

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

**Power and Persuasion: The London West India Committee, 1783-1833**

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**by**

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## **Abstract**

In 1783 the West India interest – absentee planters, merchants trading to the West Indies and colonial agents - organised into a formal lobbying group as a consequence of the government's introduction of colonial and economic policies that were at odds with its political and economic interests. Between 1783 and 1833, the London West India Committee acted as political advocates for the merchant and planter interest in Britain, and the planters residing in the West Indies, lobbying the government for regulatory advantage and protection of its monopoly.

This thesis is a study of the London West India Committee. It charts the course of British anti-abolition through the lens of its membership and by drawing on its meeting minutes it seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of its lobbying strategies, activities and membership, and further insight into its political, cultural and social outlook. It explores its reactions to the threat to its political and commercial interests by abolitionist agitation, commercial and colonial policy that provoked challenges to colonial authority.

It argues that the proslavery position was not as coherent and unified as previously assumed, and that the range of views on slavery and emancipation fractured consensus among the membership. Rather than focus primarily on the economic aspects of their lobbying strategy this thesis argues for a broader analysis of the West India Committee's activities, exploring the decline of the planter class from a political perspective.

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## Introduction

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain accumulated vast resources of wealth through the production of sugar in its West Indian colonies. Sugar enriched the lives and fortunes of many West Indian planters, as well as those of the merchants who furnished them with supplies and credit. It also required a large labour force to cultivate it. British merchant ships had been transporting enslaved Africans to the West Indies for that purpose since the end of the sixteenth century; what had begun as a modest enterprise became an extensive and highly competitive trade. Forced African labour brought vast changes to the Atlantic world; Europe's sweet tooth desired sugar, and England was its major consumer. As early as 1660, sugar was England's most valuable import from her West Indian colonies.<sup>1</sup> The involvement with the transatlantic slave trade provided the key element that determined the profitability of the West Indian colonies. Plantation slavery, which formed part of the 'triangular' trade of manufactured goods from England, enslaved workers from Africa and sugar from the West Indies, became the basis for a booming international economy. The profits that flowed from the West Indies into Britain and the commerce generated between colony and metropole shaped the British economy and created a powerful merchant and planter interest that played a significant role in the development of political, economic and moral discourses in Britain.

This thesis is a study of the London West India Committee, a lobby comprised of planters and merchants who acted as advocates for the West India interest. It explores its reactions to threats to West Indian society and economy as represented by the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, and metropolitan challenges to colonial authority. These events took place between the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, and the Act to emancipate the

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Rawley, *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade* (Columbia, MO; London: University of Missouri Press 2003), p. 2

enslaved population in the British West Indies in 1833. By examining the entries of the West India Committee's minute books, the thesis seeks to answer six questions: who were the men that made up the membership of the West India Committee? What were their objectives during the period under study, and the tactics they employed in achieving them? How did they function as an organisation, what were their political arguments, and how did these things change over time? It argues that the West India Committee was not a coherent and unified group; it was not univocal in its reactions and strategies to prevent abolition and emancipation. These events tended to fracture consensus among its membership which had an impact on its organisation and lobbying activities.

The minutes of the West India Committee offer insight into how it reacted to changes in government policy brought about by the campaigns to abolish the slave trade and slavery. They also provide insight into how the lobby functioned and was structured. Studying these aspects of the minutes means that this thesis provides a more comprehensive study of this organisation that goes beyond the traditional study of its identity as an economic lobby.<sup>2</sup> This thesis makes no contribution to the historiography that debates the factors that contributed to abolition of the slave trade and slavery, although some of these issues are explored at various points.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it engages with recent discussions on West Indian plantership and slave

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<sup>2</sup> Key economic studies on merchants and planters include Richard Pares, 'Merchants and Planters,' *Economic History Review, Supplement No. 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1960); Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Barbados: Caribbean Universities Press 1974); S.D. Smith, 'Merchants and Planters Revisited,' *Economic History Review*, 55:3 (2002), pp. 434-465

<sup>3</sup> The extensive literature on abolition discusses the primary factors that contributed to achieving abolition of the slave trade and slavery. Studies that address the economic factors include Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1944, 1994); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition, 1760-1810* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press; London: Feffer and Sons 1977); for the religious/humanitarian perspective see James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1986); John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Antislavery: the mobilisation of public opinion against the slave trade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1995); for the self-liberating efforts of the enslaved see Richard Hart, *The Slaves who abolished Slavery: Blacks in Rebellion* (University of the West Indies Press 2002); Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton

ownership in the age of abolition. These studies take an alternative approach from traditional studies of planters and merchants that explore the nature of the economic relationship between Britain and its West Indian colonies. As Christer Petley remarks, the emphasis is ‘not on the economic interests of the group, but focusing on their political and cultural outlook’.<sup>4</sup>

The philosophy, strategies, culture and foundations of the antislavery movement continue to occupy the attention of historians.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the aspects of the proslavery worldview have not received the same level of scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> In his classic study of the slave trade debates in Parliament, Roger Anstey summarised the West India interest as ‘the defenders of the established order’ in parliament who acted out of ‘instinctive concern for traditional imperial interests’; Eric Williams regarded the planter as ‘the biggest capitalist of the mercantilist epoch.’<sup>7</sup> Both historians interpret the West India Interest as an economically motivated political lobby, made rich by eighteenth-century monopoly. The economic interests of the

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Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 2006); Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 1989)

<sup>4</sup> Christer Petley, ‘Devoted Islands and that Madman Wilberforce’: British Proslavery Patriotism during the Age of Abolition, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:3 (2011) p. 395

<sup>5</sup> Explanations of the origins of anti-slavery thought continue to be debated. See Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: The Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture 2006); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1848* (London: Verso 1988); Seymour Drescher, ‘The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 33:4 (2012) pp. 571-593. Other important studies on abolition include Roger Anstey’s study of the parliamentary campaign, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan 1975); David Brion Davis is interested in the responses of the plantocracy to outside pressures such as the American Revolution, the St Domingue rebellion and the growth of the anti-slavery movement in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1975). For a study on the popular and participatory nature of the campaign see John R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1995)

<sup>6</sup> Larry Tise’s study of the proslavery ideology that existed in the United States noted the West Indian foundations of proslavery thought. He looks at the proslavery discourse in America as a way of describing the world in which Americans found themselves; Srividhya Swaminathan explores the rhetorical strategies employed by the proslavery and abolitionist camps to understand how they competed to define Britishness. Larry Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defence of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1987); Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity 1759-1815* (London: Ashgate 2009)

<sup>7</sup> Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*, p. 307; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 85

planter class are a significant contributor to its worldview; however, there were other factors that helped to shape it.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the political tactics, culture and ideologies of the planter class that has extended the discussion beyond its economic identity. David Lambert and Christer Petley's work addresses the issues of planter identity, settler rights and British liberties. They consider how the white colonists in Barbados and Jamaica articulated their identities politically and culturally in the age of abolition, and how metropolitan criticisms of West Indian slavery created tensions between colony and metropole. They explore how slaveholders were forced to defend the centrality of slavery to white creole society against abolitionist attacks in Britain, and the significance of slaveholding to those societies.<sup>8</sup>

Despite identifying themselves as loyal British subjects, the white colonists were depicted as being deficient in British virtues. Trevor Burnard and Richard Follett explore how the abolitionists successfully appropriated existing political, cultural, racial, religious and sexual perceptions of British planters to turn public opinion against them, as part of their strategy to represent slavery and slave ownership as contrary to the British character. This strategy cast

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<sup>8</sup>David Lambert, *White Creole Culture Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005); Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition* (London: Pickering and Chatto 2009); also see 'Devoted Islands and that Madman Wilberforce: British Proslavery Patriotism during the Age of Abolition', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:3 (2011) pp. 393-415



doubt on planters' claims to be loyal British subjects, a condemnation that they found increasingly difficult to contest.<sup>9</sup>

These studies have been primarily concerned with planters resident in the colonies and explore the planter class from two perspectives: how the white colonists viewed themselves, and how the abolitionists viewed and sought to represent the planters who resided in the colonies. This thesis explores how the planters who resided in the metropole responded to abolitionist attacks on the slave trade and slavery through the lens of the West India Committee membership, exploring its interactions on these issues with the government, and among its members.

Interest groups – individuals who shared a common concern and who sought to increase their own benefits through bargaining with the government - emerged in greater numbers as a consequence of the political changes that took place after the Glorious Revolution in 1688.<sup>10</sup> John Brewer attributes the growing power of the state as central to the growth of the interest group.<sup>11</sup> They sought a cooperative relationship with the government in handling their issues; they did not openly criticise or lobby in opposition to policies. Recognising that they had access to more reliable information regarding the colonies, the government encouraged lobbyists to share that information with them. This service provided commercial advantage. As Alison Olson pointed out, the merchants trading to America did not as a group concern

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<sup>9</sup> Trevor Burnard, 'Powerless Masters: The Curious Decline of Jamaican Sugar Planters in the Foundational Period of British Abolitionism,' *Slavery and Abolition* 32:2 (2011) pp. 185-198; with Richard Follett, 'Caribbean Slavery, British Anti-Slavery and the Cultural Politics of Venereal Disease,' *Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012) pp. 427-451

<sup>10</sup> Michael Kammen, *Empire and Interest: The American Colonies and the Politics of Mercantilism* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott 1970) p. 31

<sup>11</sup> John Brewer, *Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyam 1989) p. 231

themselves with politics, that is, the constitution and functioning of government. ‘Their interests were specific: to inform the government what their interests were because they were in the best position to know them.’<sup>12</sup> Being the source of valuable colonial information gave interest groups the opportunity to help shape policy in subtle ways. The strength of the Virginia merchant lobby, for example, lay ‘not in direct political influence but in their possession of information about conditions in Virginia and the state of the tobacco trade, information otherwise unavailable to statesmen who needed it.’<sup>13</sup>

The literature of interest group politics normally addresses the narrative of British merchants trading to North America. It explores their activities within the context of the escalation of constitutional conflict, identifying the American Revolution as the key moment for the merchants and colonial agents’ political demise.<sup>14</sup> They cite, among many factors, the split of opinion among the merchant groups on whether to continue to engage in hitherto successful modes of contact with the government, or to exploit public opinion that was critical of the government’s treatment of the American colonies (as promoted by the Wilkite radicals) as having a deleterious effect on the lobby’s ability to exercise political influence over the government.<sup>15</sup>

During the first six decades of the eighteenth century, the West India interest represented a similar model to the North American merchant lobbies. The three elements of the interest –

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<sup>12</sup> Alison Olson, ‘The London Mercantile Lobby and the Coming of the American Revolution,’ *Journal of American History* 69:1 (1983) p. 25

<sup>13</sup> Alison Olson, ‘The Virginia Merchants of London: A Study in Eighteenth Century Interest Group Politics,’ *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 40:3 (1983) p. 374

<sup>14</sup> See Alison Olson, ‘The London Mercantile Lobby,’ pp. 21-41; Alison Olson, *Making the Empire Work: London and American Interest Groups, 1690-1790* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press 1992); Michael Kammen, *Empire and Interest: The American Colonies and the Politics of Mercantilism*

<sup>15</sup> Olson, ‘London Mercantile Lobby,’ pp. 32-35. By exploring the interaction of the North American merchant lobbies with the government, Daeryoon Kim argues that they were not influenced by radicals, choosing to adhere to conservative methods of lobbying. Daeryoon Kim, ‘In Search of an Affectionate Regard’: American Merchant Lobbies and the State during the Atlantic Imperial Crisis,’ *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 30 Part 3 (2011) pp. 324-342

absentee planters, merchants trading to the West Indies, and colonial agents appointed by the colonial assemblies to represent their interests in the metropole - developed a strong political voice at the heart of imperial politics in London. It was a successful fixture of the eighteenth century British Atlantic system of trade and empire where it promoted the strategic, commercial and financial value of the West Indies to the imperial government. The American Revolutionary War presented a change in political and strategic circumstances which led the imperial government to pursue a series of policies that were at odds with the merchants and planters. These policies rendered their earlier methods of consensual lobbying, which relied on an alignment of interests with the government, ineffective. These changes encouraged the consolidation of merchant and planter lobbying activity, resulting in a regular structured lobbying institution with a more formal and centralised centre. From 1783 the London West India Committee functioned as the institutional wing of the West India interest.<sup>16</sup> Within a few years of its establishment, the West India Committee was faced with the emergence of the British campaign to end the transatlantic slave trade.

The historiography on the decline of the planter class has concentrated on the rise and fall in their fortunes and the economic profitability of slavery. Economic historians have featured prominently due to the immense volume of documentation of transactions and correspondence created by merchants, planters, bookkeepers, Custom House officials and attorneys associated with the West Indies. Lowell Ragatz's interpretation of the data from the West Indies led him to posit that the abolition of the slave trade, and consequently the fall of the planter class was not a consequence of humanitarian agitation. He argued that the decline in their fortunes began with the Seven Years War (1759-63), with the addition of more colonies to the empire, and was exacerbated by trade restrictions during and after the American Revolutionary War, overproduction of sugar, the destructive impact of absenteeism

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<sup>16</sup> Each port city had its own West India Association; the London West India Committee was predominant for reasons that are explained in Chapter 1

and poor estate management.<sup>17</sup> His work gave rise to a body of scholarship that focused on the profitability of West Indian slavery. Eric Williams most controversially built on Ragatz's decline thesis and supported his claim that the motives for abolition were economic, not humanitarian.<sup>18</sup> He argued that the profits from sugar and slavery were fed back into the British domestic economy and fuelled British manufacturing. The American Revolution was the start point for economic decline in the West Indies; the planters were caught in a cycle of debt and overproduction.<sup>19</sup> The slave trade and slavery were subsequently viewed as unimportant to the national wealth – moved by the economic needs of the country the slave trade was abolished on these grounds.<sup>20</sup> The most recent supporter of this hypothesis is Selwyn H. H. Carrington, who continues to support the assertion that the trade restrictions imposed after the American Revolution spelled disaster for the West Indian planter because he no longer had access to provisions essential to maintain a monocultural economy.<sup>21</sup>

A recent addition to this historiographical strand reconsiders the fall of the planter class, challenging Williams's and Ragatz's hypotheses. David Beck Ryden's research on the West India Committee between abolition of the slave trade and the end of the Napoleonic Wars suggest that economic distress was felt most intensely by the older West Indian colonies, in particular Jamaica, as a consequence of excessive cultivation, which exhausted the soil, which in turn produced an inferior quality of sugar and the inability of the planters to secure

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<sup>17</sup> Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean 1763-1833: A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York; London: American Historical Association 1928)

<sup>18</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 122-123

<sup>20</sup> Seymour Drescher is the most notable opponent of the Williams decline thesis, arguing that the plantation economy was in a good state at that time of abolition, pointing to the rise of sugar output as evidence of a healthy sugar industry. See *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition, 1760-1810*

<sup>21</sup> Selwyn H. H. Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1775-1810* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 2002); 'The American Revolution and the British West Indies Economy,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17:4 (1987) pp. 823-850

credit.<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Draper in contrast explores the rise in fortunes of the planters from Trinidad and British Guiana (Demerara) in the 1820s and 1830s. He argues that the wealth generated from these colonies as a consequence of a remarkable output of sugar flowed to a group of absentee planters who created a new planter class in Britain.<sup>23</sup> Christer Petley looks at the fall of the planter class from a cultural perspective. He explores the food rituals of the Jamaican planter class, and how their approaches to food and hospitality fed into the debates over slavery. The Jamaicans' propensity for lavish meals and excessive consumption of alcohol was interpreted by the abolitionists as examples of the corrupting influence of slavery, unacceptable to British sensibilities.<sup>24</sup>

The economic, social and cultural contexts of the fall of the planter class are subsequently being subjected to fresh interpretations. This decline can also be explained politically, by exploring the activities of the London West India Committee, in particular how the events surrounding abolition and emancipation came to bear upon its lobbying strategies, composition and structure. These issues to date remain understudied. Consequently this thesis fits within this historiographical strand because the formation of the Committee came as a consequence of a decline in their political influence; it was an indication of the increasing political weakness of the merchant and planter interest, not of its strength.

