nation's Conscience*. England: Pickering Paperbacks, p. 105.

<sup>60</sup> See HOLLIS, PATRICIA. 1980. "Anti-Slavery and British Working Class Radicalism in the Years of



in wholesale this attitude to their reading of the revolts of the slaves, an abolitionist perspective on slave revolts would have hardly existed. Slaves in rebellion, however, forced British abolitionists to alter their own personal experiences with resistance in Europe and to look to the slaves on other side of the Atlantic to structure their narrative on slave revolts. It was a narrative that was often tinged with some of the revolutionary concepts of the age.

The world in which the abolitionists lived held significant implications for the type of anti-slavery programme they designed. From the late 1780s when the campaign was in its infancy right up to the abolition of slavery, a cautious spirit of conservatism guided the policies that the leaders embraced. It has been argued that slave rebellions were responsible for retarding the objectives of the campaigners and for stamping upon the movement the gradualist image it bore. This charge, however, seems an unfair one considering that long before the abolitionists recognised slave revolts as a significant factor in their programme, they had openly avowed their commitment to a careful course. British abolitionists operated within a narrow political and civil culture, which they respected to a large extent. Both eighteenth and nineteenth century slavery opponents without exception took it for granted that freedom for slaves necessitated working through normal political and judicial channels. For the most part, the leaders of the movement adhered to the practice of targeting the parliamentary class to effect the various changes in slavery that they advocated from time to time. They were less persistent, though this was not the case during the slave trade debates and in the very last years of the campaign, to arouse public opinion in support of the cause. They all

---

Freedom” in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.) *Anti-Slavery, Abolition and Reform*, p. 303; HOBBSBORN, E. J. and RUDE, GEORGE. 1969. *Captain Swing*. London: Lawrence and Wishart; EVANS, ERIC. 1989. *Britain Before the Reform Act: Politics and Society 1815 – 1832*. New York: Longman; MOLESWORTH, WILLIAM. 1877. *History of England from the Year 1830 – 1874*, Vol. 1.



preferred operating through the presentation of reasoned arguments to the highest authority in the land. As Temperley has observed, abolitionists believed that “Whatever the rights and wrongs of slavery, ... changes ... must come gradually, after full discussion and with due regard for the political proprieties.”<sup>61</sup> British abolitionists were bound to each other by factors almost all of which were unsuited to the establishment of a commentary on slave rebellions. Religion, dislike of revolutionary methods and middle-class and humanitarian ideals were the factors around which the campaigners cohered. The point must be reiterated, consequently, that slaves in rebellion tested the legitimate limits that abolitionists were prepared to go in agitating the West India question in Britain. What made it possible for anti-slavery activists to justify the slavery question in spite of the rebellion of the slaves was the fact that they came to view the risks of slave rebellion far more tolerable than the perpetual existence of slavery.

## **Expected Outcome**

It is expected that the findings of this study would lead to a major revision of the ways in which both slave revolts and British anti-slavery are perceived. As far as revolts are concerned, it is expected that it will be regarded as a significant historical experience

---

London: Chapman and Hall for a discussion of the economic distresses of the poor during the industrial revolution.

<sup>61</sup> TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1974. “Anti-Slavery” in Patricia Hollis (ed.) *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England*. London: Edward Arnold, pp. 27 – 51. See also GRATUS, JACK. 1973. *The Great White Lie Slavery, Emancipation and Changing Racial Attitudes*. London and New York: Monty Press, p. 200; DAVIS, BRION DAVID. 1962. “The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Anti-Slavery Thought” in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2 Sep. 1962; LEWIS, GORDON. 1978. *Slavery, Imperialism and Freedom: Studies in English Radical Thought*. New York and London: Monty Review Press, p. 53; TURLEY, DAVID. 1991. *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery 1780 – 1860*. London and New York: Routledge for discussions of the policies



beyond the confines of the local plantation scenario. It is hoped that its place will be guaranteed within mainstream historical discussions of the British anti-slavery movement. Its status as a theme within Atlantic history, with the reverse situation of the colonised impinging its experience on the coloniser, will be recognized and respected.

Conversely, the study anticipates an expanded interpretation of the British anti-slavery movement making room for another factor that helped shaped its multidimensional nature. It is expected that the interpretation of this thesis will satisfactorily explain how British abolitionists were able to conduct a non-violent campaign of social reform while making use of the combustible material supplied by rebel slaves.

---

and methods of the British anti-slavery movement.

## **Section 2**

### **Chapter 2**

#### **Agitating the Question**

This chapter examines the circumstances that cleared the path for the emergence of the British abolitionists' slave rebellion discourse. It proposes that the slaves' decision to rebel just at the time when abolitionists had begun to attack the institution of slavery itself unlocked an offensive and defensive pro and anti-slavery debate that centred on slave revolts. The rebellion of the slaves fed pro-slavery accusations that abolitionists' agitation of the slavery question prompted colonial servile warfare. To protect themselves from the blast of planter accusation, abolitionists, in turn, opened their commentary on slave rebellions by structuring a series of defensive arguments. This chapter looks at the three periods over which these defensive arguments were spread. Firstly, the chapter considers the self-exculpatory positions on slave revolts that the abolitionists, led by William Wilberforce, took in the aftermath of the Barbados slave rebellion of 1816. Then the chapter traces the abolitionist attitudes to slave revolts that were presented by Thomas Fowell Buxton in the preamble of his House of Commons speech on slavery on 15 May 1823. Finally, the chapter examines the defence that the abolitionists put forward after slaves in Demerara in August 1823 confronted their masters with arms in a bid for freedom. The abolitionist response to rebellion following the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831 - 1832 is not considered here. By 1830, while planters persisted in accusing abolitionists of instigating servile



violence, the abolitionists no longer felt pressured into providing a defence for the inflammatory effect of their agitation of the slavery question.

### **On the Defensive**

Approximately on six occasions in the month of June, *The Times* newspapers of London provided coverage of the Barbados slave rising of 1816. This coverage was in the form of reports from the Barbados governor, Sir James Leith, extracts from letters, editorials and excerpts from the *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*. Pro-slavery items dominated the coverage. The abolitionists were severely attacked. They were described as “... men with diabolical motives ...”<sup>1</sup> Planters insisted that anti-slavery activities in Britain were responsible for the rebels who were “Negroes of the worst disposition.”<sup>2</sup> Anti-slavery opponents claimed, “The cause of the revolt in Barbados boils down to the early and fatal effects of the Registry Bill.”<sup>3</sup> In another London *Times* article of the same date, abolitionist critics asserted that the Registry Bill threatened “... the peace and safety of the colonies” and was tantamount to an “...an impolitic interference by the home government between the local legislatures and the slaves.”<sup>4</sup> These articles succeeded in presenting the connection between slave revolts and the British anti-slavery movement from a negative and damaging perspective.

The abolitionist early responses to these attacks were clearly self-defensive. William

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, of London, 20 June 1816, comment of Sir Charles Brisbane, St. Vincent.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 June 1816, account based on a private letter dated 22 April 1816 and on extracts from Barbados newspapers.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Wilberforce, still leading the humanitarian attack against slavery in Parliament by 1816, was the first abolitionist to issue statements on the revolt and in response to the allegations of pro-slavery advocates. Wilberforce made a strenuous effort to disassociate the slavery struggle in Britain from the counter productive activities of the slaves in the colonies. Wilberforce declared that he “... did not wish to agitate the subject or to enter fully into the state of the island.”<sup>5</sup> In an unmistakably self-exculpatory manner, he went on to declare that “Whatever happened had no reference to himself or his friends, he had no share in creating the explosion that had been felt; he washed his hands clean of the blood that was spilt.”<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the finality of the tone with which Wilberforce attempted to dismiss the perceived connection between British anti-slavery and colonial slave revolts, this was not the closing chapter of his reflections on the Barbados slave revolt of 1816. Wilberforce was haunted by the need to satisfactorily respond to the taunt that

“They [the abolitionists] will never be able to persuade one man besides themselves of a statement so glaringly untrue ... They may gloss it over to themselves as they do to others; but there will be a moment when that still, small voice; which is an inhabitant of every bosom, will be heard, and will tell them; this has been your work.[the 1816 Barbados slave revolt]”<sup>7</sup>

The West India ‘interest’ and their supporters rejected Wilberforce’s disclaimer although it was backed by arguments that attempted to refute the validity of the connections that slavery supporters drew between the abolitionist sponsored slave registration scheme and the revolt.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 19 June 1816.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Wilberforce insisted that the abolitionist scheme of slave registration could not have been responsible for instigating rebellion among the slaves. He viewed slave registration as a harmless measure that would improve and not destabilise the conditions under which slaves lived and laboured in the colonies. Wilberforce exclaimed that he was surprised that the revolt had been attributed to “ ... their unhappy registration bill.”<sup>8</sup> The abolitionist James Stephen senior, who by 1812 was a Member of Parliament and a director of the African Institution, had devised the registration scheme. Using its prerogative to issue orders-in-council to colonies without legislative assemblies, the British Government directed the crown colony of Trinidad in March 1812 to create and maintain an annual census of the slave population based on Stephen’s plan. The expense of the registry was to be met by the planters.<sup>9</sup> The register made provisions to identify slaves by age, sex, stature, country and personal marks. Births and deaths among slaves were also to be recorded. The register was to be transmitted to London in duplicate each year. One year after the scheme was introduced in Trinidad, it was found that the slave population of the colony had increased by more than four and a half thousand between 1811 and 1813.<sup>10</sup> The abolitionists naturally assumed that this was proof enough that a contraband trade in slaves was taking place despite the repeated denials of the colonists. The abolitionists rejected the explanation that the discrepancy in the figures was owing to the carelessness that prevailed in preparing the earlier census in comparison to the relatively more official report forwarded to London in 1813. Following this incident,

---

<sup>7</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, New Series*, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p. 1194.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1158.

<sup>9</sup> See RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, *op. cit.*, chapter 11; STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971. *op. cit.*, pp. 20 - 28; MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW. 1926, *op. cit.*, p. 26; BURNS, SIR ALAN. 1965. *op. cit.*, p. 590 for discussions on the slave registration scheme. See *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, New Series*, Vol. X, 16 March 1824, p. 1095 for structure of crown and legislative colonies.

<sup>10</sup> RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 390.



James Stephen prepared and submitted to the African Institution, an anti-slavery committee formed in 1808, a report that called for the establishment of a general registration of slaves in the British West Indies. He argued that slave registration was vital to the enforcement of the slave trade abolition law and that parliament should urge colonists to adopt the measure.<sup>11</sup> The abolitionists as a body took action. First, in 1815 they promoted an address to the Crown stating that colonial legislatures, both crown and chartered colonies, should be encouraged to ameliorate their slave laws. Then, in June of that year, Wilberforce presented in the House of Commons a bill for slave registration along the same lines of the Trinidad Order-in-Council of 26 March 1812. Both houses of Parliament agreed to forward the abolitionists' recommendations to the colonies.<sup>12</sup> The West Indians, both in Britain and the colonies, reacted bitterly. They regarded this development as the penultimate step to the emancipation of the slaves. They saw it as a means of unfair taxation since they enjoyed no direct representation in the British parliament but were required to bear the cost of the scheme. Furthermore, they insisted that the charges of smuggling were totally unfounded. Above all, they resented the measure as a disregard for the rights they held over their private property and a violation of their autonomy in colonial affairs.<sup>13</sup> Thus, when the slaves in Barbados revolted one year after the controversy between Britain and her colonies over registration, the colonists grabbed the opportunity to blame the revolt on the unpopular measure. Wilberforce and his supporters, however, rejected that such a conservative measure of slave reform could have such a lamentable consequence.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 391. Ragatz notes that in 1815 James Stephen published a pamphlet entitled *Reasons for Establishing a Registry of Slaves in the Colonies*.

<sup>12</sup> MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW. 1926, op. cit., p. 27; BURNS, SIR ALAN. 1965, op. cit., pp. 611 - 612; COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., pp. 114 - 115.

<sup>13</sup> RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, op. cit., p. 393.



It was the reaction of the colonists to the registration scheme, Wilberforce insisted, and not the measure itself that goaded Barbados slaves to take up arms against their masters. Wilberforce insisted that slaves in Barbados erupted in rebellion on account of the planters' misrepresentation of the objectives of the abolitionist campaign. Wilberforce reiterated that the registration measure mentioned nothing about freedom. He argued that the colonial newspaper reports and "... the violence with which the proprietors expressed themselves on the subject... and the heat with which persons talked, even in the presence of their slaves, on the effects of the registry bill [created the Barbados catastrophe]."<sup>14</sup> He produced evidence to demonstrate the extent of the planters' reaction to events taking place in Britain on behalf of the slaves. The planters had printed in their papers, Wilberforce noted, that the abolitionists were "... going to make the slaves free and suggested the possibility of black rising."<sup>15</sup> In this argument, other abolitionists supported Wilberforce. Henry Brougham insisted that the abolitionists' harmless registration bill had been contaminated and made dangerous when "... the registry was coupled with insurrection and emancipation when its motives were otherwise clearly stated."<sup>16</sup> Brougham also brought it to the attention of the House that "... he held in his hands three Jamaican gazettes, in which it was openly avowed that registration was only a cloak for emancipation."<sup>17</sup> Jamaican slaves did not rise in rebellion in 1816. Brougham, nevertheless, was warning the colonists that slave revolts would become a more regular occurrence if they persisted in mismanaging news of the slavery debate. The anonymous author of *Remarks*, an abolitionist pamphlet reflecting views on the Barbados slave revolt, also supported Wilberforce's defensive arguments. The author explained,

---

<sup>14</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*. New Series Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p.1158.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

“The planters have at all times expressed the fear that their gangs would be excited to insurrection by parliamentary discussions in the country. But their own conduct throughout the whole of the abolition controversy, flatly contradicts that profession, and proves it insincere; for these very discussions, of which the slaves could never hear without their help, have been regularly published by themselves in the colonial newspapers – or rather have been misrepresented by them in the way most likely to infuse dangerous ideas into the minds of the slaves, if they were thought susceptible of such impressions.”<sup>18</sup>

To a degree, the abolitionists were correct in asserting that the planters had predicted their own ruin at the hands of their slaves. The abolitionists were discussing the subject of slavery thousands of miles away from the scene where the system was in operation. Whatever information slaves received on the parliamentary debates depended to a large extent on how the colonists managed or mismanaged that information in the colonies. The abolitionists were the authors but they were not ultimately responsible for the circulation of their discussions in the colonies. The central point that the abolitionists were making here was that the planters had violated the very principle that they had repeatedly espoused. The need for peace and safety in the colonies was one of the major factors upon which they had opposed the agitation of the slavery question. Yet, the colonists littered their newspapers with the very incendiary material that they claimed was seized upon by the slaves to oppose slavery.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1215.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 1217.

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous. 1816. *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados and The Bill for the Registration of Slaves*. London: Ellerton and Henderson, p. 4. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Remarks*.



Up to a point Wilberforce was correcting in concluding, “ ... the piece which they had overloaded against the advocates of the measure had burst upon themselves.”<sup>19</sup>

There was, however, a greater irony in the abolitionist argument of blaming the colonists for the Barbados slave revolt. The abolitionists had undermined the very basis upon which the validity of their argument rested. Wilberforce’s line of reasoning pointed to the conclusion that the revolt took place because the slaves were not nearly as stupid as planters had assumed. Wilberforce’s sons had noted that their father had expressed the view that

“ ... the poor creatures, [the slaves] however, degraded, were not in such a state of absolute brutality as not to be operated upon by some of the passions that actuate the rest of the species. Though unable to read, the domestic slaves would obtain and promulgate the notion that their friends in Great Britain were labouring to give them liberty, while their masters were the only persons who opposed it.”<sup>20</sup>

In comparison to other commentaries on the intellect of slaves, even abolitionists’ commentaries, this was a fairly liberal position to take. Many racist conceptions about the African slave were generated during slavery. Prominent among these was the belief in the abject stupidity of the Negro. Eric Williams had quoted Hume, the English philosopher, as stating the following about the Negro:

“ ... their mind is in a continual state of depression, and if they have no expectation in life to awaken their abilities, and make them eminent, we cannot be surprised if a sullen stony stupidity should be the

---

<sup>19</sup> *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 27 July 1816.

<sup>20</sup> WILBERFORCE, R. I. and WILBERFORCE, S. 1838. *The Life of William Wilberforce*. In Five Volumes, Vol. IV. London: J. Murray, p. 288.

leading mark in their character.”<sup>21</sup>

Even some of the Christian missionaries working among the slaves to Christianise and civilise them had imbibed the notion of the absolutely ignorant slave. The rector of St. Paul’s Anglican Church in Antigua explained the slaves’ low attendance at church by this logic. “Let it be remembered that the slaves are in a state of grossest ignorance; that their minds are totally destitute of all cultivation.”<sup>22</sup> Wilberforce’s explanation that slaves’ had fed off the planters’ discussion of the anti-slavery campaign taking place in Britain was an admission that slaves exercised thinking faculties. Wilberforce suggested that slaves had tuned in to the debate in Britain that concerned their status as slaves. The role of ideas was influential in the slaves’ rebellious action. The defensive arguments raised in the wake of the 1816 Barbados slave revolt revealed the ambivalence of the abolitionist concept of the intellectual capacities of slaves. On the one hand anti-slavery campaigners insisted that ideas for the rebellion emerged from the careless talk of the planters and on the other they denied that slaves were intelligent enough to be affected by abolitionists’ discussion of their status. This ambivalence, notwithstanding, was to lead the abolitionists away from concentrating solely on the need to deflect blame away from themselves for the revolt to a more slave centred depiction of the slaves’ rising.

It is interesting to note that years later, James Stephen, writing in 1830 revealed that he did not quite share the opinion that the overseas agitation of the slavery question was incapable of unsettling the slaves. He was in agreement with other abolitionists when he reasoned that

---

<sup>21</sup> WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1966. *British Historians and the West Indies*. London: Andre Deutsch, pp. 23 -



“To deprecate discussions here, [in Britain] is in other words, to require the advocates of the slaves a final abandonment of this cause. But while we protest against any responsibility for such discussions, where [in the slave plantation colonies] they are utterly useless, we will never, desist from them here, where they are the only possible means by which we can hope to redeem our oppressed fellow subjects from bondage, or our country from guilt.”<sup>23</sup>

Stephen went on to state, in contradiction to many other abolitionists however, “I am far from thinking that such long protracted discussions, even in the mother country, fruitless as they have hitherto been of reformation, are unaccompanied with danger.”<sup>24</sup>

It took fourteen years since the slave rebellion in Barbados for one abolitionist to admit openly that indeed the campaigners were aware of the incendiary effect of the metropolitan debate on slavery on the slave population.

Another defensive tactic adopted by Wilberforce in the wake of the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 was his reiteration of the conservative agenda of the abolitionists. To defend the good name of the humanitarians, Wilberforce reminded parliamentarians that while he and his friends were accused of instigating the slaves to fight for their freedom, at this stage of the campaign, the abolitionists were not advocating emancipation. He provided evidence of the cautious path that leaders of the movement had always taken to slavery reform. He recalled that in 1792 when Mr. Burke had called for bolder, more concrete slave legislature, he himself had opposed the suggestion since “... the friends ... had been satisfied with the general measure of

---

24.

<sup>22</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XL, March 1824, p. 229.

<sup>23</sup> STEPHEN, JAMES. 1830. *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated, as it Exists Both in Law and Practice, and Compared with The Slavery of Other Colonies, Ancient and Modern*. Vol. II. Being a Delineation of the State in Point of Practice. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 412.

abolition to which they looked as the grand object of their solicitude.”<sup>25</sup> The sum of the plan that the abolitionist had embraced by 1815, Wilberforce asserted, was “ ... the abolition of the slave trade with a view to produce the amelioration of the slaves; that we might see the West Indies cultivated by a happy peasantry, instead of being cultivated by slaves.”<sup>26</sup> Wilberforce restated that the changes in colonial society that the abolitionists had envisioned were to occur smoothly over a reasonable, unspecified period of time.

Wilberforce’s defensive manoeuvres in the wake of Barbados 1816 were not surprising. The radical, chaotic and destructive dimensions of revolt ran counter to the campaign’s judicious principles and methods. In his description of the abolitionists, the historian David Turley notes that they were the “ ... middle class, religious, liberal segment of the bourgeois by the nineteenth century. They had a sense of appropriateness in balancing liberty and control, civilisation and barbarism within England and the wider world.”<sup>27</sup> Wilberforce’s repudiation of the slaves’ violent and destructive solution to the problem of slavery manifested the conservative principles to which he and his abolitionists’ circle were committed. The rising of Barbados slaves followed by the attacks of the planters had forced the backs of the abolitionists against the wall. The abolitionists’ dilemma was compounded by the fact that Barbados slaves rose in rebellion at a time when official anti-slavery policy was that freedom should flow almost effortlessly from co-operative planters. With the forces of conservatism bearing so heavily against them, the initiative that Barbadian slaves took in attacking slavery may very well have rendered the metropolitan struggle a loss

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>25</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, pp. 1155 - 1156.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> TURLEY, DAVID. 1991, op. cit., p. 6.



cause. The defensive positions that Wilberforce took in 1816, however, represented only a small fraction of the abolitionists' slave rebellion discourse.

### **The Weighty Charge**

In the years between the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 and that of Demerara in 1823, British abolitionists were coming to the decision that a more decisive programme against slavery was needed. In coming to this decision it was evident that the campaigners did give some thought to the possibility that slaves could rebel against slavery on the strength of the movement in Britain. On this issue, the abolitionists vacillated between the views of accepting slave revolt as a necessary risk of their humanitarian campaign and rejecting altogether any responsibility for causing rebellion. The crisis of conscience that Buxton experienced prior to accepting Wilberforce's offer to take over the leadership of the anti-slavery movement in the British Parliament clearly reflects the dilemma that revolts presented to the abolitionists. Buxton did not follow entirely the defensive position that Wilberforce opted for after the Barbados slave revolt of 1816. Buxton was more often inclined to take the view that if indeed slavery agitation in Britain brought insurrection in the colonies, then insurrection was a worthwhile risk of the cause. Wilberforce had written to Buxton from London on 24 May, 1821 " ... earnestly conjuring you to take most seriously into consideration the expediency of devoting yourself to this blessed service ... I entreat you to form an alliance with me [for] I should not be able to finish

it [this blessed service].”<sup>28</sup> Buxton’s reluctance to lead the anti-slavery cause was occasioned by the very accusations of the pro-slavery forces. His son, Charles Buxton, attested, “ ... what chiefly led him [Thomas Buxton] to hesitate ... was the fear that the discussion of abolition in England might lead to a servile insurrection in the West Indies.”<sup>29</sup> In coming to a decision on the matter, Buxton was unable to either easily dismiss his fears or justify the cause. Charles Buxton reasoned that his father “deeply felt the weight of this responsibility and it was the subject of long and anxious thought.”<sup>30</sup> Charles Buxton noted that it was not “ ... till after long and mature deliberations that he accepted the weighty charge ... Indeed he does not appear to have resolved upon undertaking it till a year and a half after the receipt of Wilberforce’s letter.”<sup>31</sup> Buxton’s resolution in this difficult matter was eventually based upon his willingness to accept responsibility for any adverse effects that were likely to occur as a result of the campaign that he was requested to lead. The self-questioning to which he subjected himself in an attempt to quiet his apprehensions about taking over from Wilberforce confirms that the abolitionists were conscious of the potential subversive influence of their struggle. Buxton had asked himself, “If a servile war would break out, and 50,000 perish, how should I like that?”<sup>32</sup> His fairly honest attempt at this point to eliminate the troublesome difficulty from his mind led him to flirt with the position that the end justified the means. His troubled conscience seemed to be appeased by his reasoning that “If I had two sons, I would choose to have one free and one dead than both being alive enslaved.”<sup>33</sup> Buxton’s resolution reflected the risks that he as an abolitionist was willing to take because of his personal

---

<sup>28</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES 1852, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



revulsion of the unmitigated horror of British West Indian slavery; a horror that he considered greater than that of slave rebellion itself. Making a choice on the issue of servile war was not something he could avoid. He was not allowed the luxury of entering into the struggle against slavery while ignoring the reality of slave revolts. In a letter to a friend written on 24 February 1825, he stated, “ ... the maxim I quote in our deliberations is that of the navy in the last war, ‘Always Fight’.”<sup>34</sup> This was no indication that Buxton had become a convert of using violent means to solve social ills. It meant that he was determined not to relent on his anti-slavery activities since for him risking the perils of slave revolts was far more tolerable than the indefinite continuation of slavery.

Other abolitionist leaders held their reservations in spite of the evidence that there is to suggest that Buxton had at least considered that the threat of slave revolt was no obstacle to the anti-slavery cause. George Stephen, son of James Stephen observed that the real or perceived dangers of tampering with the slave system acted as a forceful barrier to the abolitionists’ programme. George Stephen wrote,

“ ... the ablest and most zealous of the abolitionists ... were well persuaded that ... the bare suggestion of emancipating them, would create such a tumult in the country and in Parliament, as to defeat all their [the abolitionists] future efforts for their protection. ... [thus] nothing was said about emancipation, or if said, it was in a whisper. Colonial abuses, colonial obduracy, colonial hypocrisy, were the only topics for agitation, but colonial castigation and colonial emancipation were tabooed.”<sup>35</sup>

By the beginning of 1823, with the formal launching of the Anti-Slavery Society, the

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

abolitionists broke their silence on the question of emancipation. In an extremely conservative manner, Buxton, now leading the anti-slavery campaign in Parliament, declared to the House of Commons that slavery was repugnant to the British Constitution and to Christianity and ought to be gradually abolished.<sup>36</sup> The demands made in this speech on behalf of the slaves were very limited. George Stephen observed, nevertheless, that even when Buxton was given the go ahead to introduce in the House of Commons the conservative abolitionist plan for gradual slave emancipation, several abolitionist leaders were sceptical of the consequences. George Stephen wrote,

“It cannot be doubted that Mr Buxton’s agitation of the question was still premature, and I have reason to believe that most of the leaders gave only a reluctant assent to it. The country was not prepared for such a decided course; an unreformed Parliament was not to be coerced into it, even had popular opinion been ripe to goad them on. Many feared, and my father was among the number, that in the then state of the slave population, a partial admission to their undoubted rights might lead to an insurgent movement to compel a full concession of them.”<sup>37</sup>

The campaigners had ushered British abolitionism into a new era. In part it was an era in which abolitionists were quite aware that the tensions between the struggle in Britain against slavery and the conduct of rebellious slaves were growing more apparent and less simple to ignore or resolve.

---

<sup>35</sup> STEPHEN, GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 1, p. 28, footnote 15 in reference to Buxton’s 15 May 1823 speech on slavery.

<sup>37</sup> STEPHEN, GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 61.



## The Preamble of Buxton's 1823 Speech

The core subject of the preamble of Buxton's 1823 slavery speech was slave rebellion. The preamble occupied eight and one half pages of a speech just over seventeen pages long. Buxton felt bound, before formally divulging the 'new' objectives of the anti-slavery lobbyists, to address the anxieties that he well knew to be on the mind of every Member of Parliament. On the very evening just prior to the presentation of Buxton's speech, Mr Baring, a pro-slavery MP, not very subtly reminded Buxton of the risks he was about to undertake. Mr Baring claimed that he himself was an abolitionist and supported amelioration of slavery. He reiterated, however, "To bring forward the subject of the abolition of slavery in the House, was to shed blood in the West Indies and to cause rebellion."<sup>38</sup> The advocates of slavery did their part in ensuring that abolitionists were not oblivious to and silent about the role that they played, secondary and indirect though it was, in stirring slave rebellion. The contents of the preamble of Buxton's 15 May 1823 speech vacillated between views that both accepted and rejected the charge that abolitionist activities in Britain caused rebellion in the colonies. Buxton was less dogmatic than Wilberforce in rejecting the connection between the slaves' conduct and the abolitionists' activities.

Buxton's speech had begun by "... by referring to the warning he had received of dreadful evils likely to be produced in the West Indies by the agitation of this subject."<sup>39</sup> Buxton did not lightly dismiss the warnings but agreed that the question was "... a perilous one ... It is no slight matter, I have been told, and I admit it, to

---

<sup>38</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, 15 May 1823, p. 256.

<sup>39</sup> MATHIESON, WILLIAM. LAW. 1926, op. cit., p.119; NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., p. 54.

agitate the question at all.”<sup>40</sup> He even appeared willing to shoulder “ ... the responsibility which I incur by the agitation of the question.”<sup>41</sup> Buxton rejected, nevertheless, the accusations that the abolitionists’ well-intentioned attempts to humanise British West Indian slavery were interpreted as a call for “ ... insurrection of all the blacks ... murder of all the whites.”<sup>42</sup> Just as Wilberforce had sought to defend the slave registration measure from the scourge of slave rebellion, so too Buxton insisted that the abolitionists’ slave reform measures of 1823 were innocuous. Buxton was convinced that all the proposals the abolitionists had advanced for the improvement of West Indian slavery were gentle remedies for a harsh and inhumane system. In 1823, Buxton proposed that slaves should be attached to the soil and that they should no longer be viewed as chattels by the law. He asked that their testimony be received, that obstructions to their manumission be removed, that no governor, judge or attorney-general be a slave owner, that provisions be made for the religious instructions of slaves, that marriage be enforced and sanctioned and that an alternative to the current method of punishing slaves be introduced with the complete abolition of the flogging of slaves. Buxton asked rhetorically, “Is there anything irritating in this? What is there in all of this calculated to rouse the furious passions of the Negro?”<sup>43</sup> In response to his own rhetorical question, Buxton treated his opponents’ propaganda on slave rebellions as baseless apprehensions. Buxton observed “ ... no motion was ever made in this House on the subject of Negro slavery, which has not been met with the same predictions.”<sup>44</sup> He recalled that their opponents produced the bogey of slave rebellion in 1787 when abolitionists sought to lessen the sufferings of the Middle

---

<sup>40</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series Vol. IX, 15 May 1823, p. 257.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.



Passage and to end Britain's involvement in the foreign slave trade. The same outcry was made when it was proposed that it should be made a capital offence for a white man to murder a slave.<sup>45</sup> Buxton concluded that it was fantastic that pro-slavery forces could expect that the Negro slaves would be so lacking in common human sensitivity that they would revolt when measures were introduced to improve their condition. It was yet to be seen that indeed the planters were less illogical in pressing this point than the abolitionists had imagined. As far as the Buxton and his abolitionist circle were concerned, however, it was safe to proceed with the slavery discussions and suggested reforms since the objections raised against them were baseless and amounted to nothing more than a mere cry of wolf.

Buxton and his abolitionist colleagues were smug in the mistaken notion that it was possible to improve slavery and that slaves would gratefully welcome any change that appeared to mitigate their suffering. What the abolitionists did not seem to understand was that in the last years of slavery, improved conditions in the system did not make contented slaves. The planters, in a desperate effort to hold the line against reform of slavery, were in a better position to appreciate this. The slavery supporter, Alexander Barclay who had spent twenty-one years in Jamaica, hinted at this conclusion.

“ ... it has at least sometimes happened, that slaves have been found the foremost and most active in rebellion where the reigns of authority had been most slackened, and the greater indulgences had been granted to them ... where order and subordination are not maintained, there will be found the greatest discontent among the slaves, the greatest trouble to the manager ... ”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 260 - 261.

<sup>46</sup> BARCLAY, ALEXANDER. 1827. *Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies or An Examination of Mr. Stephen's 'Slavery of the British West India Colonies ...'* Second Edition, London: Smith Elder and Co., p. 251.

This was not a perfect analysis, as Craton has noted, of nineteenth century slave revolts in the British West Indies.<sup>47</sup> That slaves rebelled when the white forces of law and order had weakened was a factor that tended to be more common during the eighteenth century and was particularly evident in Cuffee's Rebellion of 1763 in Dutch Berbice. The decimation of the whites by disease and the loss of their Indian allies, who were caught up in tribal warfare, encouraged the resistance of the slaves there in that year. Cuffee, the leader of the rebellion negotiated with the Dutch governor as an equal and the slaves held control of Upper Berbice as well as the capital for little more than one year.<sup>48</sup> By the time slaves in Barbados, Demerara and Jamaica rose in rebellion in the nineteenth century, the West Indian slave plantation scenario was shaped by significantly different circumstances. Alexander Barclay, nevertheless, had pointed to a near enough approximation. Greater indulgences, in this case the 1823 amelioration proposals, encouraged slaves to seek their ultimate aspiration. Amelioration measures did not produce gratefully contented slaves. They "... did no more than refine, redefine, and whet that will [the will to be free]."<sup>49</sup>

Buxton went on in his preamble to defend his claim that his opponents' slave revolt apprehensions were without substance by proudly asserting that

"... those twenty years, which, if the West Indians were true prophets, ought to have been marked with perpetual violence, bloodshed and desolation, were, in point of fact, remarkable for a degree of tranquillity in the British West Indies, unexampled in any other period of history."<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, 15 May 1823, p. 261.



It seemed that the abolitionists, on whose behalf Buxton spoke in 1823, sincerely believed that their movement brought peace rather than servile war to the colonies. Contrary to the views of their opponents, the abolitionists felt confident that their attempts to humanise slavery could not but make the slaves more contented with and less violently opposed to their lot. Buxton, consequently, sarcastically asserted that their campaign “ ... declared to be so injurious in theory [has] never produced the slightest practical injury.”<sup>51</sup> Reference to the record of slave revolts before and during the anti-slavery era attest to a point to the validity of the conclusion reached here by Buxton. There certainly were far more incidents of slave uprisings in the pre-anti-slavery era than during the movement. What the abolitionists, perhaps, did not realise was that though fewer in number, the later revolts that took place during their agitation were more intense than the former ones. Taking the figures for the three territories alone that constitute the core of this study, the frequency of slave uprisings just before the launching of the campaign against the slave trade are staggering. In British Guiana, slaves revolted in Berbice in 1733-1734, 1749, 1752, 1762 and 1763 and in Essequibo in 1732, 1744 and 1772.<sup>52</sup> After the establishment of the humanitarian campaign against the slave trade in 1787, however, only four significant slave uprisings were reported for British Guiana. These were the uprisings of 1795, 1802 1804 and 1823 in Demerara.<sup>53</sup> In Barbados, because of geographical and other localised conditions unfavourable to the success of slave rebellions, such occurrences were comparatively rare. There were “ ... no mountains, forests or great inequalities

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> MC GOWAN, WINSTON. 1990. “Christianity and Slavery” in Hazel Woolford and David Granger (eds.) *History Gazette*. No. 24, Sep. 1990. Guyana: History Society, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

of surface in the island ...”<sup>54</sup> to facilitate retreat during and after struggles with the local militia or British military forces. Furthermore, the military force in that territory was reasonably strong, the ratio of whites to blacks was relatively high and over the length and breadth of Barbados, there existed the concentrated development of the plantation system. Even in this colony, nevertheless, the figures on both sides of the records seem to bear out the narrow conclusion of the abolitionists. They seemed to have convincingly proven the point that their opponents had blundered to a significant degree when they associated their movement with episodes of slave unrest. Only two slave plots were uncovered in Barbados in the era of nineteenth century slave reform attempts while before that time, slave insurrection against the system in that territory had erupted in 1675, 1683, 1692 and 1768.<sup>55</sup> Even more supportive of this theory is the history of armed and violent slave resistance in the colony of Jamaica. James Walvin has commented “ ... the history of the island until freedom in 1838 could almost be written in terms of slave revolt and resistance.”<sup>56</sup> This is no idle statement. Ragatz has calculated that “Over a dozen outbreaks erupted in Jamaica alone in the eighteenth century.”<sup>57</sup> By the time the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was launched, however, revolts in Jamaica had been significantly reduced in number. After the occurrence of the 1776 Afro-Creole slave plot in the parish of Hanover in Jamaica, the 1831 – 1832 slave rebellion in that island was the next serious rising of the slaves.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed the record is impressive. The agitators, however, were deceived into thinking that fewer slave revolts justified their conclusion that the slavery reform measures

---

<sup>54</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p. 1160.

<sup>55</sup> LEVY, CLAUDE. 1980. *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism. Barbados and the West Indies, 1833 – 1876*. Florida: University Press of Florida, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1992, op. cit., p. 53.



ushered in a period of relative peace in the colonies. The spirit that informed the slave rebellion of 1816 in Barbados, of 1823 in Demerara and of 1831-1832 in Jamaica as opposed to Tacky's rebellion of 1760 in Jamaica and Cufee's of 1763 in Berbice again confirm that the abolitionists' superficial assessment of the situation was off target. As historians like Mary Turner, James Walvin and Eric Williams<sup>59</sup> have incisively commented, slaves by the nineteenth century were generally more restless, expectant and politically curious about affairs concerning their status than were their predecessors. They had a greater faith in the possibility that freedom could come in their lifetime. More significantly, while the pre-nineteenth century generation of slave rebels aimed at overthrowing their masters, taking over the plantations or living in hardy and inaccessible terrain as outlaws of slavery, the spirit that motivated the new generation was quite different and more dangerous. Most of them, especially their leaders, were among the slave 'elite'. They were headmen, drivers of gangs, craftsmen; confidential slaves whose masters afforded them the privileges of extra allowances of the primary necessities of life. Above all, they had achieved some level of basic literacy and grasped every opportunity that presented itself to tap into every discourse that pertained however remotely to their situation. They took advantage of the opportunity to operate within a context of public discussion on their status taking place on the local and international scene; a context that was outside the reach of their predecessors. Like their forebears, they wanted to be free. Unlike their forebears, however, they were not struggling merely to be refugees of the law. The rebels of the 'Emancipation Revolts' fought for what they considered to be rightfully theirs by law.

---

<sup>57</sup> RAGATZ, LOWELL JOSEPH. 1963, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>59</sup> TURNER, MARY. 1982, op. cit., p. 48; WALVIN, JAMES. 1992, op. cit., p. 83 - 84; WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1952. *Documents on British West Indian History, 1807 – 1833 (Select Documents from the*

They aspired to the status of freemen having the right to be fairly compensated for their labour on the plantations with two or three days of leisure to use as they saw fit. The slaves borrowed the articulation of these demands from the British anti-slavery movement. They recognised the ways in which the objectives of the movement bore some resemblance to their own basic aspiration to be free. Eugene Genovese fittingly observes in relation to the late slave revolts “... the goals of the revolts and the terms in which they were cast changed with the revolutionary events in ... European and American society as a whole.”<sup>60</sup> Slave rebellion informed by this kind of ideology was more contagious and dangerous to the preservation of British West Indian pre-emancipation society than those led by African chieftains like Tacky and Cuffee. Walvin, drawing on the Craton/Genovese debate on this issue, has succinctly commented that

“Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the major slave revolts in the British islands was that the worst incidents erupted in the last years of slavery, not when slavery was at its worst, but in the years when the abolitionist campaign in Britain were apparently making headway towards securing black freedom.”<sup>61</sup>

This observation underscores the difficulty of separating the British anti-slavery struggle from the rebellious conduct of slaves. The metropolitan movement against slavery sharpened the slaves’ tools of resistance. The insurgents in Demerara, for

---

PRO., London, England, *Relating to the Colonies of Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad*). Port-of-Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., Ltd., p. 179.

<sup>60</sup> GENOVESE, EUGENE. 1979. *From Rebellion to Revolution Afro - American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, chapter 1.

<sup>61</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1992, op. cit., p. 84. See also CRATON, MICHAEL. 1979. “Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816 - 1832” in *Past and Present* No. 85, Nov., 1979, pp. 99 - 126.



example, had a definite plan of action that reflected the influence of events taking place in the metropolis.

“They were first to take all the arms, and then confine the white people in the stocks, for fear they should carry the news to town. In the morning the whites would all be sent to town, and the Negroes were then to arm themselves and await the Governor, whom they expected would come and ask the reasons for so acting, meanwhile they would remain on the estate without working.”<sup>62</sup>

This was a substantial leap in planning the course of rebellion from the days of the mid-eighteenth century. The objective of the slaves in sending the whites to town was to gain an update of news on the slavery question that was rumoured to have arrived from England. Slaves were exercising political curiosity and seeking out their interests. They felt confident enough to discuss their condition with the chief political authority in the colony and refusal to work had become part of their planned action of resistance. The colonists commented on the sophisticated level of the scheme that informed the Demerara insurrection of 1823 but refused to believe that the rebels were responsible for the strategy. The editor of *The Demerara Gazette* concluded on 28 August 1823 “... the plans and arrangements of the rebels were most extensive and well made – too well made indeed to admit of a doubt but a superior order of people had laid the original foundation.”<sup>63</sup> The editor went so far as to suggest “Perhaps the

---

<sup>62</sup> RODWAY, JAMES. 1893, op. cit., p. 227; *The London Missionary Society's Report of The Proceedings against the late Reverend John Smith of Demerara, Minister of the Gospel... and Including the Documentary Evidence omitted in the Parliamentary Copy With an Appendix; containing the Letters of and Statements of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Elliot, Mr. Arrindell, &C and also, the Society's Petitions to the House of Commons*. The whole published Under the authority of The Directors of the Said Society. London: F. Westley, pp. 43, 83. Anti-Slavery International, Broomsgrove Road, London. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *The London Missionary Society's Report*.

<sup>63</sup> RODWAY, JAMES. 1893, op. cit., p. 240.

intriguing saints at home had a hand in it.”<sup>64</sup>

A similar attention to some detail planning was evident in the Jamaican slave rebellion of 1831–1832. Sam Sharpe, the imprisoned leader of that rebellion, confessed before he was executed that after Christmas all the slaves were to sit down and refuse to work unless their managers agreed to pay wages for their labour.<sup>65</sup> The editor of *The Demerara Gazette* was not totally wrong when he implicated the abolitionists in the 1823 slave rebellion. What he did not recognise was that the slaves were appropriating the events taking place in Britain on their behalf in their own way. The sophisticated level of their armed resistance by the nineteenth century represented the upward transition of warfare against slavery in which the slaves had matured considerably in their ideology of rebellion. This is a more reasonable explanation for the fewer number of slave revolts that occurred in the period under investigation than the apparent comparative passivity of the slaves. Buxton attempted to come to terms with the rebellion of the slaves but his faulty reading of the slave revolt figures caused him to misunderstand to some extent the impact of the abolitionist campaign on the conduct of the slaves.

In an argument that reflected less of the abolitionist desire to refute the allegations of pro-slavery advocates and more of the ambivalence with which the new leader regarded the issue of slave revolts, Buxton argued that the danger in slavery arose primarily from the hardships of the system. “For I know,” Buxton asserted in his preamble, “wherever there is oppression, there is danger, wherever there is slavery,

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Baptist Missionary Society. 1832. *Facts and Documents Connected With the Late Insurrection in Jamaica and the Violations of Civil and Religious Liberty arising out of it*. London: Holsworth and Ball, p. 23. Anti-Slavery International, Broomsgrove Road, London. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Facts and Documents*.



there must be great danger.”<sup>66</sup> He expressed the view that as far as stirring rebellion was concerned, abolitionist activities were not nearly as great a threat as the unmitigated evils of slavery. Nevertheless, he was willing to consider that “ ... even supposing the danger of giving to be as great as the danger of withholding, there may be danger in moving and danger in standing still - danger in proceeding and danger in doing nothing ...”<sup>67</sup> Buxton had come to the position that whether or not the question of slavery was agitated, slave rebellions were inevitable. Such being the case, Buxton felt compelled to ask the House

“ ... and to ask it seriously - whether it be not better for us to incur peril for justice and humanity, for freedom, and for the sake of giving happiness to millions hitherto oppressed; or whether it be better to incur peril for slavery, cruelty and for injustice - for the sake of destroying the happiness of those wretched beings, upon whom we have already showered every species of calamity.”<sup>68</sup>

This attitude to slave rebellion was a less outright rejection of culpability that had been made in the earlier rebellion in Barbados and was even less ambivalent than other aspects of the preamble of Buxton’s 1823 speech on slavery. It was an attitude that suggested that Buxton and his supporters were prepared to temporarily accommodate slave rebellion once the risk meant that measures were taken to alter the servile regime, and, eventually, to dismantle it altogether. It appeared that this was a compromise that was more attractive to them than the alternative of doing nothing in the misplaced belief that inaction would secure peace and security in the colonies.

In his 1823 speech, Buxton also soft-pedalled between the lines of rejecting and

---

<sup>66</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, 15 May 1823, p. 264.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

accepting some responsibility for slave rebellion by emphasising that abolitionists were neither the first nor the only group to have participated in discussions on British colonial slavery. If Buxton was reluctant to shoulder the entire blame for slave revolts, at least he expressed a willingness to share responsibility for any adverse effects produced by the abolitionist campaign on behalf of the slaves. Buxton stressed that the slavery question

“ ... had been debated again and again within these walls by the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Privy Council, and it does so happen, that during those thirty years, every man of distinction in this House, without exception, has put forth his opinions on these subjects: not only the men professing to be the most eager for liberty, and who, therefore, might be supposed to overlook the danger in the pursuit of their favourite subject.”<sup>69</sup>

The attempt here was to infuse legitimacy into a debate that their opponents as well as conservative anti-slavery supporters regarded as impolitic. By referring to other figures of authority in varying branches of government who participated in the slavery debate, Buxton made the effort to reduce the pro-slavery antagonism that the abolitionists attracted. Their lobbying on behalf of slaves against vested colonial interests won them notoriety. They were sponsoring what were perceived as ill-conceived measures. Essentially, Buxton's reference to the broad-based nature of the slavery debate was a position of compromise.