The scholarship on the West India interest has gone some way to enhancing our understanding of its origins, political influence, structure and its role in orchestrating the

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<sup>22</sup> David Beck Ryden, 'Sugar Spirits and Fodder: The London West India Interest and the glut of 1807-1815,' *Atlantic Studies* 9:1 (2012) pp. 41-64

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Draper, 'The rise of a new planter class? Some counter currents from British Guiana and Trinidad, 1807-1833,' *Atlantic Studies* 9:1 (2012), pp. 65-83

<sup>24</sup> Christer Petley, 'Gluttony, excess and the fall of the planter class in the British Caribbean,' *Atlantic Studies*, 9:1(2012) pp. 85-106

campaign against the abolition of the slave trade. Yet each work reveals gaps that require attention. Lillian Penson's first study of the London West India interest demonstrated its political resourcefulness prior to the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and explored how and why the merchants, planters and colonial agents abandoned the pursuit of their individual interests at the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War, opting to form a joint merchant and planter interest to strengthen its representations to the government to ensure the protection of the colonies during that conflict.<sup>25</sup> She also explored the development of the governing structure and thus how the organisation took permanent shape. Penson admits that the history of the development of the Committee 'does not itself wholly explain the peculiar success that attended the activities of the West India interest.'<sup>26</sup> For this, she recommended an investigation of the membership and the attendance recorded at General Meetings; such an investigation 'would produce evidence to show the great strength commanded by those concerned in the West India islands.'<sup>27</sup> This thesis addresses this gap by investigating the membership of the West India Committee to ascertain which men committed their time and resources to protect the interests of the West Indies.

Andrew O'Shaughnessy's study of the West India interest looks in greater depth how circumstances precipitated by the American Revolutionary War encouraged the West India interest to become more consistent and innovative in its lobbying activities.<sup>28</sup> O'Shaughnessy notes that in this period, the West India interest's success could be attributed to three factors: the contributions of active and dedicated members such as Stephen Fuller, Jamaica's colonial

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<sup>25</sup> Lillian Penson, 'The London West India Interest in the Eighteenth Century,' *English Historical Review*, 36:143 (1921), pp. 373-392

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 392

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 391

<sup>28</sup> Andrew O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West India Interest, British colonial policy and the American Revolution,' *Historical Journal*, 40:1 (1997) pp. 71-95 Also see O'Shaughnessy's study of the West Indies and the American Revolution in *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and The British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2000)

agent; appointing members who worked for the government or were closely associated with it; and cooperating with the government in order to influence political decisions in their favour.<sup>29</sup> In this way he demonstrates that the political power of the West India lobby was not based solely on its parliamentary presence but on its close affiliations to government, and the assumption of the commercial and strategic value of the West Indies that pervaded the attitude of the government. After the war, when O'Shaughnessy concludes his study, the favourable political conditions that supported their influence were disrupted. This thesis takes up the narrative at this moment in 1783 to ascertain how the lobby, from this point onwards reacted to the circumstances that contributed to further changes in its political fortunes.

Douglas Hall's brief synoptic study of the West India Committee in the age of abolition is one of the few studies that address the institutional organisation.<sup>30</sup> It is a succinct account of the fortunes of the organisation from its inception, until the mid-twentieth century. Hall was interested in exploring the factors that contributed to the decline in the political influence of the Committee by briefly alluding to the broader historical and political context that had a significant impact on the activities of the lobby, citing abolition, the French Revolution and the debates in the 1820s on the amelioration and emancipation of the enslaved workers.

Hall acknowledged that his study did not address aspects of the West India Committee's history that would give greater understanding of its functions and operations; for example, he does not explore the details of its membership, the West Indian interests of the individual members and an examination of the relationship with government ministers. This thesis gives attention to these unexplored themes that Hall only touched upon in greater depth.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Formation of a Commercial Lobby,' pp. 83-87, 88-89

<sup>30</sup> Douglas Hall, *A Brief History of the West India Committee* (Caribbean University Press 1971) pp. 1-16. Hall accepts that this study is a brief sketch (p. vii)

An estimate of the numerical strength of the parliamentary West Indians has been remarked upon by its opponents, contemporaries and historians, who have assumed that the West India interest had a strong parliamentary presence that they used to its advantage. In 1766 an anonymous correspondent of the *Gentleman's Magazine* calculated that 'there are now in Parliament upwards of forty members who are either West Indian planters themselves, descended from such, or have concerns there that entitle them to pre-eminence.'<sup>31</sup> Lewis Namier rejected this claim, asserting that 'on average there were never more than about a dozen West Indians in the House at any time'.<sup>32</sup> Gerrit Judd estimated the figures to be between 22 and 24 members in the 1760s to 1780s.<sup>33</sup> In the 1820s it was estimated that between 39 and 56 MPs with West Indian links sat in the House of Commons.<sup>34</sup> Thomas Fowell Buxton, the parliamentary leader of the antislavery campaign in the 1820s, remarked that the West India interest had a 'phalanx of 200 members in the House of Commons, whose power the government could not resist'.<sup>35</sup> The disparities in the estimations suggest the identification of a 'West Indian' MP had not been definitively established; the contemporary assessments suggested a powerful and not easily defeated West Indian bloc; the historians' interpretations appeared to be inconclusive based on the different criteria they claimed identified a West Indian MP.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Volume XXXVI (1766) p.229

<sup>32</sup> Lewis Namier, *England in the age of the American Revolution* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1930) p. 272

<sup>33</sup> Gerrit Judd, *Members of Parliament, 1734-1832: A study of the relationship between the British ruling class and the House of Commons, with a list of members for the period* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1955) pp. 67-69; Appendices 19 and 20 (pp. 93-94)

<sup>34</sup> Roger Anstey, 'The Pattern of Abolitionism in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher ed. *Antislavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone: Dawson Archon 1980) p.24

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from Barry Higman, 'The West India Interest in Parliament, 1807-1833' *Historical Studies*, 13:49 (1967), p.2

<sup>36</sup> I address this issue in greater detail in Chapter 1



Barry Higman's analysis of the voting patterns of the West Indian MPs brought clarity to the debate. Having established a clearer criterion to identify a West Indian, he made three significant observations. Firstly, that the West Indian MPs were not a coherent and unified group that voted as a form of 'West Indian bloc'. Secondly, there was a core group of MPs that regularly spoke in defence of the West Indies, and a periphery that showed no obvious concern for its protection. Thirdly, their parliamentary activity had no significant impact on colonial issues.<sup>37</sup> The source of their power therefore is not fully explained by West Indian parliamentary activity. However, Higman noted that personal friendships existed between the Jamaican planter Charles Ellis and the prominent Tory politician, George Canning, and with John Gladstone, the wealthy Demerara planter on whose interest Canning entered Parliament representing Liverpool.<sup>38</sup> This thesis establishes whether it was through the relationships cultivated by the West India Committee with cabinet ministers and government departments that explain the source of their power, an aspect of the history which Higman did not explore.

Alexandra Franklin's exploration of the membership of the West India interest as liminal figures in British society is informed by the 'new imperial history', a historiographical approach which rethinks British imperial history by interrogating the relationship between colony and metropole and its impact on the attitudes, identities and outlooks on its population.<sup>39</sup> The historians who employ these methodologies endeavour to answer Frederick Cooper and Laura Ann Stoler's appeal to 'bring metropole and colony in one analytic field.'<sup>40</sup> These interpretations of Britain's imperial past that explore the networks of missionaries,

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<sup>37</sup>Higman, 'The West India Interest in Parliament', p. 19

<sup>38</sup>Ibid, p. 8

<sup>39</sup> Alexandra Franklin, 'Enterprise and Advantage: The West India Interest in Britain, 1774-1840,' (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania 1992)

<sup>40</sup>Frederick Cooper, Laura Ann Stoler ed., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Los Angeles; London: University of Los Angeles Press 1997) p. 15.

colonial administrators, abolitionists and settlers stress that its relationship with empire did not flow in one direction; they highlight how national identity was influenced by these dialogues concerning empire, slavery, religion, race, ethnicity, gender and class.<sup>41</sup>

Franklin discusses how the West India planters and merchants resident in England constructed an identity that spoke to their Britishness, their wealth and their social ambitions.<sup>42</sup> Her analysis addresses how these identities were complicated by the emergence of criticisms of slavery and slave ownership: planters and merchants were members of the British urban and mercantile elite through slave ownership and colonial trade; their wealth was derived from slavery, but their social positions protected them from the charges of brutality levied at the slave owners who were resident in the colonies.<sup>43</sup> Linda Colley has noted that anti-slavery became a principal element in the making of the British national identity.<sup>44</sup> How then did the planters reconcile themselves to the nation?

Franklin's thesis also explores the social views and experiences of the West India interest and how empire shaped the vision of its membership.<sup>45</sup> She analyses the social, political and economic contexts that influenced the activities of the West India interest, looking at it not only as an interest group that lobbied government but how, as part of the emerging middle class, it contributed to the constructions of their institutions, material culture and values.

Franklin demonstrates the centrality of empire to the identity of the membership of the West India interest, and how they occupied a unique position between colony and metropole, despite many of its members never visiting a plantation. She suggests that there was a

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<sup>41</sup> See for example, Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity 2002); Kathleen Wilson, *This Island Race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century* (London: Routledge 2003); Kathleen Wilson ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004)

<sup>42</sup> Alexandra Franklin, 'Enterprise and Advantage' p. 64

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 91

<sup>44</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press 2009) p. 361-366

<sup>45</sup> Franklin, 'Enterprise and Advantage', p. 113

constant awareness of empire in the minds and actions of its members. That the members of the West India interest were affected materially by and benefitted from empire is not in question. However, as Bernard Porter has argued, the direct effects of empire on the way people thought and behaved can be difficult to fully assess.<sup>46</sup> The relationship between Britons and its empire, he goes on to say, was ‘uneven, complex and changeable’.<sup>47</sup> While it is apparent that empire had the most direct influence on this group, how can it be assessed?

As Cooper and Stoler remark,

It is not clear the idea of ruling an empire captivated European publics for more than brief periods, or that a coherent set of agendas and strategies for rule was convincing to a broad metropolitan population. Nor is it altogether clear how those we have assumed were reliable ‘agents of empire’ [planters and merchants] participated in those ventures.<sup>48</sup>

It is necessary to explore not only how the men who were linked commercially and financially with the colonies considered the impact of empire on their lives, but to also consider who were the men who acted as political advocates for the West Indies. Not every member of the West India interest committed himself to regularly lobby government for favourable colonial policy. As Barry Higman noted in his study of the parliamentary West India interest, there was a core group that spoke out regularly on colonial issues. Such was the case with the London West India Committee. We still know little about its leadership, the members that drove the strategy of the organisation, what drove these men, and what set them

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<sup>46</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004) p. xv

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. xv. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose acknowledge these complexities when considering the impact of empire on Britons; Peter Marshall also asserts that ‘a transformation wrought by Empire on British people as a whole may not be a realistic project.’ See Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose ed., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006) p. 2; Peter J. Marshall, ‘Imperial Britain,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23:3 (1995) p. 392

<sup>48</sup> Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, p. 6

apart from other planters and merchants in terms of their commitment to the organisation. Consequently, this thesis goes ‘back to basics’ by making an empirically-based exploration of the West India Committee’s institutional identity.

David Beck Ryden’s work demonstrates that the debate initiated by Eric Williams’s *Capitalism and Slavery* shows no signs of abating. Ryden maintains that while Williams was correct in identifying overproduction as a critical problem facing the planter in 1807, he was incorrect in claiming that overproduction was a ‘natural tendency’ of the slave system. He argues that the trade restrictions imposed during the Napoleonic Wars, and misplaced speculation in the 1790s were relevant to the decision to abolish the slave trade.<sup>49</sup> He looks at the role of the West India Committee in defending the West India interest and the merchants involved in slave trading to ascertain the reasons for the decline of political influence of the merchant and planter interest.<sup>50</sup> He uses the records and the publications of the Committee to reconstruct their responses to the abolition campaign and the changes in the Caribbean financial system between 1783 and 1807. A prosopography of the Committee’s membership provides insight into the chief defenders of slavery, and his analysis of their minutes gives new understanding to its governing structure in the period under examination. Ryden sheds more light on the operations of the West India Committee, but it is confined to a particular time – 1783-1807, and to a particular event – the abolition of the slave trade and the economic implications for the Caribbean. This thesis studies the minutes of the West India

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<sup>49</sup>David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 16

Committee beyond 1807, shedding further light on the political and economic issues that preoccupied its membership.<sup>51</sup>

The central contribution of this thesis to the body of knowledge on the London West India Committee is its attention to the aspects of its history hitherto unexplored. It addresses how it operated and the political and economic conditions that influenced its arguments and actions. The starting point for the thesis is a database of the 596 meetings held by the West India planters and merchants between 1783 and 1833. These meetings reveal the particular interests of the Committee over that period, their campaigning strategies, liaisons with government ministers and details of its membership. The meeting minutes give detail and depth to how the Committee functioned as a lobby, allowing for a more reliable analysis of the identities of the membership and the construction of a prosopography of the key defenders of slavery.

It is supported by pamphlets written and published by members of the Committee, personal correspondence, petitions, contemporary newspaper reports and correspondence to government departments, in particular the Colonial Office, Board of Trade, Treasury and the Prime Minister's records held at the National Archives. The database and prosopography provide the core of the analytical material for this thesis. However, they give little insight into the private thoughts and opinions of the planters and merchants on a range of issues, including slavery, abolition and plantation economy. Consequently these supporting primary sources serve to augment the meeting minutes that tend not to give significant attention to personal views, or to internal conflict.

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<sup>51</sup> I engage more fully with Ryden's analysis of the West India Committee minutes in Chapter 2

After 1807 the significance of these aspects of the history of the Committee has been underexplored. These aspects, which are explored in this thesis, challenge some of the received views of the metropolitan proslavery position: that it was largely monolithic in its opinions on abolition and emancipation, and that it was largely preoccupied with economic issues. As such, this study adds to the strand of historiography that has been reframed to address planters and merchants' political, cultural and social outlook. This thesis similarly argues for further exploration into the complex nature of British proslavery. The planters and merchants resident in England were more exposed to abolitionist rhetoric than their colonial counterparts. Arguably, this proximity had some impact on the development of their ideas.<sup>52</sup>

The chapters of this thesis are arranged around the relationship between the West India Committee and the government, the themes of pro and antislavery discourses, and the politics of abolition and emancipation. Chapter 1 assesses the impact of the political crises that occurred after the American Revolutionary War, and the government's new commercial policies towards the United States on the organisational structure of the West India Committee. Chapter 2 examines the minutes of the Committee to shed light on the governing structure and membership of the Committee, and how the political and economic events over the period under study impacted on its evolution and development. A prosopography of the membership gives insight into the principal defenders of the slave trade and slavery and of the leading merchant and planter families.

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<sup>52</sup> Kent Hackmann's study of the library of the West India Committee discovered that there was a very large amount of antislavery titles that he suggests had an effect on some planters' opinions. See Kent Hackmann, 'Printed Sources 1799-1833, from the West India Committee, London,' *Archives*, 34:120 (2009), pp. 8-20

Chapter 3 explores the foundations of the proslavery discourse as constructed by the Committee membership, and how the opinions and actions of its members and other proslavery commentators complicated that discourse. This interpretation is further supported by a case study of Joseph Foster Barham, the only planter to vote for abolition, demonstrating the pragmatic willingness of some planters to accept humanitarian reforms. The devastating effects of disease on white British soldiers during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars compelled the British government to pursue the highly controversial policy of establishing West India Regiments of black soldiers to assist in the defence of the West Indies. The white colonists and metropolitan planters, fearful that the presence of black soldiers threatened to undermine the social and racial hierarchies on which slave society was based, lobbied the government to remove them. Chapter 4 explores the reaction of the Committee to the government's policy to station black soldiers in the British West Indies.

The last two chapters examine the reactions of the West India Committee to growing metropolitan involvement in colonial affairs, instigated by the parliamentary abolitionists. William Wilberforce's motion to introduce a bill to register the enslaved workers was met with robust opposition by the Committee. Not only did they lobby government, they appealed to public opinion by attacking the African Institution's involvement in Sierra Leone.

Chapter 5 examines the Committee's reaction to slave registration and the pamphlet war between one of its senior members and members of the African Institution. Chapter 6 examines the circumstances that led to the Committee's endorsement of the amelioration and gradual emancipation of the enslaved workers in the West Indies. It explores the impact and consequences of the policy on the Committee's leadership and governing structure.

Over five decades the West India Committee witnessed the dismantling of the world that the planters had made. First, the abolition of the slave trade, a system that had for over one hundred years been supported and promoted by Britain's political and economic structures. By the 1820s the slave system eventually buckled under the consistent moral condemnation by the abolitionists and the enslaved workers' own campaigns for freedom. The West Indian sugar monopoly was challenged by the inclusion of new colonial territories and an emboldened East India interest campaigning for equal duties; they also had to contend with a booming foreign sugar economy unencumbered by restrictions on forced African labour. Laid low by the advent of free trade ideology and the sustained criticisms of their livelihood and character, the West India Committee struggled to make sense of a changing world and their place in it.



## Chapter 1

### The West India Committee and British Commercial Policy: 1783-1785

In 1759 the economist and pamphleteer Joseph Massie attacked the West India interest's influence over British colonial policy. In particular he criticised the economic favours it received over the previous thirty years.<sup>1</sup> The West Indians successfully lobbied for and won a favourable set of regulatory advantages. Planters could import their rum directly into Ireland; they had secured higher duties on foreign sugars, rums and molasses imported into the British North American colonies and could export rum into Britain without paying excise duty until it was sold or landed for six months. These advantages, as Andrew O'Shaughnessy notes, had their foundation in two related factors: firstly, the belief that the West Indies was the source of Britain's wealth and power; consequently, they were able to 'gain their mystique of power by apparently influencing a government which is already predisposed to act in their favour.'<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the United States brought to a halt the traditionally harmonious relationship between the West India interest and the metropolitan government. Moreover, the determination to deny the new republic access to imperial trade brought merchants and planters together into an organised pressure group. The West Indians were keen to continue the commercial intercourse between the West Indies and the former mainland colonies

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Massie, *A State of the British Sugar Colony Trade* (London, 1759), p. 50. Massie was one of the West India interest's strongest critics, claiming that it had cost the country millions of pounds over the last thirty years due to illegal trading. It has been suggested by W.A. Shaw that he may have been a sugar merchant and had been driven out of the trade or had retired from it in 'consequence of trade depression, war or change in planter methods of marketing'. *Bibliography of the Collection of Books and Tracts on the Commerce, Currency and Poor Laws 1557-1763, formed by Joseph Massie, transcribed from Lansdowne Manuscript MXLIX, with a Historical and Bibliographical introduction by W.A. Shaw*, (London: Harding's Bookshop, 1937) p. iii. Also see Peter Mathias, 'The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century: A Calculation by Joseph Massie,' *Economic History Review* 10 (1957), pp. 30-45.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West India Interest, British colonial policy and the American Revolution,' *Historical Journal*, 40:1 (1997), pp. 93-94. Trevor Burnard's study of the wealth of the Jamaica before the American Revolution suggests that Jamaican planters were much richer than the inhabitants of the mainland colonies, leading him to conclude that this made them 'immensely valuable parts of the British Empire... it is not surprising that imperial statesmen worried little about malcontents in the poor and strife-torn colony of Massachusetts.' Trevor Burnard, 'Prodigious Riches: The Wealth of Jamaica before the American Revolution,' *Economic History Review*, 54:3 (2001), pp. 521-522.

because it provided the West Indies with essential supplies that allowed it to pursue maximum production of sugar cane.

The inability to persuade the metropolitan government of the importance of maintaining these trade links was a great blow to the West India interest. As it has been noted, prior to the American Revolutionary War the West India interest did not have an institutional identity; that is, it had no formally recognised organisation.<sup>3</sup> In his study of interest groups, John Brewer remarks that ‘a trade that was the frequent object of parliamentary legislation was likely to need a Standing Committee to guard its interests in parliament.’<sup>4</sup> Until 1783 the West India interest did not operate any such Standing Committee; rather, it was ‘aided by the assistance of a powerful body of men, including [William] Beckford, the intimate associate of the Elder Pitt and a vast number of others whose wealth could command influence in British politics.’<sup>5</sup> By 1783, the West India interest found it necessary to organise itself formally as a consequence of its failure to persuade the government to lift the trade restrictions between the United States and the West Indies, imposed on the eve of war.

This chapter examines the West India interest in London’s reaction to the new commercial policies implemented by the Fox-North and Pitt ministries between 1783 and 1784 in the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War. What impact did the West India interest’s campaign to restore trade with America have on its structure and organisation?

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<sup>3</sup> Lillian Penson, ‘The London West India Interest in the Eighteenth Century,’ *English Historical Review*, 36:143 (1921), pp. 376-380

<sup>4</sup> John Brewer, *Sinews of Power: War Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) p. 238

<sup>5</sup> Lillian Penson, quoted in Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Barbados: Caribbean University Press, 1974), p. 59

## **The West India Lobby: origins and structure**

The West India lobby's origins can be traced back to the late seventeenth century. By this time London accounted for over three quarters of Britain's plantation trade and acted as the clearing house of its Atlantic system.<sup>6</sup> The Port of London was servicing 2000 ships per year, including 350 from the colonies; it has been estimated that by 1700 a quarter of the population depended directly on employment in port trades.<sup>7</sup> London's merchants dominated her activities economically and politically; as Nuala Zahedieh observes, they played a key role in making mercantilism work by organising 'the rotation of credit and change of commodities from one place to the other', driving the wheels of commerce.<sup>8</sup> It was the success of the London merchants that fostered a change of attitude towards trade; however, the rise of wealthy and powerful planters caused a shift in the balance of political power.<sup>9</sup>

London had become the hub of colonial activity after the Restoration, where major decisions affecting the West Indies, such as gubernatorial appointments, acts of colonial legislature and the issuing of colonial council seats, were taken by the Crown. The centralisation of colonial policy resulted in the West Indians creating separate associations to bring pressure on the government to secure favourable colonial and commercial policies. Joint action occurred when the occasion required it, but there was no final form of organisation until after the

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<sup>6</sup> Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.7 For other studies on colonial commerce with London as its hub, see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic Community 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Natasha Glaisyer, *The Culture of Commerce in England, 1660-1720* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006). Linda Colley explores the ways that commerce underpinned the national identity – she argues that Britain was created to the extent that it was after 1707 because interest groups saw the nation as 'a usable resource, as a focus of loyalty which would also cater to their own needs and ambitions.' Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009) p.55

<sup>7</sup> Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies*, p.166

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.55. Also see K.G. Davies, 'The origins of the commission system in the West India Trade,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fifth Series*, Vol. 2 (1952), pp. 89-107

<sup>9</sup> Richard Sheridan, 'The Commercial and Financial Organisation of the British Slave Trade, 1750-1807,' *Economic History Review*, 11:2 (1958), p. 251

American Revolutionary War. Andrew O'Shaughnessy argues that prior to the American Revolutionary War the West India lobby lacked any formal or institutional identity.<sup>10</sup> Up until that time it had acted on an informal or ad hoc basis and rarely as a joint organisation.

Lillian Penson, in the earliest study of the London West India interest, identified three groups that made up its composition. The colonial agents represented the interests of the colonial assemblies at Westminster. Agents were often prominent planters or merchants with business connections with the islands they represented and were appointed on the basis of their political skills.<sup>11</sup> Since the late seventeenth century, agents had been responsible for supplying absentee planters with news of pending parliamentary action affecting their plantations. They collected details of prices, duties and communicated the needs and distresses of colonists to the metropolitan government. The second group were the merchants trading to the West Indies, who began to meet formally in the 1760s.<sup>12</sup> Quay security, charges for dock facilities and services, and relations with the Board of Customs were the main issues they discussed in their meetings. They were self-funding, paying their expenses by a trade rate, a self-imposed tax on colonial produce.<sup>13</sup> The third group were the absentee planters. In the 1740s a 'Planters' Club' was identified as the earliest formal organisation that organised to promote their interests.<sup>14</sup> In 1740 William Beckford wrote that 'it is very proper that a number of gentlemen should meet together to consult on everything that shall be thought of

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<sup>10</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial lobby', p.77

<sup>11</sup> Lillian Penson, *The Colonial Agents of the British West Indies: A Study of colonial administration, mainly in the Eighteenth Century* (London: London University Press, 1924), pp.95-113; O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby'

<sup>12</sup> Lillian Penson, 'The London West India Interest,' p.382

<sup>13</sup> Penson, *ibid*, p. 384

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 379. O'Shaughnessy argues that the Planters' Club was no more than a social group 'with no apparent political activities', 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby', p. 75; Perry Gauci notes that the Jamaican absentee William Beckford (1709-1770) was cautious to assign it a regulatory role, which bears out this assertion. Perry Gauci, 'Learning the Ropes of Sand: The West India Lobby, 1714-1760,' in Perry Gauci ed. *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850* (London: Ashgate, 2011), p. 113

for the good of the Country.’<sup>15</sup> The country he referred to was Jamaica, not England, with which he identified in terms of his being the representative of that colony.

***Table 1.1 Estimates of MPs with connections to the West Indies in the unreformed House of Commons, 1760-1833***

Authority and date of estimate	Estimate and number of MPs in House of Commons	Date Which Estimate Relates to
Fuller <sup>16</sup> (1781)	48	1781
Namier <sup>17</sup> (1930s)	12 maximum at any time	1760-1780
Judd (1955) <sup>18</sup>	22-39 at any time	1760-1826
Sheridan (1974) <sup>19</sup>	70 total	1730-1775
Higman (1967) <sup>20</sup>	30-40 at any time	1806-1833

A fourth group, Members of Parliament with West Indian connections continues to be a subject of dispute among historians (Table 1.1). They have attempted to estimate the numbers of West Indian MPs by assigning particular criteria to confirm their West Indian links. The Namierite criteria of identifying West Indians solely on the fact that they had been born there, or spent part of their lives there is too narrow, tending to exclude individuals who inherited properties, married into West Indian families and merchants who traded to the West Indies but had never visited the colonies. This estimation would, for example, exclude Lord Penrhyn, one of the leading defenders of the slave trade and an absentee proprietor. Stephen Fuller’s estimation is unreliable since it is inclusive of members with interests in both the

<sup>15</sup> British Library, Add MS 12431, ff. 116-117. For an excellent study of William Beckford see Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013)

<sup>16</sup> O’Shaughnessy, ‘The formation of a Commercial Lobby’, p. 73

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1930) p. 272

<sup>18</sup> Gerrit Judd, *Members of Parliament, 1734-1832: A study of the relationship between the British ruling class and the House of Commons, with a list of members for the period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) pp. 67-69; Appendices 19 and 20, pp. 93-94

<sup>19</sup> Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, pp. 58-60

<sup>20</sup> Barry Higman, ‘The West India Interest in Parliament: 1807-1833,’ *Historical Studies* 13:49 (1967), p.3

West Indies and the American colonies. William Baker, MP for Hertford, acquired his wealth through his father, who was a leading merchant trading to the Carolinas and New York.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Fuller restricts his estimations to 1781, which suggests that his list was created to assist him in his lobbying strategy. Barry Higman and Andrew O'Shaughnessy include two 'outer rings' of support, consisting of absentee planters and merchants who had never been to the West Indies, and of other interested parties such as bankers and military personnel who served in the West Indies is also included.<sup>22</sup> Higman identified the interest's numerical strength between 1807 and 1833. Based on his estimation, which focused on the years between abolition of the slave trade and emancipation, there were 20-40 MPs with West Indian connections. There does appear to be agreement that in the mid eighteenth century, with some fluctuations, there were between 20 and 50 MPs with West Indian connections. Parliamentary power, however, is not sufficient to explain the influence of the West India interest. These interpretations are by and large an attempt to demonstrate the power of the interest. It suggests that it constructed a bloc that voted against any legislation that was counter to its interests. However, as Higman observed, it is impossible to definitively identify its total parliamentary strength.<sup>23</sup> The combination of political, economic and social capital that the planters and merchants possessed goes further to explain the source of their power.