The boldest step that Buxton made in 1823 in acknowledging the connection between slave rebellions and British anti-slavery was his declaration that he was not “ ...

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 259.



opposed to the pursuit of the ideal good at the expense of present danger.”<sup>70</sup> This statement recalls the personal resolution Buxton made on assuming leadership of the cause when he embraced the view that whatever the danger, the end justified the means. Buxton’s statement suggested that the abolitionists were willing to overlook their revulsion to mass popular unrest in their anticipation of the ultimate goal that the slaves would be emancipated.

The defensive arguments of Buxton’s maiden speech in the House of Commons on the West India question had slightly shifted the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse from the uncompromising position in which Wilberforce had located it in 1816. In the later period, Buxton at least reflected a tendency to share some responsibility for the occurrence of slave revolts. Such a consideration opened the way for abolitionists to entertain slave revolts as a worthwhile risk factor in a metropolitan campaign geared to mitigate and eventually abolish the slavery regime. It is also significant that the position embraced by Buxton was a clear indication that abolitionists partially acknowledged the possibility that slaves might use the slavery debates in parliament as a cue to confront their masters with arms.

### **Loss of Reputation**

The West India ‘interest’ and their supporters were more vociferous in levelling accusations of the inflammatory effects of abolitionists’ activities in the aftermath of the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823 than after the Barbados slave rebellion. An editorial in *The Times* of London on the Demerara slave revolt included an extract

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

expressing pro-slavery views of the revolt. The consensus was

“They (the abolitionists) have put the knives at our throats, and if the blow is not struck, we shall not be indebted for our escape to either their good will or forbearance ... for the chance of obtaining a possible good, they are promoting an immediate and positive evil.”<sup>71</sup>

It was obvious that the abolitionist leaders cringed under this attack. Charles Buxton observed that following the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 the anti-slavery campaigners were painfully aware that they were “... opposed by the West Indians, deserted by the government and deemed enthusiasts by the public.”<sup>72</sup> They also realised that anti-slavery support dwindled as “... their lukewarm partisans left them at once.”<sup>73</sup> The Demerara slave rebellion ensured that the state of the abolitionists’ commentary on slave revolts that Buxton had shaped just three months ago was open to expansion. More abolitionists now contributed to the planter accusation that the agitation of the slavery question was setting off slave rebellion. The extended abolitionists’ commentaries reflected even greater inconsistencies than was evident in Buxton’s earlier reflections. What was significant, nevertheless, was the fact that the conduct of slaves in rebellion was attracting increasing abolitionist attention.

Zachary Macaulay was one of the abolitionists who looked back to the defensive position that Wilberforce had taken in 1816 to respond to the charge that anti-slavery agitation set off the Demerara slave revolt of 1823. Macaulay, however, took an even more cowardly step than Wilberforce. Macaulay did not blame the colonists’ reaction to slave reform measures but the manner in which Ministers of the Imperial

---

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, London, 13 October 1823.

<sup>72</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op cit., p. 124.



Government attempted to implement these measures. Macaulay wrote to Buxton asserting,

“In whatever degree, therefore, the disturbances in Demerara are to be traced to England (and I do not believe that they are to be so traced) they must be considered as the work of Canning, Bathurst, Horton and company instead of that other reviled and calumniated firm [the abolitionists].”<sup>74</sup>

Macaulay explained that the 1823 amelioration measures that set off the rebellion was sponsored by the British Government and was not implemented according to

“... the cautious though firm spirit of the reforms propounded by the friends of abolition, but as a substitute for them, falling short in some respects, and in others going greatly beyond what they had suggested.”<sup>75</sup>

Macaulay’s letter to Buxton was clearly intended to bring some measure of assurance to his friend at a time when pro-slavery advocates were unsparing in their attacks of abolitionist activities. The extent to which Buxton could rest easy in Macaulay’s assertion after Buxton himself had settled in his mind that slave violence was a possible corollary to his leadership of the anti-slavery struggle must have been minimal.

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

<sup>74</sup> The Papers of Zachary Macaulay, Letter of Zachary Macaulay to Thomas Fowell Buxton, London, 11 November 1823, (4pp.) from the Huntington Library, in *Abolition and Emancipation*, 1997, Part 1 (Reel 4) Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publications.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Thomas Clarkson was another of the abolitionists who added his contribution to the pro and anti-slavery debate that discussions of slavery in Britain encouraged open rebellion in the colonies. Clarkson expressed concern for the blow to abolitionist reputation that slaves in Demerara caused. He recorded that they were perceived as

“ ... traitors of our country. ... The planters had circulated the most furious and false publications throughout the whole kingdom; I found their books in the libraries and reading rooms, coffee houses and at some of the inns ...”<sup>76</sup>

Clarkson questioned whether “ ... it would be wiser to travel on in the teeth of these calumnies, or stop my journey for a few weeks and go home and write a pamphlet, and thus try to refute them.”<sup>77</sup> Clarkson did stop and it was then that he did write his *Thoughts on Negro Slavery*. It was a pamphlet intended to persuade the people and parliament of Britain that the gradual emancipation proposed by the abolitionists was both safe and practicable. After the Demerara slave revolt, Clarkson reinforced the defensive abolitionist position that the allegations that the slavery upholders directed against anti-slavery activists were groundless. He supported this position by re-emphasising the view that the abolitionists’ slave reform proposals were cautious and thus safe.

The recently formed Anti Slavery Society also published its reflections to reject blame for causing slaves in Demerara to rebel. On one occasion, the Society’s arguments built on the view that the charges were without substance. An article in the *Edinburgh*

---

<sup>76</sup> The Papers of Thomas Clarkson CN 33 Ms. Essay. *Account of Efforts, 1807 – 1824, to abolish Slavery*. p. 113, from the Huntington Library, in *Abolition and Emancipation*, 1997, Part 1 Reel 1A. M/I 5657, Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publication.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



*Review* presented in the third person plural to represent the Anti-Slavery Society reflected,

“The risks of Negro rebellion have always been greatly exaggerated, as we have frequently had occasion to show; but unquestionably such risks do exist, and are most fit to be considered when we are surveying measures of which the natural tendency is to promote discontent among the slaves, and to excite in them vague and undefined expectations of change.”<sup>78</sup>

It is difficult to imagine that the abolitionists did not readily appreciate the glaring contradiction in this statement. It clearly represented two incongruent attitudes. The abolitionists attempted to refute the allegations of their opponents concerning the predictions that agitating the slavery question would lead to slave revolts. At the same time, they wanted to demonstrate that, as responsible agitators, they were aware of the need to take every precaution to ensure that their anti-slavery plans would guarantee peace in the colonies. It could not have been difficult for them to deduce that if the planters' prediction were without substance, they were absolved from the need to exercise caution. The abolitionists sacrificed consistency to gain whatever advantage was to be had from speaking on both sides of the argument. Despite the weakness of the argument, the address of the Anti Slavery Society acknowledged that abolitionists were aware that measures of slavery reform had the potential to excite expectations in the slaves. This was only one step away from a deduction that abolitionists later made that if these expectations were not fulfilled, the slaves would rebel.

The Anti Slavery Society had also taken up on Buxton's 1823 argument that the measures the abolitionists proposed to reform slavery could only have improved and

not jeopardise the slave colonial societies of the British West Indies. The Society questioned “But how can any such effect [slave insurrection] be produced by measures of a plain and intelligible description, manifestly calculated to better their condition, without in the least weakening the authority of their masters?”<sup>79</sup> Of course the planters recognised that the very suggestion of measures from home for the regulation of their slaves was, in effect, a move that undermined their authority. Abolitionists overlooked this. They emphasised the point that should their admonitions for improvement be heeded, the relationship between the master and the slave could only improve. They stressed, “ ... where it had been acted upon in its spirit, [the proposals of the 1823 Bathurst circular despatch prompted by Buxton’s 1823 speech on slavery] no disturbance had taken place.”<sup>80</sup> The contrast in circumstances between Demerara and neighbouring Berbice in 1823 seemed to confirm the abolitionist position.

“The Governor of Berbice, on receiving Lord Bathurst’s dispatch, very judiciously employed a missionary to explain its purport to the slaves, and to address to them the necessary precautions and qualifications. At Berbice all has remained tranquil. Such was not the course pursued in Demerara.”<sup>81</sup>

To deflect guilt from themselves, abolitionists insisted on the potentially positive effect of the slave reform measures they sponsored and blamed the 1823 Demerara

---

<sup>78</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXI, June 1824, p. 216.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1823. “Negro Slavery No. 7, Insurrections of Slaves in the West Indies, Particularly in Demerara” *Tracts of the Anti-Slavery Society*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 56. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Negro Slavery No. 7*.



slave revolt on the failure of the colonial authorities to comply with the instructions they received.

The new leader of the anti-slavery struggle in Britain, Thomas Fowell Buxton, also had much to say on the servile warfare issue following the rebellion in Demerara. In one of the earlier statements he issued on the 1823 slave revolt, Buxton did take the line that abolitionists' activities were not connected to the revolt. Writing from Cromer Hall to James Mackintosh on 30 November 1823, Buxton referred to this tactic to reject culpability. He stated, "I am ... I must confess, alarmed, not at the reproach which is heaped on me, nor at the danger said to be produced in the West Indies by my motion. I disregard the former and utterly disbelieve the latter ..."<sup>82</sup> In general, however, the tone of his arguments followed up on the positions he had taken when he had first addressed the issue of slave revolts in the Commons in May 1823. After the Demerara slave revolt, Buxton was bolder in insisting that the threat of servile wars in the colonies, real or imagined, was a worthwhile risk of a campaign designed to produce incalculable good for the slaves. Buxton went so far as to position the slave at the core of his argument. He insisted that the slaves did not need to know that men in Britain were fighting their cause to encourage them to rebel against slavery.

Buxton did not wash his hands of the Demerara slave rebels. He used the criticisms that the rebellion generated to defend the anti-slavery position. Buxton emphasised that the campaign he led was a great and noble humanitarian cause on behalf of powerless masses. Admittedly, it was an argument that conjured up the image not of the rebel slave but of the suppliant slave of the Wedgwood cameo pleading with the

---

<sup>82</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES 1852, op. cit., p. 119.

powers that be in Britain for freedom. The abolitionists, however, went on to manipulate the dual image of the slave rebel as the victim/agent of anti-slavery cause. On 11 February 1824, Buxton wrote “ ... it is worthwhile to spend one’s strength on that which, if it succeeds, will change the condition, almost the nature of 700,000 human beings.”<sup>83</sup> Buxton saw himself in the role of advocate “ ... for more than half a million of human beings who cannot supplicate for themselves, and against whom there are many who can canvass and are canvassing stoutly.”<sup>84</sup> Buxton reiterated this point by observing “In the House there were hardly more than half-a-dozen staunch friends to the cause, while 200 members were considered to be more or less directly inimical to it.”<sup>85</sup> This was no exaggeration. From about 1807 to about 1832, the parliamentary strength of those who represented vested interests in the West Indian slave economy was relatively formidable. They constituted a core group of at least twenty-two members in the House of Commons. In the House of Lords, there were no less than eight Jamaican planters and the West Indian body totalled about eighteen. On the other hand, the anti-slavery supporters in the British House of Commons never numbered more than twelve members. The pro-slavery faction in the British Parliament did not merely enjoy a numerical superiority. Henry Brougham commented, “ ... their weight with the government is far more to be dreaded.”<sup>86</sup> The historian Barry Higman supports this observation by pointing out “Personal friendship existed between the Jamaican planter, Charles Ellis, and the prominent Tory politician, George Canning.”<sup>87</sup> Charles Ellis was not the only West Indian who influenced Canning. Kathleen Mary Butler’s observation sheds interesting light on

---

<sup>83</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>86</sup> Cited by HIGMAN, BARRY. 1967. “The West India ‘Interest’ in Parliament 1807 – 1833”. *Historical Studies*, No. 13, Oct. 1967, pp. 3, 8.



this issue.

“At the time of Buxton’s motion for abolition, thirty-nine members of Parliament identified with the West India cause; eleven West India merchants, including John Gladstone and Joseph Marryat, represented London and the out ports, while the remaining twenty-eight members were the absentee owners of colonial estates. ... Joseph Marryat owned estates in Jamaica, Trinidad, Grenada, St Lucia and British Guiana and Gladstone had interests in seven properties in British Guiana and six in Trinidad ... as an active member of the Liverpool West Indian Association, Gladstone exerted considerable influence over George Canning, the Foreign Minister and Member of Parliament for Liverpool.”<sup>88</sup>

In the eyes of the slavery agitators, the risk they were taking was necessary. Should they neglect to rally to the side of the slaves, the latter would be left entirely to the merciless power of their masters. Buxton, consequently, saw his persistence in the slavery question as a pledge to his self-imposed humanitarian obligations to the slaves.

Despite the nobility of the position he was taking after the Demerara slave revolt, Buxton was alive as any other abolitionists to the infamy that was heaped upon the slavery campaign in Britain in the 1820s. The pressure that he and his colleagues experienced was no doubt largely owing to the fact that almost as soon as the abolitionists had taken the step to raise the question of gradual emancipation, a major slave revolt erupted in one of the colonies. Buxton, however, did not wilt under the pressure. The slave rebellion in Demerara brought renewed attacks from the West India ‘interest’ and the Ministers of the Crown determined not to follow through with the May 1823 slave reform measures except in the crown colony of Trinidad. Buxton

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

insisted, nevertheless, that rebellion should not block the march of freedom. In 1824 he declared:

“I know that I call down upon myself the evident animosity of an exasperated and most powerful party. I know how reproaches have rung in my ears, since that pledge [to introduce the May 1823 slave reforms in all the West Indian colonies of Britain] was given, and how they ring with ten-fold fury, now that I call for its fulfilment.”<sup>89</sup>

His courageous and impressive sounding response was “Let them ring. I will not purchase for myself a base indemnity with such a thing as this in my conscience.”<sup>90</sup>

On 12 February 1824, he wrote a letter to a friend stating, “I much question whether there is a more unpopular individual than myself in the House just at this moment. For this I do not care.”<sup>91</sup> Charles Buxton reported that in the aftermath of the Demerara slave rebellion, one of his father’s friends asked him “What shall I say when I hear people abusing you? He replied, You good folks think too much of your good name. Do right, and right will be done to you.”<sup>92</sup> Buxton was determined that “... if this fear [of slave rebellion] were well grounded, the English Government ought not to be terrified by it from examining into the infinitely greater evil in question.”<sup>93</sup> Thomas Fowell Buxton confirmed this opinion when he wrote:

---

<sup>88</sup> BUTLER, KATHLEEN MARY. 1995, op. cit., pp. 8 - 9.

<sup>89</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, op. cit., p. 1115.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 107.



“I wish it to be distinctly understood that it is my firm and unalterable resolution to devote all my life and my efforts to advocating the cause of the slaves; and that I will persist in that course in spite of opposition, unpopularity, obloquy or falsehood.”<sup>94</sup>

### **Acting Like Men**

After the Demerara slave revolt of 1823, Buxton developed one argument that had only been hinted at by other abolitionists in the attempt to distance anti-slavery in Britain from slave revolts in the colonies. It was the argument that slavery was evil and naturally provoked from the slaves themselves a response of resistance. Unique in its perspective at the time, it was an argument that aided in shifting the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse away from the defensive strategy from which it emerged. It was an argument that focused on the person of the slave. At length Buxton reflected:

“He sees the mother of his children stripped naked before the gang of male Negroes and flogged unmercifully; he sees his children sent to market to be sold at the best price they will fetch; he sees in himself, not a man, but a thing – by West Indian law a chattel; an implement of husbandry, a machine to produce sugar, a beast of burden! And will any man tell me that the Negro, with all this staring him in the face, flashing in his eyes, when he rises in the morning and when he goes to bed at night – never dreams that there is injustice in such treatment till he sits himself down to the perusal of an English newspaper and there, to his astonishment, discovers that there are enthusiasts in England who from the bottom of their hearts deplore and abhor all Negro slavery!”<sup>95</sup>

Wilberforce, preparing to retire from parliament at this time, exulted in the speech. He remarked, “Short and not sweet indeed, but excellent.”<sup>96</sup> The speech carried more conviction than other attempts that had been advanced to prove that humanitarian

---

<sup>94</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XIII, op. cit., p. 1285.

<sup>95</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debate*, , New Series, Vol. XI, 16 March 1824, p. 359.

activity was partially but not fundamentally responsible for causing slave revolts. Abolitionist investigation into the Demerara slave rising produced a convincing anti-slavery doctrine that the root cause of slave rebellion was slavery itself and that the greatest opponent of slavery was the slave himself/herself. In its unmitigated form, slaves doomed the British West Indian pre-emancipation society to the perpetual threat of servile warfare.

Buxton's speech had the effect of reversing the direction of the accusing finger that the planters pointed at the abolitionists. Buxton used the speech to condemn the obstructionist tactics that colonists employed against the religious and moral instructions of the slaves. Buxton mocked the claims of the colonists that slaves were in the habit of reading newspapers to follow events taking place in Britain on their behalf. He was acquainted with the extent to which planters opposed the education of slaves. Missionaries of the sectarian churches, who arrived in the colonies by the end of the eighteenth century to impart moral and religious instructions to the slaves, were routinely persecuted by the plantocracy. Sometimes they were denied licenses or these were revoked, their hours of contact with slaves were curtailed and, especially following slave rebellions, their properties were razed and they were chased from the islands.<sup>97</sup> Above all, they were strictly forbidden to teach slaves to read. The Reverend John Smith of the London Missionary Society, who worked among the slaves of the East Coast of Demerara, was forced to abandon his views on the issue of literacy among slaves to meet those of the plantation establishment. In his initial interview with Governor Murray, His Excellency frowned on Smith and sharply declared, "If

---

<sup>96</sup> WILBERFORCE, R. I. and WILBERFORCE, S. 1838, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>97</sup> THOMSON, ANDREW. 1830. *Substance of the Speech Delivered at the Meeting of The Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Slavery, on October 19, 1830*. Edinburgh : William Whyte and Co., pp. 20 – 21. See also *Facts and Documents*, op. cit., pp. 5 - 18.



ever you teach a Negro to read, and I hear of it, I will banish you from the colony immediately.”<sup>98</sup> How then was it possible, the abolitionists wondered, for the slaves to gather subversive ammunition for their plans of rebellion from abolitionist literature? This question would ultimately prove to be the weakest link in an otherwise solid attempt to substantiate the claim that the British anti-slavery campaign was not primarily responsible for slave revolts. Planters were able to demonstrate that despite the general illiteracy that existed among slaves, they were able to gather information from local newspapers of events taking place in Britain that concerned their status.<sup>99</sup>

The crucial point that Buxton made when he focused on the person of the slave in his bid to rid the abolitionists of the scourge of causing slave rebellions was that the slave’s rebellion to slavery was an undeniable manifestation of the slaves’ intrinsic humanity. An insistent implication in Buxton’s words was that no race of the human species, not even the black slave stripped entirely of worth and dignity, would continuously and completely subject himself/herself to acts of inhumanity. Slaves were not entirely objects of slavery. By rebelling slaves demonstrated that they were actively responding to the conditions of their daily lives. Rebellion was unmistakably a response of the human spirit. In these reflections, Buxton, like Wilberforce had done before him, had exercised a measure of faith in the ability and willingness of slaves to shape their own destiny. Wilberforce’s acknowledgement of this sentiment was clearly expressed in his 1807 *Letter to the Inhabitants of Yorkshire*.

---

<sup>98</sup> WALLBRIDGE, E. A. 1848, op. cit., p. 22. See also *The London Missionary Society’s Report*, op. cit. p. 76.

<sup>99</sup> After the Barbados slave revolt, the Pallmer, British M.P., had produced evidence to confirm that slaves were in the habit of reading or paying others to read for them information on the slavery debate carried in the local newspapers. See *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p. 1171. This trend continued during the Demerara and Jamaican slave rebellions.

“ ... Negroes are men; that as men, they are subjected to human passions; that they can feel when they are injured; that they can conceive and meditate, and mature, can combine and concert, and at length proceed to execute with vigour what they have planned with policy.”<sup>100</sup>

Abolitionists did not readily accept that the role of ideas, especially abolitionist ideas, made a mark on the resistance movement of the slaves. It was easier for them to believe that slave revolt was an emotional rather than an intellectual response to enslavement. By placing the slaves' emotions at the centre of their rebellions, however, abolitionists were unable to deny that slaves exercised their ability to reason to formulate and execute strategies against the lifestyle that they abhorred.

Essentially, the abolitionists' defensive arguments vacillated between outright rejection of pro-slavery charges and the acceptance of limited responsibility for slave revolts. Both positions were taken to insist that the abolitionists' humanitarian campaign on behalf of the slaves was a noble undertaking. Their defensive arguments, however, soon caused the abolitionists to consider the role of the slaves in their own rebellion. The debate had come full circle. Open rebellion among the slaves in the midst of an era of abolitionists' attacks on slavery intensified pro-slavery accusations. In turn, these accusations led to the emergence of defensive abolitionist arguments. The continuous probing for a solid anti-slavery defence moved the abolitionist discourse on to its next stage. What began as a discourse to refute pro-slavery accusations of stirring slave rebellion soon produced an abolitionist articulation of the nature of slave rebellions. Abolitionists' conceptualisation of the open resistance of the slaves is the focus of the next chapter.

---

<sup>100</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807, op. cit.





## Chapter 3

### The Other Side of Slave Revolts

The attempt to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of the nineteenth century slave rebellions in the British West Indies presents the historian with great difficulties. Not least among these is the fact that slave rebels, generally uneducated, were unable to leave records articulating their own perception of rebellion. The slave records that do exist, largely in the form of court martial testimonies, are scarcely reliable. The historian Elizabeth Johnson accurately captivates the epistemological disadvantages of working with these sources. She observes, “ ... the judicial records were obtained under conditions of duress. For the slaves involved testimonies were often extracted through torture and almost always with the understanding that survival depended upon the statements they made to the judges.”<sup>1</sup> Planters dominated contemporaneous writings of slave revolts. Their skewed interpretations have led the historian, Hilary Beckles, to charge that pro-slavery writings of the revolts were, “ ... negrophobic descriptions and commentaries ... based on racist notions of angry and savage blacks in vengeful and mindless lust for blood and white women.”<sup>2</sup> In presenting the slaves’ personal struggle in a more positive light, the American historian, Eugene Genovese, postulates that slaves did not always react in a primitive manner to the hostile conditions of their enslavement when they revolted. The pattern of their recurrent resistance shifted over the years. It moved from a basic attempt to destroy their

---

<sup>1</sup> JOHNSON, ELIZABETH. 1977. “The Historiography of Slave Rebellion: Cuba in a Hemispheric Perspective” in *The Journal of Caribbean History*. Vol. XXXI, Nos. 1&2, 1977. Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> BECKLES, HILARY. 2001. “Caribbean Anti-Slavery: The Self-Liberation Ethos of Enslaved Blacks” in Verene Shepherd and Hilary Beckles (eds.), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*. Jamaica: Ian



masters and escape enslavement to a greater consciousness encompassing a revolutionary struggle aimed at overthrowing the slavery system altogether.<sup>3</sup> Michael Craton, whose studies on slave resistance focus on the English colonies, argues that historians subscribing to the Genovese's analysis have overstated the case. The essence of Craton's position is that by the nineteenth century the largely creolised British West Indian slave population were sharp in perceiving strengths and weaknesses in the local colonial status quo. This perception enabled them to make reasonable predictions about the most opportune times to confront their masters with arms demanding their freedom.

Both contemporaneous writings and current scholarship have presented a variety of interpretations of the nature of slave resistance. In spite of the existence of this volume, there still exists a failure to articulate satisfactorily the context within which the leaders of the British anti-slavery movement located slave rebellions. British abolitionists, however, did offer a considerable commentary on the major nineteenth century slave rebellions in the British West Indies. Abolitionists' characterization of slave revolts, while not quite as radical as Genovese's mature revolutionary interpretation, favourably depicted the protest actions of rebel slaves. Abolitionists read the records, admittedly faulty, and presented their version of the attributes that constituted a slave rebellion. It was version that challenged the accounts of their opponents. This chapter examines the manner in which abolitionists depicted the rebellions of nineteenth century slaves in the British West Indies.

---

Randle Publishers, p. 871.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote references to the works of Genovese and Craton in the historiographical context section of chapter 1.

## The St Domingue Bogey

When news of the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 reached the British public and Parliament, it seemed that the planters could not but prevail in their goal of silencing the slavery reformers. The revolt appeared to justify pro-slavery predictions that discussion of the slavery question and attempts to reform colonial plantation society would inevitably end in disaster. To the planters, Barbados 1816 was the realization of their fears that the horror of the St. Domingue slave revolt of 1791 had come to the British West Indies. St. Domingue had won notoriety among the British for being a place where black slaves massacred their masters, razed their property and spread crippling anxiety among the white population. Reports of events in the former French territory often depicted

“ ... garish images of rebellion ... white captives hung from trees with hooks through their chains; men sawn in half; children impaled; women raped on the corpse of their husbands and fathers; hundreds of plantations ablaze.”<sup>4</sup>

The historian, W. F. Finalson records that *Allison's History of Europe* was regularly quoted in recreating the horror of St.. Domingue.

“Twenty thousand Negroes broke into the city, and, with the torch in one hand and the sword in the other, spread slaughter and devastation around. The Europeans found themselves surrounded by the vengeance which had been accumulating for centuries in the African heart. Neither age nor sex was spared; the young were cut down in trying to defend their homes; the age in the churches where they had fled to implore protection; virgins were immolated on the altar; weeping infants were hurled into

---

<sup>4</sup> GEGGUS, DAVID. 1982. *Slavery, war and Revolution The British Occupation of St Domingue, 1793*



the fires. Amid the shriek of the sufferers, and the shouts of the victors, the finest city of the West Indies was reduced to ashes; its splendid churches, its stately palaces, were rapt in flames. Thirty thousand human beings perished in the massacre.”<sup>5</sup>

Pro-slavery literature about St Domingue outraged the European world, not just absentee plantation proprietors in Britain and their colleagues in the British West Indies. The coverage conjured up notions of vengeful and savage blacks intent in drawing their masters’ blood and devastating their property. The devastation was indeed extensive especially from an economic assessment of the losses. St. Domingue at the time of the rebellion was the richest colonial possession of France and was more valuable to French overseas trade than was the combined economic value of all of the British islands to Britain. Bakpetu Thompson informs, “St. Domingue was the greatest supplier in the world of sugar, coffee, cocoa, cotton, spices and precious wood. Vessels of various nations visited and traded with the colony, the turnover amounting to two-thirds of France’s overseas trade.”<sup>6</sup> The greater portion of the riches of the colony was virtually reduced to ashes in the flames kindled by slaves in rebellion. British colonial planters were confident that the St. Domingue revolt with its record of economic, as well as social and political devastation, had placed them in an indomitable position on the slavery question while it wrecked the morale of anti-slavery agitators. Coupland encapsulates the essence of the warning that the planters of the British West Indies arrogantly directed to the abolitionists in the wake of St

---

- 1798. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> FINALSON, W. F. 1869. *The History of the Jamaican Case Being an Account founded upon Official Documents of the Rebellion of the Negroes in Jamaica The Cause which led to it and the Measures taken for its Suppression, the Agitation excited on the subject Its Causes and its Character and the Debates in Parliament, and the Criminal Persecution, arising out of it*. London: Chapman and Hall, p. viii., Quoted from *Allison’s History of Europe*, Vol. VIII, p. 77.b

<sup>6</sup> THOMPSON, BAKPETU. 1987. *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas 1442 – 1900*. England: Longman, p. 304; See also JAMES, C. L. R. 1938. *The Black Jacobins Toussaint*

Domingue and thereafter.

“ ... a concrete example of the risk inherent in tampering with the established order of society in the West Indies was provided by the effects of the Revolution in the French islands and especially the French section of St. Domingue. In the course of 1791, that populous and fertile colony was plunged into anarchy and bloodshed. First the French Royalists fought the French Republicans; then the mulattos rose, demanding equality with the whites; and finally the slaves, some 100,000 strong, let loose the horrors of a servile war. About 2,000 whites were massacred. Over 1,000 plantations were destroyed ... And the moral of St Domingue was ‘Look what comes of undermining the old and natural subordination of blacks to whites with ‘Jacobin ideas’.’”<sup>7</sup>

The inconsistency in the figures for the death toll and material destruction recorded by varying sources do not corrupt the reliability of the general impression that the devastation in Haiti, as St. Domingue, was later renamed, was astounding. Jack Gratus observed that for West Indian planters and merchants, “St Domingue was the answer to every measure of reform proposed by the abolitionists.”<sup>8</sup> It was also the awful memory that planters and merchants resurrected whenever slaves in the British West Indies revolted against their masters in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Consequently, slavery supporters were confident that in the wake of the Barbados slave revolt of 1816, it would only be a matter of time before the British anti-slavery initiative folded up and withered away. They certainly did not expect that anti-slavery advocates could redeem the image of slaves in rebellion.

---

*L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. London: Allison and Busby Ltd., p. 55 for the wealth of pre-Revolutionary St. Domingue.

<sup>7</sup> COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> GRATUS, JACK. 1973, p. 91.



## Devoid of Terror

As discussed in the second chapter of the thesis, William Wilberforce took a very defensive and self-exculpatory position on slave revolts in the wake of the Barbados slave revolt of 1816. This position, however, did not cover the full range of the abolitionists' attempts to come to terms with what the slaves had done in Barbados. The abolitionists' self-defensive arguments were merely the brief prelude of a discourse that proved to be quite diverse in the range of the perspectives it covered. In an anonymously published anti-slavery tract, the abolitionist author was careful to point out that the rising of the slaves in Barbados bore no resemblance to pro-slavery commentaries on the St. Domingue slave revolt. On the one hand, the author admitted that "The insurrection in Barbados had indeed, been a great and deplorable calamity."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the author divested the revolt of the sharp and repulsive edges typical of planters' descriptions of such events. The writer asserted that the plot to revolt was not preconceived and was far from extensive as it encompassed only the four southern parishes of St. George, Christ Church, St. Phillip and St. John.<sup>10</sup> This observation was not made with the intention to undermine the rebellion. The author depicted the revolt in this manner to distinguish between the nature of the slaves' actions in Barbados in 1816 and the resistance movements that African slaves dominated prior to the nineteenth century. During the slave trade controversy, abolitionists believed that rebellion in the colonies would cease if fresh recruits from Africa were no longer imported. Wilberforce had argued then that,

---

<sup>9</sup>.*Remarks*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

“The annual importation into the West Indian colonies of a great number of human beings, from a thousand different parts of the continent with all their varieties of languages, and manners, and customs, many of them resenting their wrongs, and burning with revenge; others deeply feeling their loss of country and freedom, and the new hardship of their altered state; must have a natural tendency to keep the whole mass into which they are brought, in a state of ferment, ...”<sup>11</sup>

When the predominantly Creole slave populations took up arms against their masters after the abolition of the slave trade, abolitionists’ theory regarding the ethnicity of participants in slave rebellions was shattered. It was now clear that all slaves, regardless of their origin, contemplated active resistance against slavery. The author of *Remarks*, nevertheless, perhaps embarrassed or bewildered by the occurrence of slave revolts during the anti-slavery era, altered his position. The ethnicity of the rebels might be mixed but the later rebellion lacked the earlier dread. The slaves of Barbados were so miserably armed that even if their intention was to inflict grievous bodily harm upon their masters, they were incapable of doing so. The author reasoned, “What weapons the Negroes were armed with, we do not learn: had they been able to procure firearms and ammunition it would naturally have been mentioned.”<sup>12</sup> Historians have pointed out that the slaves in Barbados were only equipped with sharp edged instruments that necessitated close range fighting.<sup>13</sup> They had broken into the residence of “ ... a Mr Bayne, who kept a dry goods and hardware, and armed themselves with bills, axes, cutlasses and whatever edged instruments they could lay hold of.”<sup>14</sup> On 16 April on Bailey’s Plantation where most of the action was centralized, a lopsided confrontation took place between the rebels and the forces commanded by Colonel Codd. Codd controlled the garrison of St. Anne and

---

<sup>11</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807, op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>12</sup> *Remarks*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> SCHOMBURGK, R. H. 1971. *The History of Barbados*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., p. 365.



commanded the local militia that crushed the rebellion. He had a fighting column of 400 white regulars, 200 men of the First Bourbon West India regiment and 250 local militiamen. Against this formidable force, abolitionists pitted the inexperienced and poorly prepared slave rebels whose strategies were unclear and devoid of central leadership. The author of *Remarks* underscored the pitiable manoeuvres of the rebels by observing that they acted “... so stupidly and irrationally as to employ themselves solely in burning the cane pieces in a particular spot ... then to stand by their separate bonfires till their enemies arrived to destroy them.”<sup>15</sup> Barbadian colonists had little to dread from their slaves. This abolitionist emphasis challenged the findings of the committee appointed by the Barbados House of Assembly to investigate the causes and the course of the 1816 slave revolt. One section of the committee’s report stated, “... the four largest and most valuable parishes were exposed to the ravages of the insurgents.”<sup>16</sup> Members of the investigative committee strove to depict the slaves as wild and insensate villains. Like their ancestors, the 1816 slave rebels were blind in their destruction and violence. The author of *Remarks*, on the contrary, reserved doubts about applying the stereotypical image of slave rebels to the Barbados slave rising.

Wilberforce’s address on the Barbados slave revolt in the British House of Commons was strikingly developed along the lines adopted by the author of *Remarks*. Wilberforce had gone so far in diluting the terror with which slave revolts were commonly associated that pro-slavery Members of Parliament censored him. Mr. Pallmer attacked Wilberforce by observing that his “... speech ... had lightly touched

---

<sup>14</sup> CO 28/85, 25 April 1816, Codd to Leith, ff. 12; CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., p. 395.

<sup>15</sup> *Remarks*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *The Report from A Select Committee to the House of Assembly, Appointed to inquire into the Origins, Causes and Progress of the Late Insurrection*. Barbados 1818, W. Walker, Mercury and Gazette Office p. 3. Barbados Central Library, Bridgetown.

upon the ruined families, the desolated property and the lives lost in Barbados, and it had concluded with a jocularly which he (Mr. Pallmer) thought was not very suited to the subject.”<sup>17</sup> Mr. A. C. Grant was also upset about the way Wilberforce dismissed

“ ... those horrible events which have recently occurred in Barbados. Most assuredly, Sir, the learned member did speak in very light terms of the insurrection; he asked ‘what, after all, was the extent of the evils, falsely attributed by us to the introduction of the Registry Bill last session, but a riot, quickly suppressed, in which two or three estates suffered’.”<sup>18</sup>

Certainly, the revolt did not last for more than three days but the economic losses endured by planters were extensive. After setting to fire the trash heap on Bailey’s plantation, which was the signal for the simultaneous outbreak of the revolt, “ ... the trash heaps and cane fields on every estate in the upper part of the parish of St. Phillip were also set on fire. The fire spread during the whole night from field to field, from one estate to another.”<sup>19</sup> The slave ignited properties on several plantations in several parishes including Harrow, Bushby Park, Oughterson’s the Thicket, Three Houses and the Grove in St. Phillip, St. John and St. George.<sup>20</sup> The committee investigating the revolt reported that damage to property caused by the incendiary fires of the slaves amounted to £175,000, which was roughly equivalent to 25% of the year’s sugar cane crop. Looting of property also accompanied the revolt and shipping was restricted for some time.<sup>21</sup> It is almost certain that one factor influencing abolitionists’ lenient depiction of the revolt despite its record of economic devastation, was the fact that it coincided with the efforts the campaigners were making on behalf of the slaves.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p. 1168.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1222.

<sup>19</sup> SCHOMBURGK, R. H. 1971, *op. cit.*, 395.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 396 - 397.

<sup>21</sup> CO 28/ 85. 25 April 1832. Codd to Leith, ff. 11 - 12; BECKLES, HILARY. 1987, *op. cit.*, p. 89.



Although they often refused to acknowledge their limited role in the revolts, it was not impossible that abolitionists reserved doubts about their subversive impact. Consequently, it was to their advantage to ignore or at least play down the economic ruin that slaves in rebellion unleashed on planters' property and to stress that planters' traditional accounts of the conduct of rebellious slaves were no longer relevant by the final years of slavery.

### **Pressed by An Intolerable Weight<sup>22</sup>**

Wilberforce carefully probed among the scanty records available on the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 and emerged with a slave centred depiction that has been scarcely recognised. Perhaps still attempting to disprove the allegations of the planters, Wilberforce found a satisfactory explanation for the revolt by focusing on the suffering of the slaves in slavery. He confessed that the revolt represented “ ... a conduct which, though it was to be lamented, and could not be justified, nevertheless admitted of explanation.”<sup>23</sup> He could not condemn altogether the rebels and their admittedly counter-productive actions. Instead he presented the view that the Barbados slave revolt was a protest action in response to the numerous evils of slavery. Appealing to justice and humanity, hallmarks of the British anti-slavery movement, Wilberforce concluded, “ ... that degraded race [was] pressed by a weight which they felt intolerable.”<sup>24</sup> They were pushed into an act of desperation by “ ... a class of people that did not so much consult the feelings or comforts of the slaves as in

---

<sup>22</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p. 1155.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1156.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1160.

our other colonies.”<sup>25</sup> Wilberforce reasoned, just as the slaves undoubtedly would, that in slavery lay the evil that prompted the irresistible stimulus to rebellion. Wilberforce had arrived at this sympathetic depiction after eliminating the mundane explanations that planters in previous years repeatedly offered to account for slave rebellions. Wilberforce reasoned,

“They had no temptation to revolt from the peculiar nature of the country furnishing them with the means of concealment, nor could they have any sanguine hopes of success from the disproportion between themselves and the white inhabitants. There were no mountains, forests or great inequalities of surface in the island, and there was a considerable military force.”<sup>26</sup>

Wilberforce was keen on identifying the unique factor that set the Barbados slave revolt in a category of its own. The local conditions of the island hardly provided an answer. Regrettably, Wilberforce failed to declare simply that Barbados slaves revolted because they wanted to be free. He concluded, nevertheless, that “ ... impatience under suffering, rather than hopes from revolt might be supposed to have stimulated them to the conduct they pursued ...”<sup>27</sup> Recalling Genovese’s assessment of the pre-nineteenth century slave revolts in the British West Indies, Wilberforce ended up believing that slaves in Barbados were triggered into revolt by “ ... desperation against extreme severity, hunger and the denial of privileges.”<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the Barbadian planter class challenged Wilberforce’s analysis. They rejected the suggestion that material deprivation stimulated the slaves’ action. Their contradiction of this aspect of Wilberforce’s interpretation seems a more accurate

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> GENOVESE, EUGENE. 1979, op. cit., p. 4.



representation of the slaves' motivation. John Beckles, speaker of the House of the Assembly in Barbados, stated that just prior to the revolt, " ... the slaves had comfortable homes, were well fed and were well taken care of."<sup>29</sup> The committee investigating the causes and course of the revolt reinforced this view. It claimed that the harvest in crops in 1816 was abundant especially in St. Phillip where the revolt began and that a liberal allowance of corn and other provisions were proffered to the Negroes.<sup>30</sup> In his Masters thesis, Anthony Wiltshire has also been convinced that "The causes of the revolt ... did not have its roots in bad treatment but involved a spirit of rising expectations unfulfilled."<sup>31</sup> Colonel Codd insisted in his report of the course and the cause of the revolt that when he inquired of the slaves if ill treatment influenced the revolt, they consistently denied the suggestion.<sup>32</sup> It seems that on the eve of the Barbados rebellion, slaves were as comfortable as they could possibly be in slavery. Better treatment of slaves, however, a point that not even the abolitionists had grasped by 1816, was no guarantee against rebellion.<sup>33</sup> The aspirations of the slaves had gone past the desire to acquire whatever material comforts their masters offered. Ironically, in at least one aspect, the planters' assessment of the revolt cast the rebels in a more revolutionary mould than that of the abolitionists'. The planters admitted, blindly perhaps, that the revolt manifested, not protest against bad treatment but the slaves' impatient desire to enjoy a freedom that seemed guaranteed.

Wilberforce had entered the House of Commons on 19 June 1816 to move a motion

---

<sup>29</sup> Cited in BECKLES, HILARY. 1987, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> WILTSHIRE, ANTHONY. 1983. *The Reaction of the Barbadian Plantocracy to Amelioration, 1823 - 1833*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> CO 28/85, 25 April 1816, Codd to Leith, ff. 14. PRO, Kew Gardens, London.

<sup>33</sup> Governor Sir James Leith seemed to have grasped this point for he commented that "The planters of Barbados ... had flattered themselves that the general good treatment of the slaves would have prevented their resorting to violence ..." CO 28/85. 30 April, 1816, Leith to Bathurst, ff. 8. PRO, Kew Gardens, London.

for the implementation of slave registration in both the crown and legislative colonies. He had resolved to avoid the question of slave rebellion in Barbados. He ended his address, however, by confessing “ ... he had gone further than he had intended when he entered the House.”<sup>34</sup> In spite of Wilberforce’s failure or reluctance to recognise the full extent of the slaves’ political aspirations in the Barbados slave revolt of 1816, his statements clearly marked the revolt as the beginning of a new era in slave rising. Wilberforce went past the need to refer to the revolt merely to defend abolitionists against the accusations of slavery advocates. Wilberforce had broadened the scope of the abolitionists’ reflections on slave revolts. It was not the last time that the abolitionists were to speak extensively and favourably in interpreting the option that slaves took when they violently opposed their enslavement.

### **Rising Anti-Slavery Fervour**

The second major slave rebellion to erupt in the British West Indies, the Demerara slave revolt of 1823, took place against a climate of anti-slavery activities that had widened considerably.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, other abolitionists were in a far better position than was Wilberforce, who was on his way out of the movement, to analyse the position of slaves in rebellion. Thomas Clarkson, the abolitionist who worked indefatigably outside of parliament for the cause, wrote that by 1822, “ ... the eyes of the friends of Africa begun to be turned ... to slavery in the British colonies as the next evil to be subdued.”<sup>36</sup> He confessed, however, that “They were obliged to go about their work at first, as silently as they could ... every member was pledged to

---

<sup>34</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XXXIV, 19 June 1816, p. 1160.

<sup>35</sup> NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., 65.



secrecy ...”<sup>37</sup> Eventually, Clarkson concluded, “ ... they found themselves strong enough to come forth and announce their measures as well as their undertaking, to the public ... on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1823.”<sup>38</sup> On the last mentioned date, The London Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery, also called the Anti-Slavery Society or the Committee on Slavery held its first meeting at the Kings Head Tavern Poultry in London.<sup>39</sup> Soon branch or corresponding societies were established throughout England, Wales and Scotland. On 15 May 1823, the new leader of the movement, Thomas Fowell Buxton, moved a motion in the Commons for the immediate emancipation of the children of slaves. Buxton also called for the implementation of slave reforms that would gradually prepare the older slaves for eventual freedom. Rising abolitionist fervour was also manifested in the launching of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* in 1823. This magazine became an important organ of abolitionist propaganda both to parliamentarians and to such as constituted the anti-slavery public. Zachary Macaulay edited *The Reporter* from 1825. It was within this framework of a relatively radicalised British anti-slavery campaign that the slaves of Demerara rose in rebellion on 18 August 1823.

### **The Duty to Rebel**

Just prior to the rising of slaves in Demerara, an article appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* expressing an extremely radical view on slave rebellions. It was stated that in principle, slaves were justified in confronting their masters with arms demanding their

---

<sup>36</sup> Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., CN 33, p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20, E2/1, *Committee on Slavery Minute Book*, January 1823, p. 1. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

freedom. The article was included in the issue of February 1823. The argument ran thus,

“If one man or a class of men pretend to absolute dominion over the mass of their fellow creatures ... it is quite manifest that the people are fully justified in rising up and, if, it be needful, in utterly destroying them. But far more unrighteous is the horrible attempt at making property of man, holding them in the state of personal slavery or treating them as cattle or as inanimate objects, the absolute property of their owners. To terminate a state so repugnant to every principle, so abhorrent to all the feeling of our nature, is clearly and undeniably not merely a right, but an imperative duty.”<sup>40</sup>

Never before had an abolitionist appeared to take such a revolutionary position on slave resistance in the colonies. The closest that abolitionists came to making similar declarations was when they quoted the toast made by Dr Johnson on a visit to Oxford. It was a toast proposing “Success to the next revolt of Negroes in the West Indies.”<sup>41</sup> When the abolitionist James Mackintosh quoted Dr Johnson in 1824, he was careful to stress that he was no champion of slave rebellion.<sup>42</sup> Much evidence exists to prove that Henry Brougham was the author of the incendiary article in the *Edinburgh Review*. Many of the contributions in the *Review* were anonymously submitted. Chester New, Brougham’s biographer, has noted, however, “The most prolific authors [of the *Edinburgh Review*] ... Jeffrey, Brougham and Sydney Smith, often revealed their own authorship in letters written at the time.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, New stated that “... the cause of the Negro slave was supported by articles in about half of the numbers of the *Edinburgh Review* ... Nearly all were written by Brougham.”<sup>44</sup> Additionally, in

---

<sup>40</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. LXXV, February 1823, p. 169.