### **Contexts: Why the West Indies did not join the mainland rebels**

West Indian plantations were highly profitable and dependent appendages of Empire, one of several factors that kept the West Indies loyal to it. Three others have been identified. Firstly, there was a kind of umbilical attachment between the island colonies and the mother country, described by one Barbadian planter in the seventeenth century as 'a kind of magnetic force,'

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<sup>21</sup> 'Sir William Baker,' History of Parliament Online <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/baker-william-1705-70> Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014

<sup>22</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby', p. 74; Higman, 'The West India Interest in Parliament,' p. 4

<sup>23</sup> Higman, 'The West India Interest in Parliament,' p. 3

by which 'England draws all to it...it is the centre to all which tend.'<sup>24</sup> Many planters aspired to return to Britain once they had made enough money, making absenteeism a common phenomenon.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently a transient quality persisted in the West Indies, in part due to absenteeism, but also as a consequence of demographic failure.<sup>26</sup> In his study of Jamaica's white population in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Trevor Burnard notes that disease, death and fragile family formation explained why it did not increase in a similar manner to the population of the mainland colonies.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the disproportion between the enslaved and free population made the white inhabitants fearful for their security. In Jamaica, for example, the black population had increased from 13.3% in 1661 to nearly 94% in 1774.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence the white inhabitants demanded a constant military presence in the West Indies. 1000 troops and 5000 militia controlled 200,000 enslaved workers in Jamaica before 1776.<sup>29</sup> As George Metcalf noted, 'Jamaica...found it physically impossible to join the American Revolution...fears of insurrection and foreign invasion made such a course unthinkable.'<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, specialising in a monoculture made the planters economically dependent on Britain. The monopoly afforded to the sugar planters of the home market was financially advantageous – as Philip Coelho observed the price of sugar and its by-products were significantly higher in the British

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<sup>24</sup> Edward Lyttleton, *The Groans of the Plantations* (1689), cited in Andrew J O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000) p.3

<sup>25</sup> See Lowell J Ragatz, 'Absentee Landlordism in the British Caribbean, 1750-1833,' *Agricultural History* 5:1 (1931) pp. 7-24, and *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean 1736-1833: A Study in Social and Economic History* (New York; London: American Historical Association, 1928). Ragatz interprets absenteeism as deleterious to the development of the West Indies. Douglas Hall and Trevor Burnard both challenge this assertion – see Douglas Hall, 'Absentee Proprietorship in the British West Indies to about 1850' *Jamaican Historical Review* 4 (1964), pp. 15-35; Trevor Burnard, 'Passengers Only: The extent and significance of absenteeism in eighteenth century Jamaica,' *Atlantic Studies* 1:2 (2004), pp. 178-195

<sup>26</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.3

<sup>27</sup> Trevor Burnard, 'A Failed Settler Society: Marriage and Demographic Failure in Early Jamaica', *Journal of Social History* 28:1 (1994), pp. 63-82

<sup>28</sup> Robert V. Wells, *The population of the British colonies in America before 1776: A survey of census data* (Princeton; London: Princeton University Press, 1975) p. 196

<sup>29</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 34

<sup>30</sup> George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica, 1729-1783* (London: Longmans, 1965) p. 2

markets than elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Richard Sheridan estimates that sugar rum and molasses represented 93% of the total exports of Barbados, 99% for Antigua, 92% for St Kitts, and 89% for Jamaica in 1770.<sup>32</sup> The British West Indies was unable to compete with French West Indies sugar. By the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, St Domingue produced more sugar than all the British islands combined, at a price between one third and one quarter lower than British sugar.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, sugar both facilitated the need of the planter for economic protection, and restricted their ability to climb above the need for it – so they chose to remain in the colonial system.

It has also been argued that the economic, social and political ties to the mother country do not fully explain why the West Indies did not join the mainland colonies in rebellion. T.R. Clayton argues that within the colonies there were socio-political considerations that can further explain the West Indies' inaction. He argues that in Jamaica for example, politics were dominated by the planter elite; there was a lack of opposition from the lower class whites, because they aspired to be part of the elite, subsequently preserving the status quo. He further argues that the period between the Seven Years War and the American Revolution was one of prosperity for the West Indies; whereas for the mainland colonies it was one of 'increasing social, economic and political crisis.'<sup>34</sup>

### **The political posture of the West Indies and its lobby 1765-1775**

The British West Indies shared close ties with the North American colonies and shared a similar political development. Both had colonial assemblies that were sometimes hostile to

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<sup>31</sup> Philip R.P. Coelho, 'The Profitability of Imperialism: The British Experience in the West Indies 1768-1772', *Explorations in Economic History*, 10:3 (1973), p. 260

<sup>32</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, *The Development of the plantations to 1750: An Era of West Indian Prosperity 1750-1775* (Barbados; London: Caribbean Universities Press, 1970) p.47

<sup>33</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 61

<sup>34</sup> T.R. Clayton, 'Sophistry, Security and Socio-political Structures in the American Revolution; or, Why did Jamaica not Rebel?' *Historical Journal* XXXIX (1986), p.344



metropolitan control, and they shared essential and lucrative trade links.<sup>35</sup> However, favours bestowed on the West India planters by the imperial government had left the North Americans bitter. The 1733 Molasses Act, passed at the insistence of the West India interest but never effectively enforced, indicated to the North Americans that the metropolitan government was predisposed to act in the West India interest's favour at their expense. Had the tax been successfully imposed on imports of molasses from non-British colonies into the North American colonies it would have destroyed the strong foreign sugar trade links they had built up with the French West Indies, forcing them to purchase the much more expensive British sugar. In 1764 the government passed the Sugar Act, a revision of the Molasses Act which increased the tax on sugar imports from five shillings to one pound seven shillings per hundredweight.<sup>36</sup> More successfully enforced than the Molasses Act, the mainland colonists were convinced that the West India interest was the prime mover for its implementation.

What is notable in the period leading to war was the contrast in reactions between the West Indian colonists and the parliamentary West India interest to the colonial policies implemented by the government. While the mainland colonists saw the Stamp Act (1765) and the Townshend Acts (1770) as authoritative and restrictive, the West Indian colonists were divided. The Stamp Act, which was a tax imposed on public documents, printed items and civil law documents to help pay for the cost of colonial administration and defence became what Peter Thomas called 'the first phase of the American Revolution.'<sup>37</sup> T.R. Clayton notes that Jamaica and Barbados obeyed the Act with minimal protest; in contrast Andrew O'Shaughnessy observes that the Leeward Islands strongly opposed it owing to their greater

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew O'Shaughnessy, 'The West India Interest and the Crisis of American Independence', in Roderick A. McDonald ed., *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy, in honour of Richard Sheridan* (Barbados; The Press: University of the West Indies, 1996) p.127

<sup>36</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 65

<sup>37</sup> P.D.G. Thomas, 'The Stamp Act Crisis and its repercussions, including the Quartering Act Controversy,' in Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole (ed). *The Companion to the American Revolution* (London; Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000) p.123

dependence on supplies from the mainland colonies.<sup>38</sup> The West India lobby in London opposed the Act arguing that the colonies could not bear the cost of it; William Beckford attacked the Act, warning Parliament that ‘the North Americans do not think an external and internal duty the same...’ also remarking that ‘all England is not represented but it is a written part of the constitution that it is so.’<sup>39</sup>

The Townshend Acts (1767-1770), aimed to raise revenue from North America by taxing glass, lead, paper, paint and tea to pay the salaries of governors and judges so that they would remain loyal to Great Britain, were in effect a symbolic gesture to show the colonies that the mother country had the right to tax its colonies.<sup>40</sup> The reaction to the Townshend Acts in the West Indies was lacklustre. None of the island assemblies passed resolutions or presented petitions against them. In Parliament, West Indian MPs questioned the government’s policies towards the American colonies. The Jamaican absentees Rose Fuller, William Beckford and Richard Pennant (later Lord Penrhyn) attacked the policies; Beckford moved for an inquiry and tried to present petitions from the agent of Massachusetts against the Acts. In March 1770 Rose Fuller called for a complete repeal of the Duties and in April Beckford seconded the motion for the repeal of the tea duties.<sup>41</sup>

When they realised that war was imminent the West Indian agents, planters and merchants began to mobilise. In January 1775 the planters approached the Society of West India Merchants, suggesting joint action in response to ‘the very alarming situation which the West

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<sup>38</sup> T.R. Clayton, ‘Sophistry, Security and Socio-political structures’, p. 323, Andrew O’Shaughnessy, ‘The Stamp Act Crisis in the British Caribbean,’ *William and Mary Quarterly*, 51:2 (1994), pp. 204, 217

<sup>39</sup> P.D.G. Thomas, *British Politics and the Stamp Act Crisis*, p. 91

<sup>40</sup> For studies on the impact of the Townshend Act Crisis, see P.D.G. Thomas, *The Townshend Duties Crisis: The Second Phase of the American Revolution, 1767-1773* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Robert J. Chaffin, ‘The Townshend Acts Crisis 1767-1770’, in Greene and Pole eds. *A Companion to the American Revolution*, (London; Massachusetts: 2000)pp. 134-164

<sup>41</sup> O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 105

India Islands are now placed by the late American proceedings'.<sup>42</sup> At a joint meeting at the London Tavern on the 18<sup>th</sup> January, Rose Fuller 'evinced the absolute necessity of petitioning Parliament as the only probable means of warding off impending ruin.'<sup>43</sup> The petition, moderate in its tone, focused solely on the financial impact of war on the West Indies and the people who had invested in them. The West India planters and merchants hired Richard Glover, a merchant and professional lobbyist, to present their case before the House of Commons. His presentation focused primarily on the importance of the West Indies to the British economy, pointing out the exports from England to the West Indies in the 17 years to 1773 was over £1 million per year; and that the money raised from duties and excise on West India produce was £700,000 per year.<sup>44</sup> Glover's presentation was careful not to offend the British government, or the Americans. This indicates the delicate position that the planters and merchants found themselves. However, their petition was unsuccessful; the committee did not report and the petition was not debated.<sup>45</sup>

### **The West India interest in Parliament, 1775**

Andrew O'Shaughnessy has observed that many prominent West Indian Members of Parliament supported the government after the outbreak of war in April 1775.<sup>46</sup> Virtually no West Indian MPs spoke out against the war on constitutional principles; in 1774 Rose Fuller remarked that the Boston Port Act was the path towards rebellion, but did not speak out

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<sup>42</sup> Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London (hereafter ICS) West India Committee Archives (M915/1), Society of West India Merchants Minutes, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1775

<sup>43</sup> Rose Fuller, quoted in the *London Chronicle*, January 17-19, 1775

<sup>44</sup> *The Substance of the evidence of the petition presented by the West India Planters and Merchants to the Hon. House of Commons as it was introduced at the bar and summed up by Mr Glover on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1775* (London 1775) p.15

<sup>45</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, XXXV (1775), pp. 91, 202, 479, 482

<sup>46</sup> O'Shaughnessy, 'The West India Interest and the Crisis of American Independence,' pp. 35-37. West Indian MPs who supported the government were: Sir Ralph Payne (Antigua and St Kitts), John St Leger Douglas (St Kitts), William Gordon (Jamaica), Daniel Lascelles (Barbados), Edwin Lascelles (Barbados), Samuel Martin Jr (Antigua), and Anthony Morris Storer (Jamaica)

against the war with the same vehemence as he had against the Stamp Act.<sup>47</sup> William Beckford, probably the strongest advocate for the American colonies, died in 1770.

West Indian MPs objected to the impact of British policies on the West Indies, rather than the constitutional implications of secession. Nathaniel Bayly, MP for Westbury and a Jamaican planter, spoke out against the Prohibitory Bill forbidding trade between the West Indies and the rebelling American colonies. He understood that the breakdown in trade between the two regions would have implications not only for the internal economy, but also for the whole network of Atlantic commerce. He described the bill as being ‘fraught with injustice and cruelty’, and condemned it as ruinous to the West Indies:

He was fully convinced that the inhabitants of those islands would be starved; and though they should not their crops must be left, as they had not nearly lumber enough to save the present; that such being the case, the proprietors must be ruined, and the consequences would in the end reach the merchants, so as, he feared, to bring on a general bankruptcy among those in any manner concerned or interested in the West India trade.<sup>48</sup>

Conversely, John St. Leger Douglas, MP for Hindon who had considerable estates in the West Indies, rejected ruination as a consequence of an embargo:

He knew that the West India islands had sufficient lumber to serve them for one if not two years; but if not, it was better to suffer temporary inconveniences than sacrifice

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<sup>47</sup> The Boston Port Act was passed in 1774 in retaliation to the Boston Tea Party. The port was outlawed from use until the city made restitution to the East India Company for damages. ‘Rose Fuller’, History of Parliament Online [http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/fuller-rose-1708-77#footnoteref16\\_37cbg84](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/fuller-rose-1708-77#footnoteref16_37cbg84) Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> June 2014

<sup>48</sup> Cobbetts Parliamentary History, Volume 18, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1775, col. 1106

the British empire in America to the local interests of any of its own constituent parts.<sup>49</sup>

Anthony Morris Storer, one of the opposing West Indian MPs, wrote to the diplomat Lord Carlisle that ‘even moderate West Indians foresee total ruin for themselves’.<sup>50</sup> Samuel Estwick, planter and agent for Barbados and MP for Westbury (1779-1795) was known for his political writings regarding political economy and defence of slavery.<sup>51</sup> Estwick was also concerned about the effects of a trade embargo between the West Indies and the American colonies. He wrote that

The inhabitants of these [West India] islands are not only dependent on America for the materials necessary to the carrying on of their manufactures, but by that food which they are fed must be had from thence; or they must perish, and be cut off from the face of the earth.<sup>52</sup>

Not only did Estwick express concern about the commercial future of the West Indies, he entered the constitutional debate, which many West Indians avoided. He supported the principles of the American Revolution, rejecting the legislative power of Britain over the colonies. Parliament, he maintained, had no right to tax the colonies, and refuted Sir William Blackstone on the issue of parliamentary sovereignty, arguing that the people have the political power. His pamphlet expressed views not unlike those being espoused in the American colonies - ‘born under a free government’, he wrote, ‘it is individually the birth right of every member thereof, freely to enquire into those measures by which he is

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1775, col. 1041

<sup>50</sup> Lewis B. Namier and John Brooke (eds.) *The House of Commons 1754-1790*, Volume 2 (London: H.M.S.O. for the History of Parliament Trust 1964), p.332

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Estwick, *Considerations on the Negroe Cause, commonly so called, addressed to the Right Honourable Lord Mansfield. Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King’s Bench* (J Dodsley, 1773); *A Letter to the Reverend Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, in answer to his Humble Address* (London, 1776)

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Estwick, *A Letter to the Revd. Josiah Tucker* (London, 1776), p.54

governed.’<sup>53</sup> Estwick, however, did not speak in parliament against government policy, confining his speeches to matters regarding Barbados, particularly for relief after the island was devastated by hurricanes.<sup>54</sup>

Richard Pennant had attacked the government on the Townshend Duties, but there is no record of him making any speeches regarding the Prohibitory Bill. In fact it is likely that the rest of the West Indian MPs voted, as Lewis Namier observed, ‘according to their particular allegiances and connections... as did the other members of parliament.’<sup>55</sup> Outside Parliament the planters and merchants convened at a General Meeting where they appointed a committee ‘to attend to the general interest of the West India Colonies at this alarming crisis.’<sup>56</sup> The committee, comprised of 40 members, was charged to ‘give particular attention to the bill now depending in the Commons... confirming that agreement of its ruinous effects.’ They petitioned Lord George Germaine, Secretary of State for America, and the Prime Minister Lord North, complaining that the embargo on trade with North America left the planters with excess of rum which could not be consumed by the limited markets of Britain and Ireland. To counter this they suggested a suspension of British alcohol production and a reduction of the import duties on rum.<sup>57</sup> Both ministers rejected the request.<sup>58</sup>

The meeting convened in late 1775 was the formalisation of the association of the West India Planters and Merchants, later known as the West India Committee. Twelve of the Committee members have been identified as becoming members of the Standing Committee, the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>54</sup> ‘Samuel Estwick (?1736-1795)’, History of Parliament Online <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/estwick-samuel-1736-95> Accessed 21st March 2014

<sup>55</sup> Namier and Brooke *The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, Volume 1, p.158

<sup>56</sup> *London Evening Post*, 5-7 December 1775

<sup>57</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1), West India Merchants Minutes, Memorial of West India Planters and Merchants, presented to Lord Germaine, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1776

<sup>58</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1), West India Merchants Minutes, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1776

executive arm of the lobby after the war.<sup>59</sup> It was the impact of the trade embargo, the fear of conflict and the government's lack of compliance with their requests that compelled the planters and merchants to coalesce. They wanted to 'maintain the integrity of the empire.' As they stated in their memorial to Germaine,

Your memorialists are of the opinion that peace only, and only such a peace will restore the ancient intercourse between the West India Islands and the Northern Continent of *America*, to the general harmony and lasting benefit of the whole *British* Empire, can effectually prevent the evils with which they are more than threatened.<sup>60</sup>

### **'How well worth pursuing such a trade'**

The carrying trade between the American colonies and the West Indies has been termed the cornerstone of American commerce.<sup>61</sup> Colonial trade involved, by the eve of the American Revolution, approximately 40% of the ships leaving New York and Boston alone sailing directly to the Caribbean. The planter and historian Bryan Edwards noted that 'of rum, the quantity annually shipped thither, before the war, on an average of three years, was 2,800,000 gallons and the quantity of melasses (sic) was 250,000.'<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Beeston Long (Jamaica), Samuel Turner (Antigua) Charles Spooner (Leeward Islands), Stephen Fuller (Jamaica), Edward Morant (Jamaica), Sir Philip Gibbes (Barbados), John Ellis (Jamaica), Thomas Boddington (West India merchant), Richard Atkinson (Jamaica), Richard Neave (West India merchant), Philip Dehany (Jamaica) and Chaloner Arcedeckne (Jamaica)

<sup>60</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p. 158; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1), Memorial of West India Planters and Merchants presented to Lord Germaine

<sup>61</sup> Charles W. Toth, 'Anglo-American Diplomacy and the British West Indies, 1783-1789', *The Americas*, 32: 3 (1976), p.418

<sup>62</sup> Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Third Edition, Volume 2 (London, 1801), p. 488

**Table 1.2 Estimated values of total commodity exports from the British North American colonies to the West Indies, 1768-72<sup>63</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount (pounds sterling)</b>
1768	£583,000
1769	£699,000
1770	£815,000
1771	£813,000
1772	£964,000

In his study of trade between Connecticut and the West Indies, Joseph Aitaville notes that trade to the West Indies comprised the largest element in the commercialisation process in that colony. Between 1758 and 1772, its volume of commerce expanded more than tenfold, making it the fifth largest mainland colony engaged in the West Indies trade.<sup>64</sup> Connecticut provided the West Indies with a vast range of products, principally livestock and dairy; it was the principal exporter of onions, pigs and horses.<sup>65</sup>

**Table 1.3 Average annual tonnages clearing and entering the 13 colonies to and from the British and Foreign West Indies, 1768-1772<sup>66</sup>**

<b>Colony</b>	<b>Clearances</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Entrances</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Massachusetts	21285	20	20980	21
Pennsylvania	13220	12	12939	13
New Hampshire	12849	12	9280	9
Virginia	11668	11	11417	11.5

<sup>63</sup> James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade and Economic Development of Colonial North America* (London: Cambridge University Press 1972) p. 94

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Aitaville, 'The Atlantic World Economy and Colonial Connecticut,' (PhD thesis, University of Rochester, 2009) pp. 98, 112, 113

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 117

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.113



Connecticut	9653	9	8418	9
North Carolina	7214	7	3157	3
New York	7047	7	7664	8
South Carolina	6803	6	8378	8.5
Rhode Island	6709	6	6877	7
Georgia	4901	4.5	3917	4
Maryland	4136	4	4542	4.5
Delaware	777	1	766	1
New Jersey	599	0.5	448	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>106681</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>98783</b>	<b>100</b>

As illustrated by Table 1.3, the number of vessels from the mainland colonies containing supplies to the West Indies was immense, and contributed significantly to both their economies.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the Americans at the time of peace negotiations had no wish to injure this trade. John Adams, the Massachusetts delegate to the Continental Congress, had remarked that this commerce was ‘an essential link in a vast chain, which has made New England what it is, the southern provinces what they are, the West India islands what they are.’<sup>68</sup>

H.C. Bell estimated that year on year, the continental colonies exported goods to the British West Indies to the value of £500,000.<sup>69</sup> Pennsylvania and New York provided the islands with virtually all flour and bread; New England, through its trade with Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, provided fish and oil. Pennsylvania also provided the pork, ham and beef.

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<sup>67</sup>For an example of merchant success in the North American/West Indian trade, see S.D. Smith, ‘Gedney Clarke of Salem and Barbados: Transatlantic Super Merchant.’ *New England Quarterly*, 76:4 (2003) pp. 499-549

<sup>68</sup>Quoted in C.W. Toth, ‘Anglo American Diplomacy and the British West Indies’, p.418 The Continental Congress resolved in 1775 that the exportation of all merchandise and commodities to Great Britain, Ireland and the West Indies to cease. It is not within the scope of this chapter to explore the reactions of American merchants to this policy.

<sup>69</sup>H. C. Bell, ‘The West India Trade before the American Revolution’, *American Historical Review*, 22:2 (1917), p.273

Lumber, which was essential for the manufacture of hogshead barrels and rum casks, was available at most of the North American ports.<sup>70</sup> Horses and livestock, minor foodstuffs and other manufactures such as lamp oil were also part of the exports to the West Indies. The trade also provided a type of postal system, where letters between merchants, captains, commercial correspondents and friends were exchanged. The West Indian-American trade, therefore, was more than the sale of commodities between the colonies, but part of a larger system with lines of commerce that extended to Newfoundland, Canada and Nova Scotia, and to Britain and Europe. Moreover, the profits of the West India trade helped to create a reserve capital which became the mainstay of the colonial economy facilitating the payment of debts to England and Europe.<sup>71</sup>

The plantation economy was possible because of these important commercial links; supplies of food and lumber, manufactured goods and plantation equipment allowed planters to pursue a monocultural economy that enabled maximum profit.<sup>72</sup> West Indian trade therefore was interwoven with North American and the prosperity of the sugar colonies was made possible by its unrestricted commercial relationship with the American colonies.<sup>73</sup> In his resolution for conciliation with America, Edmund Burke pointed out in 1775 that

‘The export trade to the colonies consists of three great branches: The African, which, terminating almost wholly in the colonies must be put to the account of their commerce; the West Indian and the North American. All these are so interwoven that

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.273

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.274; Toth, ‘Anglo American Diplomacy and the British West Indies’, p.418

<sup>72</sup> Eric Williams states that in the 1770s the British West Indies received from the mainland colonies half of their dried fish, half of their pickled fish, seven eighths of their oats, three quarters of their corn, a quarter of their rice, nearly all of their pine oak and cedar boards, most of their horses, sheep, hogs and poultry, over half their slaves, and nearly all their hoops. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) p. 108

<sup>73</sup> Selwyn H. H. Carrington, *The British West Indies during the American Revolution* (Dordrecht, Holland; Providence, RI: Foris Publications, 1988), p25

the attempt to separate them would tear to pieces the contexture of the whole and if not entirely destroy, would much depreciate the value of all the parts'.<sup>74</sup>

Eric Williams argued that 'only the possessions of the mainland colonies permitted this sugar monopoly of the West Indian soil.'<sup>75</sup> Planters were able to specialize in the production of sugar because they relied on the mainland colonies for their sustenance. They had no surplus land to produce enough foodstuffs, consequently the mainland colonies acted as the bread basket to the sugar colonies.<sup>76</sup> The West Indian trade created a variety of businesses, and provided daily support to others.

The interruption of trade between Britain and the West Indies during the war caused higher freight rates, shipping shortages, convoy delays, increased insurance charges and severe financial losses for many, and the West India lobby responded to these crises with a flurry of consistent and sustained lobbying.<sup>77</sup> This activity paid off in certain respects. It helped that they were not lacking in friends within the various ministries who were prepared to support their interest, and therefore they were able to secure a number of concessions from the government during the war. Beeston Long, the chairman of the Society of West India Merchants, met regularly with Lord Sandwich, the Lord of the Admiralty, to apply for an outward bound convoy to protect ships laden with West India produce. At hearing the news of the bill to prohibit all trade with the mainland colonies in December 1775, they immediately got in touch with their contact in the Treasury, Sir Grey Cooper, seeking assurances that ships travelling to and from the sugar colonies would not be confiscated.<sup>78</sup> They won the right to negotiate the dates of the convoys with the Admiralty. Notice was given to traders and ship owners of the appointed dates and places of departure, protection

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<sup>74</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume XVIII (1774-77), col 486

<sup>75</sup> Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 110

<sup>76</sup> Selwyn H. H. Carrington, 'The American Revolution and British West Indies economy,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17:4 (1987), p.824

<sup>77</sup> Andrew O'Shaughnessy, 'The formation of a Commercial Lobby,' p.77

<sup>78</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1), West India Merchants Minutes, March and December, 1775

was afforded throughout the voyage and returns and losses were reduced to a minimum.<sup>79</sup> A series of hurricanes in 1780 and 1781 proved particularly disastrous for Jamaica and Barbados, whose losses ran into the millions.<sup>80</sup>

The government sent out provisions of beef, pork and flour at prime cost and free of freight charges, and after the hurricane of 1780, Parliament allocated relief funds to Jamaica and Barbados amounting to £120,000.<sup>81</sup> These considerations were given because the government believed that if the thirteen colonies were lost, the British West Indies would follow. The possession of the island colonies was essential for generating wealth to finance the war. O'Shaughnessy argues that 'British strategy placed the defence of Jamaica second only to domestic security and gave it priority over the war for America.'<sup>82</sup> The West India planter and merchants helped to facilitate the islands' defence - from 1779 to 1782, the Navy Board contracted with the London West India merchants to transport 8500 troops to the Caribbean; of these approximately 7500 were dispatched to the sugar islands on board ships belonging to West India merchants.<sup>83</sup> This saved the government about ten pounds per soldier in transportation costs, and assured West Indian ships outbound cargoes from which they could make a profit.<sup>84</sup> The West India merchants engaged in a contract with the government that was both mutually beneficial and illustrated the merchants' determination to minimise profit loss and also illustrate their strategy in maintaining their loyalty to the government which benefitted their interests.

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<sup>79</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1), West India Merchants Minutes February 1776; Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, p.145

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) p. 165

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 168

<sup>82</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, p.208

<sup>83</sup> David Syrett, 'The West India Merchants and the conveyance of the King's troops to the Caribbean, 1779-1782,' *Journal for the Society of Army Historical Research*, 45:183 (1967), p.176

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.169

### **The American Intercourse Bill, 1783**

The loss of the North American colonies created, according to Ian Christie, ‘serious political tensions within Great Britain and generated a sense of despondency about the country’s future.’<sup>85</sup> These political tensions were reflected in the four ministries that came and went during the peace negotiations in 1782-3. This fluid situation had an effect on the diplomatic activity on the negotiations featuring the West Indies. The Americans’ keenness to restore the reciprocal trade was met with a willingness to come to an accord from the Shelburne administration. Lord Shelburne favoured free trade between the two countries, in the hope that this would allow them to resume their economic relationship, even though America no longer operated within the Navigation Acts.

Shelburne’s vision of commercial freedom was at odds with those who wanted to resist conciliation with the former colonies. By mid-February 1783 his enemies, Lord North and Charles James Fox, had joined to form an opposition coalition and forced Shelburne to resign. A remnant of Shelburne’s vision to maintain cordial Anglo-American relations was embodied in the American Intercourse Bill which came before Parliament in March 1783. It allowed for the temporary regulation of trade with the United States, permitting American vessels to import American goods into the British West Indies, and exporting West Indian produce out. If passed, the bill would have given the Americans not only unrestricted trade in their produce and manufactures with the West Indies, but also that of the carrying trade between the mother country and the islands.<sup>86</sup> For the West India

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<sup>85</sup> Ian R. Christie, ‘Great Britain in the aftermath of the American Revolution,’ in Greene and Pole (eds.) *A Companion to the American Revolution*, p. 497. For other studies of the cultural and political impact of the American Revolutionary on Britain, see Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). The most recent study of the political and military explanations for Britain’s defeat is explored by Andrew O’Shaughnessy, *The Men who lost America: British Leadership, The American Revolution and the fate of the Empire* (: The Lewis Walpole Series in Eighteenth Century Culture and History; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013)

<sup>86</sup> Herbert C. Bell, ‘British Commercial Policy in the West Indies 1783-93’ *English Historical Review*, 31:133(1916), p.434

interest, this bill would allow them to enjoy free access to their natural source of supply for essential provisions, as in the pre-war days. Opponents of the bill saw it as admitting Americans to all the benefits of imperial trade.