<sup>41</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 1046.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> NEW, CHESTER. 1967. *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, p. 419.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.



a series of correspondence between James Stephen senior and Brougham, the two were on the verge of ending their friendship as a result of Brougham's review of a paper written by Stephen. Brougham refused to acknowledge his authorship of the contentious article but Stephen pressed him for a response " ... knowing as I do from yourself that the articles on the Slave Trade in the *Edinburgh Review* are generally, if not always, your own ..." <sup>45</sup> This information is significant in light of the fact that Brougham's work on slavery written under the cover of anonymity expressed far more extreme views than those in which his authorship was clearly revealed. By June 1824 when Brougham examined the revolt of the slaves in Demerara, he expressed a completely opposite view to that which was expressed in the *Edinburgh Review* in its February 1823 issue. Brougham asserted in the more formal forum of the House of Commons that,

" ... sudden, unprepared emancipation ... effected by violent measures ... would inflict the severest misery on those beings whose condition is already too wretched to require ... any increase of calamity ... emancipation must be the work of time, and, above all, must not be forcibly wrested from their masters." <sup>46</sup>

The inconsistency of Brougham's position on the issue suggests that he had not entirely resolved in his mind that it was wrong for slaves to rebel to obtain freedom. The discrepancy between his anonymous writings on the subject and his more public speeches indicates that Brougham harboured extreme attitudes about slave rebellion that he did not dare to reveal openly in defiance of the largely conservative principles of his abolitionists' associates.

---

<sup>45</sup> Brougham MSS, Letters to Henry Brougham from Sir James Stephen, 27 January 1815 (26065). University College London Library.

## One Remarkable Circumstance

The general tone of Brougham's contextualisation of the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 is contained in the two marathon speeches he delivered in the House of Commons on 1 and 11 June 1824. A number of other works repeated the main ideas expressed in these speeches. He had stated that his objective in these addresses was to examine the trial and persecution that John Smith, the London Missionary to Demerara, endured after the rebellion. Brougham's investigation of Smith's trial, however, opened up a window through which the abolitionists perceived the slaves' rebellious experience. Like Wilberforce before him but with greater boldness, Brougham, as well other abolitionists, refused to lump the rebellion of slaves in Demerara with that of the slaves in the era of pre anti-slavery agitation. In an article intending to review Smith's trial, the rising of the slaves was referred to as " ... the late, partial and inconsiderable commotion."<sup>47</sup> In the same article, the author referred to the slaves' three day resistance as a " ... movement" in which, according to the Governor's bulletin, one white rifleman was slightly wounded and another was hit in the leg by the cross-fire of his own party. The author asked rhetorically, "Now, can any man living believe in a deep laid plot for rising and massacring the whites after reading this result?"<sup>48</sup> It was the same conclusions that the author of *Remarks* was groping towards in commenting upon the Barbados slave revolt of 1816. In the House of Commons, Brougham was still sceptical of pro-slavery descriptions of " ... the transactions which are called the revolt of Demerara."<sup>49</sup> Brougham rejected the accounts of the planters and accepted instead that which the Reverend John Smith of

---

<sup>46</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 966.

<sup>47</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XL, No. LXXIX, March 1824, Article 10, p. 226.



the London Missionary Society provided. Smith had asserted,

“The revolt has been unlike every other I have ever heard of or read of. In former revolts in this colony, in Jamaica, in Grenada and in Barbados, blood and massacre were the prominent features. In this a mildness and forbearance, worthy of the faith they professed (however wrong their conduct may have been) were the characteristics ...”<sup>50</sup>

Brougham echoed Smith by declaring that the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 was “ ... a memorable peculiarity, to be found in no other passage of Negro warfare within the West Indian seas.”<sup>51</sup> Brougham was convinced that Smith had authentically represented the slaves’ conduct. Brougham added, “ ... the insurrection stands distinguished from every other movement of this description in the history of colonial society.”<sup>52</sup>

In the planters’ eyes slave revolts remained an irredeemable evil and the rebels who participated were murderous cutthroats. The abolitionists were not daunted by the expression of these hostile views. Other campaigners of the cause reinforced Brougham’s reading of the event. Thomas Clarkson, in his address to the gentlemen of Ipswich, was forthright in taking on the challenge of the pro-slavery interests. He stated that the planters’ alarms were intentionally exaggerated. He noted that the

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>49</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 990.

<sup>50</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 66. *Demerara Minutes of Evidence on the Trial of John Smith a Missionary 1824(158)*, Vol. XXIII. Shannon, Ireland: IUP, p. 95. The entire document spans from pages 51 - 142.

<sup>51</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1857. *Works of Henry, Lord Brougham Speeches on Social and Political Subjects*, Vol. X. London and Glasgow: Richard Griffin and Company, p. 159.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.; *The Missionary Smith - Substance of The Debate in the House of Commons on Tuesday the 1<sup>ST</sup> and Friday the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1824 on A Motion of Henry Brougham, Esq. Respecting the Trial and Condemnation to Death by a Court Martial to the Rev. John Smith, Late Missionary in the colony of Demerara With a Preface Containing Some new Facts Illustrative of the Subject*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 38. (Other citations of this item will be referred to as A Motion of Henry Brougham

public had been misled by accounts of the insurrection provided by

“ ... the Planters only, and unhappily we have no opportunity of getting them from any other quarter. ... they come from persons ... interested in making the occurrence a handle to prejudice the people of England against us, and to divert them for pursuing the great question of gradual abolition of slavery ... the accounts have been greatly exaggerated.”<sup>53</sup>

Clarkson believed that it was incumbent on the abolitionists to counter the planters’ tactic of exaggerating the reports of the revolt by providing their own more reasonable interpretations. He insisted that there was no need to be horrified of the slaves. Clarkson explained that recently he had heard one Mr. Brooks speaking in Brighton. Clarkson introduced Brooks to his Ipswich audience as

“ ... an eminent minister on a plantation in neighbouring Berbice [who] did not feel the need to flee the territory for in his view all had been quiet at Berbice, and as to the Demerara Insurrection, it had been more magnified than it ought to have been.”<sup>54</sup>

The question might arise as to why Mr. Brooks was in England three months after the Demerara slave revolt if indeed he was not apprehensive of the state of affairs in the neighbouring colony. The possible answers, not provided by Clarkson, are numerous. Nevertheless, the information demonstrates that Clarkson shared Brougham’s conviction that the slaves in Demerara, a territory where rebellion was no novelty, had embarked on a new and less violent phase of active resistance to slavery.

---

Respecting ... John Smith).

<sup>53</sup> Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., 5 December 1823.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



## A Combination of European Workmen

On separate occasions, Brougham, Mackintosh and the Anti-slavery Society as a body raised the dignity of the Demerara slave revolt by perceiving within it the features of a European labour protest movement. The Society detected that one marked dimension of the so-called rebellion was the slaves' bid to alter their social and economic position within the slave plantation system. The Society commented,

"In Demerara, a slight commotion was occasioned among the Negroes ... and far more resembling a combination of European workmen to strike for wages, for time or other indulgence than a rebellion of African slaves."<sup>55</sup>

Abolitionists' examinations of and commentaries upon the nature of the Demerara slave revolt dismissed the paranoia that planter accounts brought to it and established a level of esteem for the slaves' resistance. Brougham boosted the respectability that the Demerara revolt was commanding through abolitionists' discourse when he underlined that the slaves were " ... satisfied with combining not to work ... to ascertain the precise nature of the boon reported to have arrived from England."<sup>56</sup> James Mackintosh continued in this line of argument. He interpreted the terms used by slaves in their court martial testimonies to refer to their resistance as a process in labour bargaining. In Mackintosh's explanation the slaves devised

" ... a plan for obliging or 'driving', as they called it, their managers to join in an application to the governor on the subject of the new law ... The expedient of a general 'strike' or refusal to work appears

---

<sup>55</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, 1824, p. 209.

<sup>56</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 994.

to have been the project spoken of most by the slaves.”<sup>57</sup>

The abolitionists performed a major paradigm relocation in their conceptualisation of a slave revolt. They lifted it out of the world of terror and deposited it into a typical British nineteenth century confrontation between labour and management. The basis for this dimension of abolitionists’ analysis was partly facilitated by the testimony of Colonel Leahy. He was greatly instrumental in the speedy suppression of the Demerara slave revolt. Leahy acknowledged that he learnt of the slaves’ aspiration for specific improvements in their working and living conditions in the discussion he held with them just previous to the mopping up operations that the militia carried out against the slaves. He confessed, “Some wanted three days and Sunday for church ... some wanted two days ... At first there was a demand for freedom ... then, three days ... than any thing else.”<sup>58</sup> Leahy even testified that he had made a list of the demands of the insurgent slaves but had subsequently destroyed it believing that the document was useless.<sup>59</sup> Abolitionists capitalised on the fact that dialogue transpired between the slaves and the colonial authorities to justify the comparison they made between the conduct of the slaves in Demerara and that of workers at home.

Nineteenth century Britain was so seeped in the throes of industrial unrest that it was no surprise that abolitionists drew parallels between slave rebellion in the colonies and labour protest activities in the metropolis. In the period from about 1812 to about 1830, just about the time of the major slave revolts in the English colonies, Britain was rife with labour riots. Labourers throughout Britain assembled illegally, broke

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 1060. This evidence was based on information provided by *The London Missionary Society’s Report* op. cit., reflecting the testimonies of the slaves Bristol and Seaton and the Reverend Smith quoting the slave Quamina, pp. 24, 43 and 83.

<sup>58</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 66, op. cit., pp. 101 - 102.

<sup>59</sup> *The London Missionary Society’s Report*, op. cit., p. 106.



threshing machines, posted placards demanded higher wages, wrote threatening letters signed by a mysterious Captain Swing and called for the abolition of the tithe.<sup>60</sup> For agricultural workers, the threshing machine was singled out for attack. Like the cane field in the colonies, the threshing machine was “... the symbol of injustice and the prime target of their fury.”<sup>61</sup> Many in Britain agreed that the “The great political catalyst of the period was economic distress.”<sup>62</sup> Radicals like William Cobbett and the mysterious Swing were blamed for the riots but many knew that the predisposing factors were “... wars, national debt, increased population, Corn Laws, mal-administration of the poor laws [which] had reduced the great mass of the people, and especially the agricultural labourers, to the verge of starvation and despair.”<sup>63</sup> Many identified with the plight of the labourers and sympathized with their protest actions. Some abolitionists, like Wilberforce, supported the measures taken by the authorities to curb what he regarded as the excesses of the working class. In the incident that became known as the ‘Peterloo Massacre’, for example, “Wilberforce, predictably, supported the measures [of the government].”<sup>64</sup> On that occasion, a crowd of about 50,000 to 60,000 men, women and children had gathered on St. Peter’s field on the outskirts of Manchester to listen to Hunt and other orators branded by the government as dangerous radicals. Before the meeting began, the magistrates ordered the yeomanry to make their way through the throng to arrest Hunt. The yeomanry were entangled in and hustled by the crowd. Eleven people were killed or died as a result of their wounds, several hundred were injured by sword cuts or horse’s hoofs or crushed in the panic to rush to safety. Subsequent to the event, the government thanked the

---

<sup>60</sup> HOBBSBAWM, E.J. and RUDE, GEORGE. 1969, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> EVANS, ERIC. 1989, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> MOLESWORTH, WILLIAM. 1877, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>64</sup> CORMACK, PATRICK. 1983, op. cit., p. 105.

magistrates, declared the meeting illegal and Hunt and some of his colleagues were committed to trial for conspiracy to alter the law of mass meetings by force and threat.<sup>65</sup> Some abolitionists, like Henry Brougham, opposed such repressive and high-handed Government measures. In 1819, Brougham raised his voice to censure the Government and Manchester's local magistrates for the 'Peterloo Massacre'. He condemned the prison sentences imposed on Henry Orator Hunt, John Knight, Samuel Bamford and other organisers of the meeting at St. Peter's Field.<sup>66</sup> In a letter to Earl Grey on the Peterloo incident, Henry Brougham wrote on 31 August 1819,

"The magistrates there and all over Lancashire, I have long known for the worst in England, the most bigoted, violent and active. I am quite indignant at this Manchester business, but I fear, with you, that we can do nothing till the parliament meets."<sup>67</sup>

Brougham actively defended some working class radicals, who were arrested and charged for mobilising workers taking action against their miserable condition. In his capacity as a lawyer, in August 1812, Brougham had defended thirty-eight handloom weavers, who had been arrested by Joseph Nadin, Deputy Constable of Manchester. The handloom weavers had attempted to form a trade union. Their leader, John Knight, was charged with administering oaths to weavers that pledged them to destroy steam looms. The rest of the men were accused of attending a seditious meeting. As a result of Brougham's brilliant defence, all thirty-eight handloom weavers were acquitted.<sup>68</sup>

In responding to workers' protest actions at home, Buxton took a more moderate

---

<sup>65</sup> COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1923, op. cit., pp. 418- 419.

<sup>66</sup> [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PR/Brougham.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PR/Brougham.htm), 10<sup>th</sup> August 2001, Simkins, John@spartacus pavilion

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



approach than did Brougham but he too was convinced that there was justice in the workers' actions. Buxton confessed,

"I voted with ministers because I cannot bring myself to subject the Manchester magistrates to a parliamentary inquiry; but nothing has shaken my convictions that the magistrates, ministers and all, have done exceedingly wrong."<sup>69</sup>

Buxton compromised his conviction to avoid humiliating authorities at home. Nevertheless, he joined the Anti-Slavery Society as a body in his belief that labourers, whether in Britain or in her colonies, ought to enjoy the right of combining to protest appalling conditions. Thus, in an anti-slavery tract commenting on the slave rebellion in Demerara, the abolitionists saw a ready comparison between the plight of slaves' in rebellion and

"... the miners of Cornwall, ... the ironworkers of Wales, ... the keelmen of the Tyne, ... the weavers of Lancashire, ... the unhappy affair at Manchester, ... large bodies of Spitafields crowded last year to Westminster filling Palace-Yard and all the avenues and passages of the House of Parliament with their numbers, beseeching and imploring the members of the Legislatures to protect them from the unjust purposes of their masters ... Or take a stronger case, that of the agricultural labourers, who in open day have been proceeding in bodies to the destruction of threshing machines, and to other acts of destruction of lawless violence; or that of the Luddites or, that of the Blanketeers. And let us ask whether it would have been endured that even these misguided, and many of them most criminal, individuals should have been dealt with as the poor, ignorant, oppressed, cart-whipped slaves of Demerara have been dealt with?"<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES, 1852, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>70</sup>. *Negro Slavery Number 7*, op. cit., pp. 60 - 61

Abolitionists maintained that slaves were only acting like any English labourer facing harsh conditions when they rose up in resistance to their servile existence. The slaves rose to confront the managers of the system to bargain for much needed reform in the servile regime.

### **Just Ground for Alarm**

Despite the comparisons that abolitionists could and did make between slaves in Demerara and workers in Britain, many aspects of their commentary of the revolt set it apart from any other kind of industrial impasse. Brougham and Mackintosh argued that the slaves' rising in Demerara was in part the deliberate failure of the colonial authority to provide politically curious slaves with accurate and straightforward information. Not coincidentally, the missionary John Smith had come to the very conclusion. In the final entry of his private journal of 8 August 1823, Smith had written that the governor and the Court of Policy of Demerara had acted imprudently in withholding the information from the slaves concerning the orders of the British Government.<sup>71</sup> Slaves were not prepared to forever patiently await a formal report of the measures that they knew had arrived from England concerning their well being. Brougham explained that the procrastination of Demerara officials provided the slaves with just ground for alarm and rebellion. At length he reasoned,

“ ... those instructions arrived in Demerara on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July last, and great alarm and feverish anxiety

---

<sup>71</sup> Quoted by JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972. *Am I Not A Man And A Brother? British Missions and the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in West Africa and the West Indies 1786 - 1838*, Uppsala: Gleerup, p. 314; NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., p. 55. John Smith had identified this cause among the four principal causes of the rebellion. See also *The London Missionary Society Report*, op. cit., pp. 86, 188.



appear to have been excited by them amongst the white part of the population. That the existence of this alarm ... at the arrival at some new and beneficial regulations were marked and understood by the domestic slaves, there cannot be a doubt. By them the intelligence was speedily communicated to the field Negroes. All this time there was no official communication of the Instructions from the Colonial Government. A meeting had been made public in consequence of its assembling. A second was held in the prevalence of the general alarm, rendered more intense by the inquisitive anxiety of the slave population ... most certainly, the ... authorities of Demerara overlooked that course of proceeding best calculated to allay at least the inquisitive anxiety of the slaves; namely; promulgating in the colony what it really was that had been directed in the Instructions of the King's ministers ... Week after week was suffered to elapse and up to the period when the lamentable occurrence took place ... no ... authoritative communication, whether of what had arrived in England, or of what was the intention of the authorities at Demerara was made to the slaves. This state of suspense occupied an interval of seven weeks."<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the officials in Demerara, aware of the turn of events in Barbados, determined by their relative silence not to repeat the mistake of publicising slave legislation in the hearing of slaves. The abolitionists indicated that if such was their thinking, their action was ineffectual. Slaves were curious about and attuned to discussions on the slavery question taking place both in the colonies and across the Atlantic. They had managed to discover what the colonists attempted to conceal from them. Abolitionists realised that among the Negroes, an intelligentsia was to be found among the domestic slaves. Although they were relatively more comfortable than their brethren in the field, the slaves holding the 'elite' occupations on the plantations were least contented with slavery. Mackintosh observed in his comments on the Demerara slave revolt,

---

<sup>72</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1838. *The Speeches of Henry, Lord Brougham, Upon Questions Relating to Public Rights, Duties and Interests With Historical Introduction and A Critical Dissertation Upon the Eloquence of the Ancients* in Four Volumes, Vol. II. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, pp. 56 - 57. It is apparent that Brougham had carefully read the extract that Governor Murray dispatched to Colonial Secretary of State Earl Bathurst on the meeting of the Court of Policy of 11 August 1823. See CO 111/39, Murray to Bathurst, Demerara 11 August 1823, ff. 73. PRO, Kew Gardens London.



“The moving cause of this insurrection ... is the distress of the great body of insurgents; but the ringleaders are generally, and almost necessarily, individuals who, being more highly endowed, or more happily situated, are raised above the distress which is suffered by those of whom they take command.”<sup>73</sup>

‘Privileged’ slaves used their positions to undermine the system. They fed the field slaves with their often garbled interpretation of the state of the pro and anti-slavery debate. James Mackintosh was not surprised that domestic and other ‘elite’ slaves in Demerara, were at the forefront of the revolt. These slaves, he noted

“ ... had heard from seamen arrived from England, by servants in the governor’s house and by the angry conversations of their masters that some project for improving their condition had been favourably received in this country. They naturally entertained sanguine and exaggerated hopes of the extent of the reformation.”<sup>74</sup>

Brougham and Mackintosh made the important point that slaves were not altogether stupid. The slaves might have erred in the specific details of Lord Bathurst’s circular. The abolitionists were convinced, however, that slaves had proven that they would use the general impressions they extracted about the debate on slavery in an attempt to loosen the chains of their bondage. The abolitionists believed that for the sake of maintaining peace and stability, the restless slaves ought to have been clearly informed early enough of the regulations that Colonial Secretary Lord Bathurst had sent to Demerara. The slaves of Demerara had just grounds for alarm. Their revolt

---

<sup>73</sup> *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>74</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 1055 and *The London Missionary Society’s Report*, op. cit., p. 86. Smith stated here that “The Negro Jack was informed of it [Bathurst’s circular] by one of the Governor’s servants, who, it seems, heard his master speak to some



was a resolve to take decisive action on an issue in which their masters and other colonial authority were reluctant to confront.

### **Slavery Itself and Slavery Alone<sup>75</sup>**

In Wilberforce's articulation of occurrences in Barbados in 1816, he had attempted to demonstrate that the revolt was an attack upon the brutal system of slavery itself. Other abolitionists commenting upon the Demerara slave revolt were more precise and direct in making this point clear. Brougham stated that the slaves were " ... exasperated by ancient as well as by more recent wrongs (for a sale of sixty or more of them had been announced), and they were about to be violently separated and dispersed."<sup>76</sup> An objection often raised by the abolitionists to the British colonial system of slavery was that of the sale and separation of slaves and slave families. This practice more than any other reflected the extent to which slave owners regarded their labourers not as fellow humans but as chattel. One abolitionist complained,

" ... the slave has no legal property in his own body ... he has no property in anything else ... He is ... a chattel. He may be sold or bequeathed at the pleasure of his master. He may be put up to auction by process of law, for the benefit of the creditors or legatees of his master ... he may be, in a moment, torn for ever from his home, his associates, his children. He is, in addition to this, legally a subject of mortgages, demises, leases, settlements in tail, in remainder and in reversion."<sup>77</sup>

---

gentlemen concerning the instructions." See also NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> The Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., 5 December 1823.

<sup>76</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 1160. Note also that in *The London Missionary Society's Report*, John Smith had mentioned that " ... a number of our congregation being advertised for sale by auction, some on the same day of the revolt ...", p. 85. See also NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>77</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXII, January 1825, p. 467; *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1 No. 18, 30 December 1826; pp. 251; STEPHEN, JAMES SIR. 1824. *The Slavery of the British*

Abolitionists believed that the inhumanity of slavery as reflected by this treatment was a major aggravation against which slaves in Demerara rose in rebellion. Thomas Fowell Buxton's reflections on the subject maximised its emotive appeal. He personalised the experience of separating slave families. Buxton narrated the experience of a slave whom he called respectable Billy, a slave of Clonbrock plantation in Demerara. Billy lived with a woman as his wife for nineteen years. Together, they had thirteen surviving children. The family was separated when the owner divided his plantation property between his two sons; one received the wife and children and the other, the husband. Billy was debarred from seeing his wife and children although their estates were contiguous. The new gang of slaves to which the husband now belonged was to be sold by 26 August 1823.<sup>78</sup> Buxton ended his appropriately selected tale on a note of dramatic pathos. He won sympathy for Billy and succeeded in justifying the option he took against his master. He closed Billy's tale on the observation that "He was - and is it to be wondered at?- one of the insurgents, and was, when the last accounts left Demerara, hanging in Georgetown!"<sup>79</sup> Buxton's account of Billy's experience including his subsequent revolt action reinforced the abolitionists' sympathetic depiction of slave revolts. It also marked an increase over time of the abolitionists' insistence that the slaves had rights, the violation of which tended to justify their rebellion. Consequently, the Anti-Slavery Society stated,

"Everything dear to them was felt to be at issue, and knowing the men to whose decision their fate and

---

*West India Colonies Delineated, As It Exists Both in Law and Practice, and Compared with The Slavery of Other Colonies, Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1. Aberdeen: A Constable and Co., pp. 62, 435.

<sup>78</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, pp. 1132 - 1133.



that of their children was left, their alarms and apprehension must be pardoned. We must place ourselves in their situation, if we would duly estimate its difficulties and temptations.”<sup>80</sup>

Thomas Clarkson summed up abolitionists’ sentiment on the rebellious actions of Demerara slaves by concluding, “It is a fact that slavery itself and slavery alone ... produced this insurrection ... ”<sup>81</sup>

## A Holy War

Anti-slavery agitators believed that the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 was distinguished from and superior to former rebellions in the West Indies as a result of the influence of Christianity. The abolitionists exhibited a tendency to be contradictory, however, in attempting to prove this point. Brougham was convinced that Christianity was the factor that guided the slaves along a relatively non-violent course. John Smith’s unfinished letter to the Secretary of the London Missionary Society, Reverend George Burder, was the evidence the abolitionists depended upon in coming to this conclusion. Smith had written,

“The Negroes on this coast ... have seized the firearms belonging to the several plantations and retired; ... they put some of their managers into the stocks, to prevent their escaping to give an alarm, but ... they offered no personal violence to any one; neither did they set fire to a single building; nor rob any

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 1133.

<sup>80</sup> Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1823. “Negro Slavery No. VIII, Insurrections in the West Indies; St. Lucia, Trinidad, Dominica, Jamaica and Demerara” in *Tracts of the Anti-Slavery Society*. London: J. Hatchard and Son. p. 56. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Negro Slavery No. VIII*.

<sup>81</sup> The Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., 5 December 1823.

house ... except of arms and ammunition.”<sup>82</sup>

Henry Brougham concurred with Smith that the explanation for this non-violent and non-destructive course of action was Christianity. He stressed the view that

“ ... the gospel of peace was upon their lips in the midst of rebellion and restrained their hands when no other force was present to resist them. ... ‘We will take no life,’ said they, ‘for our pastors have taught us not to take that which we cannot give ...’”<sup>83</sup>

In attributing so significant an aspect of the new phase of the slaves’ resistance to slavery to Christianity, the abolitionists were not being very honest to their overall assessment on the relationship between Christianity and slavery. They had made dogged efforts to dispel pro-slavery accusations that Smith’s presence among the slaves contributed to the revolt. Far from living up to the reputation of instigator, Brougham insisted that John Smith used his influence over his Bethel congregation to dissuade not to encourage slave resistance. Chester New discusses the several arguments upon which Brougham based his insistence. In his trial, Smith’s prosecutors accused him of being aware that the slave Quamina was a rebel and that Smith conversed with him before and during the revolt.<sup>84</sup> Brougham dismissed the accusation by accepting Smith’s response to this charge. Smith conversed with and counselled Quamina that he must have nothing to do with any revolt against authority or any resort to violence.<sup>85</sup> Smith’s accusers charged that he knew of the revolt six weeks previous to its eruption but Brougham reiterated Smith’s observation that the

---

<sup>82</sup> *The London Missionary Society’s Report*, op. cit., Appendix XV, Unfinished Letter of Mr. Smith to Reverend Burder, Secretary of L. M. S. from Plantation Le Resouvenir, Demerary, 21 August 1823, p. 184.

<sup>83</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1857, op. cit., pp. 159 - 160.

<sup>84</sup> NEW, CHESTER. 1967, op. cit., p. 293.



evidence at the trial proved that it was planned only a day or two before it broke out.<sup>86</sup> Smith was implicated in planning the revolt by the testimony of the slave Paris. Brougham read a letter that was submitted in evidence by Reverend Austin of the Established Church undermining the credibility of Paris' testimony. Reverend Austin had received " ... the last confession of Paris, who stated that Mr. Smith was innocent and he [Paris] prayed that God would forgive him the lies that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ had prevailed upon him to tell."<sup>87</sup> James Mackintosh supported Brougham in making this point by observing that " ... the witness who gave that evidence ... were accomplices in the revolt, who had no chance of life but what acceptable testimony might afford."<sup>88</sup> Smith had also been charged with the offence of failing to seize Quamina. Brougham quoted the answer Smith provided to this charge to note that missionaries were incapable of restraining the slaves' deep love of liberty. "Look," said he, [Smith] "on these poor limbs, feeble with disease, and say how was it possible for me to seize a powerful robust man like Quamina, inflamed with the desire of liberty, as that slave must have been if he were a revolter."<sup>89</sup> The abolitionists sought to prove that Smith did not subject the members of his slave congregation, many of whom were implicated in the revolt, to the personal revulsion he harboured towards slavery. Even the documents submitted to the London Missionary Society by Mrs. Smith and, Smith's legal adviser, Mr. Arrindell, sought to establish beyond doubt that Christianity did not influence the chief participants in the rebellion. Mrs. Smith's letter to Secretary George Burder was written precisely for this purpose.

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 1058.

<sup>89</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1838, op. cit., p. 70. See also *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ...*

“From all we can learn from the evidence on Mr. Smith’s trial, it appears that the plot was laid by two Negroes named Jack and Paris. Jack was the son of Quamina, (one of the deacons in question) and he was the person to whom the governor’s servant made the communication concerning the instructions from England. Jack was a desolate, gay young man, very irregular in his attendance at chapel. Religion, it is to be feared, he had none. Paris was boat captain of Bachelor Adventure and, had been disposed to attend the chapel but it was out of his power to do so nineteen Sundays out of twenty. His work was to take plantain to town, to sell on Sunday. I do not suppose he attended chapel more than once a year.”<sup>90</sup>

The Smiths doggedly maintained that Christianity exerted no influence in the lives of the slaves who led the rebellion. Furthermore, abolitionists insisted that Smith’s ministry to the slaves taught implicit obedience and submission. It did not sow seeds of discontent and rebellion. How then, could the abolitionists justify their claim that Smith’s influence shaped the relatively peaceful nature of the revolt? Both the Smiths and the abolitionists attempted at one and the same time to credit the missionary for the non-violent nature of the rising while insisting that parson Smith played no role in setting it off. They staked claims on both sides of the argument. It seemed more probable that the extent to which the stamp of Christianity was upon their protest action was a manifestation that the slaves of Demerara had interpreted Christianity in their own way. They did not passively accept the doctrine that they heard from the altar. They actively transposed and subjected religion to the realisation of their main political aspiration. The gospel of peace that John Smith and other missionaries conveyed to the slaves went through various transformations before slaves received it into their heads and into their hearts. Though it was tinged with elements of Christianity, the revolt of the slaves had less to do with the influence of their ministers

---

*John Smith*, op. cit., pp. 33 - 35 for Brougham’s treatment of the charges brought against Smith.  
<sup>90</sup> *The London Missionary Society’s Report*, op. cit., Appendix VII, 4 December 1823 from Demerary, Letter of Mrs. Smith, p. 185.



and more with the slaves' own anxious desire for freedom. Brougham himself quoted an extract from Smith's personal journal to show how slaves used Christianity to defy their masters. Smith had recorded,

"Lucinda is a member of the church, and much affected with the gospel. She is an old woman, and though her manager tells her not to come to church, she tells him she will come, even if he cuts her throat for it."<sup>91</sup>

Henry Brougham used this extract to demonstrate the independent choices that slaves were making in the name of Christianity. This does not reconcile with his conviction that their pastors were chiefly responsible for the largely non-violent nature of the slaves' rebellion. Thomas Clarkson had come to a more reasonable assessment of the secondary significance of Christianity in the slaves' rebellion than Brougham did. He reasoned,

"I know that it has been stated that this insurrection was set on foot and promoted by the missionaries ...I disbelieve the fact, tho' I have it not in my power to deny it. But let us suppose that it was so. ... Let us suppose that in that unlucky moment, not only his compassion but also his indignation had been roused and that he had incautiously given vent to his feelings and burst out into expressions which had inflamed the minds of the slaves and which had led to this insurrection - Still I maintain that this insurrection had its origins in slavery. There are original causes and sub causes or occasions - The missionary in this case would have been the occasion of the insurrection. ... had the slaves been in happy circumstances, a few words dropped by a missionary could never have led them astray."<sup>92</sup>

Clarkson had a greater appreciation than Brougham of the sense in which the revolt of the slaves was more internally rather than externally triggered.

---

<sup>91</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, March 1824, Article X, West India Missions - Insurrection in Demerara, p. 252.

Further abolitionists' reflections on the effect of religious instructions on slaves suggest that indeed the abolitionists believed at times that slaves were responding autonomously to Christianity. An article in the *Edinburgh Review* of January 1825 helps to demonstrate this point. The author spoke on behalf of the anti-slavery body and explained,

“We have already given it as our opinion that ... if the great body of the Negroes ... become Christians ... we are sure that their political state would very speedily be changed. At every step which the Negro makes in the knowledge and discrimination of right and wrong ... he will learn to reprobate more and more the system under which he lives. He will not indeed be so prone to engage in rash and foolish tumults; but he will be as willing as he now is to struggle for liberty and far more capable of struggling with effect.”<sup>93</sup>

Abolitionists at times appreciated the subtle and profound ways in which religion helped shaped the revolt of the slaves. Anxious, however, to exonerate the missionaries, whom slavery supporters perceived as abolitionists' advocates, they attributed only what they perceived as the positive aspects of the revolts to the sectarians. In so doing, however, anti-slavery advocates ended up admitting that slaves of their own accord would use Christianity in a bid to overthrow slavery; not in a savagely ruthless manner but in a manner befitting the status of Christian slaves.

---

<sup>92</sup> The Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., 5 December 1823, Address to Gentlemen at Ipswich.

<sup>93</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXII, January 1825, pp. 472 - 473. See also Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery. 1833. *Analysis of The Report of a Committee of the House of Commons on the Extinction of Slavery With Notes by the Editor*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 119 for a similar view expressed by the Society after the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831 - 1832. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Analysis of The Report*.



## Freedom Struggle

Henry Brougham declared that the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 was a natural manifestation of the slaves' desire for liberty. This declaration defied the planters' assertion that all slave rebellions were nothing but savage attempts to overturn slavery. Brougham's simple statement of counterattack was that the slaves were " ... inflamed with the desire for liberty ..." <sup>94</sup> He argued that this was no surprise as it was " ... natural that the slaves would believe that the hidden circular was freedom." <sup>95</sup> Brougham's view removed the slaves from the periphery of a chaotic experience and brought their main aspiration into sharp focus. He declared that the slaves' desire for freedom permeated the very core of the rebellion. He imagined that in their conversations, the slaves asked themselves, "Has not our freedom come? Freedom! Freedom," Brougham stated echoing the demands of the rebels, "was the sound unceasingly heard, and which continuously raised the vision on which their fancy loved to repose." <sup>96</sup> In coming to this conclusion about the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823, Brougham was echoing Governor Murray's first hand account of a conversation he held with the insurgent slaves. Murray might not have realised how his testimony assisted the abolitionists in positively conceptualising the slaves' overt resistance. Murray recorded, however, that in the parley he held with the slaves on Monday 18 August, he sought " ... to ascertain their visions which they stated to be unconditional emancipation." <sup>97</sup> Murray strengthened the perception insisted on by Brougham that the revolt was a freedom struggle by explaining that the slaves could have but did not injure any member of his party. The Governor explained that during his discussion

---

<sup>94</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 991.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 965.

with the insurgents, the numbers of slaves present grew from about forty to about two to three hundred. The slaves at the back insisted on firing on him and the militia dragoons who had accompanied him. The slaves at the front with whom he had parleyed, however, prevailed in opposing this suggestion.<sup>98</sup> To the abolitionists these were important details of the 1823 Demerara slave revolt. Based on the information, British abolitionists paid one of the most positive tributes to nineteenth century slave rebels in the British West Indies. The Demerara slave revolt was a freedom struggle. It was a tribute that was repeated with greater conviction by Thomas Fowell Buxton when he reviewed events in the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831 - 1832.

### **Three Hundred Thousand Negroes**

The historian Mary Turner has observed that the period 1831 - 1832 was a fortuitous time for slaves in Jamaica to rise in rebellion considering the political scene in Britain.<sup>99</sup> This was the period when the struggle over the British Reform Bill was approaching its consummation. Many of the returning Members of Parliament of the House of Commons were candidates who had pledged their support for the abolition of slavery. Higman notes that this effectively halved the representatives of the West Indians.<sup>100</sup> It was the time too, when the unresolved issue of the abolition of slavery itself came into sharper focus than it had been by 1823. By May 1830, the anti-slavery campaigners had abandoned gradualism and increasingly pressed the British government for total abolition. Significantly too, the Jamaican slaves rose against their

---

<sup>96</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1838, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>97</sup> CO 111/39, Murray to Bathurst, Demerara 24 August 1823, ff. 77, PRO, Kew Gardens, London.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., ff. 78.

<sup>99</sup> TURNER, MARY. 1982, op. cit., pp. 31 - 41.

<sup>100</sup> HIGMAN, BARRY. 1976, op. cit., p. 231.



masters at a time when the abolitionists had already laid much of the groundwork in presenting their views on slave rebellions.

Abolitionists were bolder in insisting that it was inaccurate to regard the Jamaican slave revolt in the manner in which such events were interpreted and publicised by the planters. Sir James Stephen and another abolitionist, one Mr. Garrat, continued to challenge the planters' interpretation of revolts by speaking of " ... the insurrection in Jamaica, or the disorders so called."<sup>101</sup> They emphasised that as in Demerara in 1823, Jamaican slaves were attempting to bargain with the owners of labour. The slaves' resistance consisted essentially of " ... striking work at a holiday season longer than the Drivers permitted."<sup>102</sup> The Baptist missionary, William Knibb, had testified that when he had examined Samuel Sharpe, the leader of the rebellion, it was clear that the slaves were seeking better working conditions. Sharpe had insisted that the King of Britain had granted the slaves their freedom and that the slaves had worked long enough for nothing. They were resolved not to work after Christmas unless they received wages. Sharpe had also confessed to Knibb that the slaves had the least intention of rebellion.<sup>103</sup> The abolitionists accepted this account. In their assessment of the House of Commons committee report on slavery, which focused considerably on the rebellion in Jamaica, the Anti-Slavery Society stated,

---

<sup>101</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20, E2/3, op. cit., Letter of Sir James Stephen and Garrat to the Anti-Slavery Society, 11 April 1832, Committee on Slavery Minute Book, p. 132.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 133. It is certain that as in the case of Demerara, the abolitionists depended on the evidence provided by the missionaries in coming to their conclusions about the Jamaican slave rebellion. See Baptist Missionary Society. 1832. *Colonial Slavery - Defence of the Baptist Missionaries From The Charge of Inciting the Late Rebellion in Jamaica; in a Discussion between the Reverend William Knibb and Mr. P. Borthwick At The Assembly Rooms on Saturday 15 December 1832*. London: Tourist Office Paternoster Row, p. 4 (Other citations of this item will be referred to as Defence of the Baptist Missionaries) and Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1833. *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., pp. 121 for abolitionists analysis of the testimony of the Reverend William Knibb given before the 1832 House of Commons committee on slavery.

“As far as he [Knibb] could learn, it was not their intention at first to destroy property or to injure the whites, but to insist on having wages at the rate of 2s. 6d. currency or 20d. a day, the present rate of wages.”<sup>104</sup>

In another section of the abolitionists’ analysis of the Jamaican slave revolt, the abolitionists further endorsed Knibb’s conviction that the slaves’ primary objective in rising was to alter their position in the economic system of the slave plantation economy of the colonies. At length anti-slavery activists quoted Knibb,

“Meetings of the drivers of different estates were held at a place called Retrieve, where Samuel Sharpe appeared to be the leading man. On Christmas morning Sharpe spoke to Hilton, at the chapel at Montego Bay, to be sure, if the Minister asked him about freedom, or not working after Christmas, to tell him he knew he was free, and that he would not work again for anybody anymore unless he was paid for it.”<sup>105</sup>

Buxton made a point of emphasising that the revolt was devoid of any deliberate intention to massacre planters and destroy their property. Buxton’s insistence that the Jamaican slave rebellion was a mass strike action to improve the conditions of the labouring population was substantiated by Governor Belmore’s correspondence to the Colonial Office. When Governor Belmore wrote to Colonial Secretary Viscount Goderich about the outbreak of the rebellion, he repeatedly referred to the fact that the slaves insisted on their refusal to work after New Year’s Day without wages. Belmore even reported that in Morant Bay while slaves refused to work, they had committed no depredations on the property of their masters.<sup>106</sup> He was struck by the self-control that

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>106</sup> CO. 137/181, 6 January 1832, Belmore to Goderich, ff.3, 5, 7, 8. PRO, Kew Gardens, London.



the slaves exercised when they had an opportunity to revenge their countless years of suffering. Buxton imaginatively described the scene of the servile war in Jamaica.

“Three hundred thousand Negroes in gloomy silence stood against them ... then the first whispers of that whirlwind seemed beginning, which was to sweep off the white population. I thought indeed that the sword of eternal justice was unsheathed, but it was pleased to deal with us not in vengeance but in mercy and to say to the howling winds and swelling bellows, peace be still and there was a great calm.”<sup>107</sup>

Buxton’s description of the revolts seems more imaginary than real. The slaves, in spite of their overwhelming numbers, did not stand a chance of defeating the white forces in the colonies. In the *Cornwall Courier*, for example, the planters boasted that

“The result of the rebellion has been to open the eyes of the community to the utter incapacity of our labouring class as combatants, and has completely dispelled the idle panic which pervaded the island, on account of their vast numerical strength. This bubble has burst ...”<sup>108</sup>

For Buxton, however, the point was that slaves seemed to have taken the deliberate decision to curb the extent of the violence that they would practice. Considering the more bloody rebellions staged in Jamaica in the pre abolitionists era, Buxton did have a point. The slaves in Jamaica in 1831 – 1832 were not seeking to exact bloody revenge against their masters but to assert the rights of free men. Buxton thus insisted in speaking not of the rebellion but of the “ ... riot which had lately occurred at Jamaica.” He went on

---

<sup>107</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, The Papers of Thomas Fowell Buxton, Notes and Drafts for Speeches 1829 - 1839, Vol. 10, ff. 63 - 64.

<sup>108</sup> *Cornwall Courier*, 22 February, 1832, Institute of Jamaica: Kingston.

“ ... it might have been more - it might have been an insurrection, although, if so, I could show who were the insurgents, and that it was the planters by whom it had been caused ... ”<sup>109</sup>

Buxton widened the anti-slavery position on slave revolts. If pro-slavery forces insisted on describing the slaves' protest actions in wild and licentious terms, then he must conclude that it was the planters' conduct in these events that had not changed over the years, not the slaves'. To the Jamaican plantocracy whose material suffering in the rebellion was evident, this accusation was outrageous. Property owners in slave plantation societies had taken it for granted that all would appreciate that they were the obvious victims of slave revolts. The report of Hamilton Brown on the estate of Mrs. John L. Tweedie, for example, centred on the economic distress experienced in Trelawney as a result of the revolt.<sup>110</sup> Another correspondence on the Tweedie estates written by one Mc Alester to George French Hawkhurst reported that the rebellion was “ ... unsuccessful for the rebels but economically devastating for the planters.”<sup>111</sup>

Willoughby Cotton, who superintended the suppression of the revolt, provided an early assessment of the economic devastation that the slaves inflicted on their masters' properties in Jamaica. Cotton reported “ ... the Eastern half of Hanover, and the whole of the Northern part of St. James are in open revolt, and almost the whole of the estates destroyed, and the Negroes gone boldly away.”<sup>112</sup> In the first dispatch of Governor Belmore of Jamaica to Colonial Secretary Viscount Goderich at the Colonial Office, the governor highlighted the fact that the rebellion left in its wake “

---

<sup>109</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XI, 23 March 1832, p. 841.

<sup>110</sup> *Tweedie Estate Records*, File 4/45, 5 January 1832, No. 49, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 February 1832, No. 50.

<sup>112</sup> *The Times, London Gazette Extraordinary*, 23 February 1832.



... scenes of devastation and ruin.”<sup>113</sup> This gloomy picture of planter economic distress was minutely investigated and registered. The following is an extract of a report of the Jamaican Assembly sent to Lord Howick at the Colonial Office.

“ ... the injury sustained by the late Rebellion, by slaves wilfully setting fire to buildings, by grass and cane-fields destroyed, robbery and plunder of every description, damage done to the present and succeeding crops, the loss of the labour of slaves, besides those killed in suppressing such rebellion, and executed after trial as incendiaries, rebels and murderers has been ascertained ... to amount to ... £1, 154, 589 s2 d1. To which is added the sum of £161, 569 s19 d9 being the expense incurred in suppressing the late rebellion; and a further expense not yet ascertained ... being the pay and rations of a portion to the Maroons, as well as to the detachment of the Island Militia ...”<sup>114</sup>

It was a description not quite unlike those used to capture the ravages that had taken place in French St. Domingue in 1791. Buxton, as did Wilberforce and Brougham when they examined the Barbados and Demerara slave revolts respectively, ignored this self-exclaimed suffering. Buxton insisted, “ ... the planters were the cause of ... the insurrection and rebellion that ensued. He [Buxton] wished his words to be taken down.”<sup>115</sup> It was an assertion that reflected the growth of abolitionists’ confidence in addressing the issue of slave revolts in the struggle against slavery. It was also an attempt to redirect the course in which sympathy flowed whenever servile warfare erupted in the slave plantation colonies.

---

<sup>113</sup> CO 137/181, 6 January 1832, ff. 2, 5 - 7. Belmore to Goderich. PRO, Kew Gardens, London.

<sup>114</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relating to the Slave Trade 1831 - 1834, Slave Trade 80. Jamaica A Report from the House of Assembly on the injury sustained during the recent Rebellion, 1831 - 1832 (561)*, Vol. XLVII, pp. 189 - 234. Sent to Lord Howick - Colonial Department, Downing Street, 27<sup>TH</sup> June 1832.

<sup>115</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XI, 23 March, 1832, p. 842.