The American Intercourse Bill was divisive and was met with opposition by those who feared American commercial hegemony, and were sceptical of free trade. William Eden, diplomat, member of the Carlisle Peace Commission, and former Chief Secretary of Ireland, predicted that the bill would destroy Ireland's provision trade which currently supplied the West Indies, if America was permitted to trade freely with Britain. Furthermore, if the bill was passed, it would threaten British naval supremacy:

[If] the Americans were to be permitted under this Bill to bring the West India commodities to Europe, so he feared that the 600 ships of this country which that trade employed at present, would become useless, not only to the great decrease of our revenue but to the absolute destruction of our navy, arising from the destruction of that great nursery of seamen'.<sup>87</sup>

Eden saw the bill as a repeal of the Navigation Acts; since America was no longer a British territory, he suggested that all imports in American ships be subjected to the same duties and regulations 'as are prescribed by law in regard to the imports of European nations'. If this did not happen, America would dominate the economy and the carrying trade of the West Indies. The Fox/North coalition, who shared Eden's views, ensured the bill did not progress past the committee stage, and passed an act vesting in the King in Council temporary authority to regulate commerce between Britain and the United States. The Order in Council, introduced in July 1783 permitted the importation of lumber, livestock grain, flour and bread from the

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<sup>87</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXIII, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1783, col. 602-609. The Carlisle Peace Commission was an unsuccessful attempt by the British government to broker a peace settlement with the 13 colonies in 1778. See Jerome R. Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution* (M.E. Sharpe, 1997) pp. 71, 85, 122. 'William Eden, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Auckland (1744-1814),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8459?docPos=1> Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014

United States to the West Indies in British vessels only. The West Indian colonists could export their produce to the United States on British vessels. American ships were excluded from any share in the carrying trade; to satisfy the Irish and North American colonial interests, American pork, beef and fish were also forbidden entry.<sup>88</sup>

The silence of the West India interest in Parliament on the bill and the Order in Council is notable. Why did they not support the bill, point out its merits and benefits to MPs and ministers? There are two possible explanations. John Brewer observes that the most effective lobbies operated by ‘closeting themselves with ministers and opened up debate in Parliament using the time honoured tactic of the petition.’<sup>89</sup> As noted earlier, the British government was undergoing a period of adjustment; therefore, there was no opportunity to engage in established lobbying practices. Secondly, the Order in Council was thought to be a temporary measure, expiring after six months. Timing was everything. In the meantime, the tactic of the petition was not abandoned. The West India planters and merchants convened on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1783 to draft a petition to the ministry. This meeting, described as ‘a Committee of West India Planters and Merchants,’ suggests a further development of a more formalised West India lobby: a Standing Committee tasked with regularly attending to the West Indian interest.<sup>90</sup> The petition drafted by the Committee was a straightforward representation of their views:

The Committee entertain no doubt...such a share of the American Trade may be preserved to the Sugar Colonies as will greatly tend to their support, and upon every principle of true Policy and proper regard to the views and purposes of rival Nations,

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<sup>88</sup> Lowell Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, p. 180. For a contemporary discussion of the Orders in Council, see John Reeves, *A History of the Law of Shipping and Navigation* (London: E&J Brooke, 1792) Part III, Chapter 1

<sup>89</sup> Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, p. 233

<sup>90</sup> Chapter 2 explores the structure of the West India Committee which encompassed the Standing Committee, the executive arm, and the General Meeting

be highly deserving of the ultimate countenance and assistance from the Mother Country.<sup>91</sup>

This representation, which was made into a pamphlet and published, is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it publicly established the planters and merchants as a joint lobbying force. Secondly, that the planters and merchants appealed for the assistance of the mother country showed how their power and influence was, as Perry Gauci's observes was 'conditional on British political processes and priorities.'<sup>92</sup> Thirdly, the planters and merchants were appealing to public opinion, not just to parliament and to the ministry, on the importance of maintaining the established mode of trade with America.

### **Economic nationalism versus free trade**

The supporters of permanent trade restrictions argued powerfully against extending a policy towards the Americans that was overly accommodating. Equally, the spokesmen of the West India interest raised the level of the discourse by presenting their own cogent arguments, supporting the continuation of the carrying trade. Lord Sheffield was a prominent commentator on government economic policy who recognised the benefits of the mercantile system. He proposed that the United States be denied any benefits that accrued from trade with the British Empire. He was against relaxing the Navigation Laws in favour of the United States, proposing that the Order in Council become permanent policy. Sheffield studied the data from the Custom House records to prove that permitting American vessels to import their produce to the West Indies would precipitate the loss of the carrying trade.<sup>93</sup>

Sheffield supported his argument against free commercial intercourse with the United States with three points. Firstly, it would make the West Indian planter dependent on a foreign

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<sup>91</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1), West India Merchants Minutes, Representation of the West India Planters and Merchants to His Majesty's Ministers, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1783. There is no record of joint planter and merchant meetings prior to 1785; this representation was recorded in the Merchant minutes.

<sup>92</sup> Perry Gauci, 'Learning the Ropes of Sand,' p. 108

<sup>93</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXIII, cols. 762-764



power and encourage its shipping at Britain's expense. Secondly, the supplies the colonies required – lumber, fresh provisions, Indian corn, livestock – could in time be procured from Britain's remaining colonies, Canada and Nova Scotia. It would be a small inconvenience to pay more for these essential supplies if it meant the Navigation Laws were adhered to. To strengthen his argument, he pointed out that the French were able to undersell the British because they adhered to their navigation laws, acquiring their provisions from their own islands. Thirdly, Great Britain was entitled to the monopoly of West Indian produce; it would be injurious to her interests to permit a direct importation into the United States in her own vessels. Planters owed their wealth to Britain, and should not feel injured at rising costs as a consequence of a new policy dictated by imperial interests.<sup>94</sup> Sheffield believed that Britain should have absolute share of its output, and was in favour of boosting British exports on the grounds that they increased national wealth.

The planter and historian Bryan Edwards' response to Sheffield's observations represented the West Indian view on Anglo-American trade. He too had studied the imports and exports of American trade and the imports and exports of trade from Nova Scotia and Canada, using the data to present the West Indian perspective.

He accused the government of downplaying the true value of the carrying trade as a means to demonstrate that it was of little value. According to Edwards, the claim that it was worth £200,000 per year to 1774 was false – in fact, it was closer to £750,000 per year.<sup>95</sup> He pointed out that the Americans were the biggest consumers of West Indian produce, particularly rum, molasses, sugar and coffee, describing it as the 'happy effects of colonial navigation and commerce', with all profits returning to Great Britain.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lord Sheffield, *Observations on the Commerce of the American States* (J Debrett London, 1784) pp. 157-164

<sup>95</sup> Bryan Edwards, *Thoughts on the Late Proceedings of Government respecting the trade of the West India Islands with the United States of North America* (T. Cadell London, 1784) p.16

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p.19

Responding to Sheffield's first point, Edwards remarked that the admission of American vessels would not harm British shipping in any way. This was because the carrying trade was 'carried out by small sloops and schooners...even half decked boats, with no more than two or three men.'<sup>97</sup> These boats were too small to make a transatlantic crossing and consequently no threat to Britain's maritime interests.

On the second point, he claimed that Nova Scotia and Canada could not supply the West Indies, describing the recommendation as 'a mockery.' The winter kept them closed for six months of the year, noting that between July 1782 and July 1783 only two small vessels from Halifax and one from Quebec entered Jamaica.<sup>98</sup> Edwards argued that demand and supply must grow together, mutually supporting each other.

On Sheffield's third point, Edwards agreed that Britain was entitled to the monopoly of the produce of her West India possessions, as long as Britain's market continued to be the monopoly of the West Indies.<sup>99</sup> Where produce did not have a sufficient demand, it should not be restricted to the British market, but open to the American market. The case Edwards was making was that since the Navigation Laws were no longer providing the West Indians with economic advantages a flexible adherence to those laws should be adopted. The exclusion of American trade, which was in line with mercantilist principles, did not suit the West Indian interest, which wanted to have access to American provisions, and were prepared to advocate free market principles because it suited their requirements. Edwards saw the West Indies as a vital sector of the British economy. As far as he was concerned, if all parties involved in its trade were profiting, relations between the two countries would improve. For Edwards and the West India interest, there were no separate political and economic considerations.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.22

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

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 25

George Chalmers, a Loyalist attorney from Maryland and future Chief Clerk in the Committee for Trade, considered the West Indian position insupportable. He rejected Edwards' reasoning, asserting that the colonies were not only valuable for the profit they produced but also for the development of Britain's navigation. Accusing the planters of 'sacrificing at the shrine of interest,' he maintained that the law was not to be bent for their benefit. 'Our policy,' he wrote, 'ought not to permit aliens to act as rivals in the commerce of the British West Indies which the British nation is still bound to defend'.<sup>100</sup>

In the newspapers the planters were accused of 'unbounded avarice', willing to sacrifice the Navy for their own personal ends. 'The benefits expected to flow from [free intercourse between the United States and the West India islands] which is now so strenuously insisted on by our West India planters and merchants would not be *national* but *individual* benefits', wrote one commentator.<sup>101</sup> Like Sheffield and Chalmers, the public was not convinced that accommodating the West Indians would benefit the country.

### **The West India Committee and the Committee of Trade**

Losing the pamphlet war did not deter the planters and merchants from appealing to the ministry for 'nothing but the unlimited permission of navigation by American ships between the American dominions and the sugar colonies'.<sup>102</sup> Lord Penrhyn repeatedly attended William Pitt (who became prime minister in December 1783) with petitions from the West India Planters and Merchant for the opportunity to make a formal representation to the

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<sup>100</sup> George Chalmers, *Opinions on Interesting Subjects of Public Law and Commercial Policy arising from American Independence* (London, 1784) pp. 50, 53. George Chalmers later became colonial agent for the Bahamas and was an active member of the Standing Committee from 1814 until his death in 1825. Also see Grace Cockcroft, *The Public Life of George Chalmers* (New York: Columbia University Press 1939)

<sup>101</sup> John Stevenson, *Morning Herald*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1784

<sup>102</sup> The National Archives (hereafter TNA) CO 137/83, Committee of West India Planters and Merchants, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1784

government. The West Indians were encouraged by comments made by Pitt in November of that year which suggested he was disposed to allow trade to continue uninterrupted:

The nation had a right to expect that, without delay a complete commercial system suited to the novelty of our situation will be laid before parliament. I am acquainted with the difficulty of the business and will not attribute the delay hitherto to any neglect on the part of the present ministers...I expect the business will soon be brought forward, not by piecemeal but that one grand system of commerce built on circumstances of the times will be submitted to the House for their consideration.<sup>103</sup>

However, Paul Kelly notes that Pitt was in the midst of a power struggle, fighting for his political life against the attacks of Charles James Fox, Lord North and their allies.<sup>104</sup>

Consequently, he was only able to refer the lobby to a Committee of Council he established to consider its petition. All the arguments for and against commercial intercourse were again played out before the Committee, which heard evidence not only from the planters and merchants, but also from assemblies, colonial governors, merchants and government officials over twelve weeks, between March and June 1784. The Committee considered the allegations advanced by the West India lobby.<sup>105</sup>

The West India planters and merchants now had the task of convincing the Committee that the profitability of the West Indies and its continued benefits to Britain could not be maintained without unrestricted trade with the United States. The delegation was led by some of the most prominent planters and merchants. Lord Penrhyn, the owner of six Jamaican

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<sup>103</sup> *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and debates of the House of Commons*, Volume XII (1783), pp. 10-11

<sup>104</sup> Paul Kelly, 'British Politics 1783-4: The Emergence and Triumph of the Younger Pitt's Administration', *Historical Research*, 54:129 (1981), pp. 62-78

<sup>105</sup> The West India planters and merchants' allegations were for immediate free intercourse; that supplies from America could not be provided by other country, that it was too expensive to navigate between the sugar colonies and the North American colonies; and that they can only pay for American supplies with their own produce, that cannot be sold in the mother country. TNA, BT 5/1, *Committee Appointed for Consideration of all matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations*, folio205

plantations, and Member of Parliament for Liverpool, was their spokesman. Other delegates included Richard Atkinson, a partner in the West India merchant house Mure, Son and Atkinson, Jamaican proprietor and Alderman of London. During the war Atkinson had held a number of government contracts supplying rum victuals and other necessities to the troops in North America.<sup>106</sup> Charles Spooner had estates in Antigua and St Christopher; Bryan Edwards, who had argued the West Indian case in print, was another Jamaican absentee and merchant; and Sir Philip Gibbes was a Barbados proprietor and baronet.<sup>107</sup> These men had a vast knowledge of the West Indies and access to Custom House data, correspondence from the planters who were resident in the colonies, and data from their own merchant houses, which they presented as their evidence.

They opened their case by arguing that without this trade the West Indies could not receive the essential lumber to build the barrels for sugar, or feed their enslaved workers. They asserted that only the United States could provide supplies all year round at reasonable prices. The suggestion that British ships should engage in a circuitous route from Britain, collecting provisions at American ports and landing them in the West Indies was impractical, expensive and time consuming. Lastly, they argued that the established market for their produce was in jeopardy. They exchanged their produce for American supplies; this produce had no outlet in British markets and would consequently remain a 'dead weight' on the rest of the produce of the West Indies.<sup>108</sup> To support their claim of distress, the planters and merchants produced letters from leading planters in Jamaica and a petition from the Jamaican Assembly stating that commercial intercourse was vital for the economy. The Order in Council had caused

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<sup>106</sup> *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/atkinson-richard-1738-85> Accessed 18th March 2014

<sup>107</sup> Vere Langford Oliver, *Caribbeana: Being Miscellaneous papers relating to the history, genealogy, topography and antiquities of the British West Indies, Volume 1* (London: Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, 1910), p. 2; John Burke, *A General Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire, Volume 1* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832) p. 510

<sup>108</sup> TNA, BT 5/1, Committee Appointed for consideration of all matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1784, f. 205

prices of colonial produce to rise exponentially; for example, the price of mutton in Antigua had risen from eighteen pence per pound to four shillings per pound, and the price of flour in Jamaica had doubled due to the uncertainty of when another shipment would arrive; in Barbados the price of lumber had gone up from £7 per thousand feet to £25, subsequently falling back down to £12.<sup>109</sup>

To prove that only the United States could provide the necessary supplies they presented Custom House records showing in the three years before war only five vessels had arrived from Canada, six from Newfoundland and two from Nova Scotia. In 1774 three quarters of commerce had been carried by American ships.<sup>110</sup> Canada could not even supply its own army of 15,000 men during the war. Richard Atkinson maintained that his partnership was disappointed with the profits made conducting business with Canada, which was not yet in a position to lead in the production of grain and lumber. As a consequence, Maine had been contracted to fill the vacuum.

The Order in Council angered the Americans, the delegation argued. Philadelphia and Maryland placed high duties on British ships or refused them entry into their ports. Not only was there a threat of higher duties on British ships, there was also the threat that they would seek trade with the French West Indies. The governor of Martinique had given permission to American merchants to build a rum distillery in St Pierre, its principal commercial town.<sup>111</sup> This, the delegation claimed, would affect the export of rum from the British West Indies resulting in a glut of that article.

To answer the charge of American ships threatening the British monopoly, the planters and merchants insisted that the numerous vessels travelling between the West Indies and America

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, ff.10-12

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, f. 13

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, f. 16

were very small, hardly exceeding 50 tons. There were two ways that supplies could arrive in the West Indies: clandestinely or on a fair footing that would be to the mutual advantage of both countries. An illegal trade would only benefit America.