## Christian Retribution

Buxton's comments on the Jamaican slave revolt also provided another dimension to the way in which abolitionists perceived the crisis between slavery and Christianity made evident through slave rebellions. After the revolt, Jamaican planters insisted that sectarian missionaries were " ... men who have been the cause of destroying the fairest portion of Jamaica, and who had to answer for the blood that has been shed in consequence ... we abhor the whole race of Methodists and Baptists."<sup>116</sup> The pro-slavery discourse of the interaction between Christianity and slavery insisted on the role of the sectarian missionaries as catalysts of rebellion. The abolitionists, however, did not objectify slave rebels in assessing their relationship with missionaries. Buxton agreed that the Jamaican slave revolt was partly a protest against planters' intolerance of Christianity. It is to be noted, however, that he shaped this argument, not merely by paying attention to the persecution of the missionaries but to the religious persecution endured by slaves themselves. Buxton stressed that the examples he would produce to demonstrate the tensions between slavery and Christianity would not consist of the often repeated experiences of John Smith and William Knibb.<sup>117</sup> The experiences of the slaves, he believed, most clearly demonstrated the crisis. He narrated the circumstances that surrounded the punishments of slaves like Henry Williams who was caught praying, Swiney for moving his lips in prayer and George Atkins for attending a prayer meeting. These slaves were flogged, sentenced to periods of hard labour in Rodney-Hole Workhouse and confined.<sup>118</sup> Buxton, as Brougham had done,

---

<sup>116</sup> *The Jamaican Courant*, 24 January 1832. Institute of Jamaica, Kingston.

<sup>117</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XI, 23 March, 1832, p. 842.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 840 - 842; STANLEY BRIAN. 1992. *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792 - 1992*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, pp. 74 - 75. See also TURNER, MARY. 1982, op. cit., pp. 139 - 140; JAKOBSSON STIV. 1972, op. cit., pp. 433 - 488 for the Swiney case. The case of Henry Williams and



insisted that when slaves in Jamaica rose in rebellion, they themselves were staging a holy war against an unholy regime. Christian slaves took their own action against the aggravation of their masters. Within this context of viewing the rebellion, Buxton was persuaded that the slaves were justified in the line of conduct they had pursued. Rhetorically Buxton reasoned, “Suppose the riot had occurred on the occasion which he had alluded to [The flogging of Henry Williams] who could have lamented it? If the miscreant who had committed the atrocity had been put to death, who could have lamented it?”<sup>119</sup> Buxton had begun to echo the radical view expressed by the anonymous author of the *Edinburgh Review* that it was the duty of the slaves to rebel against the injustices of a cruel regime.

### **Struggle for Freedom**

The abolitionists had carefully examined the official dispatches that passed between the governor of Jamaica and Viscount Goderich, Colonial Secretary, to come to terms with the slaves’ rebellious conduct. Some of these dispatches referred to the parish meetings that were held in Jamaica in the summer of 1831 protesting the new slave code of 1830 that were forwarded both to the crown and legislative colonies. These parish meetings took place three months prior to the rising of the slaves and a number

---

Samuel Swiney were presented to the House of Commons in the following Parliamentary Papers: *Jamaica Return to an Address of the Honorable The House of Commons dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 1830*; - *for Copies of all Communications relative to the reported Maltreatment of a Slave named Henry Williams, in Jamaica.* addressed to Lord Howick, Colonial Department, Downing Street, 23 December 1830 and *Jamaica: Slave Punishment Returns to an Address to His Majesty, dated 23 March 1832*; *for, No, 1 Copies of all Communications from Jamaica relating to the Trial of George Ankle, a Negro Slave, and of Samuel Swiney, a Negro Slave, for certain alleged Offences relating to Religious Worship.* These papers are contained in a bound volume entitled *Slavery Parliamentary Papers &c.* Angus Library, Baptist Missionary Society Archive, Regent’s Park College, Oxford.

<sup>119</sup>*Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XI, 23 March 1832, p. 841.



of slaves were present during the discussions.<sup>120</sup> Buxton appropriated the proximity in the timing between the parish meetings and the revolt to a cause and effect relationship. It was a development of the point initially raised by Wilberforce that slaves would seize hold of and act upon any idea remotely linked to their well being. Buxton noted that the *Port Royal Gazette* for 13 August 1831 reported the intention of the white inhabitants of St. Ann's Parish to secede from Britain.<sup>121</sup> In the *Jamaican Courant* of 16 August 1831 Buxton noted a more decisive resolution. The parishioners of St. Ann's had declared, "The Government which arbitrarily or capriciously invades the right of private property, releases the oppressed sufferer from obedience and allegiance."<sup>122</sup> Buxton believed that such an open show of contumacy on the part of the planter class towards imperial resolutions on slavery could not but add fuel to the slaves' tendency to the restlessness of the slaves. The Jamaican parish meetings in the summer of 1831 was the immediate push factor in the war for freedom that the slaves of the island staged just after the Christmas holidays.

Buxton's final words on the actions of the Jamaican slaves in 1831 - 1832 infused the rebellion with both the spiritual and political dimensions with which the slaves perceived it themselves. William Annand, the overseer of Ginger Hill Plantation in the Parish of St. Elizabeth had sworn on oath that when he was taken prisoner by a group of slaves, they stated their intention to " ... fight for their freedom."<sup>123</sup> The overseer went on to state that

---

<sup>120</sup> British Parliamentary Papers, *Report From The Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, 11 August, 1832, p. 243; HINTON, JOHN HOWARD. 1847. *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica*, pp. 112 - 113, *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>121</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XI, 23 March 1832, p. 842.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> CO 137/181. 2 January 1832. Deposition on oath of William Annand, Overseer of Ginger Hill



“ ... they said that I knew as well as themselves that Jamaica was now free and that half of the estates from Ginger Hill to Montego Bay were burnt down the night before [27 December 1831] ... they were obliged to assist their brethren in the work of the Lord, that this was not the work of man alone, but they had assistance from God.”<sup>124</sup>

Thomas Fowell Buxton expressed the identical sentiments. Buxton was of the view that the Jamaican slave revolt was a protest action upon which the stamp of approval of Almighty God was fixed. He was unwilling, therefore, to summon the people of England to suppress such a war opposing such an authority. At the same time Buxton stated that the slave rebellion in Jamaica represented the noble aspirations of a people to secure lives as free men. Buxton declared in the British House of Commons,

“War was to be lamented anywhere and under any circumstances but a war against a people struggling for their freedom and their rights, would be the falsest position in which it was possible for England to be placed. The people of England would not support this loss of resources to crush the inalienable rights of mankind ... in such a warfare, it was not possible to ask, nor could we dare to expect, the countenance of heaven. The Almighty had no attribute that would side with them in such a struggle.”<sup>125</sup>

This positive interpretation of the Jamaican slave revolt sealed the abolitionists' dismissal of the terror with which pro-slavery voices were wont to highlight slaves in rebellion. It also encompassed the tendency of the abolitionists to overlook the material losses that planters experienced when slaves revolted and which the planters were so keen in highlighting. Abolitionists' depiction of revolts identified the several ways in which slaves acted autonomously in making decisions in response to their enslavement. British abolitionists confirmed the answer of Eugene Genovese to his “

---

Plantation in the Parish of St. Elizabeth, ff. 106.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

... deceptively simple question ... What was a slave revolt?"<sup>126</sup> It was a multiple protest action; it was a holy war, a war against the injustices of slavery and a labour protest movement. But it was more than these. Thomas Fowell Buxton, British anti-slavery leader by 1823 climaxed the discussion on the issue by agreeing with the one compelling answer. A slave revolt was the slaves' own struggle for freedom. Faced with the challenge of slave revolts in their campaign against slavery, the abolitionists presented to the British parliament and a restricted public the hidden side of slave revolts; a side that was decidedly more sympathetic, and, on all counts, diametrically opposite to that depicted by the planters. Nineteenth century slave rebels in the British West Indies had succeeded in directing British abolitionists' to a transformed perception about their open opposition to enslavement. From as early as 1816 following the revolt in Barbados, slaves swung abolitionists' reflections on slave revolts away from a defensive strategy to a concentrated analysis of the nature of the revolts themselves.

---

<sup>125</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Third Series, Vol. XIII, 23 March 1832, p. 48.

<sup>126</sup> GENOVESE, EUGENE. 1983, op. cit., p. 2.



## Chapter 4

### Loaded With Deadly Evidence<sup>1</sup>

Chapter three emphasises that in general British abolitionists challenged the common and negative perception of slave revolts that was shaped by slavery advocates and presented instead a more sympathetic depiction of the slaves' revolt. The intention behind that tactic was not merely to dismiss planter descriptions of slave revolts or to examine the slave rebels' role in shaping the slave plantation colonies of the New World. The abolitionists' were marshalling the evidence on slave revolts to convert it to useful anti-slavery material. They best achieved this goal when they examined the manner in which colonists crushed the rebellions of the slaves. This present chapter traces the approaches used by abolitionists to present the dual image of the slave rebel as victim/agent of the anti-slavery attack in Britain. Abolitionists used slaves defeated in rebellion as a propaganda tool for their anti-slavery cause.

From 31 January 1823 British abolitionists publicly announced their intention to work more vigorously for the mitigation and gradual extinction of colonial slavery. They were no longer hopeful that improvement in the daily lives of the slaves would follow the abolition of the slave trade as a matter of course. They sought a more practical method to achieve their objectives. They perceived that the most effective way to bring about the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery was to embark on a programme of exposure of the evils of the system. On 19 February 1823, just over two weeks of the formal launching of the London Committee on Slavery, the leading

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited in COUPLAND, R. 1933, op. cit., pp. 67 – 68 in reference to the field work covered by Thomas Clarkson on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society.

abolitionists resolved,

“That this Committee are of opinion that an exposition of the laws of slavery as it exists in the British West India Islands would essentially promote the object of enlightening the public mind as to the true condition of the slaves.”<sup>2</sup>

Society members believed that a good starting point for highlighting the evils of the system was the publication and circulation of the work of James Stephen senior entitled *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated*.<sup>3</sup> Stephen wrote to the Society on 28 February 1823 accepting the challenge and informing the members that his work did not focus only on the laws of the colonies but also on the practice of slavery itself.<sup>4</sup> In producing the work, he had intended to awaken the public to the suffering of the wrongs of the slaves.<sup>5</sup> *Delineation* paved the way for the immediate post 1823 exposure tactics of the abolitionists. This tract was well supported by a series of anti-slavery pamphlets under the common title of *Negro Slavery*. The stated objective of *Negro Slavery* was to “... furnish to the public a plain, authentic and unvarnished picture of Negro Slavery ... as it exists at the present moment.”<sup>6</sup> The publication of many other anti-slavery treatises was to follow. George Stephen, son of James Stephen senior, noted that

“In 1825 and 1826 the subject of slavery was often brought before Parliament in one form or another.

---

<sup>2</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E2/1, op. cit., 19 February 1823, p. 8; see also *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 30 November 1825. London: J. Hatchard, p. 53 where the Anti-Slavery Society stated that the colonists themselves were the witnesses who proved that slavery was evil.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1823. *Negro Slavery or A View of the More Prominent Features of that State of Society as it exists in the United States of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies Especially in Jamaica*. London: J.



The Mauritius slave trade ... the administration of the slave laws, the proceedings of the colonial assemblies, the slave holding interest of colonial officers, were so many texts on which Buxton, Whitmore, William Smith, Brougham, and Lord Suffield preached most orthodox and powerful sermons...”<sup>7</sup>

Although abolitionists did not set out intentionally to publicize slave rebellions, their treatment of the manner in which slaves were victimized in the suppression of slave revolts soon became a central feature of this anti-slavery programme of exposure. Charles Buxton, the son of abolitionist leader Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, observed that after 1824, “The next three years were spent in discussion of Smith’s death and the treatment of the rebel slaves...”<sup>8</sup> The abolitionists were able to put enough distance between the act of rebellion itself, which they denounced, and the suffering of rebel slaves, which they managed to manipulate to the advantage of the British anti-slavery cause.

Notwithstanding abolitionists’ conservatism, the campaigners’ sympathetic treatment of rebels was not at all surprising. British anti-slavery campaigners were humanitarians who had established a tradition of identifying, exposing and condemning acts of man’s inhumanity to man. This scrutiny was not limited to West Indian slavery but included various humanitarian causes both at home and abroad. Colonial slavery, however, had distinguished itself as an institution abounding in atrocities. Moreover, the worst punishments for slaves were reserved for those found guilty of rebellion. Thus, it was only consistent that much of abolitionists’ discourse addressed the cruelties colonists inflicted on slaves in the name of suppressing rebellions.

---

Hatchard and Son, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 97.

It was not merely for the sake of sentimental rhetoric that abolitionists spoke out against the excessive punishments that rebel slaves experienced. Had this been the case, then the conjecture that slaves were nothing but passive victims in the British struggle against slavery will seem unquestionable. Such a perception, by extension, would reinforce the narrow and simplistic interpretation that gives primacy to the role of the humanitarians as the great benefactors largely responsible for the emancipation of the slaves. Additionally, the perspective that the cruelty of West Indian colonists was itself a crucial argument for ending slavery will be strengthened. British abolitionists' utilization of the discourse they fashioned on crushed slave revolts does not, however, allow these interpretations to stand on their own as definitive representations of the anti-slavery campaign. Anti-slavery's sentimental depiction of suppressed slave revolts acted as a corollary to their tactical propaganda programme, conservative though it was. Through their victimization, British abolitionists converted slave rebels into agents of the attack that they launched against slavery.

### **The Sentimental Tradition**

The first leader of the British anti-slavery movement, William Wilberforce, had committed almost all of his life's work to the abolition of the British Atlantic slave trade. He was not, however, a man of one project. He had assigned to himself an all-compassing and consuming mission. Wilberforce had declared, "God has set before me as my object the reformation of [my country's] manners."<sup>9</sup> This assignment, he believed, involved infusing " ... amongst his numerous friends a determination to

---

<sup>8</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 211.



resist the growing vices of the times ... to prevent crime ... to resist that general spirit of licentiousness, which is the parent of every species of vice.”<sup>10</sup> Wilberforce supported schemes for the relief or improvement of prisoners, the poor at home and those in Ireland. He was devoted to “... acts of munificence and charity, from a fourth to a third of his annual income.”<sup>11</sup> In an interview regarding the opinions he held about the role of the statesman in society, Wilberforce responded,

“It appears to me that public men in this country should consider it one of the duties imposed on them by Providence, to receive and inquire into the case of distressed persons, who from finding them interesting for suffering individuals, or classes of mankind, are naturally led to apply to them for the redress of their own grievances, or the supply of their wants.”<sup>12</sup>

Wilberforce converted this principle into action by supporting a “... multitude of daily charities.”<sup>13</sup> Everyday he filled a tray with letters responding to one cause of humanity or the other. Lord Clarendon recalled how on one occasion, Wilberforce was preparing to move an important motion in the House of Commons and was interrupted by a poor man whose name might have been Simkins. The man was in danger of being imprisoned for a small debt. Instead of sending him away at this busy moment, Wilberforce spent some time inquiring into the details of the distressing case and eventually paid the man’s debt. Lord Clarendon commented that Wilberforce had never learnt to “... stop his ears at the cry of the poor.”<sup>14</sup> Critics of Wilberforce such as his contemporary, William Cobbett and the historians, Eric Williams and Jack

---

<sup>9</sup> WILBERFORCE, R. I. and WILBERFORCE, S. 1838, Vol. V, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *The Edinburgh Review*. Vol. LXVII. No. 135, ? 1838. p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> WILBERFORCE, R. I. and WILBERFORCE, S. 1838, Vol. V, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Gratus, seem to be persuaded that he was a hypocrite who did good works to parade his generosity. Gordon Lewis makes the valid point, however, that

“ ... no one can read the record of the men who led the battle for abolition ... and ... emancipation ... without a profound respect for the sense of stricken conscience that converted a disparate conglomeration of fine poetic-literary indignation into a highly efficient movement of at once parliamentary manoeuvre and national propagandist agitation.”<sup>15</sup>

Wilberforce did not lead the movement for emancipation nor was he very keen on adopting a public national programme of agitation against slavery. Gordon Lewis, however, is perhaps right in believing that Wilberforce's humanitarian conscience, which led him to agitate on behalf of the downtrodden around the world, proceeded from a genuine conversion to Christianity. This spiritual awakening took place soon after Wilberforce's entry into active parliamentary politics.<sup>16</sup> The scepticism, nevertheless, persists concerning the motives underlying his overall leadership of and involvement in the British movement against slavery. Given the impressive record of his support of charitable causes both on the national and international scene, however, it was almost inevitable that Wilberforce and his circle of agitators would have drawn from the slaves' experience of crushed rebellions to formulate their anti-slavery ideology.

Still, it must be stressed that Wilberforce was extremely conservative in the options he advocated to make the rebels' experience count in dismantling the slave system. He favoured the tactic of exerting anti-slavery pressure from within parliament and was

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 232 - 233.

<sup>15</sup> LEWIS, GORDON. 1978, p. 36.



reluctant to broaden the base of support by appealing to the wider populace. Sir George Stephen, ardent anti-slavery member of the Agency Committee established in the summer of 1831, attempted an explanation of Wilberforce's conservatism. Stephen asserted, " ... he [Wilberforce] felt, perhaps unconsciously, too much deferential regard for rank and power, irrespective, not of the morality, but of the sterling worth of their possessors."<sup>17</sup> Stephen's comment provides a useful insight into the complexity of the principles upon which, not only Wilberforce but also the majority of the anti-slavery leaders operated. They reserved a deep regard for the respectable classes of society but were not opposed to using slave rebellions to advance their conservative cause. It was a blend that risked the introduction of significant incongruent elements into the movement. Yet it was a risk that British abolitionists, consciously or unconsciously, were to take time and again.

The man who succeeded Wilberforce in the leadership of the anti-slavery movement was just as involved as his predecessor in agitating on behalf of the poor or distressed in society. Charles Fowell Buxton became a Member of Parliament for Weymouth in 1818. Soon after the beginning of his political career, he joined two select committees to champion " ... the battle for reforming the prisons and the penal code."<sup>18</sup> In February 1818 he had published a work entitled *An Enquiry Whether Crime may be Produced or Prevented by our present system of Prison Discipline*. This work exposed the British public to the abuses suffered by prison inmates. So considerable was its effect that " ... it was translated into French and distributed on the continent. It even reached Turkey and ... India."<sup>19</sup> At home the work helped to induce the British

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

government to ameliorate the wretched conditions of prisoners. In India a similar effect was achieved. Buxton's exertions in this and other fields were paramount in convincing Wilberforce that Buxton was the most appropriate candidate to succeed him in representing the slaves in parliament. After Buxton had delivered a speech depicting the materially depraved conditions under which the aged and the weavers subsisted in Spitalfields, Wilberforce wrote to Buxton confessing:

"I have both heard and read of your successful effort on Tuesday last on behalf of the hungry and naked ... I anticipate success of the effort which I trust you will one day make in other instances, in an assembly in which I trust we will be fellow labourers, both in the motives by which we are actuated, and in the objects to which our exertions will be directed."<sup>20</sup>

Making representations on behalf of men by isolating and featuring the severity of their conditions was not a novel approach of the humanitarians. It was a method that was central to British abolitionist policy. Buxton was one of the main abolitionist spokesmen to convert defeated rebels in Jamaica into valuable anti-slavery material. He accomplished this task in spite of the fact that he was at least uncomfortable in using the elements of popular radical behaviour to maximize the strength of the cause that he propagated.

Thomas Clarkson was the anti-slavery campaigner who was most responsible for collecting the hard empirical data to support the arguments of the abolitionists. Gordon Lewis calls him " ... a born detective ... a Benthamite utilitarian in his

---

<sup>20</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., Letter to T. F. Buxton from Wilberforce addressed from Kensington Gore, 18 November 1816. p. 52.



passion for facts.”<sup>21</sup> Clarkson’s involvement in Britain’s anti-slavery movement began with his 1795 Cambridge University Latin prize winning essay entitled *Is it Right to Make Men Slaves Against Their Wills?* Research on the subject set him beyond the quest for academic reputation to a consideration of the extent to which Europe was injuring Africa. He resolved to act upon what he had written. He became a member of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade formed in 1787 whose main object following its establishment was to collect incriminating evidence that would lead to the dismantling of the system. To conduct research for his essay, and to fulfil the objective of the slave trade committee appointed by parliament to investigate this branch of British commerce, Clarkson toured Liverpool, London, Lancaster and Bristol. He boarded slave ships and measured the quarters provided for slaves. He found out how much profit was made by traders in the business. He obtained specimens of the shackles, thumbscrews and mouth openers; instruments of human torture that were used in the trade. He read all he could about the trade, talked to London businessmen involved in it and even created local centres of abolitionists’ opinion. After indefatigable labour, “He completed his inquiries and returned to London loaded with deadly evidence.”<sup>22</sup> Clarkson’s industry and propaganda were more directed towards the abolition of the slave trade than slavery. Even after 1807, nevertheless, he continued to work for the cause. Between 1822 and 1824, Clarkson was the agent of the Anti-Slavery Society lecturing and helping to organize branch societies throughout the United Kingdom.

Clarkson also believed in the effectiveness of bringing the slavery question before the British Legislature. In 1824, he insisted that the treatment of the Negroes must be

---

<sup>21</sup> LEWIS, GORDON. 1978, op. cit., p. 40; KLINGBERG, FRANK, J. 1926, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> COUPLAND, R. 1933, op. cit., pp. 67 - 68.

removed out of the hands of the planters. He reasoned, “To whom then are we to turn our eyes for help on this occasion? I answer, to the British Parliament, which has already heard and redressed in part the wrongs of Africa.”<sup>23</sup> Clarkson, however, did not lay his entire confidence on the policy of pressure within the house. In a very real sense, he had provided the abolitionists with a practical demonstration of how best to combine anti-slavery rhetoric and tactic to achieve their objectives. Clarkson was a man of the people unshackled by class partiality. He strove to engage all men of all walks of life in the fight for the great cause.

In attacking the institution of slavery itself, however, Clarkson’s example was only partially followed. The new leaders were more inclined to adopt Wilberforce’s more conservative style of appealing directly to the highest authority. George Stephen observed that “It was the Anti-slavery policy at this time, and for several years afterwards, to address the million through the House for it was the only way of getting into the newspapers.”<sup>24</sup> Stephen went on to state that many abolitionist leaders “... forbade all the obtrusive weight of pressure from without.”<sup>25</sup> The leaders believed that their movement was of such a character that it “... required the influence and talents of acknowledged men in Parliament.”<sup>26</sup> The abolitionists did not, however, completely refrain from enlisting the support of extra parliamentary bodies. After 1823 a new vigour in the campaign witnessed the increase of numerous petitions, annual mass meetings, corresponding societies, distribution of tracts and anti-slavery pamphlets. Anti-slavery views flooded the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>27</sup> The information, however, was not always read and, when read, did not always provoke

---

<sup>23</sup> CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1824, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> STEPHEN, GEORGE 1971, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 112 - 113.



the intended response but it was out in the open. Another drawback in the national propagandist policy was that the groups and individuals whose support the abolitionists targeted and accepted were notably limited. The historian Patricia Hollis notes that abolitionist leaders did not wish to appear to intimidate parliament by presenting support from a mob of unruly people out of doors.<sup>28</sup> They felt it was more appropriate to receive testimony from ladies and sectarian ministers and their congregations.<sup>29</sup> Even the emergence of ladies anti-slavery societies by the 1820s, however, was unacceptable to Wilberforce. Around 1824, he gave out instructions for leaders of the movement not to speak at women's anti-slavery societies.<sup>30</sup> The male leaders also made some attempts to suppress information about the existence of Elizabeth Heyrick's anti-slavery pamphlet entitled *Immediate not Gradual Abolition of Slavery*.<sup>31</sup> The historian Patricia Hollis observes that "Anti-slavery leaders in any case were no radicals ..."<sup>32</sup> Abolitionist leaders were responsive to the fact that opinion in Britain, especially parliamentary opinion, was characterized and swayed by " ... inherent caution and fair-mindedness ... love of compromise and dislike of violent courses."<sup>33</sup> Hence " ... the backing for abolition ... remained throughout respectable, rational and articulate, even when plebeian."<sup>34</sup>

In spite of the limitations of their programme, the abolitionists were great propagandists for themselves and their campaign. Their success in this area was in

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> HOLLIS, PATRICIA. 1980, op. cit., p. 295.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> WWW. SPARTACUS.SCHOOLNET.CO.UK.REANTI-SLAVERY HTM. 14 March 2002. ListBot.; and WILBERFORCE, R. I. & WILBERFORCE, S., 1838, Vol. V, op. cit., pp. 264 - 265.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.; MIDGLEY, CLARE. 1992, op. cit., pp. 93, 114, 115. Note that Midgley comments that "Heyrick's pamphlets, while officially ignored by the leadership of the Anti-Slavery Society, they were ... privately given serious attention."

<sup>32</sup> HOLLIS, PATRICIA. 1980, op. cit., p. 295.

<sup>33</sup> COUPLAND, REGINALD, 1933, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1986, *England, Slaves and Freedom 1776 - 1835*. England: The Macmillan Press Ltd., p. 153.

part due to the fact that the language they employed to fight the anti-slavery battle successfully appealed to the sentimental humanitarianism of the middle classes of the day. God fearing people, men and women in nineteenth century Britain who supported charitable organizations and who agitated against cruelties of all kind tended to respond to the outrage abolitionists expressed about the inhumane treatment of slaves.<sup>35</sup> It was within this admittedly narrow range of popular support of a conservative campaign that slave rebels made their mark in the abolitionists' attack on British West Indian slavery.

### **Call for Papers**

Following the first major rising of slaves in Barbados in 1816, common themes began to emerge from abolitionists' descriptions of failed slave revolts. Although lack of official documents restricted the comments that abolitionists could make on the revolt, they were quick off the mark in articulating their responses. Abolitionists insisted that Barbadian colonists were not merely interested in putting down the rebellion. They seemed intent on making their slaves victims of bloody and hysterical carnage. Within the British House of Commons, Thomas Fowell Buxton presented to parliamentarians the events of Barbados 1816 by referring to scenes of “... blood not of whites but of blacks in abundance.”<sup>36</sup> The London Anti-Slavery Society reinforced this impression. It reported,

“All we know is that the alleged insurgents made no attack; they were the party attacked. No white man

---

<sup>35</sup> MIDGLEY, CLARE. 1992, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, 19 June 1816, p. 1142.



appears to have been killed or even wounded by the Blacks, while from one to two thousand are said to have been hunted down, and put to death, without resistance.”<sup>37</sup>

Abolitionists’ writings immediately attacked the excessive vindictiveness of the initial moves taken by the planter class in crushing the revolt and emphasised the pitiable position of the slaves. In staking this claim the abolitionists were building upon the observation of Colonel Codd, commander of the garrison at St. Anns. Codd had expressed the opinion that

“ ... under the irritation of the moment and exasperated at the atrocity of the insurgents, some of the militia of the parishes in insurrection were induced to use their arms too indiscriminately in pursuit of the fugitives.”<sup>38</sup>

The abolitionists were keen to stress that the very first blow that the planters struck was thoughtlessly swift and fatal. From the outset, guilt lay with the colonists not with the slaves. Another abolitionist tract directly prompted by the Barbados slave revolt, which expressed the same view, was the anonymously published *Remarks*. The author reinforced the doctrine that the planter class resorted to actions that surpassed the exigencies of the occasion. The author noted, “The repression of the revolt was responsible for the extent of the mischief.”<sup>39</sup> The author also took another step in converting the suffering of the slaves into useful anti-slavery materials. He advised that “The repetition of such horrors may be prevented by the timely interposition of

---

<sup>37</sup>Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions 1824. *A Review of Some Of The Arguments Which Are Commonly Advanced Against Parliamentary Interference In Behalf Of The Negro Slaves, With A Statement Of Opinions Which Have Been Expressed On That Subject By Many Of Our Most Distinguished Statesmen*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 12. Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Review*.

<sup>38</sup> CO. 28/85, 25 April 1816. Codd to Leith, f. 13. PRO, Kew Gardens, London.

<sup>39</sup> *Remarks*, op. cit., p. 6.

parliament...”<sup>40</sup> The Barbados slave revolt of 1816 foreshadowed abolitionists’ demand both for improvement in the slavery system and for the intervention of parliament in colonial affairs. These were demands that the campaigners embraced more fully after 1823.

The immediate tactical gain of the suppression of revolt in Barbados was that it propelled the abolitionists to request official documents detailing the treatment of slaves in the colonies. Although the abolitionists made bold assertions about the revolt, they had no solid basis for their conclusions. They drew attention to the fact that the events of the revolt were shrouded in mystery. The London Anti-Slavery Society remonstrated, “Into this bloody transaction, Parliament has made no inquiry whatever! Why have not the West Indians called for such an inquiry?”<sup>41</sup> The abolitionists’ initial interest in accessing supporting documents on the treatment of slaves in the vicious aftermath of slave rebellion was not primarily out of concern for the punished rebels. It was stimulated by the desire to defend themselves against planter accusation. The campaigners were almost always anxious to prove that, contrary to the assertions of the planters, their debates on the slavery question were not responsible for fomenting rebellion. Thus, they created an opportunity out of the revolt to exonerate themselves and, at the same time, to justify their agitation of the slavery question. The abolitionists insisted,

“Until this is done [presentation of official documents on the revolt], until the whole of this mysterious affair is placed in the light of day, it will be impossible for them [the West Indians] to use it as an argument against discussion ... not a syllable has been officially published, either in England or in

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Review*, op. cit., p. 12.



Barbados, which can throw light on these dark and sanguinary occurrences... ”<sup>42</sup>

In demanding colonial authorities in Barbados to dispatch detailed information on the treatment slaves endured in rebellion or in other circumstances, abolitionists were attempting to break new ground in colonial administration. By 1816, “ ... official returns of slave treatment could only be obtained from the crown colonies ... unencumbered by ‘Assemblies’”.<sup>43</sup> It was a proverbial truth that “From 1807 to 1820, the market place of a West Indian colony was a sealed book to the British public.”<sup>44</sup> The selfish impetus that prompted abolitionists to demand colonial documents on the treatment of the slaves soon gave way to alternative motives that were more altruistic. Abolitionists used the brutal suppression of the 1816 slave rebellion in Barbados to peer more closely into slavery as it existed in the legislative colonies of the British West Indies. A committee appointed by the Barbados House of Assembly eventually published an official report of the rebellion in 1818.

### **Death in the Battlefield / Propaganda in Britain**

Of the three major slave rebellions that erupted in the British West Indies in the nineteenth century, the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 received the most abolitionist attention. It was in their commentary on this revolt that the abolitionists most sharply portrayed the victimization of rebel slaves. It was through this episode too, that they grasped the opportunity to call both on the British Parliament to implement measures of slave amelioration, and on sections of the British public to rally to the cause of the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> STEPHEN, GEORGE, 1971, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

slaves. The suppression of rebellion in Demerara was alluring to the abolitionists since its victims most irresistibly presented their shed blood as a sacrifice crying out for redress. Anti-slavery's emphasis that slave revolts ended in the slaughter of blacks not whites was most visibly presented in their account of the rebels' confrontation with colonial militia forces in Demerara in 1823. Abolitionists depicted the slaves as sacrificial lambs approaching their own slaughter.

“While they were thus conferring with Colonel Leahy, or just as their conference ceased, the troops are said to have begun firing upon them, ... As the slaves were crowded together, and were not expecting an attack, the carnage was considerable. In a few minutes, one hundred and fifty of them ... lay dead or wounded on the spot; the rest, as soon as they recovered from their surprise, fled with precipitation, and without offering any resistance whatever. The carnage appears for a time to have been pursued. The Indians were called in and used as blood hounds, and to bring them in alive or dead.”<sup>45</sup>

The wanton, indiscriminate and apparently deliberate massacre that took place in Demerara in 1823 appeared to the abolitionists as a repetition of events in Barbados on a larger scale. In the initial confrontation between slaves and slave owners, planters seemed to make no attempt to bring the slaves to justice. Vengeance consumed their attention. Against such unhesitating brutality, anti-slavery campaigners protested. The Anti-slavery Society insisted, “ ... it becomes the Parliament of this country to make diligent inquisition respecting the blood which has been thus profusely shed, and to judge fairly between the oppressor and the oppressed.”<sup>46</sup> The points on which abolitionists raised their objections were becoming all too familiar. These objections soon became tenets of anti-slavery thought. Anti-slavery reiterated that in Demerara planters were not benevolent masters. The heavy loss of lives sustained by the slaves

---

<sup>45</sup> *Negro Slavery No. VII*, op. cit., p. 59.



irrefutably exposed that fact.

Anti-slavery was not prepared to simply create a picture of defeated rebels. They demanded that action be taken to redress the suffering of the slaves. Correctly identifying the perpetrators of crime in the colonies was only an initial, though important step in this direction. The abolitionists used the suppression of the Demerara slave revolt to become more emphatic in demanding that matters relevant to the treatment of slaves be produced for their perusal and for the perusal of Ministers of Parliament. In time, these documents were passed on to corresponding societies around the country and to nonconformists and other special friends in the form of anti-slavery tracts and pamphlets. The abolitionists demanded,

“ ... let the documents necessary to elucidate this transaction be produced - the entire documents - the records of the Fiscal's office, the dispatches of the Governor, the reports of the inferior officers, both civil and military; the examinations and depositions of witnesses, the previous interrogatories addressed to the accused, with their answers, the whole detail of the proceedings on their trial, their defence, their sentence, and their punishment. And let the evidence of witnesses and the declarations of prisoners be communicated to us, not in the language into which they have been translated, but in that which they were given; not in the balanced phrases which would be unintelligible to the Slaves ... but in the mongrel dialect of Dutch and English, which forms the colloquial language of the Slaves of Demerara. We shall then ... ascertain whether our wretched fellow-subjects ... have met with their fair share of even-handed, temperate, British justice.”<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, abolitionists' focus on the detailed accounts of defeated rebellions was a tactic of using evidence produced by the colonists themselves to undermine the slave system. This was one of their expressed objectives. As early as 1822 James Cropper

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 61 - 62.

had written to Thomas Clarkson advising, “ ... let us show what the slavery of the British colonies is and then our opponents will be speechless.”<sup>48</sup> Significantly, it was the intention of the abolitionists, however, to dumbfound their opponents, not only by their own evidence but also by the literal testimonies of the slaves. It was an ambitious objective, which the colonists complied with only partially. By 1820, colonial dispatches were sent regularly both from colonies with and without legislative assemblies. The verbatim testimonies of the slaves, however, were not forthcoming and even the translated testimonies of the slaves were corrupted.<sup>49</sup> It was to the credit of the abolitionists, nevertheless, that they demanded and did hear, though in transmuted tones, the voice of the slaves in the official documents of slave revolts posted to the Colonial Office at Downing Street. At the same time, it is interesting to note how the revolt of the slaves were leading abolitionists to adopt doctrines that belonged to the revolutionary age of nineteenth century Europe. The abolitionists did not neglect to mention that the slaves, fellow citizens of Britain, were denied but were entitled to ‘ ... their fair share of even-handed, temperate, British justice’.

Steps were also taken in Britain to disseminate anti-slavery views on the practice of slavery in the colonies, which included the treatment of slaves in the suppression of slave rebellions. The pamphlet *Review of Some of the Arguments*, which contained the opinions of the London Anti-Slavery Society on the suppression of the 1816 Barbados slave revolt, had been circulated between both Houses of the British Parliament.<sup>50</sup> The

---

<sup>48</sup> Cited in WALVIN, JAMES. 1980. “The Rise of British Popular Sentiment for Abolition 1781 - 1832” in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.). *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform in England*: Wm. Dawson and Sons, Ltd., p. 154.

<sup>49</sup> See *Edinburgh Review*. March 1824 Article X, p 258 and, *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 19 on the author’s view that Demerara authorities twisted the evidence to conceal their own guilt in the revolt. Doctoring the testimonies of slaves was the main reason why the London Missionary Society was determined to produce its own version of the trial of Reverend John Smith.

<sup>50</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E2/1 op. cit., 30 April 1823, p. 24.



first formal information about the Demerara slave rebellion reached the London Committee on Slavery on 24 October 1823. In December of that year Thomas Clarkson was

“ ... requested to proceed on his new tour as soon as convenient ... in behalf of the Society ... to visit the Principal Places in all the fourteen counties ... rather than to confine himself to the complete organization of nine as it seems important that petitions should be procured without delay from those places which will have the greatest weight of influence with Parliament.”<sup>51</sup>

In addition to Clarkson's tour of the country, Clarkson wrote the pamphlet *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of Slaves* after the Demerara slave revolt. Clarkson noted, “The London Committee printed and circulated many citations of it among the committees in the country.”<sup>52</sup> Subsequent to the circulation of *Thoughts*, Wilberforce wrote to Clarkson congratulating him “ ... in the success of your endeavours to call the public voice into action.”<sup>53</sup> The public was small and very restricted. Slave rebellions, nevertheless, led the abolitionists to adjust the timing and the thrust of their plans so as to maximize the effects they anticipated from their tactics of petitioning the legislature and circulating anti-slavery opinions on the slavery question.

The reprehensible conduct of slaveholders in the battlefield of insurrection was also evident in the Jamaican slave revolt of 1831 - 1832. The British General, Sir Willoughby Cotton, had circulated in January 1832 a proclamation offering clemency to all slaves who were not leaders among the rebels. According to the proclamation, these slaves were expected to return to their estate and submit to the authority of the

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., CN33 MS Essay, p. 114.

established forces of law and order in the colony. This offer was disgraced by

“ ... officers of the militia bent upon revenge ... who fired upon the returning culprits ... Cheated by the proffer of mercy, the poor wretches fled to the woods again, where Maroons were sent to hunt them down, stimulated by the bribe of a price for each pair of human ears brought in.”<sup>54</sup>

Anti-slavery agitators were incensed by the glaring instances of unmitigated vengeance to which the planter class in the various colonies had resorted. On 11 April 1832, the leading abolitionists met at the Society's Office at 18 Aldermanbury London and discussed at length the recent events in Jamaica.<sup>55</sup> In the minutes of the meeting the Society recorded its disapproval of “ ... the terrible means resorted to for its [the Jamaican slave rebellion] suppression.”<sup>56</sup> The commentary was a reiteration of the statements made of suppression of revolt in Demerara. On account of the “ ... large effusion of innocent blood”<sup>57</sup> that was shed in the colony, Stephen and Garrat referred to the rebels as the “ ... sure victims of insurrection.”<sup>58</sup> The abolitionists had obviously read the various accounts that were dispatched from Jamaica to the Colonial Office, thanks to the demands that followed the 1816 Barbados slave revolt. Stephen and Garrat were horrified that in the attempt to nip the rebellion in the bud, slaves had “Fallen by the muskets, the swords, ... of the British soldiery.”<sup>59</sup> Abolitionist observations were confirmed by many accounts in the colony. The Presbyterian missionary, the Reverend George Waddell, had commented that “ ... the Negroes began to cower under the storm they had raised, terrified by consequences never

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> FINDLAY, GEORGE. 1921. *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*. London: Epworth Press, p. 89.

<sup>55</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E2/3, op. cit., 11 April 1832, pp. 132 - 135.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



anticipated.”<sup>60</sup> In analysing the testimony provided by the Reverend William Knibb on the Jamaican slave revolt, the abolitionists expressed their outrage that some slaves were shot by the random firing of the militia.<sup>61</sup> Like the first meeting between the handful of Spanish Conquistadors of the sixteenth century and the thousands of Incas of Peru in Cajamarca, slave rebels were caught completely off guard by the reaction of their injured masters. They were deceived into thinking that in seeking to address their wrongs through the enlightened approach of demonstration, they would be spared the planters’ wrath. They did not believe that the King’s troops would fire on them.<sup>62</sup>

The slaves were pitiable in their defeat. The crucial lesson of their failure, however, was not lost to the humanitarians. The suppression of the Jamaican slave rebellion, like that of Demerara, helped to stir the abolitionists into propaganda action. After discussing the events of the Jamaican slave revolt, the London Anti-Slavery Society resolved to hold a public meeting in Exeter Hall on Saturday 12 May 1832.<sup>63</sup> In a subsequent meeting, it was reported “Great Britain and Ireland raised upwards of 6000 petitions to Parliament pronouncing that slavery was wholly repugnant to the spirit of Christianity, to the claims of humanity and justice and to the principles of the British Constitution.”<sup>64</sup> The success of the abolitionist propaganda campaign after the Jamaican slave revolt was certainly not completely reflective of the extent to which

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> WADDELL, HOPE MASTERSTON REV. 1970. *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa. A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure 1829 - 1858*. Second Edition. London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>62</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relating to the Slave Trade 1831 - 1834, Slave Trade 80. Papers Relating to Slave Insurrection*, Jamaica. Copy of the Report of a Committee of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, Appointed to Inquire into the Cause of, and Injury sustained by, the recent Rebellion in that Colony; together with the Examinations on Oath, Confessions and other Documents annexed to the Report. Shannon, Ireland, 1969: Irish University Press, p. 215. Sir Willoughby Cotton, commander in charge of the armed forces suppressing the revolt testified that he heard a report had been circulated among the slaves that the navy and the military would not act against them.

<sup>63</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E2/3, op. cit., 9 May 1832, p. 143.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 147.



rebellion won support for the campaign or stirred the abolitionists into greater action. Parliamentary reform, the demand for the end of the monopoly that the West Indians enjoyed in Britain, persecution of sectarian missionaries and the general evils of the servile regime, among other factors, played their part. The discussions of the Committee on Slavery following the revolt, however, confirm that the experiences of defeated rebels were also taken into significant consideration.

### **The Letter of the Law**

The vindictive behaviour of planters during the nineteenth century slave revolts in Barbados, Demerara and Jamaica, while it outraged humanitarian sensitivity was consistent with the insular codes of the various island legislatures. To the abolitionists, the brutal suppressions did not come as a complete surprise. Sir James Stephen had observed in his *Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves* that animals enjoyed greater protection under colonial laws than did slaves. It was well known that an apparent contempt in all legal matters was reserved for the slaves. James Stephen explained,

Nay, a horse, a cow, or a sheep, is much better protected with us by the law, than a poor slave. For these, if found in a trespass, are not to be injured, but secured for their owners; while a half-starved Negro, may, for breaking a single cane, which probably he himself has planted, be hacked to pieces with a cutlass; even though, perhaps, he be incapable of resistance, or of running away from the watchman, who finds him in the fact. Nay, we find men among us, who dare boast of their giving orders to their watchmen, not to bring home any slave that they find breaking of canes, but, as they call it, to hide them, that is to kill, and bury them.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> RAMSAY, JAMES. 1786. *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the*



In spite of the gross vulgarity of this state of affairs, the worst was still in store “ ... for the wretches who had committed the diabolical crime of insurrection.”<sup>66</sup> James Stephen recorded that rebellious slaves were “ ... roasted alive, hung up in irons to perish of thirst, shut up in a cage and starved to death.”<sup>67</sup> He also commented that rebellion was a crime “ ... of such a nature, that you always annex to it the most excruciating pain.”<sup>68</sup>

Planters in Barbados demonstrated that here at least, they adhered to the strict letter of the law. The preamble to the Barbados law of 1661 or *An Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes* had declared that slaves were “ ... heathenish, brutish and a dangerous kind of people.”<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the lawmakers of the colony deemed it appropriate that “Criminal slaves should be branded, whipped, mutilated, suffer amputation of limbs and capital punishment for public crimes like rebellion.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, following the discovery of the 1675 Barbados slave plot to revolt, of the seventeen slaves who were found guilty and executed, six were burnt alive and eleven were beheaded and their bodies were dragged through the streets of Speightstown. The horror of the last act was intended to deter other slaves from contemplating rebellion. One of the conspirators, however, urged to reveal the full nature of the plot scornfully refused. He resigned himself to the cruel fate that he knew awaited him and boldly

---

*British Colonies*. London: James Phillips, p. 63; see also STEPHEN, JAMES SIR. 1824, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> STEPHEN, JAMES SIR. 1786, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in BECKLES, HILARY. 1987, op. cit., p. 21

<sup>70</sup> Ibid; The Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1826. “Barbados - New Slave Law” in *The Slave Colonies of Great Britain; or A Picture of Negro Slavery drawn by the Colonists Themselves; being An Abstract of the Various Papers Recently Laid Before Parliament on that Subject*. Second Edition, Corrected. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 15.

declared, “If you roast me today, you can’t roast me tomorrow.”<sup>71</sup>

Captured nineteenth century slave rebels, like their predecessors, felt the full blast of the merciless power of colonial law. Slaves in rebellion not only lost their lives when the whites panicked in the chaos of a rising slave population. Many also died when colonial authorities had time to consider and execute punishments. Abolitionists turned to the account of the anti-slavery cause the death sentences that were authorized by the court martial sessions held in the colonies in the aftermath of slave revolts. The Anti-Slavery Society made it clear that they regarded the court martial sentences as part of the irrefutable proof that slavery was evil and was in need of reform. The Society stated that in using the colonists’ recorded evidence to condemn British West Indian slavery,

“We allude ... to their criminal slave courts - to the nature and imperfections of the judicial returns - from the Fiscal of Demerara - to the trials of the insurgents in that colony in 1823 ... in which every species of judicial irregularity appears to find a place ...”<sup>72</sup>

Several abolitionists expressed their condemnation of the courts martial that put to death alleged slave rebels in the Demerara slave revolt. In the House of Commons Henry Brougham took strong objection to the fact that “ ... they [the slaves] are cut off in hundreds by the hand of justice.”<sup>73</sup> This was how, Quamina, the alleged leader of the revolt, met his end. Quamina was a deacon at the Bethel Chapel, the Methodist slave congregation over which the Reverend John Smith presided. He was one of

---

<sup>71</sup>. BECKLES, HILARY. 1987, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 30 November 1825, p. 53; see also Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1826, op. cit., pp. 29 - 33.