From the West India lobby's perspective the consequences of trade restrictions were obvious and disastrous. When asked by the Committee whether they had any further evidence to support their allegations, they replied, rather testily, that they felt they had sufficiently proved that the West Indian planters were in distress, and that it was clear that the North American colonies were unable to provide the West Indies with supplies in exchange for rum. The trade restrictions benefitted their enemy the French, who by trading with the Americans were taking commerce away from the British, subsequently resulting in a glut in West Indian produce and higher expenses for the planter.<sup>112</sup>

Evidence given by other witnesses, however, contradicted the West India lobby's assertions. William Knox, former undersecretary of state for American affairs, was the author of the Order in Council, which he drew up in May 1783 at Lord North's request. As a Loyalist and committed mercantilist, he was not disposed to grant the Americans any favours. He looked to the potential of the North American colonies, which were increasingly populated with Loyalists apparently keen to establish trade links with the mother country, to eventually remove the American monopoly.<sup>113</sup> He was certain of the deleterious effects on British navigation if the Americans were allowed to import lumber and other provisions into the West Indies using their own vessels. He was confident that in time, Canada and Nova Scotia would be in a position to provide the West Indies with everything it needed.<sup>114</sup> Knox admitted

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, f. 168

<sup>113</sup> For a classic study on the Loyalists see Mary Beth Norton, *The British Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774-1789* (London: Constable, 1974); and a study of the Loyalist Diaspora has been written by Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: The Loss of America and the remaking of the British Empire* (London: Harper Press, 2012)

<sup>114</sup> TNA, BT 5/1, *Committee Appointed for consideration of all matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations*, f. 35

however, that at present the Americans should come to the West Indies assistance, and that provisions should be paid for with West Indian produce. Nevertheless, ‘whatever permissions of this kind be given it should be remembered that the object of this country is to exclude the communication of foreigners with our colonies...intercourse should not be a condition of treaty but a mere permission or indulgence without condition or equivalent.’<sup>115</sup> Knox supported the exclusion of the North American colonies from the West Indian market, believing that Canada could supply them with lumber, fish and flour.

The most damaging evidence against the West India lobby’s case was from a West India merchant. Robert Milligan gave a completely different account of the state of commerce in the West Indies.<sup>116</sup> In fact, his testimony showed the level of his own interest in the West Indies-American trade. Milligan had lived and traded in Jamaica between 1767 and 1779, when he returned to England. A prominent member of the Jamaican mercantile community, he served as a founding member of the Kingston Chamber of Commerce.<sup>117</sup> He challenged the assertion that there was a scarcity of flour in Jamaica. At the news of the issuing of the Order in Council, the price of flour did increase 100%, which encouraged many merchants to seek great profits for their produce. Subsequently many ships were sent to the West Indies, which caused a glut in the flour market and prices decreased. According to Milligan, by January 1784 there was over 17,000 barrels of flour in Kingston Market. This contradicted the merchant and planter delegation that the price of flour had doubled.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> British Library, Add MS 61864. William Knox, ‘Intercourse between our colonies and the United States’, (n.d.) ffs. 106-107. Also see Leland J. Bellot, *William Knox: The Life of an Eighteenth Century Imperialist* (Austin; London: University of Texas Press, 1977)

<sup>116</sup> Robert Milligan would become one of the principal merchants behind the creation of the West India Docks

<sup>117</sup>TNA, BT 5/1, *Committee appointed for all matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations*, f. 107. The Kingston Chamber of Commerce was established in 1778 to liaise with the naval commanders to ensure the safe passage of shipping to England. See Robert J. Bennett, *Local Business Voice: The History of the Chamber of Commerce in Britain, Ireland and Revolutionary America, 1760-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 144-148

<sup>118</sup>TNA, BT 5/1. f.108



Milligan believed that a regular importation of supplies from Britain could enter the West Indies – twelve British ships had already been established for undertaking the carrying trade and freight from North America to the West Indies. When asked if he had made an offer to the Jamaican planters to furnish them with supplies, the answer was not recorded. He denied that the planters were in distress as a result of the Order in Council – while there had been a temporary effect, there was no real scarcity. The planters were portrayed as alarmist.

The Committee of Trade carefully investigated the allegations of the West India lobby. According to those investigations, the planters and merchants' evidence was contradictory, inconsistent and incomplete leading the Committee to uphold the Order in Council. As far as it could ascertain, flour importation was equal to pre-war levels; between December 1783 and March 1784, 75 vessels had entered Kingston with sufficient cargoes of lumber and provisions from American ports, which had been 'navigated according to the law.' The letters they had received from correspondents in Jamaica stated that the planters were well supplied and paying reasonable prices. As Anna Lane Lingelbach noted, the Committee was able 'to view the privations of the planters with a more judicious eye than the planters themselves.'<sup>119</sup> To this end, they noted that the West India lobby provided no accounts of current prices in Barbados or the Leeward Islands; they had received no letter of complaint from Barbados. Any distress suffered in the West Indies was temporary.

In reply to the allegation that the West Indies could only be supplied by America, the Committee chose witnesses who were overwhelmingly biased. Sir Guy Carleton, for example, was former Governor of Canada and the commander of forces in North America, who assured the Committee that within two years New Brunswick could produce enough

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<sup>119</sup> Anna Lane Lingelbach, 'The Inception of the British Board of Trade,' *American Historical Review*, 30:4 (1925), p. 707

lumber for its own use and that of the West Indies.<sup>120</sup> Thomas Ainsley was the Collector of Customs at Quebec, and was anxious to secure an appointment to Quebec's Legislative Council.<sup>121</sup> Brook Watson, a prominent merchant, was the former Commissary General to the British Army; and Thomas Irving, the former Inspector General of Imports and Exports in North America, was described by Gouveneur Morris, United States Minister to France as 'decidedly opposed to America'.<sup>122</sup> These individuals hoped to see Canada and Nova Scotia benefit from the exclusion of America from the carrying trade, as well as harbouring their own agendas and biases. In responding to this allegation, the Committee offered only forecasts of what could be provided by North America and Britain. The conclusions reached by the Committee were in accordance with the stipulations of the Order in Council; it respected the principles of the Navigation Laws. Furthermore, some members of the Committee had an anti-American attitude. The leader of the Committee, Charles Jenkinson (later Lord Hawkesbury and Earl Liverpool), has been described as one of the most zealous and influential believers in the navigation system, and well known for his reputation of vindictiveness towards America.<sup>123</sup> In particular, he played a critical role in devising the Stamp Act for the colonies and voted against its repeal, which Gerald Graham argued brought matters to an issue, and was generally acknowledged as an expert in commercial and financial matters.<sup>124</sup> Henry Dundas, the secretary of the Navy, at the time of war the Lord Advocate of Scotland, called the bills to impose trading sanctions on New England 'just and merciful'. 'When it is said that no alternative is left to the New Englanders but to starve or

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<sup>120</sup>TNA, BT 5/1, f. 108

<sup>121</sup> 'Thomas Ainsley 1729-1806,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*  
[http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/ainslie\\_thomas\\_5E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/ainslie_thomas_5E.html) Accessed 7th June 2014

<sup>122</sup>TNA, BT 5/1, f. 110 John McCusker, 'Thomas Irving: Loyalist and Civil Servant', in John J McCusker, *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.196

<sup>123</sup> Gerald Graham, *Sea Power and British North America: 1783-1820* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1941), p.13; John E. Crowley, 'Neo-Mercantilism and the Wealth of Nations: British Commercial Policy after the American Revolution,' *Historical Journal*, 33:2 (1990), p.340

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p.340

rebel', he is recorded to have remarked, 'this is not the fact, for there is another way, to submit.'<sup>125</sup>

The inquiry, with its opposing interests, and Committee laden with an anti-American bias explains Bryan Edwards' bitter comments when reflecting on the episode ten years later. He described the ruling as a consequence of 'a lurking taint of resentment and malignity, and an ardent desire to wound the new republic through the sides of the West Indies as to benefit Nova Scotia at their expense.'<sup>126</sup> He maintained that there were 'private interests and prejudices towards the West Indies', and that the inquiry was influenced by 'Loyalists who had resentments to gratify and secret purposes to promote.'<sup>127</sup>

## Conclusion

At the eve of war, the West India interest in London was careful not to put any strain on its relationship with the imperial government. Consequently it avoided engaging in any constitutional discourses and focused on the threats to its economic interests that war would bring. This conservatism resulted in little to no parliamentary interference with the determination of the ministry and Parliament to assert its authority over the colonies. This action also demonstrates that the debates over the parliamentary presence of West Indian MPs are not sufficient to explain their influence. The economic consequences of war did not alter many planters and merchants' support of the government.

The outbreak of war compelled the West India Planters and Merchants to act jointly to protect the West Indies from invasion and financial ruin. Their belated appeals for peace ignored, they engaged in traditional forms of lobbying – petitioning and conferences with ministers - to ensure the safe passage of their produce from the West Indies to Britain, sought

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<sup>125</sup> Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) p. 85. Dundas is said to have coined the term 'starvation,' which also became his nickname.

<sup>126</sup> Bryan Edwards, *A History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Volume 2 (London, 1801) p. 498

<sup>127</sup> Edwards, *ibid*, p. 510

relief for damage caused by hurricanes, and facilitated stronger security from invasion. This lobbying was frequent and regular and, as Andrew O'Shaughnessy has demonstrated, made the West India interest into a formal commercial lobby. The trade restrictions imposed on the United States by the British was the cause of further innovations in the West India interest to ensure an uninterrupted commercial intercourse between the two countries. The development of a Committee of Planters and Merchants - later known as the Standing Committee - meant that there was now a group of West Indians regularly responding to the challenges of preventing the potentially deleterious effects of trade restrictions. Unfortunately, the West Indians did not fully appreciate the determination of the Fox/North ministry to adhere to the principles of the Navigation Laws to protect British interests.

The short-lived ministries and constitutional crisis of 1783-84, which removed the Fox/North coalition and installed the ministry of William Pitt the Younger were instrumental in the institutional development of the West India interest. In this period the dependency on patronage and the cultivation of a rapport with ministers, both key elements of their lobbying strategy, were ineffective. However, that they successfully petitioned for an investigation into their grievances suggests they still wielded significant influence. The West Indians assumed that the commercial and strategic importance of the West Indies to the British Empire guaranteed them a favourable outcome. However, interests competing to replace America's commercial dominance and a Committee with members hostile to the new republic meant that the West Indians lost in their bid to restore trade. Selwyn H.H. Carrington asserts that the restrictions contained in the Order in Council of 1783 cost the West Indies a healthy economy and the West Indies remained dependent on the United States for their economic survival.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Selwyn H.H. Carrington, 'The United States and the British West Indian Trade, 1783-1807,' in Roderick A McDonald ed. *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy*, p. 165

The West Indians recognised the necessity of a formal representation. Subsequently the West India Committee assumed that role on behalf of the West India interest, relying on its parliamentary, colonial and institutional manifestations. The next chapter will explore how the West India Committee developed through its structure and membership over the next five decades.

## Chapter 2

### The West India Committee 1785-1833: Structure, Functions and Scope

Chapter 1 explored how the political circumstances after the American War for Independence encouraged the West India interest to establish a permanent organisational wing in 1783. The West India Committee's agenda was to maintain the profitability of West Indian produce by negotiating regulatory advantages. It was also one of the key proponents of the anti-abolitionist agenda that lobbied against abolition of the slave trade and slavery.

The organisational structure and membership of the West India Committee has only recently received attention by historians. In his study of the West Indian economy and British abolition, David Beck Ryden takes a prosopographical approach to the meeting minutes of the West India Committee between 1785 and 1807, gaining insight into its lobbying strategies, organisational and governing structure, and the identities of the chief defenders of the slave trade.<sup>1</sup> However, a study of the organisational and governing structure of the West India Committee in the period after abolition and to the emancipation of the enslaved workers in 1833 remains relatively unexplored.<sup>2</sup> This chapter complements and expands on earlier work in analysing the minutes of the West India Committee to 1833. First, it engages with the previous analysis, expanding on the interpretations of the meetings and membership from 1785-1807, putting it into a wider perspective. Second, it analyses the minutes from 1807-1833 to ascertain the nature of the Committee's lobbying activities, organisational and

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<sup>1</sup> David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition 1783-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 40-81. Ryden has adopted the term 'Society of West India Planters and Merchants' or 'Society' since this is what they called themselves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have chosen to adopt the term 'West India Committee' since this was how they were identified by the government and their contemporaries, and also since their archival records are also identified in this manner.

<sup>2</sup> Ryden gives an overview the lobbying activities of the West India Committee from 1807-1815; his focus are the economic reasons for the decline of the Jamaican planter class in that period. David Beck Ryden, 'Sugar Spirits and Fodder: The London West India Interest and the glut of 1807-1815,' *Atlantic Studies*, 9:1 (2012), pp. 41-64. Lillian Penson only made a small reference to the organisational changes to the West India Committee in the 1820s, see *The Colonial Agents of the British West Indies : A Study in Colonial Administration, mainly in the Eighteenth Century* (London: University of London Press, 1924) p. 211

governing structure and identifies its key members in this period. Third, it draws conclusions based on those findings.

Two main findings arise from the study of the minutes. Firstly, its membership was dominated by Jamaican absentee planters and merchants. They played a central role in the Committee, representing it at a leadership level consistently throughout the period Ryden studied. These Jamaican planters and merchants were connected through their social activities, patterns of marriage and shared business interests. Using these commercial, social and political networks, they promoted the West Indian interest in London and Parliament. Jamaican absentees developed a close-knit community in the metropole, meeting socially and formally outside of official West India Committee meetings.<sup>3</sup> For example, a study of the journals of the Jamaican absentee Nathaniel Phillips, who arrived in England in 1789 indicate that he frequently met with his fellow absentees and participated in political meetings to discuss strategy on how to defend against the attacks on the slave trade.<sup>4</sup> Of the fifty most frequently attending families and individuals of the West India Committee between 1785 and 1807, 36 were Jamaican absentees or merchants, which further demonstrate the dominance of the Jamaica merchant and planting interest. Ryden is particularly interested in the way the Jamaicans worked to maintain a strong colonial identity in Britain and highlights the planter merchant family alliances that existed within the West India Committee.