<sup>73</sup> HENRY BROUGHAM LORD. 1857, op. cit., p. 158.



those slaves who had been hunted in the bushes by a group of Indians after fleeing the initial carnage unleashed by colonial forces in the mopping up operations of the Demerara slave revolt. An Indian called Cattaw killed him. Such was the desire of the master to exact revenge that after Quamina was shot and his dead body recovered,

“... he was dragged to the front of Success Estate, and there, between two cabbage trees still standing, he was gibbeted as a rebel, the corpse bound together with chains, and allowed to swing in the breeze for many months after, to the terror and disgust of every passer-by.”<sup>74</sup>

Quamina’s corpse was subjected to this brutal treatment in spite of the fact that the court had no conclusive evidence that he was indeed involved in the rebellion. According to the testimony of Dr. Michael Mc Turk of Plantation Felicity and Burgher General in Demerara, Quamina may not have been armed when he was killed. Mc Turk stated that Quamina might have had a cutlass or a stick with him at the time of his death. <sup>75</sup> Quamina was not the only slave whom the planters subjected to deliberate and calculated disgrace for the role he was accused of playing in the 1823 slave rising. Almost all slaves who appeared to be prominent among the rebels were subjected to hasty trials and executions. “Ringleaders were rounded up, tried by court-martial and hanged the very day they were sentenced.”<sup>76</sup> Among the slaves thus swiftly condemned to death were

“Two prisoners, Louis of Plaisance and Natty of Enterprise, [who] were tried on the first day, found guilty, sentenced and brought in procession to the Parade Ground about five in the afternoon, where after engaging in prayer they ascended the gallows with much firmness and were hanged under the

---

<sup>74</sup> WALLBRIDGE, EDWIN. 1848, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>75</sup> *The London Missionary Society’s Report*, op. cit., p. 36

<sup>76</sup> WEBBER, R. F. 1931. *Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana*. British Guiana: The

discharge of cannon. The following day five more were executed, and so it went on for several days.”<sup>77</sup>

British abolitionists read the reports documenting the operations of the courts martial and the executions that they authorized. They questioned the nature of the legal system operating in the slave colonies in which slaves were summarily executed. Henry Bougham remonstrated against the irresponsible deaths that slaves endured. He cried,

“How many victims were sacrificed we know not with precision. Such of them as underwent a trial before being put to death were judged by this court martial. ... I fear we must admit that far more blood was thus spilt than a wise and just policy required ...”<sup>78</sup>

Dr Stephen Lushington reiterated the sense in which Brougham believed that slaves in rebellion were cheated of the justice to which as citizens of Britain they were entitled. Lushington stated, “ ... many have perished by sentence of the court ... by September, forty-seven had been executed.”<sup>79</sup> Lushington was struck by the possibility that innocent slaves might have been hastened to their end by the faulty system that operated in the aftermath of slave rebellion. He disapprovingly and sarcastically noted, “ ... a sentence which their humane tribunal passed on several of the unfortunate beings at their bar and which, to the everlasting disgrace of the British name, was, in some instances actually carried into execution.”<sup>80</sup> In the colonies slave resistance unleashed brutal repression. In Britain, however, it was widening the grounds upon which abolitionists opposed the servile regime.

---

Argosy Co., Ltd., p. 50.

<sup>77</sup> RODWAY, JAMES. 1893, op. cit., Vol. 11, 1782 - 1833, p. 240.

<sup>78</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 994.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1212.



Brougham's attack of the malpractice of law in Demerara also stressed the unnecessary prolongation of martial law in the colony. Governor Murray had stated in a dispatch to Colonial Secretary of State Lord Bathurst that

"I shall not hesitate to seize the first justifiable period for restoring to the colony [Demerara] its regular course of law ... but the alarm of the white inhabitants is too great and too general to lead one to hope for an early return of confidence; they at present place none but in their arms and a rigorous militia service must be permanently resorted to ..."<sup>81</sup>

Brougham, however, refused to accept that Governor Murray exercised reasonable judgment in the length of time that he maintained martial law in Demerara. Brougham was aggrieved that the massacre continued for " ... five calendar months, although there is the most unquestioned proof, that the revolt had subsided, and indeed that all appearance of it had vanished."<sup>82</sup> The abolitionist, James Mackintosh supported Brougham on this issue. He remarked, "I know not how many Negroes perished on the gibbet ... These dreadful cruelties, miscalled punishments, did indeed occur after the 17<sup>th</sup> of August."<sup>83</sup> The Anti-Slavery Society as a body had taken notice of the fact that by 14 January 1824, the Demerara tragedy had not yet closed. A missionary's wife and friend of Smith's wife, one Mrs. Elliot, had written that in the week prior to 14 January, a slave had been executed for his alleged role in the revolt.<sup>84</sup> To the abolitionists the perpetuation of the executions looked like violence for violence sake. The mass action of slaves in rebellion and the punishments they suffered in the

---

<sup>81</sup> CO. 111/39, Demerara, Murray to Bathurst, 24 August 1823, ff. 84. PRO, Kew Gardens, London.

<sup>82</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 968; *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 8. Brougham had pointed out that according to the dispatch of General Murray to Earl Bathurst of 26 August and subsequent dispatches of 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of August, " ... no further disturbance had taken place; nor was there from that time any insurrectionary movement whatever."

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1062.

aftermath caused abolitionists to carefully scrutinise and be critical of the legal system that governed the life of the slave in the West Indian colonies of Britain.

Henry Brougham's legal acumen enabled him to capture the whole range of abuses of the legal system that took place in the aftermath of Demerara 1823. He condemned the individuals who constituted the court martial. He questioned the admissibility of the testimony of slaves against a white man, a practice that on other occasions, though permitted in the former Dutch colony, was not permitted by the English colonists. He also condemned the charges brought against Smith, the inappropriateness of the line of questioning and, in general, the anomalous nature of the entire proceedings.<sup>85</sup> Though Brougham stated that he sought redress for the persecution of Smith in Demerara, it was apparent that he disapproved of the suffering of both missionary and slaves in the aftermath of rebellion. In one of his two marathon speeches in June 1824, he interjected, "It would appear, indeed, that in these colonies, it was sufficient evidence of a man's being a revolter that he was first shot and afterwards gibbeted."<sup>86</sup> He argued that it was nothing short of scandalous that slaves lost their lives on the testimony of a " ... prisoner, trembling upon his trial, and crouching beneath their remorseless power."<sup>87</sup> The Anti-Slavery Society supported Brougham by summing up that

"Martial law, blood, slaughter, pursuit, summary and sweeping execution are promptly resorted to by the local authorities of Demerara. Day after day and week after week, witness the steady undeviating march of their retributive vengeance. Scores, nay hundred, of victims are required to satisfy its demands. For the Negroes to have demanded what it was which the benevolence of his sovereign really

---

<sup>84</sup> *Negro Slavery No. VIII*, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>85</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, pp. 961 - 999; *A Motion by Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., pp. 39 - 40.

<sup>86</sup> HENRY BROUGHAM LORD. 1857, op. cit., p. 140.



designed for him, must be expiated by a river of blood.”<sup>88</sup>

Abolitionists used slaves in revolt to justify the anti-slavery campaign they conducted in Britain by pitting the colonists’ abuse of power against the rights of the slaves to peacefully enquire about their status. Consequently, in the House of Commons Henry Brougham called for a cessation of the practice of courts martial in the colonies. He reminded members of the House of Commons how the system had

“ ... become so unbearable that there arose from it the celebrated *Petitions of Rights* ... left to this country by that illustrious lawyer, Lord Coke ... The petition declares, that all such proceedings shall henceforward be put down: it declares that ‘no man shall be fore-judged by life and limb against the form of the Great Charter;’ that ‘no man ought to be adjudged by death but by the laws established in this realm, either by the custom of the realm, or by acts of parliament;’ and that ‘the commissions for proceeding by martial law should be revoked and annulled, lest, by color of them, any of his Majesty’s subjects be destroyed or put to death, contrary to the laws and franchise of the land.’ Since that time, no such thing as martial law has been recognized in this country; and courts founded on proclamations of martial law have been wholly unknown. ... Afterwards came the annual Mutiny Acts, and Courts Martial, which were held only under those acts. ... These courts were restricted to the trial of soldiers for military offenses; and the extent of their powers was pointed out and limited by law.”<sup>89</sup>

The colonists could have argued that proclamation of martial law rendered every man to be treated as a soldier and therefore susceptible to be tried by the court. Brougham’s conclusion was that once the revolt had been quelled, martial law should have ceased. The court martial in Demerara had overstepped its jurisdiction. The abolitionists used the abuse of power in Demerara as an opportunity to call upon Parliament to exercise

---

<sup>87</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 986.

<sup>88</sup> *Negro Slavery No. VII*, op. cit., p. 60.

its duty to reconcile the colonial legal system with that which operated in Britain. The abolitionist proposal to end courts martial in the colonies was also a manifestation that slave rebellion was a basis upon which abolitionists sought to reform the structure of the slave plantation societies of the English Caribbean. Brougham's speeches in June 1824 ended with a motion praying most earnestly that

“ ... His Majesty adopt measures ... for securing such a just and humane administration of law in that colony as may protect the voluntary instructors of the Negroes, as well as the Negroes themselves, and the rest of His Majesty's subjects from oppression.”<sup>90</sup>

Brougham as well as other abolitionists used the deaths of slaves following the Demerara rebellion to pressure both parliament and public to rethink and take corrective action on the regime of slavery. Brougham energized the suffering of the slaves by urging

“Parliament to rescue the West Indians from the horrors of such a policy; to deliver those misguided men from their own hands; I call upon you to interpose while it is yet time to save the West Indies ... their masters, whose short-sighted violence is, indeed, hurtful to their slaves, but to themselves is fraught with fearful and speedy destruction if you do not at once make your voice heard and your authority felt, where both have been so long despised.”<sup>91</sup>

The Anti-Slavery society was convinced that the mode of the trials “ ... will afford no small matter of deep reflection to the people...”<sup>92</sup> The abolitionists therefore expected

---

<sup>89</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 969.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1206.

<sup>91</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1857, op. cit., p. 165. Brougham also warned that by their brutal suppression of the Demerara slave revolt, the colonists “ ... place in jeopardy the life of every white man in the Antilles.” *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>92</sup> *Negro Slavery No. VII*, op. cit., p. 59.



that the details of the evils of the suppression of revolts would lead to action on the part of the highest authority in the land. Looking back on events in Demerara the Society admonished as late as 1830,

“Let these things be fully weighed, and neither the Government nor the Parliament can hesitate as to the imperative necessity of radically reforming a system which produces such abominations as have been detailed; - such perversions of the very forms of law to purposes of cruelty and oppression ... These things must come to an end, and that speedily.”<sup>93</sup>

The society went so far as to assert that if their assessment of events in Demerara was accurate then

“Parliament and the Public will feel that if they hesitate to apply an effectual remedy to such evils as have been placed before them, they will be justly chargeable with all the atrocities which have been or may henceforth be committed and with all the blood which has been or may still be shed, in the maintenance of this abominable system.”<sup>94</sup>

The abolitionists were equally censorious of the abuse of martial law in the suppression of the Jamaican slave rebellion. Here again they relied almost explicitly on the evidence provided by the Baptist missionary to Jamaica, William Knibb. The Anti-Slavery Society noted, “In the report of a speech of Mr Knibb, he had spoken of the innocent blood that had been shed during the insurrection. He said he referred to the number who, during martial law, had suffered innocently!”<sup>95</sup> The abolitionists retailed Knibb’s conclusion that the sentences that court martial officials in Jamaica

---

<sup>93</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 30 November 1830, London: J. Hatchard, pp. 53 - 54.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

passed on alleged slave rebels were not just punishments but painful and alarming excesses of a corrupt system of law. The Society echoed Knibb by recording,

“The executions were conducted with considerable levity; four or six being sometimes executed in a day at Montego Bay. ... The bodies of those shot and hung at Montego Bay were buried in a trench; those put to death in the country were left to be devoured by vultures. The feeling produced by all this is very painful and alarming, as many have lost not only fathers and brothers, but wives also.”<sup>96</sup>

In the eyes of British abolitionists slaves accused and punished of staging slave rebellions were martyrs of a corrupt interpretation of British law and order. The anti-slavery activists emphasized that Jamaican colonists, like their colleagues in Demerara, had overstepped the legal bar. They pointed out that Knibb doubted whether the court martial officers had the permission of Sir Willoughby Cotton for the sentences they executed. The Anti-Slavery Society noted that Knibb had explained,

“ ... they could not have had sanction, as persons were shot at distant places on the same day. There were about 300 shot, many by drum-head courts. Some were tried, and shot or hung in half an hour, Sir Willoughby Cotton being then absent. He [Knibb] had himself seen men hung at Montego Bay when Sir Willoughby Cotton was so far distant that he could not have been referred to. The trials and execution went on the most rapidly in St. James’s while the general was in Westmoreland.”<sup>97</sup>

There is no exaggeration between the way in which the abolitionists assessed slave casualties both during and after the suppression of slave revolts and the final figures that were left by the records. James Walvin approximates that the death toll among the slave population totalled “ ... 400 in Barbados, 250 in Demerara and 500 in

---

<sup>95</sup> *Analysis of The Report* op. cit., p. 120.



Jamaica.”<sup>98</sup> The figures that Michael Craton has found do not differ greatly. He calculates that in Jamaica, 200 slaves were killed while fighting and the judiciary executed 340.<sup>99</sup> Craton also provides a comprehensive breakdown for deaths in Demerara. He tallies that 100 or 150 rebels were killed or wounded by the Black West India Regiment, 23 leading rebels were shot or fled south into the trackless mountains where they were hunted and some were shot. Of the 72 who were tried in the five months between 25 August 1823 and 19 January 1824, 33 were actually executed.<sup>100</sup>

The victimization that slaves endured in defeated slave rebellions fed an anti-slavery discourse that denounced the evils of the servile regime. It also bolstered abolitionists’ tactics of pressuring the British government and its people to assume their responsibility to correct an evil that was taking place under its colonial power. These views were expressed as early as 1823 when the campaigners were still committed to the gradual abolition of slavery and reiterated after the 1831 - 32 Jamaican slave revolt when immediate slave emancipation had just become their objective.

### **A More Horrible Tale**

Abolitionists were not satisfied that the deaths slaves endured in the field and at the merciless hand of colonial executioners were sufficient examples of the evidence that revolts piled up against slavery. Henry Brougham stated that in Demerara “A more

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> WALVIN, JAMES. 1977, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

horrid tale of blood yet remains to be told.”<sup>101</sup> Brougham had consulted the *Port Royal Gazette*, an organ of planter propaganda in Demerara, to formulate conclusions on the revolt and to supply him with further detailed evidence of the afflictions of the slaves. He noted that on 16 January 1824,

“ ... seven more of the rebel Negroes have been flogged according to their respective sentences ... Louis of Porters Hope, ... 1000 lashes, ... Field of Clonbrock, ... 1000 lashes, ... Mercury of Enmore, 700 lashes, ... Austin of Cone, ... 600 lashes, ... Jessamin of Success, ... 300 lashes, John Campbell of Otto, ... 200 lashes, ... August of Success, ... 300 lashes ...”<sup>102</sup>

Brougham believed that the flogging the slaves endured was “ ... a fate hardly preferable to execution, ... ”<sup>103</sup> He was appalled that slaves actually received the whole or almost the whole of these cruel sentences. He also read in the *Port Royal Gazette* of 24 July 1824,

“This morning, the brigade were under arms, at an early hour, to witness the flogging of three convicted insurgents, who had been some time under sentence - Cobino, Sammy and Cudjo; the first to receive 1000 lashes and be worked in chains for life, the second, the same number of lashes, and to be worked in chains for seven years, and the third the same as the first. Cobino received the whole amount of the number of lashes awarded; Sammy only 900 and Cudjo only 800. There are several more who still remain for punishment. ...”<sup>104</sup>

Sir James Mackintosh was similarly struck by the fact that the floggings continued “Five months after the rising [Demerara 1823] when hot blood might have cooled ...

---

<sup>101</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 995.

<sup>102</sup> *Edinburgh Review* March 1824, Article X, pp. 246 - 247.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247, Brougham quoting from *Port Royal Gazette* of 24 July 1824.



<sup>105</sup> Mackintosh was more contemptuous, however, of the fact that the colonists regarded the flogging of slave rebels as an act of mercy. He described this manifestation of the planters' effrontery as nothing more than an " ... insolent, atrocious, detestable pretext of mercy ... "<sup>106</sup> The Anti-Slavery Society as a body also supported Brougham's condemnation of the floggings the slaves received. It stated, " ... immediately after quiet was restored, many of the survivors were torn in pieces by infliction of the scourge, more merciless than anything upon record in modern times, and in Christian countries."<sup>107</sup>

The driving system in which the planter regarded the use of the whip as a badge of authority and an inducement of labour had been a bone of contention between the pro and anti-slavery camps. This was partly the reason why Buxton had brought the notorious case of Huggins, though not related to slave rebellions, to the attention of parliamentarians in the House of Commons in 1824 just after the Demerara slave revolt. Buxton confessed that a case like this " ... is painful to me to state, and it will doubtless be as painful to the House to hear these sad details."<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, he ran through the charges against Mr Huggins.

" ... the celebrated case of Mr Huggins, who himself a magistrate, in the presence of other magistrates, in the public market place of Nevis, in the year 1810, inflicted on one Negro 115 lashes; on another 65; on another 47; on another 165; on another 242; on another 212; on another 181; on another 59; on another 187; on a Negro woman 110; on another woman 58; on another woman 97; on another woman 212; on another woman 291; on another woman 83; on another woman 49; on another woman 68; on another woman 89; and on another woman 56 - for which treatment the following whimsical reason was

---

<sup>105</sup> COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>106</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 1 June 1824, p. 1062.

<sup>107</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXI, January 1825, p. 209.

assigned by his son - 'he conceived that moderate measures, steadily pursued, were more likely to produce obedience'.”<sup>109</sup>

Huggins case, which took place in 1811, was a clear reminder of the floggings that alleged slave rebels of Demerara endured in 1823 - 1824. Anti-slavery campaigners distinctly objected to this mode of punishing and driving the slaves to work. They described it thus

“ ...punishments are usually inflicted on the naked body with the cart whip, an instrument of dreadful severity, which cruelly lacerates the flesh of the sufferer. Even the unhappy females are equally liable with the men to have their persons thus shamelessly exposed and barbarously tortured by the caprice of their master or overseer.”<sup>110</sup>

On account of these dreadful cruelties, the author of an *Edinburgh Review* article felt compelled to quote two extracts from the journal of John Smith that eventually passed into the mainstream of anti-slavery ideology. Smith wrote the first extract on 22 March 1819. It stated, “I have thought much of the treatment of the Negroes, and likewise of the state of their minds. It appears to me very probable, that, ere long, they will resent the injuries done to them.”<sup>111</sup> It is probable that this idea appealed to the author because abolitionists too were closely examining the treatment and conduct of the slaves. They were beginning to accept that rebellion was a response of the slaves to the brutality of their servile existence. After 1823, several abolitionists began to whisper that if the British Imperial Parliament did not abolish slavery, the slaves

---

<sup>108</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. .X, 1 June 1824, p. 1118.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Anti-Slavery Society. 1825. *A Brief View of the Nature of Slavery in British West Indian Colonies*,.....

<sup>111</sup> *Edinburgh Review* March 1824, Article X, p. 253. This extract appears in *The London Missionary*



would abolish it in the colonies. The second extract of Smith's journal that was included in this article embodied another anti-slavery ideology that began to take shape after the Demerara slave revolt. Smith in a conversation with a plantation manager had agreed that " ... the project of Mr. Canning will never be carried into effect, ... The rigors of Negro slavery ... can never be mitigated: the system must be abolished."<sup>112</sup> The flogging slaves endured in the aftermath of the Demerara slave rebellion provided abolitionists with the opportunity to launch another attack against the use of the cart whip in the slave colonies.

Abolitionists also took note of the flogging of slaves in the aftermath of the Jamaican slave revolt by again retailing the evidence produced by the missionary William Knibb. Knibb reported that at Falmouth, 36 slaves were flogged and that " ...some were flogged to death, dying of the infliction on the next day. One of Mr. Burchell's members, sentenced to 500 lashes, died of flogging."<sup>113</sup>

The floggings, the executions and the massacre that slaves experienced in the cruel suppression of slave revolts encouraged British anti-slavery campaigners to focus more sharply on and to speak out against the penal codes of the British West Indian slave system.

### **Pleading the Negroes' Cause**

A discussion of the value of defeated slaves to the anti-slavery movement raises the question of the comparative value of persecuted missionaries to the same. Several historians argue that the suffering that was truly valuable to the campaign was not that

---

*Society's Report*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., and *The London Missionary Society's Report*, op. cit., p. 8.



of the slaves but that of persecuted missionaries. Chester New, for example, asserts that because of the Demerara slave rebellion “ ... the movement [would have been] seriously retarded ... had not been for the case of missionary Smith.”<sup>114</sup> Reginald Coupland is similarly of the opinion that the trial of Smith “ ... may well have been the decisive factor in starting the last irresistible current of anti-slavery opinion.”<sup>115</sup> Michael Craton states that “The news [of Smith’s death] provoked an uproar among the British emancipationists who, typically, regarded Smith’s ordeal as far outweighing the death of 250 slaves.”<sup>116</sup> Frank Klingberg asserts “ ... hopes of emancipation seemed shattered, until Brougham by his masterly handling of the case of the missionary, Smith, revived the cause and dealt British slavery a blow from which it never recovered.”<sup>117</sup> Undoubtedly, British abolitionists treated planter reaction to sectarian missionaries in the aftermath of slave rebellion as part of the practice of slavery that demanded exposure and condemnation. After slave rebellions, sectarian missionaries working among slave congregations in the colonies were arrested and imprisoned, tarred and feathered, driven into exile and their properties were subjected to arson attacks.<sup>118</sup> The abolitionists openly expressed the view that these experiences were fortuitous to the movement against slavery. Most popular among the incidents of ill treatment of sectarian missionaries was the case of John

---

<sup>113</sup> *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>114</sup> NEW, CHESTER. 1961, op. cit., p. 290.

<sup>115</sup> COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>116</sup> CRATON, MICHAEL. 1982, op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>117</sup> KLINGBERG, FRANK, J. 1926, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>118</sup> *Defence of the Baptist Missionaries*, op. cit., p. 5. See also *Facts and Documents*, op. cit., pp. 5 - 16; Baptist Missionaries. 1833. *A Narrative of Recent Events Connected with The Baptist Mission In This Island Comprising also A Sketch of the Mission from its Commencement in 1814 to the end of 183*. Jamaica: Edward Jordan and Robert Osborn, pp. 35, 38 - 51; *Analysis of The Report* op. cit., pp. 108 - 110; Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1833. *Abstract of the Report of the Lord’s Committees on the Condition and Treatment of the Colonial Slaves, and of the Evidence taken by them on that Subject; With notes by the Editor*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, p. 87, letter of Henry Bleby to J. Barry dated Montego Bay 24 April, 1832; (Other citations of this item will be referred to as *Abstract of the Report*) HINTON, JOHN HOWARD. 1847, op. cit., pp. 126, 128 - 129, 135; JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972, op. cit., p. 472; STANLEY, BRIAN.



Smith of the London Missionary Society. He was charged with complicity in the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823.<sup>119</sup> The court martial that tried him brought in a guilty verdict but recommended him to mercy. Smith died in goal before he could be released on the full exoneration that was granted him from Britain.<sup>120</sup> In very optimistic terms, abolitionists commented on the great advantage of Smith's tragic fate to the cause. Thomas Fowell Buxton declared, "We have a capital case as to the Demerara insurrection. Smith is innocent."<sup>121</sup> In the *Edinburgh Review*, the Anti-Slavery Society echoed Buxton by stating "The great debate in Parliament upon the missionary question produced an invaluable acquisition to this great cause."<sup>122</sup> The Society openly hailed John Smith as "the martyr and victim of our cause."<sup>123</sup> In his *Recollections*, George Stephen remembered John Smith of the London Missionary Society as " ... a martyr to the missionary zeal for the cause."<sup>124</sup> Stephen asserted, "Demerara murdered Smith but at the same time, it contributed largely to the extinction of slavery."<sup>125</sup> Sturge's memoirs recorded that

" ... the furious persecution of the missionaries, displayed by the destruction of their chapels, their own wanton imprisonment, or expulsion from the islands and culminating at last in what was, in effect, the judicial murder of Smith, 'the Demerara martyr', helped, by degrees, to prepare the country for that cry of total and immediate emancipation which a few earnest spirits were already beginning to raise."<sup>126</sup>

---

1992, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>119</sup> See *British Parliamentary Papers Demerara Minutes of Evidence on the Trial of John Smith a Missionary 1824*, op. cit., p. 83 for the four charges brought against Smith.

<sup>120</sup> Cited in JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972, op. cit., p. 349 [Bathurst to King George IV, 13 February 1824. Copy. CO 111/42. PRO. On the recommendation of Lord Bathurst, Foreign Secretary of State for the Colonies, the King remitted Smith's death sentence.]

<sup>121</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>122</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXI, 1824, p. 227.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

The abolitionists were not so positive and direct in stating the value of victimized slaves to the cause. Perhaps this was a reflection of the caution they took in not appearing too radical as they defended the position of slaves who had dared to use force to challenge the slavery system. Abolitionists, however, did not tend to elevate the significance of persecuted missionaries over defeated slave rebels. Although they did not use the term ‘martyr’ to refer to the slaves, the evidence demonstrates that they upheld both parties, slaves and missionaries, as agents of the anti-slavery cause. At times abolitionists even admitted that in relation to the slaves, the missionaries were secondary. In the *Edinburgh Review* it was explained,

“If it should be surmised that I speak with peculiar complacency of the Wesleyan missionaries and with a tendency to lead to a preference of them, the imputation ... is groundless. I plead the cause of the Negroes, and not that of the Wesleyans. ... in the course of the researches and the communications which I have had to enter into for the attainment of the end I had a view, ... the Wesleyan Missionary Society, ... affords at present by far the most powerful means of introducing Christianity among the slave population; and ... its action has been materially thwarted and counteracted by suspicion, mistrust and occasionally by injurious and unfounded accusation.”<sup>127</sup>

Abolitionists appreciated the proper perspective in which the missionaries had assumed roles in the scenario of British West Indian slavery. In the *Edinburgh Review* the abolitionists made it clear that they understood that “ ... these proceedings [trial and persecution of Smith] are all intimately connected with the great question of Negro improvement.”<sup>128</sup> Wilberforce in particular made it clear that while Smith’s case

---

<sup>126</sup> RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>127</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXI, March 1824, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



“ ... involves the question of the rights and happiness of a British subject, and, still more, the administration of justice in the West Indian colonies ... there is another point of view in which the questions is to be regarded, in which it will assume far more importance and excite a still deeper interest...”<sup>129</sup>

In Wilberforce's estimation the greater context of Smith's trial and persecution was colonial obstruction to slave amelioration, which included obstacles to the moral and religious instruction of the slaves.<sup>130</sup> In one of its tracts examining the rebellion in Demerara the Anti-Slavery Society observed that, “The case of Mr. Smith must be reserved for another opportunity. That of the slaves is sufficient to engage our present attention.”<sup>131</sup> The abolitionists did at times separate the experiences of persecuted missionaries from that of crushed rebels. It was more typical of them, however, to speak of “The blood of martyred missionaries and murdered Negroes”<sup>132</sup> or “.... oppressed missionaries and their persecuted followers.”<sup>133</sup> Charles Buxton, writing his father's memoirs, adequately demonstrated the point. Without making distinctions between slave and missionary he reported,

“ ... the colonial legislatures ... had punished the rebel Negroes with a severity that shocked every feeling of humanity; they had condemned Smith to the gallows and thus turned the Independents against them; they forced Shrewsbury to fly for his life, and the Wesleyans were aroused, ... the Baptist chapels were razed to the ground, and the Baptists became their enemies.”<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> *Negro Slavery No. VII*, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> *Negro Slavery No. VIII*, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>133</sup> STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

In 1830, the Anti-Slavery Society condemned the “ ... persecution which Christians missionaries and their Negro converts have had to endure, and are still enduring in that island [Jamaica].”<sup>135</sup> By 7 September 1832 British abolitionists made their position clear on this issue by insisting that events in Jamaica, “ ... whether viewed as religious persecution on the part of the masters or as insurrection on the part of the slaves” necessitated a speedy settlement of the slavery question.<sup>136</sup> This perspective underscores the fact that when abolitionists set out to examine the trial and persecution of a missionary, they were primarily drawn into a large-scale examination and denunciation of the operations of the system of slavery itself. The abolitionists found it almost impossible to differentiate between the suffering of missionaries and that of slaves. The two parties had first hand experience of planter degradation of which the abolitionists disapproved equally. Abolitionists did not overlook the fact that the persecution of the missionaries was intimately bound up with the service they provided to the slaves.

Another factor that needs to be clarified in appreciating the relationship between dissenting missionaries and the anti-slavery movement, is the support that missionaries enjoyed when news of their persecution in the colonies reached Britain. The abolitionists played no small part in stimulating public support at home for missionaries like John Smith in Demerara, Shrewbury in Barbados and Knibb, Burchell, Whitehorne, Abbot and Bleby in Jamaica. The religious public was among the elite that the London anti-slavery leaders handpicked to circulate their views amongst. ‘Respectability’ was the criteria for selection. James Stephen provided this cue when he encouraged the group of London abolitionists with the report that

---

<sup>135</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 3, No. 61, June 1830, p. 251.

<sup>136</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E2/3, op. cit., 7 September 1832, p. 163.



“... a Society, respectable as yours and others of the same character have been formed and are forming in different parts of the kingdom for the purpose of mitigating and gradually terminating that odious oppression ... among their number men like yourself whose characters are a pledge for resolute perseverance.”<sup>137</sup>

On 17 June 1823 in keeping with the anti-slavery campaign of exposure to the respectable, pamphlets were sent to members of the Bible and Missionary Societies and the African Institution.<sup>138</sup> Again, it was resolved on 9 September 1823 to send copies of the substance of Buxton’s May 1823 Commons speech to the

“President and Vice President of the Society, the Board of Directors of the African Institution as are not members of the Anti-Slavery Society, all speakers in the debate who are not members of the Society, all members of Cabinet, R. Wilmot Horton at the Colonial Office, each of the periodical works and to each of the newspaper ... and 500 Circulars and 50 debates ... to the Church Missionary Society for distribution and the same number to the Methodist Society”<sup>139</sup>

These attempts to create a religious anti-slavery public were taken prior to the formal announcement among abolitionist circles of the eruption of slave rebellion in Demerara. Thus, when news that planters in the colonies threatened the lives and the rights of their white Christian brethren and destroyed their property, the support of the missionaries was a forgone conclusion. After the rebellion, abolitionists were so confident of this that their approach to the dissenters was forthright. It was resolved on 19 June 1824 that “Mr Macaulay be requested to confer with the Secretary of the Missionary Society upon the publication of the late speeches in Parliament relative to

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., E2/1, 16 April 1823, p. 16.

the Missionary Smith.”<sup>140</sup>

A letter written by Joseph Sturge to the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1828 reveals that targeting the church was not only an option suggested by the desire to incorporate respectable support for the cause. It was also a pragmatic approach to meet the financial demands of disseminating information on the state of British West Indian slavery. Sturge suggested, “Perhaps the quickest way of getting a large number of petitions would be through the different religious congregations.”<sup>141</sup> Abolitionists before Sturge had already appreciated this fact. The church presented a ready meeting place for many individuals. Circulating materials supporting the great cause among the congregations was relatively inexpensive. This was an important consideration to the Anti-Slavery Society whose funds were almost always dangerously low. On 8 July 1823, the treasurer of the Society’s Sub-Committee on Finance reported that while its balance stood at £1.1.1, “... the outstanding bills against the Society ... do not amount to less than between £700 and £800.”<sup>142</sup> The poor state of the funds of the Society may very well have been a reflection of its unwillingness to extend its network of public support. It certainly provides some explanation as to why the nonconformist ministers and their congregations were included in the narrow range of groups and individuals to whom the abolitionists turned to create a public voice for their cause while other classes of society were avoided.

Finally, as is suggested from their limited publicity programme, it is important to emphasize that abolitionists were not solely responsible for the remarkable number of

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 17 June 1823, p. 39

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 56

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>141</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 18, C1/61, Correspondence of Thomas Pringle, Secretary of the Committee on Slavery, 13 March 1827 - December 1834. Letter of Joseph Sturge to Thomas Pringle, 20 March 1828. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

<sup>142</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E2/1, 8 July 1823, p. 43.



petitions on behalf of Smith that poured into the House of Commons in the spring of 1824. London Missionary Society petitioners from all over the kingdom sent upwards of 200 petitions to the House of Commons. The abolitionists, of course, endorsed the gesture and on 13 April 1824, Sir James Mackintosh presented the London Missionary Society petitions to Parliament.<sup>143</sup> The Directors of the London Missionary Society wanted to arouse as much public interest as possible in the case of Missionary Smith. Thus, they launched an extensive campaign. It was a perfect replica of the abolitionist propaganda tactics. The Directors sent letters all over the country to members and supporters of the London Missionary Society. They encouraged members of the House of Commons to be present at the debate on the trial of Smith. They sent a copy of the court martial proceedings to every member of the House of Commons and to one hundred members of the House of Lords.<sup>144</sup> The London Missionary Society and not British abolitionists were primarily responsible for the dissemination of information on the suffering of Smith that led to the petitions that thronged the British parliament in the spring of 1824. Additionally, the London Missionary Society petitioners had made it clear that the objectives they were seeking had nothing to do with the slavery question itself. They wanted a reversal of the sentence that had been pronounced on Smith and future protection for missionaries in the slave colonies.<sup>145</sup> Smith's popularity in Britain, then, though used by the abolitionists to win support for the cause, was truly developed and exploited by the sectarians themselves to achieve a

---

<sup>143</sup> CO 111/47, 6 March 1824, William Alers Hankey, Treasurer of the London Missionary Society, to Wilmot Horton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, ff. 180 - 189; JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972, op. cit., pp. 353 - 354.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 355. [Minutes of the Board of the London Missionary Society 17 May 1824 CCWM]

<sup>145</sup> The Directors of the London Missionary Society was grateful that the Ministers of His Majesty's Government " ... thought it proper to remit the punishment of death [of Smith] but they appear to your petitioners to have given an approval of the findings of the Court, by directing that Mr Smith should be dismissed from the colony and should enter into recognizances never to return." CO 111/ 47, 24 March 1824, Petition of Directors of London Missionary Society to Secretary of State for the colonies Wilmot Horton ff. 187; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XI, 13 April 1824, p. 401.



much narrower objective than the gradual and eventual emancipation of the slaves sought by the abolitionists.<sup>146</sup>

In spite of the special efforts that both the abolitionists and church leaders made to enlist the support of the sectarians for the struggle against slavery, however, the attention provided by the dissenters was not constant. George Stephen commented in his *Anti-Slavery Recollections* that

“The dissenters rendered good service, for they were greatly excited by the case of Missionary Smith, but it was not at this time, even with them, a topic of constant interest; a casual allusion to it was all that their preachers could spare from more serious subjects. It is perhaps scarcely going too far to say that at the beginning of 1830, not one in ten thousand of the whole population had any but the most vague and general idea of the nature of the colonial controversy, or even of the state of slavery itself. ... An anti-slavery public was yet to be created.”<sup>147</sup>

Apparently, the older heads directing the anti-slavery campaign were satisfied with the limited inroads they had made in canvassing the sectarians to their cause. George Stephen was not. He considered himself to be a young England abolitionist and identified with the members of the more vigorous Agency Committee who wanted to do more to rouse greater public participation in the movement.

The historian Madge Dresser, who has conducted considerable research on the slavery question in the English City of Bristol, supports the conclusions of George Stephen on this issue. Dresser weighs the strength of dissenter support for the movement by measuring it against other coverage of the slavery question in Britain. Dresser notes

---

<sup>146</sup> The request of the petitioners was that “... Your Honourable House will institute such Enquiries or direct or adopt such measures as may best tend to obtain the revision or rescindment of the Sentence passed on My Smith and also will adopt such measures as shall ensure needful protection to Christian missionaries in every part of the British Empire throughout the world, and will afford such further relief as shall seem meet to the Humanity, Wisdom and Justice of Your Honourable House.” CO, op. cit.



that the arrest of the Bristol Baptist missionary, William Knibb, in Jamaica in 1831 was of particular concern to members of that sect in Bristol.<sup>148</sup> In the *Baptist Magazine*, the Baptists also expressed their fury that the Colonial Church Union formed by planters after the rebellion burned nine Baptists and six Methodists chapels, tarred and feathered at least one missionary and imprisoned, not only Knibb but also his fellow minister, the Reverend Thomas Burchell.<sup>149</sup> Like the suffering of the slaves, however, the persecution of the missionaries was almost completely confined to anti-slavery tracts and House of Commons remonstrance made by parliamentarian abolitionists. Dresser goes on to state that the cry of the dissenters in the *Baptist Magazine* was drowned by more popular journals in Bristol. Dresser notes that

“The *Felix Farley Bristol Journal* though unforthcoming about the cruel treatment of slaves, and the harassment of missionaries, the editor ensured that his paper detailed descriptions of slave violence. ... the bloodthirsty and savage cruelties of the slaves knew no bounds, and whilst white men were horribly murdered, their unfortunate females were reserved in their caves and fastness often witnessing the maligning of their fathers, husbands and brothers, for the more brutal purposes not to be described.”<sup>150</sup>

Dresser demonstrates that the public response in Bristol to the Jamaican slave revolt was largely a re-enactment of the response triggered by news of the great St. Domingue slave rebellion of 1791. Before 1830, apart perhaps from Smith's case, the fact that white missionaries faced persecution alongside defeated slave rebels made little impact in altering this public response. What really caused the suffering of

---

<sup>147</sup> STEPHEN, SIR GEORGE. 1971, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>148</sup> DRESSER, MADGE. 2001. *Slavery Obscured The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port*. London and New York: Continuum, p. 218.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.; *Facts and Documents*, op. cit., pp. 5 - 13.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 219.



missionaries to hit home was when Knibb and other missionaries returned to England and joined the anti-slavery circuits established by the Agency Committee. This was towards the end of 1831 till slavery was declared abolished in 1833.<sup>151</sup>

Anti-slavery agitators did not elevate persecuted missionaries above slaves who were victimized in the suppression of revolts. They etched out a discourse that attempted to capture slavery as it existed in the colonies. This discourse did not ignore the experience of slaves facing the vicious aftermath of slave revolts. In fact, it was a discourse that gauged in turn the roles of planters, missionaries and slaves as well. What is regrettable is that before 1830 and before the activation of the more radical Agency Committee, the abolitionists failed to disseminate this countervailing discourse among a more broad based public.

---

<sup>151</sup> The Baptist missionaries themselves, Knibb, Phillipo, but not the Baptist Missionary Society Committee, were intent in using their persecution in Jamaica to advance the cause of the slaves. The Committee met on 25 May 1832 to discuss the persecution of its missionaries in Jamaica but nothing was said of slavery itself. Its concern was wholly with the infringement of their missionaries' civil and religious liberties. See STANLEY, BRIAN. 1992, op. cit., pp. 77 - 78. The Baptist Missionary Society admonished both Knibb and Phillipo not to speak about the rebellion in Jamaica at the annual General meeting of the BMS on 21 June 1832 at Spa Fields Chapel at 11:00am. Phillipo spoke before Knibb at the meeting and confined his address to a general appeal for renewed effort to sustain the Jamaican mission. Knibb ignored the admonition he received and insisted that the question of slavery and Christianity could no longer be separated and that the former ought to be abolished to enable slaves to worship God. See also HINTON, J. H. 1847, op. cit., pp. 145 - 148. Knibb was radical about his position. The Baptist Missionary Society was cautious. On 25 June 1832 the Society agreed to meet with Buxton but the object in view was still defined in terms of religious liberty in Jamaica. In August 1832 the *Missionary Herald* raised the subject of abolition for the first time. The article was a sanguine warning that better times were approaching both for the slaves and masters but that emancipation was fraught with difficulties and that time was necessary before it could be safely accomplished. See STANLEY, BRIAN, 1992, op. cit., pp. 79 - 80. Finally the conservatism of the *Missionary Herald* was overtaken by 15 August 1832 in an interdenominational meeting held in Exeter Hall to adopt measures to safeguard religious liberty in Jamaica. John Dyer moved a motion calling on the legislature and Government to implement the complete and immediate extinction of slavery throughout the British dominions. In the closing months of 1832, Knibb, Burchell and Phillipo toured England and Scotland, mobilizing humanitarian opinion in favour of immediate abolition. See HINTON, J. H. 1847, op. cit., pp. 136 - 7, 151 - 152; BURCHELL, W. F. 1859. *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*. London, p. 255; UNDERHILL, E. B., 1881. *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*. London, pp. 103 - 104; STANLEY, BRIAN. 1992, op. cit. p. 76; JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972, p. 471.



## Defeated Heroes

As a result of the blood that was shed among slave rebels in British plantation colonies, an extensive and significant aspect of anti-slavery discourse was written. In converting the rebels' experience to useful anti-slavery material, however, the abolitionists necessarily left in the shadow the courage slaves demonstrated in confronting cruel but powerful masters with arms to assert their right to freedom. Abolitionists' narration of the suppression of the slave revolts appeared to rob the slaves of the respect and dignity they deserved. It was admittedly a discourse in which slaves were identified on the basis of their impotence and their suffering. The humanitarians focused upon the pain, degradation and cruelty the slaves endured. In order to elevate the slaves they must first be pictured in the most miserable terms. In their absolute suffering they found a purity that was beyond reproach. ... it was a purity earned by being outside of power and the victims of power. While the scales tipped on the side of their degradation, however, it must neither be forgotten nor ignored that suffering slaves brought the subject of slavery to the attention of the British Parliament and, to a limited extent, to the British people. The abolitionists recognized that " ... the slaves in the colonies, who are not permitted to speak for themselves - who have no tongues, [use] their bleeding wounds to plead their cause."<sup>152</sup> The 'anonymous' author of an article in the *Edinburgh Review* pointed to this conclusion when the author advised the British West Indian plantocracy of the true strength that lay behind the apparent weakness of the defeated rebels.

"You may renew all the atrocities of Barbados and Demerara, you may inflict all the most hateful

punishments authorized by the insular codes. You may massacre by the thousand, and hang by the score, you may even once more roast your captives in slow fires and starve them in iron cages or flay them alive with the cart whip. You will only hasten the day of your retribution. Therefore we say, let them go forth from the house of bondage. For woe unto you, if you wait for the plagues and the signs, the wonders and the war, the mighty and the outstretched hand.”<sup>153</sup>

British abolitionists had realized that the suffering slaves endured in the aftermath of slave rebellion would not, as the planters had assumed, produce such terror among the slaves that they would no longer dare to oppose by force their enslavement. After the Jamaican slave rebellion the Anti-Slavery Society reiterated the verdict that had been reached after the Demerara slave revolt by commenting that “The severity exercised is much more likely to excite a deep-rooted feeling of revenge, and to accelerate a recurrence to violence, than to produce terror.”<sup>154</sup> The abolitionist warning was not only directed to stubborn colonists, who refused to cooperate with attempts to reform slavery. The abolitionists also sent out this challenge to the British Government and Parliament. In 1825, the Anti-Slavery warned that,

“ ... if the government and the parliament and the people of England should be so lost to a sense of their obligations, as to suffer them [the evils of slavery] to continue, they must find their close in one of those convulsions which will involve White and Black, master and slave, the oppressor and the oppressed, in one common and undistinguishing and overwhelming calamity. Such must, sooner or later, be the effect of going on to delegate, to the colonial assemblies, the solemn duty, which parliament alone can discharge ... ”<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 28 February 1826. London: J. Hatchard, p. 83.

<sup>153</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXII, January 1825, p. 487.

<sup>154</sup> *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>155</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 30 November 1825, London: J. Hatchard, p. 54.



This was one of the early whisperings of the abolitionists that not only cruel masters and persecuted missionaries but injured slaves as well were tearing down the system of British West Indian colonial slavery. In their abject victimization during the suppression of slave revolts, the abolitionists portrayed slaves rebels as agents of the anti-slavery cause. The rebels led the abolitionists to sharpen the focus of their attacks on the most significant dimension of the slave plantation society; the draconian penal codes of the various island legislatures. Slaves in rebellion facilitated abolitionists with the opportunity to highlight and condemn the legalised corruption that colonists practised through the courts martial judicial system. As the discourse expanded, it became more instrumental. The following chapter explores the sense in which slave rebels continued to energise the movement abolitionist leaders directed in Britain, not this time through their suffering but through the damage they were inflicting on the British West Indian slave economy.

## Chapter 5

### Apocalyptic Warning

This, the final chapter of the thesis, explores the most dynamic lesson that British abolitionists extracted from the nineteenth century rebellions of the slaves in the British West Indies. The chapter examines the ways in which, the extent to which and the periods in which abolitionists used slave rebellions to warn of the dangers they posed to the British Empire and to individuals with economic stakes in the colonies. The chapter emphasises that while the basic message of warning remained the same, it was used to justify different objectives at different periods of the anti-slavery movement in Britain. The discussion moves through the years 1823, when the abolitionists embarked on its campaign for gradual emancipation, to 1834 when the abolitionists were sceptical whether the adopted emancipation plan would secure peace and safety in the colonies.

British abolitionists repeatedly referred to the inflammatory toast of Dr. Johnson on the subject of slave rebellion in the British West Indies. In one version of this toast, it was stated that in the hearing of a Black servant Dr. Johnson rose his glass and declared, “A speedy insurrection of slaves in Jamaica and success to them!”<sup>1</sup> As often as they chose to quote the doctor, however, anti-slavery advocates were hardly at liberty to even seem to champion the self-liberating attempts of the slaves. To do so was not only dangerous to the continued survival of the colonies but it also caused the abolitionists to appear hypocritical. They had made known their intolerance of all

---

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXIV, No. LXXVII, October 1823, p. 119; see also chapter 3, pp. 143, 144 of thesis.



violent means of addressing the slavery problem since the time of the slave trade debates. They had advised that emancipation must come not by the slaves but that the masters themselves should be its willing authors. They had stated then that only an enemy or enemies of the slaves would resort to violence to secure immediate and premature emancipation.<sup>2</sup> It was easy for their opponents to construe as malicious any abolitionist effort to turn to advantage the issue of servile war in slavery. It did not seem to matter that this was exactly what the slaving interest were doing in the attempt to forestall the anti-slavery initiative.

British abolitionists, in spite of intense opposition, found it pragmatic to employ the slave violence argument. They harboured no sense of self-condemnation in so doing for they reasoned that operating as if the problem did not exist would only exacerbate the danger. They regarded it as their duty to warn both the slaving interests and the British Government of the dangers inherent in slavery while fervently expressing the hope that both or either of these parties would take measures to prevent the abolitionists' dreadful foreboding from materializing.

Almost as soon as the abolitionists embarked on the mission of attacking the system of slavery itself as it existed in the British West Indian colonies, they began making reference to the dangers of servile war in their debates. By 1823, both Thomas Fowell Buxton, the new leader of the anti-slavery movement, and his predecessor, William Wilberforce, voiced the issue. These were only early reflections, however, and were put forward at a time when the abolitionists did think about rebellion but it was not a pressing issue on the minds. It had been seven years since the Barbados slave revolt and just a few months prior to the slave rising in Demerara in 1823. In the aftermath

---

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, *ibid.*, p. 126; WILBERFORCE AND WILBERFORCE. 1838, Vol. V, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

of the Demerara slave rebellion, several abolitionists took up with greater fervency the question of the dangers of slavery. None was more outstanding in his concentrated treatment of the subject in this period than William Wilberforce. His coverage of the theme of rebellion in British abolitionism was seminal to the discussion. He furnished a clear general overview of the topic. In the mid 1820s, Thomas Clarkson and the Anti-Slavery Society took up the slave rebellion argument in more detail. Most of this discussion was published in the *Edinburgh Review* and in *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, which was later called *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*. Throughout the 1820s, however, the abolitionists were committed only to slave amelioration or the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery. Consequently, while they did shape and present the dynamic vision inherent in the slave rebellion argument, the abolitionists suffocated its strength by their requests for mere pastoral measures of slave reform. By the 1830s, however, the abolitionists were finally persuaded of the failure of amelioration. They grew more convinced that the only solution to the slavery problem was complete and immediate emancipation. When slaves in Jamaica rose against their masters in 1831 - 1832 in what was the largest rebellion of the century in the British West Indies, they strengthened the abolitionist commitment to immediate emancipation. Thus, the abolitionists used the danger of slave rebellion to give greater force to their movement than was the case in the 1820s. In the British attack against the system of slavery, the importance of the threat of slave revolt can conveniently be divided into three segments; the limited treatment it received in 1823 when the abolitionists announced for the first time their objective of gradual emancipation, Wilberforce's comprehensive summary of the subject reinforced by abolitionists' reviews in the *Edinburgh Review* and in *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* in the aftermath of Demerara and the intensified force of its application after the slave revolt in Jamaica.



## On the Eve of Demerara

Thomas Fowell Buxton was under immense pressure when he took the first step to introduce the subject of gradual abolition of slavery in the House of Commons in 1823. The lengthy preamble of his speech was an indication that he sought to find a strong justification for this move.<sup>3</sup> Buxton finally declared that he was resting his motion against slavery on the principles of humanity, justice and Christianity. He did not, at that point of the speech, mention the threat of slave violence. In the preamble, however, Buxton did use the slave revolt issue to persuade Parliament to adopt his motion for the gradual abolition of slavery. Buxton stated that British West Indian slaves were geographically hemmed in by examples of neighbouring states of free blacks. No one could deny outright that danger lurked in this scenario. The English colonies were strategic targets for the horror of servile war. Free blacks modelled the fact that freedom was possible to those still under the bondage of unmitigated slavery. Buxton invited the House to contemplate with him.

“What does the Negro, working under the lash on the mountains of Jamaica, see? He sees another island, on which every labourer is free; in which eight hundred thousand blacks; men, women, and children, exercise all the rights, and enjoy all the blessings - and they are innumerable and incalculable - which freedom gives. ... It would be singular enough if, the only emperor who did not feel a desire to meddle with the affairs of his neighbours should be the emperor of Hayti. I touch lightly upon this subject. Let government - let the West Indians - justly appreciate the danger with which they may be menaced from that quarter.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 2, p. 86 of the thesis.

Warning of the threat of slave rebellion by pointing to the proximity of states of liberated Negroes was regularly repeated by other abolitionists and soon became a distinct theme of the anti-slavery discourse on slave rebellions. In 1823, Buxton also appealed to the planters' need to secure their West Indian property by using the threat of destruction that slaves in rebellion posed to the plantations. It was another point that the abolitionists were to raise repeatedly until slavery was abolished in 1833. Buxton asserted that it was unwise for the West Indians to oppose the anti-slavery initiative on the grounds of interference of property since slaves would continue to destroy their plantation works and other structures if mismanagement of the regime continued unabated. Buxton insisted,

"I am fully persuaded that security is to be found - and is only to be found - in justice towards that oppressed people. If we wish to preserve the West Indies - if we wish to avoid a dreadful convulsion - it must be by restoring to the injured race, those rights which we have too long withheld."<sup>5</sup>

Buxton's comments on the dangers inherent in slavery, brief as it was at this time went a long way in cementing the links between abolitionist activities in Britain and that of rebel slaves in the colonies. What was also significant was the fact that the signature of the man leading the new direction of the anti-slavery cause was stamped on this position.

William Wilberforce supported Buxton's 1823 motion for slave amelioration both in and out of the House by making reference to the recurrent crisis of slave war. In Parliament he used the issue to make a further effort to deflect blame for rebellions

---

<sup>4</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, 15 May 1823, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.



away from the abolitionists' agitation of the slavery question.<sup>6</sup> He warned planters and the British Government that the tendency of slaves to rebel made slave reform a necessity. He stated, " ... whatever may be the dangers to be apprehended from such discussions, there are yet no dangers so great, or so formidable, as those which must arise from a continuation of the present West Indian system."<sup>7</sup> Wilberforce was clearly intent on converting this message of warning into practical politics. He stated further that we " ... must enter into investigation of the evils ... with a recollection of the infinite danger which must attend a continuance of the present system of slavery."<sup>8</sup>

Outside of Parliament, Wilberforce addressed again the potential problem that English colonists could expect to confront when their slaves compared their unfavourable condition with that of free black neighbours. He wrote that if the planters in the English colonies were blind to the dangers that were accumulating around them, the slaves were not similarly oblivious. The slaves were restless and curious. Like the maroons in the cockpit country of Jamaica, these neighbouring ex-slave communities stood out as beacons of hope to those still ensnared by the chains of slavery. Wilberforce asked rhetorically,

"Within a community of near 800,000 free blacks, many of them accustomed to the use of arms, within sight of the greatest of our West Indian islands; ... with the example afforded in many of the United States, and in almost all the new republics of South America where Negro slavery had been recently abolished - is this the time, are these the circumstances in which it can be wise and safe, if it were honest and humane, to keep down in their present state of heathenish and almost brutish degradation, the 800,000 Negroes in our West Indian colonies? Here, indeed, is danger, if we observe the signs of

---

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 3, p. 130 of the thesis.

<sup>7</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the times, ...”<sup>9</sup>

The abolitionists took note of the fact that British West Indian slavery, especially by the nineteenth century, was not operating in a vacuum. They contended that the slaves would turn to several outward directions if the impetus for change were not coming from within. Abolitionists’ observations contradict the belief that slaves in rebellion in the British West Indies in the nineteenth century were unresponsive to the political upheavals outside of their immediate world. Abolitionists lodged their slave rebellion discourse within in an international context of rising revolutionary spirit in the Western Hemisphere. The colonists in the British West Indies were out of step with the march of progress and their ill timing was ill fated.

### **In the Wake of Demerara**

William Wilberforce was responsible for presenting the most comprehensive single exposition of the slave revolt argument in the debates on British West Indian slavery in the 1820s. He did this not at a time when he was leading the British anti-slavery movement but almost immediately after passing over that lead to Thomas Fowell Buxton. In fact, by 1824, Wilberforce was already preparing for his exit from Parliament and from public life in general. Despite the relaxation of his efforts in the struggle, after the Demerara slave revolt Wilberforce expounded at length on the slave violence issue. He highlighted the major perspectives from which the threat of slave violence could be made to serve the anti-slavery cause. His deliberations on the subject were not to be surpassed by any other abolitionist before or since even when

---

<sup>9</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1823, op. cit., pp. 72 - 73; see also WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM.



he himself had examined the subject in his *Appeal* published in 1823. His earlier reflections on servile war lacked the conviction that marked the later discourse. Wilberforce's 1824 speech on the dangers of slavery was the most complete delineation of a single treatment of the subject by a single abolitionist.

The occasion of Wilberforce's 1824 slave violence speech was the House of Commons debate of 16 March when Colonial Secretary, George Canning, informed the House that the Government intended to restrict its enforcement of the 1823 amelioration proposals to the Crown Colony of Trinidad. Canning explained that the reaction of both slaves and masters, culminating in the Demerara slave revolt of 1823, was responsible for the decision to limit the application of the measure.<sup>10</sup> Buxton, the new leader of the slavery struggle and not Wilberforce, was the first abolitionist to protest against this backward step. Buxton had come to the House prepared for the announcement that the Government was about to compromise its support of the abolitionist programme. He had written to his wife before the parliamentary session noting, "I expect to see Canning tomorrow; he seems very cold to me, and the report is he will join the West Indians. If he does, we shall go to war with him in earnest."<sup>11</sup> Buxton was indeed livid. He chided, "

"A pledge was obtained. You were, therefore, in some sort, to be considered holder of that pledge ... And then, fearful of a little unpopularity ... you sat still, you held your peace, and were satisfied to see this pledge, in favor of a whole Archipelago, reduced to a single island."<sup>12</sup>

The emphasis of Buxton's attack was not the slave revolt threat. He believed that it

---

1807, op. cit., p. 329.

<sup>10</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, 16 March 1824, p. 1112.

<sup>11</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852. op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, op. cit., p. 1115.

was cowardice on the part of the Government to yield to the West Indian clamour against attempts of the Parent State to introduce slave laws in colonies with their own assemblies. When he finally did mention slave revolts, he made the very valid point that the colonists were rejecting the very abolitionist measures that might have safeguarded Demerara from servile unrest. Considering the range of his reflections in this address, however, Buxton's focus on the issue of servile war in the colonies was very limited. It paled in comparison to Wilberforce's attention to the subject.

Wilberforce indicated the focus of his contribution to the debate in the House on that occasion when he emphasized that Parliament ought to consider how its actions would affect not only the masters but also the slaves. He reiterated the argument that he and his friends used after the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 and, to a lesser extent, after Demerara in 1823. The thoughtless and inappropriate communication of the colonists in their newspapers, at their dinner tables and in the fields, Wilberforce believed, activated the rumours of freedom among slaves. The expectations of the slaves, consequently, had risen to a feverish level that would brook no disappointment. In developing his argument, Wilberforce went beyond the need to deny that abolitionists had caused the revolt and that the colonists had sparked the rumour among the slaves. He sharpened his rhetoric and depicted the cataclysmic day of reckoning that was imminent. He stated with solemnity that after serious deliberation he was convinced that the colonies were on the brink of a precipice. His language typified the caustic images conjured up in prophetic warnings of doom and gloom. It was not the last time that abolitionists were to speak in such terms. Wilberforce went on to assert that since slaves were in no mood to be disappointed in their expectations, it was incumbent upon the British Government to compel the colonial authorities to execute the 1823 measures of slave amelioration. Wilberforce had struck a sensitive note here. He



addressed the issue of parliamentary intervention in the colonies, which by 1815, with the Slave Registration Bill, had become a point of sore contention. The three parties locked in the slavery debate each had a different concept of how best to regulate the relationship between Britain and her slave colonies, especially those with charters of self-government. The British Government's position on the matter was one of compromise. Colonial Secretary, George Canning, had made it clear in 1823 that in embracing amelioration, the Government's preferred policy was for a determined and persevering but at the same time judicious and temperate enforcement of the programme.<sup>13</sup> Time was to prove that the Government was not so determined and persevering after all in seeking to improve the daily lives of the slaves. Until slavery was abolished by act of Parliament, the Government generally maintained its old relationship with the self-ruling colonies. It left the whole of the regulation of actual government with the local institutions while relying upon voluntary cooperation in its relationship with the colonists. In the nine years after 1823, the Government reacted to abolitionist pressure to enforce amelioration by making frequent, though insufficient attempts to obtain colonial consent to several variations of amelioration.<sup>14</sup> West Indian merchants and planters living in Britain and settlers in the colonies viewed the attempt of the mother country to legislate on behalf of the slaves as a violation of their constitutional rights to make their own laws to regulate the lives and labour of their slaves. They remonstrated against every slave legislation passed by three successive Secretaries of State for War and the Colonies from 1823 to 1828 and 1830 to 1831.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Vol. IX, op. cit., p. 286; MURRAY, D. J. 1965. *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government, 1801 - 1834*. Oxford, pp. 127 - 128.

<sup>14</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, op. cit., pp. 1069, 1165 - 1169; 1 March 1826, Vol. XIV, pp. 968 - 982; 3 March 1826, Vol. XIV, p. 1080; 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 29 March 1831, Vol. III, p. 1138; 15 April 1831, Vol. III, pp. 142 - 145; GROSS, IZHAK. 1980, op. cit., pp. 63 - 85; MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW. 1926, op. cit., pp. 162 - 163; LEVY CLAUDE. 1970. "Slavery and the Emancipation Movement in Barbados, 1650 - 1833" in *Journal of Negro Slavery*, Vol. 55, January



During the anti-slavery era, they continually threatened to throw off their allegiance to Britain, establish their independence or take protection against British autocracy under the ex-British colonies of North America.<sup>15</sup> Taking their cue from their opponents, the abolitionists for a long time restricted their investigation of the need for reform in the colonies to providing evidence of planters' contumacy and the obligation, consequently, to call on Parliament to fulfil Canning's pledge of 1823.<sup>16</sup> Wilberforce himself on 16 March 1824 did not completely avoid this approach. He argued that the late and respected statesmen, Burke and Dundas, reserved no qualms about legislating for the colonies and would be shocked that those with interests in the colonies objected to such a policy. From 1823 till the abolition of slavery, the abolitionists repeatedly argued that the right of Britain to legislate and enforce laws in her colonies had never been surrendered and was unquestioned.<sup>17</sup> When Wilberforce made the rebellion of the slaves the central focus of his attempt to convince the Government of the need to take more direct action in the colonies, he located the question of parliamentary intervention on another level. It was no longer merely a question of the right to intervene. Viewed from the perspective of the threat of servile war in the colonies, the crucial concern became the need to intervene to prevent calamity. Wilberforce argued that the rumours circulating among the slaves throughout the colonies made it imperative to ensure that promises of change were backed by actual enforcement of change. He considered it a dangerous misjudgement on the part of the

---

1970, No. 1, pp. 1 - 14; BURN, W. L. 1937, op. cit., p. 81;

<sup>15</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., pp. 327 - 328; 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XI, 23 March 1832, pp. 815 - 832; 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XVII, 14 May 1833, pp. 1197 - 1202; WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1852, *Select Documents*, op. cit., p. 80; THOMPSON, ANDREW. 1830, op. cit., pp. 12 - 13; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., pp. 76 - 77; *The Jamaican Courant* 16 July 1831; *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 28 February 1826. London: J. Hatchard, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 30 November 1825, London: J. Hatchard, pp. 51 - 53. Brougham MSS, op. cit., Buxton to Brougham, 3 October 1827.

<sup>17</sup> BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1857. op. cit., pp. 342 - 343; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series Vol. X, op. cit., p. 1152; Vol. XXXIV, p. 1175.



Government to respond to the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823 by opting to retrace the steps taken towards slavery reform. Other abolitionists did take up and expand this argument. In the mean time, Wilberforce illustrated his point by reflecting on dire consequences for the colonies occasioned by disillusioned slaves. He invited Parliament to contemplate the frustrations of slaves. The British Government offered them a cup that was as soon dashed away as they brought it to their lips. He depicted the terror of slaves being reassigned to the state of darkness just when the light of dawn was about to break upon their gloom. Wilberforce warned the Government that to avoid disaster inherent in a disillusioned slave population, instead of toying with the awakened aspirations of the slaves, it was mandatory to act decisively and without hesitation. He was convinced that since colonial cooperation in slave amelioration was not forthcoming, if the Government also failed them the slaves would seize the initiative and attempt to achieve by violence what had been denied them by law. To reinforce this argument, Wilberforce revisited the St Domingue slave rebellion of 1791. Wilberforce likened the mixed signals conveyed from France to the slaves in St Domingue to the reluctance of the ministers of the British Crown to follow through with its 1823 commitment. He regarded this circuitous approach as the real cause of the calamity that destroyed the wealth of the French colony. The slaves had just cause for their violent and destructive actions. They were provoked beyond what was tolerable. Years of retrospection had led Wilberforce and his abolitionist circle to a reassessment of St. Domingue's notoriety as a bloody legend. In 1807 Wilberforce had referred to life in Haiti as " ... the wild licentiousness of a neighbouring kingdom."<sup>18</sup> By the early 1820s with at least two slave rebellions in the British West Indies during an era of slave reform promoted by the abolitionists, Wilberforce's

---

<sup>18</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807, op. cit., p. 259.

perspective had changed. In his revised view, the Government's hesitation was comparable to the blundering policy of the French towards its colonies. The administrators of the colony and not the slaves were chiefly to be blamed for the upheaval. Not only did the abolitionists present the other side of nineteenth slave revolts in the British West Indies<sup>19</sup> but the other side of the St Domingue slave revolt of 1792 as well. British colonial policy was setting its colonies on a course of danger that paralleled the indecisive colonial attitude of the French National Assembly in the 1790s. As a slavery reformer, Wilberforce was convinced that it was his responsibility to steer the British Government from this dangerous path. Wilberforce ended his contemplation by noting that the threat of slave rebellion was not to be ignored for it impinged on the great question of the economic value of the colonies to the parent country. Other abolitionists were to challenge the alleged value of the colonies to Britain. Wilberforce, however, did not take this line of argument. He had, nevertheless, placed before the British Parliament the fundamental dimensions of the slave rebellion argument that infiltrated British anti-slavery ideology. The following is an extract of Wilberforce's 16 March 1824 slave rebellion speech.

"It is worthwhile to consider the impression which the recent conduct of parliament seemed to have made, both on the masters and on the slaves. ... he must here tell the House most sincerely and solemnly, that it was his deliberate and fixed opinion and belief - an opinion which, as far as it could be confirmed, had been confirmed - that they were now standing on the brink of a precipice, and that if they did not take great care, they would find that the more they paused, the less energetic they were, the greater was the danger likely to become. ... through the whole slave population, there was a feeling that something essentially beneficial was intended to be done for the Negroes, but that their masters were opposed to any amelioration of their condition. It was vain to deny, that such was the state of their

---

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 3 of the thesis.



feelings. Well, then, such being the case in Jamaica - such being the case in the rest of the islands - the House would naturally suppose, that the Negroes were on the very tip-toe of expectation, that something was about to be done for them by the British Parliament. What then under these circumstances, would be the effect of our not making good the hopes our last year's resolutions had excited? What would be the feelings of the Negroes, when they found that parliament was about to pause and stop short in the course it had undertaken - when they found that the King's government, and his right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, whom they supposed to be so firm and serious a friend to them, were now about to make a stand? He could easily imagine the sad dejection of heart that these poor creatures must feel at seeing the cup of happiness which had been offered them, dashed from their lips, just at the very moment when they hoped to have quaffed the sweet draught of liberty which had just before danced before their eyes. The consequence, he feared, would be, that, despairing of relief from the British parliament, they would take the cause into their own hands, and endeavor to effect their own liberation. No man living would more sincerely lament that they should resort to such a mode of proceeding than he should do. He could most solemnly declare, that the subject of his daily and nightly prayer - .. was that so dreadful an event might not occur. Still, it was a consequence which he could not but apprehend, and, as an honest man, he felt it to be his duty to state that apprehension. Let the House only consider what a terrible thing it was for men who had long lived in a state of darkness, and just when the bright beams of day began to break in upon the gloom ... to have the boon suddenly withdrawn, ... and to be afresh consigned to darkness, ... Whatever parliament might think proper to do, he implored them to do it quickly and firmly. Let them not proceed with hesitating steps: let them not tamper with the feelings and the passions which they had themselves excited. Certainly, he could not conceive how it was possible for a few years to pass over our heads, without a recurrence of serious disturbances in the colonies, unless parliament acted with that promptitude, that spirit, and that temper, which would prove to the population of those colonies, that we had their happiness at heart. Let every man present appeal to his own experience, nay, to his own feelings, for the truth of the position which he had just laid down. ... Again, let them only contemplate the scenes which had occurred at St. Domingo. ... All those mischief had arisen from the constant vacillations on the part of the French convention - granting rights in one month, and withdrawing them in the next - again renewing the concessions of those rights, and again retracting them, until at length they produced that mixture of doubt and despair, ... ultimately the inhabitants were driven to the



desperate course of taking their cause into their own hands ... Now he was prepared to contend, that it was impossible this could be effected by the colonial assemblies; that it must be accomplished by the imperial parliament, ... By endeavouring to effect this object any other way, they were exciting irritation; and they would, perhaps, feel the effects of that despair, which all would lament, when it was too late, when they would vainly wish, that they had adopted a straighter, and a more direct course. ... a course which would not only be beneficial to the interest of humanity, but conducive to the wealth and prosperity of the country.<sup>20</sup>

It was a lengthy speech unique in its concentrated focus on the impact of slave rebellions on multiple aspects of the debates on slavery. Wilberforce had provided incontrovertible proof that slave rebellions were valuable to the anti-slavery position for they questioned whether the bonds of slavery were to be broken by physical or moral and legal force. He had realized that slaves were active agents in the struggle against slavery. It was almost unimaginable that Wilberforce, who had insisted in 1807 that slaves were not yet fit for freedom and who had disavowed all association with the Barbados slave revolt of 1816 could be the abolitionist author of such an excitable vision. Alas, however, it must be noted that Wilberforce's excited vision of apocalyptic doom was not consistent with the temporizing measures he aimed at. It was not until 1830 that the abolitionists rejected as impractical the policy of amelioration and it was not till 1832 that Buxton presented to the House the first abolitionist motion for the complete and immediate abolition of slavery.<sup>21</sup> By 1824 Wilberforce and his circle concentrated on such pastoral reforms of the slaves' condition as religious instruction, the abolition of Sunday market, the regulation of the flogging of males and the abolition of the flogging of females, prevention of

---

<sup>20</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, op. cit., pp. 1145 - 1155.

<sup>21</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/3, Committee on Slavery Minute Book, 25 April 1832, p. 138. Rhodes House Library, Oxford; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., p. 90; MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW,



separation of families and the sale of slaves, the establishment of slave saving banks, removal of obstacles to manumission, the encouragement of slave marriages and the admission of the evidence of slaves in colonial courts of law.<sup>22</sup> Wilberforce gave very limited force to a very powerful argument. Nevertheless, he went a long way in clearly articulating and drawing together previous and later abolitionist deliberations on the race war factor in British abolitionism.

### **Safety in Emancipation**

British abolitionists had realized that once they began to refer to slave violence in the anti-slavery deliberations, they could not ignore the greatest of all slave rebellions; the St. Domingue slave rebellion of 1791. Thomas Clarkson was in the forefront of addressing the St Domingue question. While other abolitionists capitalized on Haiti to warn of the dangers of slavery, Clarkson was more preoccupied with the responsibility of showing that there was safety in emancipation. His treatment of Haiti, however, was the other side of the same coin. If colonists did not seize the safety that alone lay in eventual emancipation, they would suffer the ravages that lay in slavery. By the 1820s the abolitionists had settled in their own minds that emancipation and race war were not synonymous. Quite the opposite impression, however, bombarded the thinking of many.<sup>23</sup> Clarkson was burdened with the need to erase from the public consciousness the mindset that emancipation symbolized all the horrors of race war

---

1926, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>22</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, op. cit., p. 1132.

<sup>23</sup> ABZUG, ROBERT. 1970. "The Influence of Garrisonian Abolitionist Fears of Slave Violence on the Anti-Slavery Argument" in *Journal of Negro Slavery*, Vol. LV, No. 1, January 1970, pp. 15 - 28;  
DAVIS, D.B. 1962. "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Anti-Slavery Thought" in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2, September 1962, pp. 215 - 216;  
LEWIS, GORDON. 1978, op. cit., p. 36.



dramatized in St. Domingue. He was determined to prove that “ ... the transition of the people of St. Domingo from bondage to freedom, has been accomplished with safety and ease.”<sup>24</sup> He insisted that the Haitian slaves were freed “ ... by virtue of the proclamation issued by Santhonax in the south and Polverel, the other French commissioner, in the north and west, with the almost unanimous consent of the planters. ...[the Negroes] did nothing to show they were incapable of enjoying this boon.”<sup>25</sup> Clarkson went on to assert that the atrocities committed by the Negroes only took place when slavery reigned over them and when, from 1802 to 1804, Le Clerk took orders from Napoleon Bonaparte to re-enslave the Negroes, not when the law set them free.<sup>26</sup> The danger, then, was in slavery. Clarkson furnished six other examples of groups of slaves, who were immediately or gradually liberated or rescued from illegal shipments of slaves, to prove that it was erroneous to associate emancipation with slave rebellion.<sup>27</sup> Clarkson tried to prove that these blacks, like their Haitian counterparts, were peaceful and industrious once they had made the transition from bondage to freedom. The most valued of these groups to the British abolitionists was the experiment of Mr. Steele in Barbados. From 1782 to 1789, Steele had established on his three estates in Barbados an arrangement with his slaves very much resembling the manorial and copyholder system that operated in Britain. Steele’s labourers were not set free but were managed in a state that prepared them for eventual freedom. They settled their own disputes amongst themselves with the supervision of Steele and worked for wages at daily assigned task work. Both in social and economic terms,

---

<sup>24</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No. LXXVII, October 1823, p. 133; CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1824, op. cit., pp. 20, 24 - 26, 38.

<sup>25</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; see also RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., pp. 88 - 89. Sturge agreed with Clarkson that “ ... the history of St Domingo from the commencement of its independence to the present time, may be considered a triumphant refutation of all those who say immediate emancipation is dangerous.”

<sup>27</sup> THOMAS, CLARKSON. 1824, op. cit., pp. 16 - 35.



Steele's Barbadian experiment was a great success. He tripled his investments and the threat of slave discontent leading to violence was markedly absent on his plantations.<sup>28</sup> Clarkson's reflections on St. Domingue, though approached from a less explosive perspective, had come to the similar warning. The danger of slavery lay in the unmitigated continuation of the system.

### **Danger in Slavery**

In spite of his cautious treatment of St Domingue in the abolitionist slave violence argument, Clarkson did not completely refrain from the sharp rhetoric used to warn planters of the dangers that the slaves posed to an unreformed system of slavery. After the Demerara slave revolt, Clarkson was amongst those abolitionists who declared that one rebellion would lead to another if the lives of the slaves remained unchanged. He asserted that there was neither no novelty in the Demerara rebellion of 1823 nor was it unexpected. He warned that it was not the last tumult of the slaves to be raised in that part of the world. To the contrary, he observed with caustic candour, " ... it is only a mercy that such insurrections do not happen every month instead of only once in ten or twenty years."<sup>29</sup> Clarkson noted also that the slave rebels of Demerara spoke directly to all three parties locked in the agitation of the slavery question. To the abolitionists and to the British Government the slaves' rising was a mandate " ... not to delay or suspend but to renew and redouble our exertions."<sup>30</sup> To the advocates of

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 35; *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No. LXXVII, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., 5 December 1823; see also *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XL, No. LXXIX, March 1824, p. 243 for a similar abolitionist view on Demerara and *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>RD</sup> Series, Vol. X, 7 March 1832, p. 1262 for Buxton's view that "When he heard of insurrection, [Jamaica] he was not surprised of it, and was convinced that nothing would be done to suppress it until the question of the extinction of slavery was set at rest."

<sup>30</sup> The papers of Thomas Clarkson, op. cit., 5 December 1823.

slavery anxious about the threat to the peace and security of their property, the message Clarkson extracted from the revolt was “Take away slavery and you take away insurrections, take away slavery and you give tranquillity to the islands.”<sup>31</sup> In Clarkson’s opinion, the campaign of the ‘saints’ was best calculated to achieve the very objectives sought after by the pro-slavery forces. If they wanted peace in their colonies, they had to remove the motive that stimulated violence among the slaves. It was a lesson that most colonists and their supporters in Britain never leant. Peace was not their first priority. Clarkson’s examination of the slave revolt issue assured him, however, that

“We therefore, who are labouring to improve gradually the temporal and moral condition of the slaves and to bring them by degrees to the rank of a free peasantry are working in fact to prevent these insurrections, and we consider ourselves on that ground to be the best friends of the colonies.”<sup>32</sup>

Henry Brougham was more penetrating than Clarkson in capturing the fact that the British colonial slave society deposited in its bowels combustible materials ready to explode with the least aggravation. He reinforced Wilberforce’s initial reflections on the issue. Brougham warned in 1824 that slaves were far superior in number to whites; a factor that made precarious the safety of the latter in the colonies. British West Indian slaves were surrounded not merely by ex-slaves but by ex-slaves who gained freedom by successfully defeating their former white masters. The existence of independent Haiti presented the spectacle of Negroes assuming the exalted position once held by vanquished white masters. This was a dangerous example to slaves whose masters stubbornly refused to ease the oppressive existence of their bondsmen.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



Furthermore, the geographical isolation of the colonies from the mother country on whose military support they were dependent in times of crisis, not least among which was servile warfare, underscored the fragility of an unreformed system of slavery. Brougham summarized the ever present dangers that threatened to blow to pieces the slave colonial structure when he observed,

“The frame of West Indian society ... is so feeble in itself, and, at the same time, surrounded with such perils from without, that barely to support its demands, the most temperate judgment, the steadiest and the most skilful hand; and, with all our discretion, and firmness and dexterity, its continued existence seems little less than a miracle.”<sup>33</sup>

It is significant to bear in mind that Brougham’s speech was intended to move a motion against the treatment of Smith and other missionaries. He made it his responsibility, nevertheless, to draw to the attention of the colonists the fact that the very composition of the slave West Indian society made it particularly prone to destruction. The rebellion of the slaves helped to define the mission of the British anti-slavery movement. It was a mission designed to diffuse the ticking bomb that threatened to explode at any time and in any of the territories in the English Caribbean.

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> *A Motion by Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 43. Note also that as early as 1804 during the slave trade debates, Brougham had warned that the rebellion that had liberated the Negroes in St. Domingue served as an example to Jamaican slaves. See BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1804. *A Concise Statement of The Question Regarding the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. London: J. Hatchard, T. N. Longman and O. Rees, p. 76 for Brougham’s discussion on the threat that St Domingue proved to slavery in neighboring Jamaica.

## A Question of Property

No planter in the British West Indies agreed with the abolitionists “They ... who should emancipate their Negroes there would promote their interests by so doing.”<sup>34</sup>

Planters assessed the anti-slavery campaign from a completely different perspective. With singularity of mind, they denounced every abolitionist argument and proposal as an attempt to undermine their property. Mr Baring’s petition from the West India Committee of Merchants and Planters in London in 1823 typified their attitude.

“ ... the [slavery] question involved the security of property to an immense amount, belonging to the subjects of this country, as well as to the lives and means of subsistence of all the West India colonists ... they considered ... amelioration essential to the welfare of both parties; but it was another question whether property, which had been acquired under the sanction of that House, should be taken away ... what improved morality and justice there was in the arbitrary deprivation of property, the acquisition of which the laws had allowed? <sup>35</sup>

Planters were anxious about but not paralyzed by the threat of slave revolts. They lived in daily fear of slave rising but regarded the danger as a regular feature of the risks attendant upon possessions in the slave plantation system.<sup>36</sup> They believed that with rigorous policing measures and no outside interference, least of all by the abolitionists, the system could be kept under control. Fewer slaves would be inspired by promises of freedom to rise in arms against their masters. Uppermost in the minds

---

<sup>34</sup> THOMAS, CLARKSON. 1824, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., pp. 255 - 256. See also *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 22, 31 March 1827, p. 315 where abolitionists took note of the claims of the planters regarding the value of the colonies to Britain.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 1, pp. 19 - 21 of the thesis; CRATON, MICHAEL. 1980, op. cit., p. 2; see also NORTHCOTT CECIL. 1976, op. cit., pp. 41 - 42 where he comments “ ... slavery would need more than a revolution to shake it.”



of West Indian planters was their property. In their calculation, they would have more to lose if the ‘saints’ succeeded ultimately in freeing the slaves than in the occasional revolt that was quickly and brutally suppressed. Thus, they had no inclination to do anything that would appear to compromise the value of their property in slaves. They would not be so unwise as to assist the abolitionists, whom they branded as misguided philanthropists, in destroying themselves. The voice of caution meant little to them. Economic interest meant everything.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the campaign, the abolitionists tried to assure the slaving interests that they respected their property rights and were prepared in their deliberations to take steps to protect them. One of the clearest indications of the abolitionists’ sincerity on this point was their ready consent to the vital phrase in the amendment of Buxton’s proposal of 1823. Abolitionists generally agreed that measures adopted for the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery would be guided by “ ... a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property ...”<sup>38</sup> In effect, this meant that whenever the time would have arrived for emancipation, the planters could be certain that even the abolitionists would support compensation for the loss of slave labour.<sup>39</sup> After the Demerara slave revolt, Buxton requested that the promised boon to the slaves be granted in such a manner so as to “ ... injure no man’s property, and

---

<sup>37</sup> MS 725, Memorial from the West India Planters and Merchants, 22 November 1823, p. 1. Institute of Jamaica, Kingston; *Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXIX, No. LVIII, July 1823, p. 478; FURNESS, A. E. 1965. “George Hibbert and the Defence of Slavery in the West Indies” in *The Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. V, No. 1, May 1965, pp. 56 - 70; NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., p. 44; BUTLER, KATHLEEN MARY. 1995, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, 15 May 1823, op. cit., p. 275; Abolitionists denied pro-slavery accusations that they were disinclined to compensate slave owners for their losses in the event of emancipation and insisted that the “ ... people of England would rather pay £6,000,000 annually for the discontinuance than £3,000,000 for the continuance of slavery.” *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 31 May 1831, 1826, pp. 177 - 178.

<sup>39</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* op. ibid., p. 178, “Compensation, however unreasonable in principle, would readily be granted.”; BUTLER, KATHLEEN MARY. 1995, op. cit., pp. 19, 24.



wound no man's feelings.”<sup>40</sup> Thomas Clarkson reinforced the abolitionists' sincere respect for the property rights of the planter class by stating,

“The emancipation that I desire is such an emancipation only as I firmly believe to be compatible not only with the due subordination and happiness of the labourer, but with the permanent interests of his employer.”<sup>41</sup>

Throughout their campaign, British abolitionists held to the position that improvements in the conditions of the slaves must not conflict with the interests of their masters. The West India ‘interest’ was dogmatic that neither amelioration nor emancipation could be considered without compensation. British abolitionists, however, never demanded that such a sacrifice was necessary. Some abolitionists did insist, nevertheless, that British law had erroneously protected slavery and that they rejected the principle of holding property in man. In 1823, the abolitionist William Smith rose in the House of Commons to register his “ ... strongest and most indignant protest against the doctrine of treating man as the property of other men ...”<sup>42</sup> While Smith made his opposition to this principle quite clear, he was also careful to note that the private ownership of legitimate property ought not to be trampled upon.<sup>43</sup> Henry Brougham by 1830 revisited the question of property in slaves and insisted that there was neither moral nor religious justification for the practice.<sup>44</sup> Buxton, who had questioned the legality of the acquisition of slaves in 1823, returned to the subject in 1832. He settled on the compromising view that “ ... the Negro ... owed no compensation to the planter. Whatever the Government and the country might owe the

---

<sup>40</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. X, op. cit., p. 1133.

<sup>41</sup> CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1824, op. cit., p. 56 & preface.

<sup>42</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



planter as a compensation, the Negro did not owe the planter anything.”<sup>45</sup>

Some abolitionists went so far as to challenge the planters' jealous regard for their property by questioning the value of colonial investments both to Britain and to its individual investors. Abolitionist supporters with East Indian interests were in the vanguard of this challenge. These included such abolitionists as James Cropper, Emmanuel Sturge, Whitmore, Zachary Macaulay and Henry Thorton.<sup>46</sup> Among their assertions was the charge that the viability of the British West Indian economy was artificially boosted by “... the enormous pecuniary sacrifices made by the people of this country in the shape of bounties and protections.”<sup>47</sup> They also claimed that it was propped up by the accidental circumstances following the slave rebellion in St. Domingue in 1792. Abolitionists insisted too that after 1805, with competition in the sugar market from Brazil and Cuba, increased supply on British West Indian sugar glutted the market causing the slump in sugar prices of 1806. The real gripe of the East Indians/abolitionists, however, was that higher import duties were paid on East Indian than on West Indian sugar. By 1813, the duty paid on importing one hundred weight of sugar from India increased from 3s to 10s. By 1821, the East Indians paid 45s to import one hundred weight of white or clayed sugar while the West Indians paid 30s. The East Indians argued that the favoured position of the West Indians was unjustified.<sup>48</sup> Anti-Slavery Society members with East Indian interests also claimed that should the West Indies be lost to the mother country, her contribution to Britain's

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., New Series, Vol. XXV, 13 July 1830, p. 1176.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XIII, 24 May 1832, p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 1, p. 54 of the thesis.

<sup>47</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 31 May 1826, James Cropper at Anti-Slavery Society Meeting in Liverpool on 24 April 1826, p. 187.

<sup>48</sup> CROPPER, JAMES. 1822, op. cit., p. iii - ; *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. LXXV, February 1823, pp. 210 - 211; *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 17, 31 October, 1826, pp. 243 - 244 (This issue of the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* is entitled “On the Bounties and Protecting Duties, and the Restrictions on Trade, intended for the Support of the Slave System”).



economy could be easily replaced. Additionally, they viewed Britain's commercial connection with the colonies as a burden to the taxpayers in the metropolis. It was saddled with the expenses of civil and military establishments. Abolitionists regarded planter assertions that the colonial possessions benefited Britain's shipping and manufactures as a monstrous misrepresentation. The Anti-Slavery Society concluded by this period that on account of the monopoly of trade enjoyed by the British West Indian colonies, these possessions were a curse rather than a blessing.

"We venture to say that Colonial Empire has been one of the greatest curses of Modern Europe. ... What have been its fruits? Wars of frequent occurrence and immense cost, fettered trade, lavish expenditure, clashing jurisdiction, corruption in governments and indigence among the people. ... This it is that has ... led us to give subsidies which were never earned. ... what are the bounties and forced prices but an enormous poor rate in disguise?"<sup>49</sup>

The East India/abolitionists, borrowing ideas from Adam Smith, also submitted the view that free labour was cheaper and more efficient than slave labour; a pragmatic justification for dismantling the system. James Cropper asserted that British consumers were paying £1,200,000 as a premium on slave cultivation and that by consuming free grown as opposed to slave grown colonial produce, they would be doing both themselves and the slaves a great service.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Joseph Sturge, abolitionist and corn merchant of Birmingham, supported this idea by making available in London a depot at No. 17 East Cheap where free grown or East Indian

---

<sup>49</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXII, January 1825, p. 483; Society for The Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery 1823. *East and West India Sugar; or, A Refutation of the Claims of the West India Colonists to a Protecting Duty on East India Sugar*. London: J. Hatchard and Son, pp. 63 - 65. (Other citations of this item shall be referred to as *East and West India Sugar*). See also *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 17, 31 October 1831, pp. 247 - 248; Vol. 3, No. 57, February 1830, article entitled "Cost of Negro Slavery - Army, Ordnance, Commissariat, Miscellaneous, Navy".

<sup>50</sup> See CROPPER, JAMES. 1822, op. cit., p. v, 37 - 41, 48 - 50; *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*,



sugar was supplied. By September 1824, a subcommittee of the Anti-Slavery Society for the use of sugar produced by free labour was formed.<sup>51</sup> Thomas Clarkson, who had no commercial connections in the East, was one of the more prominent abolitionists who lent some support to this position. In 1824 he had stated that free men in the East Indies are employed at a cheaper rate and that if the West Indians follow this example, they would spend less to maintain their ineffective slave labour force. Clarkson observed that, "A Negro if he worked for himself, could do double the work."<sup>52</sup> Even Thomas Fowell Buxton referred occasionally to the argument that British West Indian slavery was not economically advantageous to the British Empire. In an anti-slavery meeting at Freemasons' Hall in 1828, Buxton explained that he could not understand how,

"... Britain professes herself the friend of freedom and the enemy of slavery, [but upholds] the gross inconsistency of that policy which gives premium, encouragement, protection and bounties to the produce of slave labour, denying all these to the produce of free labour."<sup>53</sup>

At times, the abolitionists were able to marry economic arguments against slavery with positions founded upon the strong moral objections that typified the British anti-slavery movement. The Anti-Slavery Society believed, for example, that it was an enormous injustice that "... that people of this country are made to contribute in bounties and protecting duties, to the maintenance of a system which they detest and reprobate."<sup>54</sup> In spite of negative assessments of the economic relationship between Britain and her colonies, the Society ended by noting that for the sakes of the slaves

---

Vol. 1, No. 9, 28 February 1826, p. 83.

<sup>51</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/3, op. cit., 8 and 23 September 1824, pp. 135 - 136, 138.

<sup>52</sup> CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1824, op. cit., pp. 44, 48 - 49.

<sup>53</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 2, No. 36, May 1828, p. 230.



and for absentee proprietors, it would be grievous to witness the ruin of private property.<sup>55</sup>

The attacks on slavery as an economic institution give rise to the question as to whether the British West Indies was in economic decline during the period of the anti-slavery agitation. This is an ongoing debate in British West Indian history sparked largely by Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* and Lowell Ragatz's *Fall of the Planter Class* and opposed particularly by Seymour Drescher and Roger Anstey.<sup>56</sup>

The arguments, while focusing on the abolition of the slave trade, have spilled over to the campaign against slavery itself. While historians contend over the economic viability of the slave economies of the British West Indies, the abolitionists addressed the issue from a different perspective. They argued that the colonial system enriched the pockets of those with West India interests while it impoverished British manufacturers and British consumers of British West Indian colonial produce. The abolitionists argued that the West Indian plantation system meant the under development of British India and seemed to support the strange view that the idea of colonizing was to purchase colonial produce at as dear a rate as possible. Abolitionists believed that Britain's support of the plantation economy of the West Indies also had the negative effect of aggravating the evils of slavery.<sup>57</sup> The abolitionists also did not hesitate to point out that the West India 'interest' themselves had been complaining for some time of the financial strain under which they were operating.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 14, 31 July 1826, p. 198.

<sup>55</sup>CLARKSON, THOMAS. 1824, op. cit., pp. 44, 48 - 49.

<sup>56</sup> See DRESCHER, SEYMOUR. 1977, op. cit., chapter 1; SEYMOUR DRESCHER. 1976.

"Capitalism and Abolition: values and forces in Britain, 1783 - 1814" in Roger Anstey and P. E. H. Hair *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition*. Bristol: Historical Society of Lancashire and Chelshire Occasional Series, pp. 167 - 195; NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976, op. cit., pp. 34 - 35, 38 - 39 for his discussion on the prosperity of Demerara proprietors in the pre-emancipation era.

<sup>57</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 14, 31 July 1826, p. 204; Vol. 1, No. 22, 31 March 1827, pp. 316 - 323; Vol. 2, No. 32, January 1828, 174.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 12, 31 May 1826, p. 178.



The counter attack of the abolitionists that went furthest in the attempt to displace the formidable safeguard that planters secured in the property argument was found, not in attempts to undermine the value of the colonies, however, but in the threat of slave revolts. The abolitionists logically reasoned that whatever profits were to be gained through slavery were adversely affected when slaves resorted to war in the attempt to achieve their own emancipation. This position did not deny the planters' claim to the protection of their economic rights neither did it question the value of the colonies to the parent body. It was a pragmatic call to the West India 'interest' to take measures that would secure the safety of those rights and the value of the colonies.

### **No Security of Property in Slavery**

In the course of the 1820s, the abolitionists learnt and mastered the one argument capable of undermining the formidable property claims put forward by the planters to oppose the anti-slavery initiative. Property interests might listen to reason only if it was clear that property was threatened by violence. One mode by which the Society attempted to demonstrate the negative impact of slave rebellion on planters' property was by making a sharp distinction between proprietors of West Indian property resident in Britain and those who depended on them in the colonies. The Society insisted that the latter were the real obstacle to slavery reform and, thus, to West Indian prosperity. Their contumacy was motivated, not by a desire to protect their property for the slaves and the plantations did not belong to them. They had no self-interest in improving the management of the system for if rebellion or any other disaster ruined the plantations, they had nothing to lose and if compensation was

granted when slavery was abolished, they had nothing to gain.<sup>59</sup> They clung to their posts as bookkeepers, managers and overseers, nevertheless, for the opportunity of exercising racial tyranny over the slaves. Their familiarity with oppression was responsible for their corruption.<sup>60</sup> The abolitionists claimed that the hired hands of slavery were ultimately responsible for putting at risks the property of others. The abolitionists noted, on the other hand, that the absentee planters, “ ... the Ellises, the Hibberts, the Mannings, men of the most respectable characters and minds in the country, ...” are the ones whose pecuniary interests would suffer in the event of unrest in the colonies.<sup>61</sup> The abolitionist leaders always tended to portray in a positive light West Indian proprietors living in England many of whom were fellow Members of Parliament.<sup>62</sup> It was an attempt to appeal to the West Indians’ regard for a reputation for fair-mindedness and consistency in principles. The abolitionists reminded the absentee planters that they had claimed to be “ ... the strenuous advocates of popular rights, and the sworn enemies to oppression, at least in Europe.”<sup>63</sup> The abolitionists were calling on colonial proprietors at home to demonstrate that their commitment to high ideals were not coloured by geographical distance, race and personal interests.<sup>64</sup> This was, of course, an attempt to persuade them to urge their hirelings in the colonies to adopt amelioration measures that would protect their slave property. The abolitionists, however, did not quite achieve their objective with this tactic. It was perhaps true that the slaving interests at home were less cruelly disposed to the slaves

---

<sup>59</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., 334 - 335; *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXVIII, op. cit., p. 480.

<sup>60</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, *ibid.* See also *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 28 February 1826, London: J. Hatchard, p. 82.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807, op. cit.; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., p. 335; BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1804, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 28 February 1826, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



than those in the colonies. The abolitionists were also probably correct in asserting that the real power on the plantations laid home in Britain and not in the West Indies. In the final analysis, however, it was the economic interests of the absentees that more firmly tied the slaves to slavery than the inhumanity of their managers on the plantations.

In a less cautious assessment of this particular aspect of the slave revolt argument, the abolitionists declared that the destruction to property that attended a slave revolt was more acceptable than the permanent existence of slavery. The Society reiterated the abolitionists' respect for the rights of property but asserted, " ... such a revolution, violent as it would doubtless be, would be desirable, if it were the only possible means of subverting the present system."<sup>65</sup> The position was a restatement of the abolitionists' occasional assertion that the end justified the means. The rebellion of the slaves, if it should end in eventual emancipation, would be a worthwhile sacrifice. Many abolitionists shrank back from this radical view. It was a position that endorsed too closely Dr Johnson's toast to the next rebellion in the West Indies.

A far more irrefutable and less contentious abolitionist treatment of the slave rebellion issue as it regarded the question of planter property was that the rising of the slaves made slavery a precarious investment. It was a shrewd appeal to the commercial interest of the planters. The abolitionists pointed out to the slaving interests that they were poor judges of the policies that would best safeguard their property. If protecting their interests was their principal concern, they ought to be aware that in a servile war they would inevitably emerge as losers. The Society cautioned,

---

<sup>65</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXI, October 1824, pp. 213 - 214; No. LXXXII, January 1825, p. 485.

“We entreat these respectable persons to reflect on the precarious nature by which they hold their property ... if the slavery debate ended, could they think themselves secure from ruin? ... Property will be deprived of all its security. In a servile war, the master *must* [Italics used by the author] be the loser - for his enemies are his chattels, whether the slave conquers or falls, he is alike lost to his owner. In the meantime, the soil lies uncultivated; the machinery is destroyed. And when the possessions of the planter are restored to him, they have been changed into a desert.”<sup>66</sup>

The abolitionists attempted to persuade the colonists that protecting their property and reforming slavery were one and the same interest. In one sense, this was a reminder of the abolitionists’ promise to keep in mind both the well being of the slaves and their masters’ interests. The campaigners urged planters to stake their claims behind the struggle on behalf of slaves for to sabotage the movement was to sabotage their own property. Abolitionist warned, “ ... nothing short of a miracle can save the Whites, if they neglect any longer the performance of their promises, and the discharge of their imperative duty.”<sup>67</sup> In the abolitionists’ view, cooperation in amelioration was not suicidal for the colonists. It was the one insurance available against the rebellion of the slaves, which put their property on the line. The argument was a powerful abolitionist attack that ought to have hit its target dead in the centre. It emphasised the far-reaching economic ruins that slave rebels inflicted on colonial property. It pulled from under their feet the main ground upon which planters objected to measures of slavery reform. Even in defeat, slave rebels were capable of hurting their masters at the point where it mattered most. The abolitionists, however, did not attempt to turn to much advantage the strength of this position. By 1825 they were still addicted to promoting pastoral measures of slavery reform even when these were backed by

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., No. LXXXII, p. 487. James Cropper raised the same point at a Liverpool anti-slavery meeting when he noted that “ ... if the slaves become worth nothing, then the masters’ property is gone.” *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 31 May 1831, p. 187.



explosive depiction of cataclysmic doom in the colonies. They were contented to request on behalf of the slaves “ ... institutions that they have no temptation to change.”<sup>68</sup> Conservative as was this request, nevertheless, the West India ‘interest’ and their supporters spurned abolitionists’ grave advice to loosen their stranglehold on slavery.

### **Parliamentary Intervention**

The Anti-Slavery Society used slave revolts to elaborate on the danger of the defiance with which planters resisted the interference of the parent state in their colonial affairs. The Society emphasised that intervention was necessary because the colonies were powerless. They were in no position to adequately protect themselves from any of the ravages to which they were periodically vulnerable. In times of crisis; European colonial war, drought, hurricane and slave revolts, the colonists needed and depended on the protection of Britain to secure both their lives and their property.<sup>69</sup> The abolitionists, accordingly, warned planters that they should desist from their threats to throw off their allegiance to Britain and follow the pattern of independence set by the Americans. West Indian troops were small, and, divided as they were, they could not act in concert to either defeat the mother country or maintain independence with restless slave populations in their midst. Abolitionists warned the West Indians of the dreadful and real possibility that without Britain and her troops, their slave plantation possessions would be swept away in the wave of slave rising. The abolitionists challenged the West Indians,

---

<sup>67</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXI, October 1824, p. 214.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

“Are you, in point of fact, at this moment able to protect yourselves against your slaves without our assistance ...can you still rise up and lie down in security? If we suspend our protection - if we recall our troops - in the week the knife is at your throats.”<sup>70</sup>

Since the colonists were so dependent on British military might as well as their financial assistance in times of crisis, it was inappropriate for them to reject as unconstitutional Britain’s prerogative to superintend the government of the colonies. By depicting the relationship between the mother country and the colonies in this light, the colonists’ infatuated perverseness in defying the parent state appeared shortsighted, ungrateful and a flirtation with danger. The abolitionists reiterated,

“ ... they [the colonies] are both defended from foreign attack, and protected from intestine trouble, by the forces of the mother country. Those planters who talk so largely of their rights could not hold their property four and twenty hours without the aid of those forces; they who deny the right of the parent state to protect the Black subjects from cruel usage, could not exist in the midst of those Blacks , but for the protection of her arm; left to themselves, they would suddenly experience a change indeed - the slave and his master would exchange places ...”<sup>71</sup>

This was a reminder of the unwritten pact between the colonial power and the colony. The parent body was responsible for protecting her dependent while the dependent in return was obliged to submit itself to the direction of the parent. All the colonists could hope to achieve by their foolhardy rejection of the advice of Britain was the end

---

<sup>69</sup> See MATHIESON, op. cit., p. 3

<sup>70</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI, No. LXXXII, January 1825, p. 481.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., No. LXXXI, pp. 214 - 215. See also *East and West India Sugar*, op. cit., p. 61 - 62. The author states that “ ... slaves, outnumbering the white population in almost every colony by at least twenty to one, form the great object of their apprehensions, and it is against them they have to multiply precautions.”; The *Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, 15 June 1831 similarly asserts that “ ... it is nothing short of madness to talk about opposition to the Parent Government ... men are ... giving



of forced labour and another black, liberated and independent Haitian state in the British West Indies.

The slave rebellion argument was not only used to persuade absentee and resident colonists of the need for parliamentary intervention. Abolitionists also addressed the British Parliament and Government on this issue. As Wilberforce had done, the Society compared Government's reluctance to take decisive measures in the colonies to the procrastination of the authorities in Demerara. The abolitionists had widened the discussion on parliamentary intervention in colonial affairs through its reference to the issue of slave rebellions. Slave violence made intervention a question of right, a question of necessity as well as a question of responsibility. The abolitionists advised Government that they should perform their rightful duty by the colonies for,

“ ... an act commanding and ordaining them ... will create over the whole British Islands less commotion by far than the very inconsiderable ferment which the worst possible management excited in Demerara.”<sup>72</sup>

The obvious implication of this advice, of course, was that Government was playing a dangerous game. Its failure to compel colonial compliance with its instructions would unleash in the other colonies on a wider scale the revolt that took place in Demerara. Henry Brougham dwelt on this point when on 1 June 1824, he brought forth Smith's case in the House of Commons after the Demerara revolt. Almost echoing Wilberforce, Broughman stated,

“My opinion ever has been, that it is alike necessary to the security of our White brethren, and just, and

---

expressions to sentiments unsupported by reason, and formed without the slightest reflection ...”

<sup>72</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XLI., No. LXXXI, October 1824, p. 213.

even merciful, to the Negroes - ... to maintain firmly the legal authorities, and, with that view, to avoid, in our relations with the Slaves, a wavering uncertain policy, keeping them in a condition of doubt and solicitude, calculated to work their own discomfort, and the disquiet of their masters.”<sup>73</sup>

In 1826, the Anti-Slavery Society also insisted that the ministers of Government were pursuing a dangerous policy in persisting in attempts to conciliate a manifestly contumacious body of colonists to adopt slave reform measures. The Society plainly stated, “ ... the course it was determined to adopt, must end in delay and disappointment, if not in insurrection, and all its concomitant evils.”<sup>74</sup> The argument was sound. In the 1820s, however, enough parliamentarians were not convinced. As for the ministers of Government, they believed that they were acting responsibly by pursuing the judicious and temperate enforcement of the measures of slave reform advocated by the abolitionists.

### **From Gradualism to Immediate Emancipation**

It was not until 1830 that the abolitionists declared their determination to move away from their conservative programme of the mitigation and gradual abolition of slavery and to demand the immediate emancipation of the slaves. The newer members of the Anti-Slavery Society took the lead in guiding the movement in this direction. At the 1830 annual general meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society held on 15 May at Freemason’s Hall, the leaders of the movement, Buxton, Denman, Lushington, Brougham with Wilberforce in the chair, had expressed the usual cautious resolutions

---

<sup>73</sup> *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 30 April 1826, p. 131; Vol. 1, No. 14, 31 July 1826, p. 201.



on the slavery question. The younger abolitionist, Henry Pownall, rose and moved an amendment to Buxton's proposals calling for the immediate emancipation of all slaves born in the colony by 1830.<sup>75</sup> The majority who attended the meeting accepted the amendment. Thus, referring to the promise of eventual emancipation given in the 1823 resolutions by the Government, Buxton had declared in the House of Commons in 1830 that

“... slavery, not having been ameliorated by the colonial legislatures in accordance with the resolutions passed by the House of Commons on that day seven years ago, should, as soon as possible, be abolished.”<sup>76</sup>

Again on 15 April 1831, Buxton referred to the legislation of 1823 and called for the emancipation of infant slaves in the colonies.<sup>77</sup> Despite the steps that Buxton was taking towards immediate emancipation, radical abolitionists criticized that he was not going far enough. In 1831, he wrote to Sturge responding to a letter of complaint that he received from the latter. The more radical supporters of the movement alleged that Buxton, as their leader, was retarding the cause by sticking to the 1823 proposals and seeking only immediate freedom for slave children.<sup>78</sup> It was not a very bold step but Buxton at last believed that the time had come to begin the process that would lead to the eventual emancipation of the slaves.

The abolitionists forwarded two basic explanations to justify their shift in policy from gradual to immediate emancipation. They finally admitted that amelioration was a total failure. The evils of slavery could not be remedied; the system must be

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, No. 61, June 1830, pp. 256 - 257; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>76</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E. 2/3, 27 May 1830; MATHIESON, WILLIAM LAW, 1926. p. 196.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., Letter from Buxton to Sturge, 27 January 1831, Northrepps Hall,

eradicated. Secondly, in spite of the failure of amelioration, the slaves had amply demonstrated that they were creolised and Christianized in the years following the abolition of the slave trade. Slaves were, therefore, fit for freedom. In moving from the position of gradual to immediate emancipation, the abolitionists were forced to subject themselves to a considerable amount of self-reproach. Radical supporters of the anti-slavery movement had for some time criticized the conservative leaders of dragging their feet in pressing for freedom.<sup>79</sup> The conservative abolitionist leaders had replied that it would be a mockery and violation of justice and humanity to free slaves while they were unprepared for the responsibility of freedom. It was insisted that slaves had first to be trained and educated for this perfect state of maturity. Abolitionists declared that it was insane to free slaves without previous preparation. Such an action would be ruinous both to the slaves and to their masters. Clarkson had gone so far as to state that if the slaves were “...suddenly emancipated, nothing is more clear that they would not work for their masters but would return into the woods and lead a savage life.”<sup>80</sup> Brougham explained after the Demerara slave revolt that “It is for the sake of the blacks themselves, as subsidiary to their own improvement, that the present state of things must for a time be maintained.”<sup>81</sup> In making these statements, the abolitionists, no doubt, had their eyes set on the plantation society in the aftermath of slavery. They were anxious to ensure that the slaves would continue to labour on the estates once free, thereby making the right use of their freedom. Contrary to the economic views about the West Indian plantations that some abolitionists expressed, most of the leaders believed in and hoped that the colonies would continue to be a viable branch of the British economy when ex-slaves

---

Cromer, pp. 98 - 99.p. See also MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 31.

<sup>79</sup> See HEYRICK, ELIZABETH. 1824, op. cit., p. 7, 9.



cultivated it.<sup>82</sup> While abolitionists sympathized with the plight of workers in industrialized Britain, they confined their attacks to slave labour and not free labour. Elizabeth Heyrick, the radical female abolitionist of Leicester, had criticized that the male leaders of the movement supported amelioration and gradual emancipation not only for economic reasons but also because they were over concerned about their public image. They were aware of and their attitude to the slavery question was influenced by the fact that “ ... every idea of immediate emancipation is still represented, ... as impolitic, enthusiastic and visionary ...”<sup>83</sup> Abolitionists’ apologies for many of their conservative positions, however, were fairly regular by the 1820s. Abolitionists still maintained that slaves were expected to be industrious on the plantations after slavery was abolished. Even Heyrick was not opposed to the establishment of a free labour system in the British West Indies after emancipation.<sup>84</sup> The male leaders of British anti-slavery, nevertheless, admitted that the ideas on which they forestalled emancipation were “ ... slippery and dangerous and situated on the brink of the most fatal error.”<sup>85</sup> Clarkson and, later, Joseph Sturge openly confessed, “ ... we have to reproach ourselves with a long and most cruel delay of justice.”<sup>86</sup> The Anti-Slavery Society stated a new position regarding the reputed laziness of the slaves; a reputation that they themselves had helped to shape. By 1827

---

<sup>80</sup> Papers of Clarkson, CN 33, 5 December 1823.

<sup>81</sup> *A Motion of Henry Brougham Respecting ... John Smith*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807, op. cit., pp. 249 - 250, 258 - 259; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. IX, op. cit., p. 266; 24 March 1824, p. 1133; Clarkson's Papers, CN 33, 5 December 1823; MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/3, op. cit., 28 November 1832, p. 179; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., p. 74; DAVIS, D.B. 1962, op. cit., p. 214; ELTIS, DAVID. 1982. “Abolitionist Perceptions of Society After Slavery” in James Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society, 1776 - 1846*, p. 199.

<sup>83</sup> HEYRICK, ELIZABETH. 1824, op. cit., p. 10. See also MIDGLEY, CLARE. 1992, op. cit., pp. 103 - 118 for her discussion on Heyrick's radical opposition to the relatively conservative anti-slavery attitude of the male leaders of the campaign against slavery.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 108, 111.

<sup>85</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No. LXXVII, October 1823, p. 120.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 126; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., pp. 87 - 88.



the Society, using the evidence provided by colonists regarding the thriving local provision markets in the colonies, came to the conclusion that “ ... when facilities have been given them [slaves] of obtaining their freedom, their voluntary industry has been thereby greatly augmented.”<sup>87</sup> As chairman of the annual Anti-Slavery meeting held at Freemasons’ Hall in 1830, Wilberforce declared, “There was no longer, ... any time for delay or half measures.”<sup>88</sup> Buxton also admitted that it was erroneous to place so much faith in the amelioration measures proposed in 1823.<sup>89</sup> As a body, the Society confessed that they were to be blamed for adopting gradualism for three reasons: “ ... they had been too indulgent towards the measures of Government, ... too reluctant to embark in desperate councils [and] ... too willing to avert the evils of collision.”<sup>90</sup> The Anti-Slavery Society’s analysis of the report of the House of Commons committee on slavery recanted the major views that abolitionists had expressed regarding the prospects of an emancipated slave society in the British colonies. They “unhesitatingly asserted” that the evidence produced by the House of Commons Committee on slavery in 1832

“ ... have shown, not only that the slaves will incur no risk of suffering want by emancipation, but that their speedy emancipation affords the only rational prospect of preserving the public peace, and of securing the permanent interests of the planters themselves.”<sup>91</sup>

When the Lords’ Committee of 1832 on the treatment and conditions of the slaves interviewed Buxton, he made it clear that the abolitionists were no longer convinced

---

<sup>87</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 2, No. 27, August 1827, p. 42.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, No. 61, June 1830, pp. 213 - 234.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239; *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XIII, op. cit., p. 96; BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit.

<sup>90</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444. The Papers of Thomas Fowell Buxton, Vol. 12 (Reel 4) Extract from *The Morning Herald*, 22 July 1833.



of the wisdom in delaying slavery. To the contrary, Buxton emphasised “ ... the advantages of an early emancipation to masters as well as slaves and the dangers of delaying it ...”<sup>92</sup> When slaves in Jamaica rose in rebellion in 1831 - 1832, just at the time when the abolitionists adopted immediate abolition, the anti-slavery activists abandoned amelioration altogether and maximized the opportunity for the danger of slave revolts to assume its place among the principles upon which they attacked the system of slavery.

### **The Ultimatum**

The Jamaican slave revolt pushed the abolitionists to a greater commitment to immediate emancipation than they had taken in 1830. The Anti-Slavery Society first met as a body to discuss the rebellion on 27 February 1832. The Secretary of the Society, Mr. Thomas Pringle, informed members that a letter of one Mr. Hilderbee referring to the rebellion had been passed to Buxton. "After much discussion on the subject of the disturbances in Jamaica, it was resolved that a deputation be appointed to confer with Mr. Buxton ... to offer to the House their views on the late disturbances in Jamaica.”<sup>93</sup> After this February meeting, the Society met again in April 1832. It was now clear that the abolitionists were no longer inclined to ignore or overlook the ultimatum that was presented by slave rebellion. In addition to the resolution that all children should be freed after this present session of Parliament, the Society further resolved that

---

<sup>91</sup> *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>92</sup> *Abstract of the Report*, op. cit., p. 117.

“Parliament should proceed forthwith to adopt measures to secure immediate emancipation of all persons held in slavery in the British dominions ... [and] that Mr. Buxton be respectfully requested to divide the House on his motion on 19 April.”<sup>94</sup>

James Stephen was forefront among the abolitionists in being open and vocal in linking the Jamaican slave revolt to the demand for complete and immediate emancipation for all slaves. On 3 April Stephen wrote to the Society stating that he strongly advised “ ... nothing short of immediate and general abolition of slavery in all the British colonies by direct parliamentary enactment.”<sup>95</sup> He also made it clear that his views “ ... have been strongly confirmed by ... the late insurrection in Jamaica, or the disorders so called ...”<sup>96</sup> The Society did not deviate from the position taken by Stephen. From that time on there was no looking back. Slave rebellion introduced a sharp edge to the tone of the Society’s reflections and resolutions. On four separate occasions in 1832; 9 May, 12 May, 7 September and 19 September, the Anti-Slavery Society used the threat of slave violence to lay before the British Parliament the grim state of the slavery question. The British public was also addressed on the issue. The following extracts demonstrate the direct manner in which the abolitionists were finally prepared to maximize the strength of the slave violence argument.

“ ... it is the duty of Parliament to proceed forthwith with the adoption of such measures as may accomplish the immediate and total abolition of slavery in the British Dominions ... and ... it is the conviction of this meeting that until this object shall have been effected, nothing can afford a security

---

<sup>93</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/3, op. cit., 27 February 1832, p. 123; 4 April 1832, p. 129; BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>94</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp., Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20, E 2/3, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.



against the recurrence of such calamities as have recently afflicted the black and disgraced the white population of the island of Jamaica.”<sup>97</sup>

“It is the duty of the Government and Parliament of this country to proceed without any further delay to fulfill their pledge and to adopt forthwith the necessary measures for the total abolition of slavery it being now unquestionable that it is only by the interposition of Parliament any hope can be entertained of peacefully terminating its unnumbered evils or any security afforded against the recurrence of those bloody and calamitous scenes which have recently afflicted Jamaica.”<sup>98</sup>

“ ... unless immediate measures are taken for the entire removal of this great national crime, it is to be feared that the natural hostility now existing between the slave and slave holder may lead to such an extermination of the system as will involve the oppressor and the oppressed in one common calamity.”<sup>99</sup>

“ ... the Committee anticipating the probability of emancipation being accomplished by violence, if the right of the slave to his freedom be not speedily established, call the attention of the public to the calamitous consequences which may attend further delay - consequences which all men of Christian principles will most deeply deplore; the blood which must be so profusely shed, the inevitable destruction of property in the colonies and the consequent injury to the commercial interests of Great Britain.”<sup>100</sup>

The reflections and resolutions of the Anti-Slavery Society in this period were all very similar and yet, no doubt to emphasize the sense of urgency and dread with which abolitionists now viewed the slavery question, they were repeatedly recorded in the minutes of their meetings. Although Eric Williams did not develop the point, British abolitionists proved that he was correct in asserting that the rebellion of the slaves

---

<sup>97</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S.20 E 2/3, 9 May 1832, p. 144.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 12 May 1832, p. 147.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 7 September 1832, p. 163.

made the alternatives clear: emancipation from above or emancipation from below but emancipation.<sup>101</sup> Abolitionists reiterated that it was imperative that Parliament enacted legislation for emancipation. Failure to do so meant that the slaves, intent on having their freedom, would take matters in their own hands and continually turn to violence to obtain it. Time was also of the essence. Parliamentary measures should be drawn up ‘forthwith’, ‘without any further delay’, ‘immediately’ and ‘speedily’. The colonies were no longer on the brink of a precipice, as Wilberforce had warned in 1824. They had gone over it and the day of reckoning was at hand. Additionally, it was evident that, despite the East India/abolitionists’ critical economic assessment of the colonies, as a body, anti-slavery agitators appreciated the value of the colonies to the mother country and were sincere in the intention to safeguard colonial property. They were no strangers to scenes of crowd violence attacking and destroying private property. They were living in an industrial age when workers in Britain were unleashing their economic frustrations on threshing machines and other property of their employers. Although some abolitionists sympathized with workers’ suffering, none supported their acts of vandalism.<sup>102</sup> It was no surprise, therefore, that the abolitionists re-emphasised the argument that emancipation was necessary for slave violence deprived property of all security. The abolitionists also recognized that they could no longer afford to muffle the slaves’ ultimate aspirations. The time for pastoral measures in slavery had passed. The intensity of slave war made it crucial that abolitionists demand ‘total abolition’, the ‘entire removal’ of the system of slavery. The letter that Stephen and Garrat wrote to the Anti-Slavery Society, which was included in the minutes of 11 April 1832, emphasized this wholehearted commitment to abolition.

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 19 September 1832, p. 164.

<sup>101</sup> See chapter 1 of the thesis, *Historiographical Context*, p. 33.



“We do not believe that in any middle course, or in the total rejection of the claims of justice and mercy, there would be greater safety. Only through measures brought forward and totally supported by the Government and in that way alone, a step towards the termination of slavery might be safely taken.”<sup>103</sup>

Pro-slavery advocates made a last ditch effort to sabotage the march to freedom. They reasoned that the Jamaican slave revolt was further proof that slaves were uncivilized barbarians. The revolt meant that the emancipation process should be interrupted. The abolitionists insisted on the contrary view. It was now unquestionable that slave rebellion should hasten not delay the abolition of slavery.<sup>104</sup> Abolitionists maximized the extent to which they could convert the rebellion of the slaves into useful anti-slavery materials. They were convinced now more than ever that slave rebellion was the just retribution exacted on a nation guilty of the sin of upholding slavery. They reconciled the humanitarian struggle with the idea of justice in slave violence by reflecting that God is a just God and that his justice would not sleep forever. It was an old argument that had been raised as early as the second half of the sixteenth century when John Hawkins became the first Englishman to engage in the slave trade. At that time, Queen Elizabeth the second had declared sincerely or otherwise that if Hawkins was dealing in slave trading as opposed to the voluntary labour of Africans, “ ... it would be detestable and call down the vengeance of heaven upon the undertakers.”<sup>105</sup> Even Wilberforce had hinted in 1830, already bent in age and retired from public life, that he believed that a moral retribution was in store for Britain and her colonies for

---

<sup>102</sup> TURNER, MARY. 1982, op. cit., p. 32; see also chapter 3 of the thesis, **A Combination of European Workmen.**

<sup>103</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S.20 E 2/3, op. cit., 11 April 1832, p. 134.

<sup>104</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, Vol. 3, p. 37.

persisting in the maintenance of slavery.<sup>106</sup> James Stephen senior was foremost among the abolitionists in propagating this ideology. He explained, “Servile wars were indicators of Divine wrath; and forerunners of approaching chastisement of the nations of Europe, for the grievous and impious oppression of the unfortunate African race.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, Stephen regarded the Jamaican revolt as a confirmation of his predictions. He commented that slave violence and destruction ravaged Jamaica because colonists despised the warnings they received “... and dreadful has been the consequences. The contumacy of the planters has been fully and fatally justified.”<sup>108</sup>

Buxton expressed similar sentiments about the Jamaican slave rebellion. He reflected,

“Then indeed the storm seemed beginning, then the first whispers of that whirlwind seemed beginning which was to sweep off the white population. I thought indeed that the sword of eternal justice was unsheathed ... ”<sup>109</sup>

Buxton was persuaded that justice to the slaves would be done and that it would be visited on the property of the planters if not on their lives if slavery were not abolished.

It was only after the Jamaican slave rebellion that the abolitionists brought forward in the House of Commons their first motion for the complete and immediate emancipation of all slaves in the domains of Britain. Prior to presenting this motion, Buxton warned the House that “If the question respecting the West Indies were not

---

<sup>105</sup> *The Baptist Magazine*, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 2, No. 36, May 1828, p. 217.

<sup>107</sup> STEPHEN JAMES. 1830, op. cit., p. 395.

<sup>108</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/3, op. cit., 11 April 1832, Letter from James Stephen senior and Garrat, pp. 132 - 133.

<sup>109</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 10, Notes and Drafts for Speeches, 1829 - 1839, p. 64; see also *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XIII, op. cit., p. 48; RECKFORD MARY, 1968. “The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831” in *Past and Present A Journal of Historical Studies*, No. 40, p. 123.



speedily settled, it would settle itself in an alarming way ...”<sup>110</sup> In May 1832 Buxton finally rose in the House and called for a select committee to consider and report on measures for the extinction of slavery. He rested his motion on four points; decline of the slave population, the abuse of the whip, the neglect of the moral and religious instruction of the slaves and slave rebellion. Buxton used the fear of rebellion to justify abolitionist demand for the eradication of slavery. He asked,

“Did anyone doubt that a crisis was coming which would leave them no alternative but an immediate concession of freedom to the slaves, or a dreadful attempt to extort it through the horrors of a servile war?”<sup>111</sup>

This was neither just rhetoric nor an attempt to use fear to control the Government and people of Britain. Buxton was personally troubled by the dangers that he foresaw in the slave colonies. In February 1833 his prayer was that “Almighty God would give these thy unhappy creatures their liberty - that liberty in peace and protect their masters from ruin and desolation.”<sup>112</sup> Abolitionists corresponded with each other expressing the same foreboding. Macaulay wrote to Brougham anxiously stating that “If we agree it [freeing the slaves] is safe, do so and do it at once ...”<sup>113</sup> The dread of recurrent servile warfare in the colonies was chiefly responsible for shaping Macaulay’s view on the slavery issue. He stated, “... above all I allude to the danger which it is admitted must arise from any long delay in the final adjustment ... which

---

<sup>110</sup> *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. X, 7 March 1832, p. 1262.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, op. cit., pp. 46 - 48. See also *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 87, 1831 - 1832, 24 May 1832, p. 338. Buxton’s motion rested on the question of safety but was amended by adding the words, “... in conformity with the Resolutions of this House on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of May 1823”; *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>112</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, February 1832, Vol. 4, Birthday/Anniversary Reflections, p. 233.

<sup>113</sup> Brougham MSS., op. cit., 6 April 1833 (13670), Macaulay to Brougham. Note that Macaulay was here reiterating the view of Lord Howick. See *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 212.

must lead to anarchy and blood.”<sup>114</sup> The Anti-Slavery Society by 1833 openly stated a similar viewpoint in an even more emphatic manner. Taking the cue from the 1832 House of Commons Committee appointed to inquire into slavery, the Society asserted that

“ ... the evidence before us has most irrefragably and triumphantly established; that the danger of withholding freedom from the slaves is greater than that of granting it, and the controversy, therefore, as respects the expediency of an early emancipation, may be considered as decided.”<sup>115</sup>

It was unquestionable that by 1832, the slaves’ rebellion was prominent among the factors that fuelled the drive of the last phase of the anti-slavery movement conducted by humanitarians in Britain.

### **Prolonged Apprehensions**

A ministerial proposition for the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies was laid before the House of Commons for the first time in May 1833.<sup>116</sup> Its presentation, however, did not alleviate the abolitionists’ fears of the threat of slave violence. To the contrary, the nature of its provisions intensified the impact of the rebellion of the slaves on the British anti-slavery movement. Abolitionists were generally persuaded that its measures were unsafe and unsatisfactory. The proposal

---

<sup>114</sup> Brougham MSS., *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 8; Agency Anti-Slavery Committee. 1833. *The Danger of Delay , and the Safety and Practicability of Immediate Emancipation, From the Evidence before the Parliamentary Committees on Colonial Slavery*. London: W. Johnston

<sup>116</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 88, 1833, 14 May 1833, p. 389. It became bill No. 482 on 5 July after second reading of the proposal, p. 553. The full title of the bill was *A Bill for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Colonies for Promoting the Industry of the Manumitted Slaves and for Indemnifying the Owners of Such Slaves*.



created divisions in the abolitionist camp between radicals, intolerant of any compromise in emancipation, and conservatives, convinced that a degree of compromise was essential if the slaves were to gain their freedom.<sup>117</sup> Strangely enough, both radical and conservative abolitionists used the slave violence argument to justify their divergent positions. The conservative abolitionists, the leaders of the movement, won the day. Buxton, supported by leading Anti-slavery Society members, had no doubt that his conservative parliamentary politics were better calculated to secure the ultimate objective of freedom for the slaves than the hard line policy advocated by the radicals.

The pressure exerted by the anti-slavery activists in the form of parliamentary petitions, and the tactics resorted to by Buxton to force the Government to take the slavery question into its own hands, contributed in part to producing the 1833 anti-slavery legislation.<sup>118</sup> It was clear that, among other factors, parliamentarians accepted the abolitionists' view that slave rebellion dictated emancipation. The House of Commons Committee's report on slavery of 1832 had explained that it restricted its investigation of the subject to two major considerations on account of the voluminous data that the slavery question was generating. One of these concerns was the rebellion of the slaves. The committee sought to determine whether " ... the dangers of convulsion are greater from freedom withheld, than from freedom granted to the slaves."<sup>119</sup> Lord Howick, Parliamentary Under-secretary, just before he resigned from office, had no doubts about the answer to such a reflection. He stated that delaying

---

<sup>117</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 274.

<sup>118</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/4, op. cit., 27 March, 3 April, 10 April 1833, pp. 15, 19 - 20, 22;

BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., pp. 260, 321.

<sup>119</sup> Society for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. 1833. *Analysis of The Report*, op. cit., p. 2.

emancipation would lead to great disasters.<sup>120</sup> Howick, as well as Taylor, head of the West Indian desk at the Colonial Office, had both prepared schemes of emancipation. Both plans concurred in the principle that planters should be compensated for the property they would lose in slaves after emancipation. In spite of this provision, the plans were unacceptable to the West India Committee and by 1833 both plans were discarded.<sup>121</sup> Stanley, the successor of Lord Goderich as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, drew up the emancipation plan that was finally brought before Parliament in May 1833. The measures forwarded by Stanley ensured that slaves were retained on the estates for as long as possible, provided planters with a large compensation package in the form of a loan, protected West Indian sugar on the British market and left the details of emancipation to the local legislatures. Stanley's scheme almost totally disregarded the demands of the abolitionists. It mentioned nothing, for example, concerning the religious and moral instructions of the ex-slaves. Both the abolitionists and the West Indians rejected it. It was published in *The Times* on 11 May but was received with hostility. With the assistance of James Stephen junior, legal counsel to the Colonial Office from 1813 to 1834, Stanley's plan was re-examined and by May 14, a modified version was published. Stanley prefaced his emancipation proposals on three principles; the dangers of servile war, the immorality of slavery and the contumacy of the colonists. Its five clauses stipulated that children under six were to be entirely free when emancipation was proclaimed if they were maintained by their parents. If not, they were to be subjected to certain restrictions. All other slaves were free in all other spheres except labour. For twelve years, they were to work for their former masters as apprentices for three-quarter of the day, equal to

---

<sup>120</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XI, 23 March 1832, p. 815.

<sup>121</sup> GROSS, IZHAK. 1980, op. cit., p. 67.



ten hours, and could work for themselves in the remaining quarter of the day. If they worked in all their free time, in twelve years they would have saved enough to buy their freedom. Planters were obligated to supply food, clothes and allowances to their apprentices. For the loss of their private property, planters were to receive compensation in the form of a loan totalling £15,000,000 to be provided either by Britain or the Negroes. Stanley preferred the latter. Stipendiary Magistrates would superintend the apprenticeship system. The debate over the emancipation bill spanned fifteen weeks. During this time, no doubt because of both pro and anti-slavery objections, two major changes were adopted. Buxton was relieved to note that slaves would no longer be considered liable to pay for their own emancipation.<sup>122</sup> The loan was converted to a gift of £20,000,000. Secondly, the proposed apprenticeship was reduced almost by half.<sup>123</sup>

## **The Money Battle**

The abolitionists' early assessment of the whole scheme was that it was a concoction for disaster. In an article entitled *Remarks on the Proposed Bill for the Abolition of Colonial Slavery*, the Anti-Slavery Society asserted that

“ ... it cannot for a single moment be expected that all this will pass - that the twenty millions and the apprenticeship will go down smoothly together - still less that this confidence in Transatlantic assemblies will not be abused, or that a handful of half paid magistrates will do justice between 800,000 slaves and slave owners. On the other hand, it is certain, that when the seeds of discord are thus sown,

---

<sup>122</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XVIII, 14 May 1833, p. 1260.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1221 - 1231; *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 88, 1833, 12 June, 7 July, 22 July, 24 July, 25 July, 29 July, 30 July, 31 July - 1 August 1833, pp. 482, 553, 592, 599 - 600, 602, 611 - 612, 614, 617 - 618; BURN, W. L. 1937, op. cit., pp. 62 - 70 GROSS, IZHAK. 1980, op. cit., pp. 70 -

and anger and discontent scattered with a profuse hand, all must terminate in bloodshed and confusion.”<sup>124</sup>

The two clauses of Stanley’s emancipation scheme that irked and created the most anxiety for the abolitionists, however, were compensation for former masters and apprenticeship for would be ex-slaves. They objected to compensation since in effect it did not disturb but left intact and sanctioned the principle of holding property in man.<sup>125</sup> Buxton had even gone so far as to argue “ ... if compensation were to be made, the compensation was due from them [the planters] to the Negro - compensation for evils without number and for years of unrewarded toil.”<sup>126</sup> Abolitionist leaders, however, soon regarded compensation as a worthwhile sacrifice for immediate emancipation.<sup>127</sup> They believed that compensation would help to pacify the planters, thus making slavery safer for all parties. The greater consideration, of course, was that “ ... while the Negroes were set at liberty, the planters should not be exposed to ruinous loss.”<sup>128</sup> Buxton felt it was wiser and safer to attempt to modify rather than to reject the bill. He said to his sister, Mrs. Foster, that he would prefer to give up the £20,000,000 than have bloodshed in the colonies.<sup>129</sup> Thomas Pringle concurred in this view. He declared that he would “ ... give twenty millions with the utmost satisfaction, if it accomplished the entire, complete and satisfactory performance of the annihilation of this great crime.”<sup>130</sup> By adopting this conservative

---

74.

<sup>124</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 22, G. 44, British West Indies General, 1795 - 1835, Anti-Slavery Society, p. 8.

<sup>125</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 12 (Reel 4) Extract from *The Morning Herald*, 22 July 1833; RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., p. 104; BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 265; MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 22, G. 44, ibid., p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 3, No. 61, June 1830, p. 240.

<sup>127</sup> RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, op. cit., pp. 107 - 108.

<sup>128</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 263.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>130</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 12 (Reel 4) Extract from *The Morning Herald*, 22 July 1833.



position on the money issue, Buxton and the leading abolitionists were only adhering to the earlier position taken by the Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, Buxton and his conservative band came under considerable attack for the compromise they had made on compensation. Buxton tried to explain that he followed this line of action for the expediency of securing peace in the colonies. In June 1833 he wrote to Joseph Sturge, who had complained to Buxton, “... if you had stood firm, the planters would have got no compensation.” Buxton replied, “Perhaps so ... they no compensation and we no extinction of slavery: or rather it would have been extinguished by a rebellion.”<sup>132</sup> Buxton also explained to abolitionists Cropper, Sturge, Moorson and George Stephen, who also wanted him to fight the money battle, that had he done so Stanley might have carried out his threat to throw up the whole bill.<sup>133</sup> Buxton believed that by allowing the Stanley’s proposal to go through its first and second readings with its irksome compensation clause, the abolitionists would strengthen their ability to eliminate or at least shorten the proposed period of apprenticeship.

### **Apprenticeship - The Fearful Experiment**

Neither conservative nor radical abolitionists were able to reconcile themselves completely to the apprenticeship scheme proposed by Stanley. Up to a point, Buxton was willing to accept the plan as an expedient for the continued productivity of the colonies. He considered that it was a necessary training ground for ushering the slaves from forced to free labour. He positively supported the principle of making the Negroes industrious since idle ex-slave populations would present the unattractive

---

<sup>131</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 31 May 1826, p. 178. The Society had stated here that “Compensation, however unreasonable in principle, would readily be granted.”

prospect that the property of the planters would fall to ruin. The abolitionists had always intended that the British West Indian system would move from a slave labouring economy to a free labour economy. As David Brion Davis has observed,

“Abolitionists were not considering the upward mobility of workers but rather the rise of the Negroes to the level of humanity ... they combined the ideal of emancipation with an insistence on duty and subordination ... the anti slavery movement reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order.”<sup>134</sup>

Buxton was persuaded that emancipation must be only as immediate as it would ensure safety, peace and continued productivity in the colonies. He was appalled to realize, however, that the West Indians did not regard apprenticeship as a beneficial measure that would prepare the slaves to continue to work diligently when freed. They regarded it as a part of their compensation package. Consequently, Buxton feared that the colonists would use the period of labour without wages as a valuable respite during which they could squeeze the last juice out of their apprentices. He was persuaded that such an attitude would lead to great conflict in the colonies for he was informed that the slaves were determined not to work unless they were compensated for their labour. On that ground, Buxton objected to apprenticeship calling it slavery by another name. Having come to that conclusion, he warned, “ ... to compel the slaves to become apprentices ... we have reason exceedingly to dread will cause insurrection and bloodshed in the colonies.”<sup>135</sup> In the House of Commons, Buxton

---

<sup>132</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>134</sup> DAVIS, BRION DAVID. 1975. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770 - 1823*. pp. 466 - 467.

<sup>135</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 12 (Reel 4) Extract from *The Morning Herald*, 22 July 1833; Vol. 3, Miscellaneous Letters and Letters from Joseph Gurney, 29 October 1832, p. 34.



reiterated that

“He could not help saying this - from all the facts that had come to his knowledge, and from the communication he received, both public and private, his mind was deeply impressed with a conviction that a servile war would be the inevitable consequence of deferring emancipation.”<sup>136</sup>

During the House of Commons debate on the Ministerial Plan for the Abolition of Slavery Buxton again objected to the apprenticeship scheme on the grounds that delaying emancipation would result in bloodshed in the colonies. Buxton reasoned,

“ ... if you did not determine to do justice to the Negro, and to pay them wages, and that forthwith, you would have an insurrection of the blacks in that colony. What, he would ask, was the main cause of the late insurrection of the blacks in Jamaica? It was the determination of the Negroes not to work without remuneration.”<sup>137</sup>

Other abolitionists supported Buxton in warning that apprenticeship, by prolonging the servile regime, was destined to end in cataclysmic upheaval. Thomas Pringle remonstrated that

“ ... when he opened the Bill, he found that it was not for the abolition of slavery, but for the substitution of one species of slavery for another. It did not promote the industry of the slaves but it prevented all possibility of industry ... he could only describe the Bill as the worst of all possible things under the best of all possible titles. ... the consequence of this measure if carried into effect, would be ... servile insurrection.”<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Vol. XVII, 14 May 1833, pp. 161, 163[ Buxton “saw no alternative in the rejection of this measure but the precipitation of emancipation by bloodshed and violence.”] Buxton opposed property but supported the proposition of the right gentleman, p. 163.[ Buxton was also opposed to apprenticeship because he was convinced that slaves would not work without wages, p. 162.]

<sup>137</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XIX, 24 July 1833, p. 1190.

<sup>138</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 12 (Reel 4) Extract from *The Morning Herald*, 22 July 1833.

Central to the very debates regarding the clauses that would direct the slaves from slavery to freedom was the issue of slave violence in the colonies. Having subjected their disapproval of most of its measures in order to secure in principle a bill for the abolition of slavery, the anti-slavery leaders persisted for some time in their opposition to apprenticeship. On 12 July 1833, a group of abolitionists waited on Stanley to discuss the apprenticeship issue. Stanley reiterated that apprenticeship must stand or the whole bill would go with it.<sup>139</sup> On 24 July 1833, Buxton rose in the House of Commons and made another bid to have apprenticeship shortened. He reasoned,

“If they [apprentices] were not paid, insurrection would be the consequence and that would be the termination of British authority in those islands ... it was his intention to move ... to limit apprenticeship to the shortest period which could be sufficient for introducing the necessary regulations; and that no money should be paid to the planters until slavery should have been extinguished.”<sup>140</sup>

His motion was defeated. The abolitionists finally conceded defeat on the apprenticeship issue as they had done on compensation. In a memorial to Lord Glenelg the Anti-Slavery Society voiced its general disapproval and distrust of apprenticeship. The Society reluctantly conceded to the scheme, nevertheless, believing that its unsatisfactory measures were still safer than the perpetuation of the present system. The memorialists wrote,

“ ... any attempt to combine freedom with slavery must fail, and they earnestly deprecate any partial,

---

<sup>139</sup> CHARLES, BUXTON. 1852, op. cit., 330; GEORGE, STEPHEN, 1971, op. cit., 230 - 234;

GROSS, IZHAK. 1980, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>140</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 12 (Reel 4) Extract from *The Morning Herald*, 25 July 1833.



imperfect or protracted measure which continued the violation of the great principle of justice, which afford, in their opinion, little relief to the slave and be attended with equal expense and danger to the community. ... The Apprenticeship System, [is] neither safe nor satisfactory, but on the contrary , fraught with evils of such magnitude as to endanger the success of the whole experiment, ... they submit ultimately to the term, not from any conviction of its necessity or utility, but principally from an apprehension of those direful consequences which must have ensued from the rejection or abandonment of the whole measure.”<sup>141</sup>

Buxton, Denman, Brougham and Lushington eventually voted with those who accepted Stanley’s bill on 7 August 1833 after its third reading and hoped for the best in the colonies.<sup>142</sup> They judged that a compromise on freedom was less dangerous than no freedom at all. Thomas Clarkson endorsed the decision of the leading abolitionists in voting for the bill. He seemed to have been similarly persuaded that the compromise of the leaders was a vital sacrifice to safeguard the colonies from servile war. He wrote, “I tremble to think what might have been the consequences, if you had refused the proposals of the Government.”<sup>143</sup> Wilberforce rejoiced that he lived to see the day that Britain was willing to pay £20,000,000 to set its slaves free. He died on 29 July.<sup>144</sup> On 28 August the bill received the royal assent.<sup>145</sup>

## **After Emancipation**

It was with fearful apprehension that Buxton awaited the initial outcome of slave emancipation. He was very sceptical that the experiment as designed by the ministers

---

<sup>141</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 22, G. 44, op. cit., pp. 2 - 3.

<sup>142</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 88, 7 August 1833, p. 647.

<sup>143</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., Clarkson to Buxton, 25 September 1833 from Playford Hall, p. 283.

<sup>144</sup> DEVERELL, LIZ & WATKINS, GARETH. 2000. *Wilberforce and Hull*. Hull: Kingston Press, p. 65.

of Government could be peacefully implemented. His constant preoccupation and repeated prayer in this period was for emancipation with peace and peaceful emancipation. Even before Government had laid out its plan for emancipation, Buxton outlined the precautionary measures he would take in pursuing freedom for the slaves. He imagined that had he the opportunity to speak directly to the slaves,

“I would implore them to do their part towards the peaceful termination of their bondage. I would say to them ‘The time of your deliverance is at hand; let that period be sacred, let it be defiled by no outrage, let it be stained by no blood, let not the hair of the head of a single planter be touched. Make any sacrifice ... rather than raise your hand against any white man ... Preserve peace and order to the utmost of your power’.”<sup>146</sup>

Buxton also wrote to several missionary societies pledging their support to send out more ministers to the colonies in anticipation of abolition. He wrote to the Moravians, the Church Missionary Society, the Baptists and the Wesleyans requesting written answers to specific questions. He believed that the presence of the missionaries could “... tranquilize the minds of the emancipated Negroes through the medium and by the influence of religion.”<sup>147</sup> Buxton had also made it clear to his radical abolitionists critics that he was not willing to entertain emancipation without some form of police regulations. The precautions that Buxton advocated to prepare for emancipation suggest that he was the last of the abolitionists to reassess earlier abolitionists’ ideas that immediate emancipation would ruin the colonies. Buxton believed that, like a strong religious force in the colonies, a form of regimentation was essential to keep

---

<sup>145</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, Vol. 88, 28 August 1833, p. 726.

<sup>146</sup> BUXTON, CHARLES. 1852, op. cit., pp. 278 - 279.

<sup>147</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 3, Letter to the Secretaries of Missionary Societies, 2 November 1832, pp. 37 - 39.



the labour force under control of white managers. He explained,

“ ... in the reform of the greatest abuses, we are bound as legislators to effect them without convulsions. ... the line of our duty, therefore, in this case, as it appears to me , lies in the instant adoption of those Police Regulations which are necessary to secure a peaceable liberation of our slaves ... ”<sup>148</sup>

It was only when the first reports streamed into Britain regarding the slaves' immediate reception of the emancipation degree that Buxton experienced some thankful relief that his worst fears on the slave revolt issue was over. He gave thanks to God that slaves were emancipated and that the abolitionist predictions of imminent apocalyptic doom in the colonies did not materialize. Buxton wrote,

“I prayed for the slavery cause - I turn to the prayer of last year - I cannot but acknowledge that it has been most signally and surprisingly fulfilled - liberty in peace and peaceful liberty to the slaves has been accomplished. ... I prayed that those concerns which have caused much prolonged anxiety might be permitted to prosper - and so they have - the burden has greatly ceased. I have been signally relieved.”<sup>149</sup>

There is no doubt that soon after the Demerara slave revolt of 1823 until slavery was declared abolished in 1834, British abolitionists exploited the slave rebellion argument though they subordinated its dynamic potential to serve only the objectives that they were willing to embrace at any given time. Thus, in the 1820s, this explosive vision of doom and retribution was used merely to call for the implementation of pastoral measures of slave reform while after 1830 it was used to demand complete

---

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., Letter to Mr Sturge, 29 October 1832, p. 34. Buxton also recommended to the Lords' committee of 1832 the need for a strong police force in the West Indies after slavery abolition.

<sup>149</sup> MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, op. cit., Vol. 4, 28 December 1834, p. 288.

and immediate abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, even from the earlier period, the issue of slave violence was alone capable of attacking the West India 'interest' where it was most vulnerable. Abolitionists demonstrated that to maintain a system of unmitigated slavery was to undermine the very property for which those with West India interests, and the British nation as a whole, had so much regard. Furthermore, the abolitionists used the rebellion of the slaves to widen the controversy over the colonial relationship between the Parent State and her colonies. It was an incontrovertible fact that the colonies owed their trade, their bounties, their lives and, most importantly, their property in times of rebellion to the protection of the mother country. Objection to intervention was thus, not only absurd but also suicidal. The laws of the mother country, like its military resources, were framed to protect the domains and people of his Majesty's subjects. Right down to the very last phase of the slavery struggle, the rebellion of the slaves featured strongly. It was upon the issue of slave revolt that abolitionists objected to the emancipation bill in general and to apprenticeship in particular. The conservative leaders of the movement were willing to concede the £20,000,000 compensation to planters to buy their cooperation for peaceful emancipation. They held out longer against apprenticeship because, more than any other clause, it seemed destined to produce servile upheaval. Abolitionists pointed to rebellion to insist that emancipation must not only be granted but its measures must also be safe and satisfactory. Failure to meet these requirements would leave the slaves with no alternative but to take matters in their own hands and force emancipation by war. The bill passed into law, however, without fully satisfying either the conservative or radical abolitionists. Buxton's fearful apprehensions in the penultimate years of slavery, which in part led him to advocate precautionary measures of control, was finally converted to thankful relief only when the first



reports from the colonies confirmed that slaves received the frightful experiment of apprenticeship in peace. Buxton had great difficulty in exercising the faith of such abolitionists as Clarkson that emancipation, however much it compromised the rights of the Negroes, could be both safe and practicable.

## Conclusion

British anti-slavery discourse on the major nineteenth century slave revolts in the English Caribbean colonies was in one sense a defensive discourse. By taking the initiative to rise in rebellion immediately after each wave of abolitionist sponsored programme, the slaves enabled pro-slavery advocates to make a strong case about the incendiary effect of anti-slavery activities on the slaves. The rebellion of the slaves thus forced the abolitionists to forward a counter discourse to the allegations of the planters. This counter discourse vacillated between blunt rejection of the allegations and the acceptance of limited responsibility for the conduct of rebellious slaves. The abolitionists also took the opportunity in this defensive discourse to emphasise the point that their campaign was a noble humanitarian undertaking well worth the risk of servile warfare. The defensive arguments of the abolitionists proved that the mass protest action of the slaves engendered among anti-slavery leaders an extensive deliberation on slave revolts and that the leaders did not flinch in their commitment to the cause even when the rebellions reduced the strength of their support.

British abolitionist commentary on slave rebellions did not consist essentially in a self-defensive position. Anti-slavery activists did not seek merely to contradict the claim that they were instigating slave violence. They were particularly intent in proving that pro-slavery descriptions of nineteenth century slave rebellions were outdated and inaccurate. Planters and their supporters had failed to appreciate or chose to overlook the fact that the rebellions of the last years of slavery in the English Caribbean were devoid of the bloody terror with which they were wont to capture the conduct of rebellious slaves. Abolitionist commentary focused on and presented a completely opposite perspective of the slaves' rebellion. It was a commentary that



refused to dwell on the economic devastation that planter commentators violently denounced in St. Domingue in 1792, Barbados in 1816 and Jamaica in 1831 - 1832. Instead, the abolitionists exulted in the fact that not one piece of plantation property was destroyed in the rising of the slaves in Demerara in 1823. In shaping their analysis of what constituted a slave revolt, British abolitionists also laid great emphasis on the fact that nineteenth century slave rebels without exception demonstrated no intention whatever to take their masters' lives. They did admit that a few whites lost their lives at the hands of rising slave populations but were keen to point out that cold-blooded murder formed no part of the aims of these slave rebellions. The abolitionists' scrutiny of the tactics and objectives of slave rebels captured the multidimensional features of these rebellions. The revolts represented action against unfair treatment. They were processes in labour bargaining. They were holy wars against an unholy regime. They were decisive actions against procrastinating colonial and metropolitan authorities. They were, above all, conscious political movements of an oppressed people staking personal claims for their freedom. Abolitionist depiction of British West Indian slave revolts in the nineteenth century demonstrated the ways in which and the extent to which the rising of the slaves led a band of conservative reformers to adopt some of the revolutionary concepts of the protest actions of working class people. They extended the notion of the rights of the Englishman to include slaves, who were also citizens of Britain. As citizens, slaves too were entitled to enquire about and protest against poor working conditions without being denied their share of even-handed British justice. Nineteenth century slaves in the British West Indies caused abolitionists in metropolitan Britain to abandon some of the negative attitudes they had held towards the egalitarian ideologies that emerged in the age of the American and French revolutions. Abolitionists' slave rebellion commentaries contradicted the



common assumption that slave rebellions were nothing but counterproductive and violent reactions to slavery that ought to be brutally and swiftly suppressed. Abolitionists' treatment of slave revolt was largely sympathetic to the rebels, positively conceptualised and gave esteem to a process that was otherwise readily condemned and dismissed. It was remarkable that to a degree worthy of significant attention, British abolitionists justified the active resistance of slaves in the last phase of British West Indian slavery.

Abolitionists managed the information on slave rebellions in such a manner so as to make it useful to the anti-slavery cause. This was particularly apparent in the indictment they levelled against the suppression of slave revolts. Paradoxically, abolitionists rescued defeated slave rebels from being passive objects of a cruel and dehumanizing system and converted them to agents or martyrs of the anti-slavery cause. The victimization of slaves in rebellion provided the abolitionists with the ammunition they needed to present to the people and parliament of Britain a stinging denunciation of a corrupt and corrupting judicial regime desperately in need of change. The abolitionists demonstrated that the injury that slaves unleashed during rebellion was mild in comparison to the vindictive spirit that dominated the colonists' crushing of slave rebellions. The abolitionists went so far as to examine the suffering of persecuted sectarian missionaries along side that of defeated slave rebels. In abolitionist' eyes, victimized slaves were in the same position as tormented missionaries. The experiences of both slaves and missionaries demanded alterations to the servile regime. The interaction between slave rebellion and anti-slavery in this respect reinforces the solid humanitarian framework that has significantly shaped British abolitionism.

The slave rebellion argument in British abolitionism also served to heighten the



economic dimensions from which the campaigners sought to undermine the servile regime. After the slave rebellion of 1823 in Demerara, anti-slavery activists repeatedly emphasized the way in which the real threat of servile war threatened the very property that made the slave plantation economies of the colonies so valuable to its stakeholders. Emphasizing the danger of rebellion provided the campaigners with a definition of their mission. It was a mission to warn West Indian property holders, absentee and resident, that it was in their interest to support the anti-slavery initiative in an effort to stave off the destruction of their colonial possessions and possibly even their lives. The anti-slavery/slave rebellion message of warning was directed as well to the Government and Parliament of Britain. Abolitionists insisted that slave rebellion made it glaringly apparent that Britain ought to implement a more authoritative mode of directing affairs in her colonies in order to maintain possession of this branch of her colonial possessions. The abolitionists also used the rebellions to alert the mother country to the fact that despite the objections of the colonists, the survival of the colonies was dependent on the intervention of Britain.

The open resistance to slavery of nineteenth century slaves in the British West Indies provided humanitarian reformers on the other side of the Atlantic with the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse. Although this discourse has hitherto remained hidden from history, it was extensive and varied. It was a discourse that took shape before abolitionists demanded emancipation and when emancipation ultimately became the objective it was used as a significant reinforcement. It shifted its focus from being a defensive abolitionist instrument to being a medium through which plantocratic descriptions of slave revolts were challenged and replaced by a more positive interpretation of the slaves' overt resistance. The slaves' conduct had so challenged the outlook of conservative humanitarian reformers that some of the very

revolutionary doctrines that the abolitionists had rejected in Europe were employed to expand their attack against slavery. In the final analysis, the abolitionist slave rebellion discourse was a propaganda tool used to justify different stages of abolitionist demands.

This study of how the experience of nineteenth century rebel slaves travelled with the currents of the Atlantic from the shores of the West Indian slave colonies to the hallowed hall of Westminster in metropolitan Britain is by no means the definitive study on slave resistance history. It is outside the range of the research to investigate fully two important issues that have been raised in the discussions. A satisfactory articulation of abolitionists' comparative assessment of the value of persecuted missionaries and punished slaves in the aftermath of these rebellions to the metropolitan anti-slavery campaign is still required. Secondly, the thesis strongly suggests the need to establish one way or the other whether these rebellions were influenced by factors external to the slaves.



## **Bibliography**

### **Unpublished Manuscripts**

Anti- Slavery Society Papers - MSS. Brit. Emp. S 18, C 1 - 71, Correspondence of Thomas Pringle, Secretary of the Committee on Slavery, 13 March 1827 - December 1834. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

Anti-Slavery Society Papers - MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 20 E 2/ 1 - 4, Minute Books of the Committee on Slavery and of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society from the period 1 January 1823 to 1833. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

Anti-Slavery Society Papers - MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 22 G. 44, 1795 - 1839, General. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

Brougham MSS - Letters to Henry Brougham. University College London Library, London.

Buxton, Sir Thomas Fowell - MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 444, Volumes 1, 3, 4, 10 and 12. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

Clarkson, Thomas Papers (microfilm) from the originals at the Huntington Library, San Antonio, California, in *Abolition and Emancipation*, Part 1, Reels 1 and 1a, Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publications, 1997.

CO (Colonial Office) 28/85. President Spooner and Sir James Leith, Barbados 1816. Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, London.

CO 111/39, 42, 47. John Murrery, Demerara, 183 - 1824. Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, London.

CO 137/181. Somerset Lowry Earl of Belmore, Jamaica, Vol. 1, January - March 1832. Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, London.

Macaulay, Zachary Papers (microfilm) from the originals at the Huntington Library, San Antonio, California, in *Abolition and Emancipation*, Part 1, Reel 4, Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publications, 1997.

MS 725, Memorial from the West India Planters and Merchants. Institute of Jamaica, Kingston.

*Tweedie Estate Records*, File 4/45, 5 January 1832, No. 49 - 50, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town.

WILTSHIRE, ANTHONY. 1983. *The Reaction of the Barbadian Plantocracy to Amelioration, 1823 - 1833I*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.

### **Newspaper sources**

*Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette* (microfilm). National Library of Barbados.

*Cornwall Courier*, (microfilm) Institute of Jamaica: Kingston.

*The Jamaican Courant*. Institute of Jamaica, Kingston.

*Port Royal Gazette*, (microfilm) Institute of Jamaica, Kingston.

*The Times* of London (microfilm). Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull.

*The Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, (microfilm) Institute of Jamaica, Kingston.



## Published Primary sources

Agency Anti-Slavery Committee. 1833. *The Danger of Delay, and the Safety and Practicability of Immediate Emancipation, From the Evidence before the Parliamentary Committees on Colonial Slavery*. London: W. Johnston. Local Studies Library, Hull.

*Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, Vol. 1, Nos. 5 - 24, October 1825 - May 1827; Vol. 2, Nos. 25 - 48, June 1827 - May 1829; Vol. 3, Nos. 56 - 72 January 1830 - December 1830; Vol. 4, Nos. 73 - 76, January 1831 - February 1831. London: J. Hatchard. (The issues from Vol. 3, No. 63, July 1830 were renamed *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*.) Local Studies Library, Hull.

*The Baptist Magazine*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. III, January 1833, "Sketch of the Life of William Wilberforce Esq. With a Review of the Present State of the Anti-Slavery Cause". Local Studies Library, Hull.

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY. 1832. *Colonial Slavery - Defense of the Baptist Missionaries From The Charge of Inciting the Late Rebellion in Jamaica; in a Discussion between the Reverend William Knibb and Mr. P. Borthwick At The Assembly Rooms on Saturday 15 December 1832*. London: Tourist Office Paternoster Row. Angus Library, Baptist Missionary Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY. 1832. *Facts and Documents Connected With the Late Insurrection in Jamaica and the Violations of Civil and Religious Liberty arising out of it*. London: Holsworth and Ball. Anti-Slavery International, Broomsgrove Road, London.

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY. 1833. *A Narrative of Recent Events Connected with The Baptist Mission In This Island Comprising also A Sketch of the Mission from its Commencement in 1814 to the end of 1831*. Jamaica: Edward Jordan and Robert Osborn. Angus Library, Baptist Missionary Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1804. *A Concise Statement of The Question Regarding the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. London: J. Hatchard, T. N. Longman and O. Rees.

CLARKSON, T. 1824. *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies; with a view to ultimate Emancipation; and on the practicability, the safety and the advantage of the latter measure*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

*Cobbet's Parliamentary Debates*.

CROPPER, JAMES. 1822. *Letters Addressed to William Wilberforce, M. P. Recommending the Encouragement of the Cultivation of Sugar in our Dominions in the East Indies, as the Natural and Certain Means of Effecting the General and Total Abolition of the Slave Trade*. Liverpool: Longman, Hurst and Co. Angus Library, Baptist Missionary Society Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

*Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*.

*Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 88, Session of 1833.

*The London Missionary Society's Report of The Proceedings against the late Reverend John Smith of Demerara, Minister of the Gospel... and Including the Documentary Evidence omitted in the Parliamentary Copy With an Appendix; containing the Letters and Statements of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Elliot, Mr. Arrindell, &C and also, the Society's Petitions to the House of Commons*. The whole



published Under the authority of The Directors of the Said Society. London: F. Westley. Anti-Slavery International, Broomsgrove Road, London.

*The Missionary Smith - Substance of The Debate in the House of Commons on Tuesday the 1<sup>ST</sup> and Friday the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 1824 on A Motion of Henry Brougham, Esq. Respecting the Trial and Condemnation to Death by a Court Martial to the Rev. John Smith, Late Missionary in the colony of Demerara With a Preface Containing Some new Facts Illustrative of the Subject.* London: J. Hatchard and Son.

*Parliamentary History of England.*

*British Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 66. Demerara Minutes of Evidence on the Trial of John Smith a Missionary 1824 (158), Vol. XXIII.* Shannon, Ireland: IUP.

*British Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relating to the Slave Trade 1831 - 1834, Slave Trade 80. Jamaica A Report from the House of Assembly on the injury sustained during the recent Rebellion, 1831 - 1832(561), Vol. XLVII, pp. 189 - 234.*

*British Parliamentary Papers, Report From The Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index, 11 August, 1832.*

RAMSAY, J. 1786. *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies.* London: James Phillips, George Yard, Lombard Street.

Anonymous. 1816. *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados and The Bill for the Registration of Slaves.* London: Ellerton and Henderson.

*The Report from A Select Committee to the House of Assembly, Appointed to inquire into the Origins, Causes and Progress of the Late Insurrection.* Barbados 1818, W. Walker, Mercury and Gazette Office. Barbados Central Library, Bridgetown.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1823. *East and West India Sugar; or,  
A Refutation of the Claims of the West India Colonists to a Protecting Duty on East  
India Sugar*. London: J. Hatchard and Son. Angus Library, Baptist Missionary Society  
Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1823 "Negro Slavery No. VII.  
Insurrection of Slaves in the West Indies particularly in Demerara" in *Tracts of the  
Anti-Slavery Society*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1823 "Negro Slavery No. VIII.  
Insurrection in the West Indies; St. Lucia, Trinidad, Dominica and Demerara" in  
*Tracts of the Anti-Slavery Society*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1823. *Negro Slavery or A View of  
the More Prominent Features of that State of Society as it exists in the United States  
of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies Especially in Jamaica*. London: J.  
Hatchard and Son.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1824. *A Review of Some Of The  
Arguments Which Are Commonly Advanced Against Parliamentary Interference In  
Behalf Of The Negro Slaves, With A Statement Of Opinions Which Have Been  
Expressed On That Subject By Many Of Our Most Distinguished Statesmen*. London:  
J. Hatchard and Son.



SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1826. "Barbados - New Slave Law"  
in *The Slave Colonies of Great Britain; or A Picture of Negro Slavery drawn by the  
Colonists Themselves; being An Abstract of the Various Papers Recently Laid Before  
Parliament on that Subject*. Second Edition, Corrected. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1833. *Abstract of the Report of the  
Lords Committee on the Condition and Treatment of The Colonial Slaves, and of The  
Evidence taken by them on that subject; With notes by the Editor*. London: J. Hatchard  
and Son.

SOCIETY FOR THE MITIGATION AND GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY  
THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS. 1833. *Analysis of The Report of a  
Committee of the House of Commons on the Extinction of Slavery*. London: J.  
Hatchard. Local Studies Library, Hull.

STEPHEN, JAMES SIR. 1824. *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies  
Delineated, As It Exists Both in Law and Practice, and Compared with The Slavery of  
Other Colonies, Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 1. Aberdeen: A Constable and Co.

STEPHEN, JAMES. 1830. *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies Delineated,  
As it Exists Both in Law and Practice, and Compared with The Slavery of Other  
Colonies, Ancient and Modern*. Vol. II. Being a Delineation of the State in Point of  
Practice. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1807. *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade;  
Addressed to the Freeholders and other inhabitants of Yorkshire*. London: T. Cadell  
and W. Davies, Strand; and J. H. Piccadilly.

WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. 1823. *An Appeal to Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

WILBERFORCE, WILLIAM. (ed.) 1823. *Tracts of the Anti-Slavery Society*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

### Contemporary Sources

BLEBY, HENRY. 1853. *Death Struggles of Slavery*. London.

BROUGHAM, HENRY. 1838. *The Speeches of Henry, Lord Brougham, Upon Questions Relating to Public Rights, Duties and Interests With Historical Introduction and A Critical Dissertation Upon the Eloquence of the Ancients in Four Volumes, Vol. II*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black

BROUGHAM, H. 1857. *Works of Henry, Lord Brougham Speeches on Social and Political Subjects, Vol. X*. London and Glasgow: Richard Griffin and Company.

BRYANT, JOSHUA. 1824. *An Account of the Insurrection of the Negro Slaves in the colony of Demerara which broke out on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 1823*. Demerara: Guiana Chronicle Office, Georgetown.

BUXTON, C. 1852. *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. Fifth edition. London: John Murray.

*Edinburgh Review*



GODWIN, B. 1830. *The Substance of a course of lectures on British Colonial Slavery*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

HEYRICK, E. 1824. *Immediate Not Gradual Abolition or An Enquiry into the Shortest, Safest and most effectual means of getting rid of West Indian Slavery*. London: J. Hatchard and Son.

HINTON, JOHN HOWARD. 1847. *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica*. London: Houlston and Stoneman.

*Quarterly Review*.

RICHARD, HENRY. 1864, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*. London: Patridge and Bennet

STEPHEN, GEORGE. 1971. *Anti-Slavery Recollections in A Series of Letters Addressed to Mrs. Beecher Stowe*. Second edition. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd. (First edition, 1854)

WALLBRIDGE, EDWIN A. 1848. *The Demerara Martyr. Memoirs of the Reverend John Smith, Missionary to Demerara*. Demerara: Charles Gilpin,.

WILBERFORCE, ROBERT I. and WILBERFORCE, SAMUEL. 1838. *The Life of William Wilberforce* in five volumes. London: John Murray.

## **Secondary Sources**

ABZUG, ROBERT. 1970. "The Influence of Garrisonian Abolitionist Fears of Slave Violence on the Anti-Slavery Argument" in *Journal of Negro Slavery*, Vol. LV, No. 1, January 1970, pp. 15 - 28.

ARGOSAH, K. (ed.) 1994. *Maroon Heritage - Archaeological, Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives*. Barbados: Canoe Press.

ANSTEY ROGER. 1968. "Capitalism and Slavery: A Critique" in *Economic History Review*, Vol. 21, pp.307-330.

THOMPSON, BAKPETU. 1987. *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas 1442 – 1900*. England: Longman.

BARCLAY, ALEXANDER. 1827. *Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies or An Examination of Mr. Stephen's 'Slavery of the British West India Colonies ...'* Second Edition, London: Smith Elder and Co.

BECKLES, H. 1982. "The Two Hundred Year War: Slave Resistance in the British West Indies. An Overview of the Historiography" in *The Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. 13, 1982. pp.1-10.

BECKLES, HILARY. 1984. "Inside Bussa's Rebellion: Letters of Colonel John Rycroft Best" in *The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*. Vol. XXXVII, No. 2, 1984.

BECKLES, H. 1987. *Black Rebellion in Barbados: the Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838*. Bridgetown, Barbados: Carib Research and Publications Inc.

BECKLES, HILARY. 1990. *A History of Barbados from Amerindian Settlement to Nation State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BECKLES, M. 1990. "Caribbean anti-slavery: The Self-Liberation Ethos of Enslaved Blacks" in *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 22, Nos. 1 & 2. pp.1-19. Also in

BECKLES, HILARY. 2001. "Caribbean Anti-Slavery: The Self-Liberation Ethos of



Enslaved Blacks” in Verene Sheppherd and Hilary Beckles (eds.), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.

BLACKBURN, ROBIN. 1988. *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848*. London: Verso.

BOUBACAR, BARRY. 1998. *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BRADLEY, I. 1985. “Wilberforce the Saint” Jack Hayward (ed.) in *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

BRIZAN, G. 1984. *Grenada: Island of Conflict: from Amerindians to People's Revolution, 1498-1979*. London: Zed Books.

BROWN, C. L. 1999. “Empire Without Slaves; British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution” in *William and Mary Quarterly - A Magazine of Early American History and Culture. African and American Atlantic Worlds*. Third Series, Vol. LXI, No.2. Williamsburgh: Omuhundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.

BURN, W. L. 1937. *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.

BURN, W. L. 1965. *History of the British West Indies*. Second edition. London: George Unwin Ltd.

BURNS, SIR ALAN. 1965. *History of the British West Indies*. Revised Second Edition, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

BUSH, B. 1985. "Toward Emancipation: Slave Women and Resistance to Coercive Labour Regimes in the British West Indian Colonies, 1790-1838" in David Richardson (ed.) *Abolition and its Aftermath*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

BUTLER, KATHLEEN MARY. 1995. *The Economics of Emancipation Jamaica and Barbados, 1823 - 1843*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.

CAMPBELL, JOHN. 2001. "Reassessing the Consciousness of Labour and the Role of the 'Confidentials' in Slave Society: Jamaica 1750 - 1834" in *The Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. XXI, 2001 Kingston, Jamaica: The Jamaican Historical Society.

CARRION, I. P. 1998. *Freedom Road*. Cuba: Jose Marti Publishing House.

COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1923. *Wilberforce A Narrative*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

COUPLAND, REGINALD. 1933. *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*. London: Thorton Butterworth, Ltd.

CORMACK, P. 1983. *Wilberforce. The Nation's Conscience*. England: Pickering Paperbacks.

CRATON, MICHAEL. 1974. *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery*. New York.

CRATON, MICHAEL; WALVIN, JAMES & WRIGHT, DAVID. 1976. *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation - Black Slaves and the British Empire. A Thematic Documentary*. London: Longman.



CRATON, MICHAEL. 1979. "Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816 - 1832" in *Past and Present* No. 85, Nov., 1979.

CRATON, MICHAEL. 1980. "The Passion to Exist: Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies; 1650 - 1832" in *The Journal of Caribbean History* 1980, Vol. XIII, Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann Education Books Ltd.

CRATON, M. 1982. "Slave Culture, Resistance and the Achievement of Emancipation in the British West Indies, 1783-1838." in James Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*. London and Basingstoke: The Mac Millan Press Ltd. pp.100-122.

CRATON, M 1982. *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. London: Cornell University Press.

CRATON, M. 1985. "Emancipation From Below? The Role of the British West Indian Slaves in the Emancipation Movement, 1816-1834" in *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. Jack Hayward (ed.). London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

CRATON, M. 1997. *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean*. Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.

CURTIN, PHILLIP. 1968. *Two Jamaicas The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony 1830 - 1865*. New York: Greenwood Press Publishers.

DAVIS, DAVIS B. 1962. "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Anti-Slavery Thought" in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2, September 1962.

DAVIS, DAVIS B. 1974. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770 - 1823*.

DAVIS, DAVIS. B. 1984. *Slavery and Human Progress*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DAVIS, DAVIS. B. 1987. "Capitalism, Abolitionism and Hegemony" in Babara Solow and Stanley Engerman (eds.) *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery - The Legacy of Eric Williams*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DOOKHAN, I. 1971. *A pre-Emancipation History of the West Indies*. London: Collins.

DRESCHER, SEYMOUR. 1977. *Econocide British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

DRESCHER, SEYMOUR. 1985. "The Historical Context of British Abolitionism" in David Richardson (ed ) *Abolition and Its Aftermath. The Historical Context, 1790 - 1816*. London: Frank Cass and Co.

DRESSER, MADGE. 2001. *Slavery Obscured The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port*. London and New York: Continuum.

EDWARDS, BRYAN. 1973. "Observations on the Disposition, Character, Manner and Habits of Life; and a Detail of the Origin, Progress and Termination of the Late War Between those People and the White Inhabitants" in PRICE, RICHARD (ed.). 1973, op. cit., pp. 230 - 245 being an extract from EDWARDS, BRYAN. 1807. *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Vol. I, Appendix 2, pp. 522 - 535, 537 - 545. London. First published separately in 1796.

ELTIS, D. 1970 "Dr. Lushington and the Campaign to Abolish Slavery in the British Empire" in *The Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 1, pp. 41 - 56.



ELTIS, D. 1982. "Abolitionists perception of Society after Slavery". in James Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*. London and Basingstoke: The Mac Millan Press Ltd. pp. 195- 213.

EVANS, ERIC. 1989. *Britain Before the Reform Act: Politics and Society 1815 - 1832*. New York: Longman.

FINALSON, W. F. 1869. *The History of the Jamaican Case Being an Account founded upon Official Documents of the Rebellion of the Negroes in Jamaica The Cause which led to it and the Measures taken for its Suppression, the Agitation excited on the subject Its Causes and its Character and the Debates in Parliament, and the Criminal Persecution, arising out of it*. London: Chapman and Hall.

FINDLAY, GEORGE. 1921. *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*. London: Epworth Press.

FURNESS, A. E. 1965. "George Hibbert and the Defence of Slavery in the West Indies" in *The Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. V, No. 1, May 1965, pp. 56 - 70.

GARDNER, W. J. 1971. *A History of Jamaica. From its Discovery by Christopher Columbus to the year 1872*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

GASPAR, DAVID BARRY. 1978. "The Antiguan Slave Conspiracy of 1736 - A Case Study of the Origins of Collective Resistance" in *William and Mary Quarterly A Magazine of Early American History*. Third Series, Vol. XXXV, April 1978, pp. 308 - 323.

GASPAR & GEGGUS (eds.) 1997. *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

GEGGUS, DAVID. 1982. "British Opinion and the Emergence of Haiti, 1791-1805" in James Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*. London and Basingstoke: The Mac Millan Press Ltd. pp.123-149.

GEGGUS, DAVID. 1982. *Slavery, War and Revolution. The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

GEGGUS, DAVID. 1985. "Haiti and the Abolitionists: Opinion, Propaganda and International Politics in Britain and France, 1804 - 1838" in David Richardson (ed.) *Abolition and Its Aftermath The Historical Context, 1790 - 1916*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

GENOVESE, E. 1979. *From Rebellion to Revolution. Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press.

GOVEIA, ELSA. 1977. *Amelioration and Emancipation in the British Caribbean*. St Augustine: University of the West Indies.

GOODRIDGE, S. 1981. *Facing the Challenge of Emancipation: A Study of the Ministry of William Hart Coleridge, First Bishop of Barbados 1824-1842*. Barbados: Cedar Press.

GRATUS, JACK. 1973. *The Great White Lie. Slavery Emancipation and Changing Racial Attitudes*. London and New York: Monthly Review Press.

GROSS, IZHAK. 1980. "The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics 1832 - 1833" in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 1980, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

HARRIS, J. 1926. *Slavery or Sacred Trust?* London: Williams and Norgate Ltd.



HART, RICHARD. 1985. *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery, - Blacks in Rebellion*. Vol.2  
Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research.

HAYWARD, JACK. 1985. *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass  
and Co., Ltd.

HERSKOVITTS, MELVILLE. 1958. *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Boston: Beacon  
Press.

HEUMAN, GAD. (ed.) 1986. *Out of the House of Bondage Runaways, Resistance  
and Marronage in Africa and the New World*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

HEUMAN, GAD. 1996. "A Tale of Two Jamaican Rebellions" in *The Jamaican  
Historical Review*, Vol. XIX.

HIGMAN, BARRY. 1967. "The West India 'Interest' in Parliament 1807 – 1833".  
*Historical Studies*, No. 13, Oct. 1967.

HIGMAN, BARRY. 1976. *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834*.  
Manchester: Manchester University Press.

HOBBSBAWM, E.J. and RUDE, GEORGE. 1969. *Captain Swing*. London: Lawrence  
and Wishart.

HOLLIS, PATRICIA. 1980. "Anti-Slavery and British Working Class Radicalism in  
the Years of Reform" in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.) *Anti-Slavery,  
Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*. England: Wm Dawson and  
Sons Ltd.

IFILL, M. 1990. *Social Death or Communal Victory?. A Critical Appraisal of Slavery  
and Social Death by Orlando Patterson*. Trinidad: Economic and Business Research.

JAKOBSSON, STIV. 1972. *Am I Not A Man And A Brother? British Missions and the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in West Africa and the West Indies 1786 - 1838*, Uppsala: Gleerup

JAMES, C. L. R. 1938. *The Black Jacobins Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. London: Allison and Busby Ltd.

JAMES, C. L. R. 1969. *A History of Negro Revolt*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd.

JOHNSON, ELIZABETH. 1977. "The Historiography of Slave Rebellion: Cuba in a Hemispheric Perspective" in *The Journal of Caribbean History*. Vol. XXXI, Nos. 1&2, 1977. Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press.

KLEIN, M. "The International Labour Market and the Emancipation of Slaves in the Nineteenth Century" in Paul Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers (eds.) *Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World*. England: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

KLINBERG, FRANK. J. 1926. *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

KNIGHT, F. K. 1997. *The Disintegration of the Caribbean Slave Systems, 1772-1886*. UNESCO Publishing.

KOPYTOFF, BARBARA. 1978. "The Early Political Development of Jamaican Maroon Societies in *William and Mary Quarterly. A Magazine of Early American History*, Third Series, Vol. XXXV, April 1978.

LAURENCE, K. O. 1995. *Tobago in Wartime- 1793-1815*. Jamaica: The University of the West Indies.



LEWIS, ANDREW. 1995. "An Incendiary Press: British West Indian Newspapers During the Struggle for Abolition" in *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 16, No. 3, Dec. 1995.

LEVY CLAUDE. 1970. "Slavery and the Emancipation Movement in Barbados, 1650 - 1833" in *Journal of Negro Slavery*, Vol. 55, January 1970, No. 1, pp. 1 - 14.

LEVY, CLAUDE. 1980. *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism. Barbados and the West Indies, 1833 – 1876*. Florida: University Press of Florida.

LEWIS, GORDON. 1978. *Slavery, Imperialism and Freedom: Studies in English Radical Thought*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press.

LEWIS, GORDON. 1983. *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492 - 1900*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.

LUSTER, R. 1995. *The Amelioration of the Slaves in the British Empire, 1790-1833*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

MARSHALL, BERNARD. 1976. "Maroons in Slave Plantation Societies: A Case Study of Dominica, 1785 - 1815" in *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, Nos. 2 & 3, June, September, 1976.

MATHIESON, W. L. 1926. *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838*. New York: Longman's, Green and Co., Ltd.

MC GOWAN, WINSTON. 1990. "Christianity and Slavery" in Hazel Woolford and David Granger (eds.) *History Gazette*. No. 24, Sep. 1990. Guyana: History Society.

MELLOR, G. R. 1951. *British Imperial Trusteeship 1783-1850*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

MIDGLEY, CLARE. 1992. *Women Against Slavery The British Campaigns, 1780 - 1870*. London and New York: Routledge.

MOLESWORTH, WILLIAM. 1877. *History of England from the Year 1830 - 1874*, Vol. I. London: Chapman and HALL.

MULLIN & WALVIN. 1972. *Flight and Rebellion, England, Slaves and Freedom*. New York:

NEW, CHESTER. 1967. *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

NORTHCOTT, CECIL. 1976. *Slavery's Martyr: John Smith of Demerara and the Emancipation Movement, 1817-1824*. London: Epsworth Press.

PATTERSON, ORLANDO. 1970. "Slavery and Slave Revolts A Socio-Historical Analysis of the First Maroon War, Jamaica, 1655 - 1740" in *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, March 1970. UWI, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research. Also published in PRICE, RICHARD (ed.). 1973. *Maroon Societies Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, Part V, Jamaica, pp. 246 - 292.

PATTERSON, ORLANDO. 1985. "Slavery: The Underside of Freedom" in Jack Hayward (ed.) *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After* London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

PRICE, RICHARD (ed.). 1973. *Maroon Societies Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday.

RAGATZ, L. 1977. *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1776-1833. A Social and Economic History*. New York : Octagon Books.



RECKFORD, MARY. 1971. "The Colonial Office and the Abolition of Slavery" in *Historical Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 4 pp. 723 - 734.

RECKFORD, MARY. 1968. "The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831" in *Past and Present A Journal of Historical Studies*, No. 40, pp. 108 - 125.

RICHARDSON, R. K. 1987. *Moral Imperium- Afro Caribbeans and the Transformation of British Rule, 1776-1838*. New York: Greenwood Press.

RODWAY, JAMES. 1893. *History of British Guiana from the year 1682 to the Present Time*. Vol. II, 1782 – 1833. Demerara: J. Thompson.

SCHOMBURGK, R. H. 1971. *The History of Barbados*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

SCHULER, MONICA. 1970. "Ethnic Slave Rebellion in the Caribbean and the Guianas" in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. III, No. 4, Summer 1970. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

SHERIDAN, R. 1974. *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1625-1775*. Barbados: Caribbean University Press.

SHORT, K. R. M. 1976. "Jamaican Christian Missions and the Great Slave Rebellion of 1831-1832" in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 27. No.1. pp. 57 - 72.

SIMON, K. 1929. *Slavery*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

SMALL & WALVIN. 1994. "African Resistance to Enslavement" in Anthony Tibbles (ed.) *Transatlantic Slavery. Against Human Dignity*. London: National Museum and Galleries, HUSO.

SPIERS, F. 1985. "William Wilberforce: 150 Years On" Jack Hayward (ed.) *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

STANLEY BRIAN. 1992. *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792 - 1992*.  
Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1972. *British antislavery 1833 - 1870*. London: Longman.

TEMPERLEY, HOWARD. 1985 "Abolitionism and the National Interest" Jack  
Hayward (ed.) *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd.

TIBBLES, A. (ed.). 1994 *Transatlantic Slavery. Against Human Dignity* London:  
National Museum and Galleries, HUSO.

THOMPSON, VINCENT BAPEKTU. 1987. *The Making of the African Diaspora in  
the Americas 1442 - 1900*. England: Longman.

THOMSON, ANDREW. 1830. *Substance of the Speech Delivered at the Meeting of  
The Edinburgh Society for the Abolition of Slavery, on October 19, 1830*. Edinburgh :  
William Whyte and Co.

TURLEY, DAVID. 1991. *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery 1780 - 1860*. London:  
Routledge.

TURNER, MARY. 1982. "The Baptist War and Abolition" in *The Jamaican  
Historical Review*, Vol. XIII, Sam Sharpe Rebellion 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue, pp. 31 -  
41.

TURNER, MARY. 1982. *Slaves and Missionaries. The Disintegration of Jamaican  
Society, 1787-1834*. London: University of Illinois Press.

TURNER, S. 1975. "The Bishop of Jamaica and Slave Instruction" in *Journal of  
Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 34. No.4. pp.363-378.



WADDELL, HOPE MASTERSTON REV. 1970. *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa. A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure 1829 - 1858*. Second Edition. London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd.

WALVIN, JAMES. 1977. *Questioning Slavery*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

WALVIN, JAMES. 1980. "The Rise of British Popular Sentiment for Abolition 1781 - 1832" in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.). *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform in England*: Wm. Dawson and Sons, Ltd.

WALVIN, JAMES. (ed.). 1982. *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*. London and Basingstoke: The Mac Millan Press Ltd.

WALVIN, JAMES. 1983. *Slavery and the Slave Trade- A Short Illustrated History*. London: The Mac Millan Press Ltd.

WALVIN, JAMES. 1985. "Freeing the Slaves: How Important was Wilberforce?" Jack Hayward (ed.) *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*. London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd

WALVIN, JAMES. 1986, *England, Slaves and Freedom 1776 - 1835*. England: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

WALVIN, JAMES. 1992. *Slaves and Slavery: The British Colonial Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

WALVIN, JAMES. 1994. "British Abolitionism" in *Transatlantic Slavery. Against Human Dignity* Anthony Tibbles (ed.). London: National Museum and Galleries.  
HUSO.

WARNER, OLIVER. 1962. *William Wilberforce and His Times*. London: B. T. Batsford Ltd.

WEBBER, R. F. 1931. *Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana*. British Guiana: The Argosy Co., Ltd.

WILLIAMS, E. 1944. *Capitalism and Slavery*. London: Andre Deutsch.

WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1952. *Documents on British West Indian History, 1807 – 1833 (Select Documents from the P.R. O., London, England, Relating to the Colonies of Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad)*. Port-of-Spain: Trinidad Publishing Co., Ltd.

WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1966. *British Historians and the West Indies*. London: Andre Deutsch.

WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1970. *From Columbus to Castro. The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969*. London: Andre Deutsch.

WILLIAMS, ERIC.(ed.) 1975. *The British West Indies at Westminster Part 1: 1789-1823- Extracts from the Debates in Parliament*. Connecticut: Negro University Press.

WILLIAMS, ERIC. 1977. *The March to Liberty Through Jesus Christ. A Discourse On Slavery and Emancipation*. Trinidad: Citadel Publishing Service.

WRIGHT, P. 1973. *Knibb 'The Notorious' Slaves Missionary, 1803-1845*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson.

[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk)

### **Sources on historical philosophy**

BLOCH, M. 1954. *The Historian's Craft* (translated by Peter Putnam with an introduction by Joseph R. Strayer). Manchester: Manchester University Press.



CARR, E. H. 1961. *What is History?* England: Mac Millan.

DUNNE, T. 1987. "The Writer as Witness" in *Historical Studies*, Vol. XVI. Cornell University Press.

ELTON, G. R. 1967. *The Practice of History*. London and Glasgow: Sydney University Press.

ELTON, & FOGEL. 1983. *Which Road to the Past? Two Views of History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

EVANS, J. L. 1985. *The Foundations of Empiricism*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

FAY B. 1998. "Nothing But History; Reconstruction and Extremity after Metaphysicalism" in *History and Theory*, Vol.37, pp.83-90.

FINLEY, M. I. 1985. *Ancient History: Evidence and Models*. London: Chatto and Windus.

JENKINS, K. 1991. *Re-Thinking History*. London: Routledge.

KEARNS, K. 1997. *Psychoanalysis, Historiography and Feminist Theory. The Search for Critical Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LORENZ, C. 1978. "Can Histories be True?" in *History and Theory*, Vol. 37, pp. 308 - 333.

MARTIN, R. 1995. "On Telling the Truth about History" in *History and Theory*, Vol. 34. pp. 320 - 329.

PARTNER, N. 1998. "Hayden White; The Form of the Content" in *History and Theory*. Vol. 37, pp. 162 - 172.

SAMUEL, R. 1990. "Grand Narratives" in *History of Workshop Journal*, Issue 29.

WHITE, H. 1978. *The Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.

WHITE, H. 1984. "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" in *History and Theory - Studies in Philosophy of History, Vol. 23*. (ed.) George H. Nadel et al Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University. pp. 1 - 33.

WHITE H. 1987. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.