The Committee was divided into two distinct organisational structures, the Standing Committee and the General Meeting, which together made up about 80 percent of the total meetings. The Standing Committee was responsible for directing the agenda of the lobby, for convening meetings and communicating with ministers and heads of government

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<sup>3</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, pp. 42-44

<sup>4</sup> Clare Taylor's researches on Nathaniel Phillips based on his Slebech journals provides insight on absenteeism and planter attitudes towards abolition. See Clare Taylor, 'The Journal of an Absentee Proprietor: Nathaniel Phillips of Slebech', *Journal of Caribbean History* 18 (1984), pp. 67-82; 'The Perils of a West Indian Heiress: Case Studies of the Heiresses of Nathaniel Phillips of Slebech', *Welsh History Review* 18 (1985), pp. 495-513

departments, and appointing subcommittees to deal with specific issues such as administering the Committee finances or drafting petitions. The General Meetings were open to everyone with an interest in the West Indies, and these meetings were more informational and attracted a much larger attendance, sometimes as high as three hundred.<sup>5</sup>

Ryden highlights the role of the planters and merchants with Jamaican interests in his analysis of the West India Committee minutes because they played a leading role in orchestrating the defence of the slave trade.<sup>6</sup> However, an investigation of their activities provides a more comprehensive study of the West India Committee. A broader interpretation of the meeting minutes suggests that the assertion that the General Meetings ‘were informational gatherings that served to express a unified interest amongst absentee planters, merchants and metropolitan sympathisers,’ and that the Jamaicans dictated the lobby’s agenda requires further examination.

### **The General Meeting 1785-1807**

General Meetings were convened from 1785 as part of the West India Committee’s main operations to provide information for the merchants and planters based in the metropole. They were convened to publicise significant developments on colonial policy, but also for them to instruct the Standing Committee to take particular action on any governmental policy that affected trade, defence, and duties on West Indian produce, such as rum, sugar, cotton or coffee. Memorials or petitions drafted by the Standing Committee were approved and adopted at General Meetings, as were duties levied on West India produce that funded the

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<sup>5</sup> ICS, West India Committee Minutes (M915/2). At the General Meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> April 1789, 281 attendees voted on a declaration of anti-abolitionist principles. General Meetings with over 100 attendees took place on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1792, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1792, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1792, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1792, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1806, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1806, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1807, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1807, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1807, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 1807

<sup>6</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, pp. 75-81. Ryden acknowledges that the Jamaican planter interest defended the interests of all the West India colonies. His identification of Jamaica as a dominant force in the Committee is not in dispute; however, his emphasis on its activity implies only Jamaican interests were represented. To demonstrate the presence and involvement of other West Indian colonies he examines the role of the colonial agents, describing them as ‘allies of the Jamaican interest,’ whose political connections and experience were useful to the Committee.



Committee's operations. This indicates that between 1785 and 1807, the General Meeting was a key element to the functioning of the Committee.

***Table 2.1 Percentage Distribution of Committee meetings by type May 1785-May 1807, from a total of 287 meetings<sup>7</sup>***

<b>Type of Meeting</b>	<b>Number of Meetings</b>	<b>Percentage Distribution</b>
General Meeting	115	40%
Standing Committee	112	39%
Sub/Special Committee	46	16%
Jamaican Planters and Merchants	11	4%
Unspecified	3	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2.1 shows that in this period, Standing Committee and General Meetings were held with almost equal frequency. The campaign to abolish the slave trade can explain this frequency of General Meetings; its membership was anxious to be apprised of any developments in the campaign and to be informed of West Indian strategies to counter the crisis. The General Meetings were regarded as the space to inform all those interested in the colonies of developments in parliament that affected them, as well as important news out of the colonies such as rebellions or hurricanes. It was also the forum where new members were elected to the Standing Committee. Another explanation for the equal proportion of General to Standing Committee meetings was the tumultuous events that occurred in the 1790s that affected the West Indies: the revolution in St Domingue, and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 45. Prior to 1785 there were joint meetings with the Society of West India Merchants; in 1785 the West India Committee kept separate minutes.

*Table 2.2 Topics discussed at General Meetings 1785-1807 and their frequency<sup>8</sup>*

<b>Topics discussed at General Meetings 1785-1807</b>	<b>Number of meetings on topic</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Abolition of the slave trade	34	29.6
Rum and sugar duties	27	23.5
Accounts and fundraising	11	9.6
Creation of West India Docks	8	6.9
Military defence of the colonies	7	6.0
St Domingue Rebellion	6	5.21
Sierra Leone settlement	6	5.21
Conduct of Jervis and Grey	6	5.21
East India Sugar	6	5.21
Commercial intercourse between the West Indies and United States of America	5	4.34
<b>Total meetings</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2.2 illustrates that General Meetings were not only convened to share information but to respond to a range of issues important to the membership. Nearly a third of the General Meetings were dedicated to the campaign to prevent the abolition of the slave trade – these meetings attracted a high attendance; often over one hundred and fifty people were present.<sup>9</sup> The Standing Committee directed strategy and policy related to countering the tactics of the abolition campaign; it must be noted, however, that all tactics were agreed on by both structures. The petition sent to the Commons to appoint a Select Committee to investigate the

<sup>8</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1 and 2)

<sup>9</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting Minutes, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1789. Over 281 attended

slave trade was moved by the attendees of the General Meeting.<sup>10</sup> The merchants, planters and all those interested in the British West Indies used the General Meetings to draft resolutions, collect and present evidence against abolition and to approve the raising of subscriptions to fund their campaign, raising the trade rate from a penny to sixpence.<sup>11</sup>

The issue of duties on West Indian produce was the second most important topic that preoccupied the planters and merchants. Between 1786 and 1787, for example, the Committee dedicated a great number of their meetings to the tax policy on rum exports. This was in consequence of the proposed changes to British tax law, giving the Committee the opportunity to lobby for a preferential tax for British West Indian rum.<sup>12</sup> Since rum was a completed product at the time of export, unlike sugar, the Committee found it difficult to convince the government it should be subsidised.

The Committee's campaign for government assistance stemmed from the consequences of the Order in Council of 1783 which ended free trade between the British West Indies and the United States.<sup>13</sup> The sale of rum to the United States was forbidden under the new trade regime and was a huge inconvenience for planters, because they were compelled to seek alternative markets for their rum in the remaining North American colonies. Further, the government negotiations towards a commercial treaty with France in 1786 further angered the Committee since they now found that their rum was in competition with French brandy. They rejected Pitt's offer of a 3 pence reduction on the rum duty, arguing that it would not give sufficient relief to the West India colonies.<sup>14</sup> The General Meeting instructed Lord

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1789. The co-ordination of the anti-abolitionist campaign by the West India Committee is explored in Ian Barrett, 'Cultures of Proslavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain c.1787-1807' (Ph.D. thesis, Kings College, University of London, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> ICS, West India Committee Minutes (M915/2), General Meeting, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1789

<sup>12</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, p.105

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 1

<sup>14</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, pp. 106-108

Penrhyn, the chairman of the West India Committee, to present Pitt with their memorial, and to circulate copies to the outports.<sup>15</sup>

The General Meeting minutes that reported on the above event reflected the level of activity in reaction to the proposed treaty with France and the disastrous consequences of it as perceived by the West India interest. The Bristol West India Association was particularly anxious to know the result of the West India Committee's applications to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as well as the contents of any memorial they planned to submit to Parliament, 'so that they may have an opportunity of joining their efforts to obtain a redress.'<sup>16</sup> This is an early example of a coordinated lobbying effort led by the West India Committee in conjunction with other associated bodies throughout Britain.

The General Meeting allowed non-Standing Committee members a platform to seek redress and to petition the imperial government in cases where their property and investments were under threat. The war against the French in the West Indies (1793-1815) was of particular concern to the West India Committee membership. In February 1795 George Woodford Thelluson, a West India merchant with commercial links in Martinique, chaired 'a meeting of Merchants and Others commissioned to act on behalf of claimants of a property confiscated in the island of Martinique.'<sup>17</sup> General Charles Grey and Admiral John Jervis, the commanders of the West Indies expedition of 1793-94, had been accused by the Martinique planters of unwarranted property seizure against the peace terms issued. An immediate concern of the West India merchants was that any confiscation of property in Martinique would prevent the payments of money advanced as credit to French planters. As a way to

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<sup>15</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1787

<sup>16</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting Minutes, Letter from William Miles (Chair of Bristol West India Merchants) to James Allen (Secretary, West India Committee), 17<sup>th</sup> December 1786

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1795; Susanne Seymour and Sheryllynne Haggerty, 'Property, Power and Authority: The implicit and explicit slavery connections of Bolsover Castle and Brodsworth Hall in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,' in Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann ed. *Slavery and the British Country House* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013), pp. 80, 85-86

prevent the French from opening trade of their West Indian colonies to neutral vessels, an Order in Council issued in November 1793 had authorised commanders of British warships to arrest and bring to a court of admiralty any vessels carrying produce of, or supplies for any French colony. This order proved particularly controversial because it resulted in the confiscation of 250 American vessels, many of which were condemned as prizes.<sup>18</sup> Before the expedition sailed, Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War, had ordered commanders to agree on a method for the division of war booty, which encouraged them to be on the lookout for financial gain. Prize money was one of the few ways in which officers in the army and navy could become wealthy; the Order in Council therefore led the commanders to assume that they had a claim to all the property of the islands they captured. The activities of the commanders were described by a contact from Martinique to Edmund Thornton, a member of the Standing Committee who had an estate in St Pierre in April 1794:

Never was such unheard of conduct as has been practiced here...they have confiscated every article in the towns of St Pierre and Fort Royal and their agents are now basely employed selling indiscriminately, and the emigrants suffer equally with the others...there is no respect to persons or property, 'tis hardly possible to describe to you the scene of distress.<sup>19</sup>

The West India Committee moved quickly to protest against the actions of the British forces which they believed to be damaging to their interests. In a series of petitions they pressured the Duke of Portland, Secretary of State responsible for the colonies, to act against the commanders' violations of the merchants' 'full and immediate enjoyment of all lawful property', and railed against the 'extreme acts of military rigour against the private rights of

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<sup>18</sup> J.M. Fewster, 'The Jay Treaty and British Ship Seizures: The Martinique Cases', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 45:3 (1988), pp. 426-52

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from J.M. Fewster, 'Prize Money and the British Expedition to the West Indies of 1793-94', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12:1 (1983), p.7; *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXXII, col 56

the French colonists.<sup>20</sup> Provocation of this kind, the merchants and planters feared, would lead to reprisal attacks and confiscation of British property by the French. ‘Should the fortunes of war be reversed...and any of the British Islands be captured by the enemy...retaliation will be little short of total ruin...’<sup>21</sup>

What the planters and merchants wanted was a public renunciation of the proclamations made by the two commanders on the confiscation of properties, which they claimed were illegal. The Committee further supported their case with letters from Barbados, describing attacks made by the French on St Vincent’s, Grenada and St Lucia, implying that reprisals against Grey’s and Jervis’s conduct were already taking place.<sup>22</sup> Portland tried to draw a line under the affair by writing to the Committee stating that when the government was informed of the proclamations they had ordered Grey and Jervis to refund any monies received. The West India Committee were not appeased. They continued to petition the Commons for a public disavowal of the Jervis and Grey proclamations because they believed that a public reversal would protect the colonists’ property in Martinique and in turn protect British investment.<sup>23</sup> They appointed a committee to engage in research and draft another memorial based on letters to Charles Thomson, agent for St Kitts from the assembly on French attacks on Grenada and Montserrat. The draft was written by Gilbert Francklyn, a planter from Tobago, and Charles Thomson, with a paragraph suggested by Sir William Young, agent for Tobago.<sup>24</sup>

Joseph Foster Barham, MP and member of the Committee was instructed to call for a motion to conduct an inquiry into the legality of the proclamations in the House of Commons as well

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<sup>20</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting minutes, Memorial to the Duke of Portland, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1795

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> ICS West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting Minutes, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1795

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, Memorial to House of Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1795

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See Chapter 4 for Francklyn’s activities

as a disavowal of them.<sup>25</sup> The motion was rejected. Henry Dundas conceded that the proclamations could have been worded better, but argued that

To punish error or inadvertency in the application of the general principles of the laws of nations on the parts of the commanders would be to subject them to a responsibility too rigorous for any officer to bear.<sup>26</sup>

The motion was rejected by 67 to 17, the proclamations were never disavowed, and the House maintained a good sense of the commanders' services to the country. That the West India Committee was unsuccessful is less important than their robust and sustained lobbying on the issue. They utilised all of their resources – providing detailed evidence from their networks, an assault of memorials and petitions and their parliamentary platform to seek redress; and at the very least were able to bring the matter to public attention.

### **The Standing Committee 1785-1807**

The Standing Committee was responsible for the development of the lobbying strategy of the West India Committee, and its execution. Its approach to lobbying was consistent with how the West India interest had lobbied in its earlier manifestations. Memorials or petitions were drafted to Parliament or to the secretaries of states of the government departments. The Committee appealed directly to various government ministers in their attempts to influence government policy. Petitions bore the signature of the chairman and were addressed to the relevant department or minister, and had the generic title 'The Memorial/Petition of the West India Planters and Merchants'. The secretary was sometimes instructed to publish the petitions, which would be disseminated to the West India Associations of the outports and

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<sup>25</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXXII, col. 54

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, col. 70

occasionally in the newspapers.<sup>27</sup> This occurred at critical times when the Committee felt especially under threat from abolition or from excessive duties; for example, it sent 38 petitions between 1786 and 1807 addressed to the House of Commons or to the Crown.<sup>28</sup> This was the Committee's standard form of political engagement, using it to lobby for the amendment of clauses in current legislation. They were formal applications made on behalf of the West India interest.

National issues such as the abolition of the slave trade were addressed to the Houses of Parliament. These petitions had the dual role of appealing to Parliament and to the public. In these petitions the Committee reminded the government of the fact that the use of slave labour in the British West Indies had been legally sanctioned and presented their case to the public by outlining the amounts of money invested in the West Indies, and the consequences if the abolition bill was passed. The Standing Committee appointed deputations that waited on and conferred with ministers and collected evidence to support their petitions. These tasks were usually delegated to smaller committees appointed by the Standing Committee, which would meet separately and reconvene with the other members to report back their progress or their findings, and action would be taken based on the subcommittee's report, or the outcomes of meetings held. The members of the Standing Committee kept themselves extremely well informed on legislation that was to be presented to Parliament, using their contacts to provide them with early drafts. It allowed them to respond quickly to any proposed legislation that could be harmful to their interests by requesting a meeting with the relevant minister and discuss amendments to clauses or to petition the department, if

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<sup>27</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Petition to the House of Commons on the question of Abolition being again proposed for deliberation (privately printed); 21<sup>st</sup> December 1792, Declaration of Attachment to the British Constitution (*Gazette*, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1792); Petition to the House of Commons opposing the Slave Registry Bill, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1816 (privately printed)

<sup>28</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/1,2,4), General Meeting and Standing Committee Minutes



conferences were unsuccessful. Developing a good working relationship with the appropriate minister was also necessary for securing favourable outcomes.

An example of this took place in 1787, when Lord Penrhyn was given a copy of a bill from a member of the Privy Council for Trade of the list of goods to be admitted into the free ports to be established in Jamaica, Dominica and Providence. A deputation was dispatched to the Privy Council with a set of resolutions stating they had no objections to the admission of tortoiseshell, corn, timber, livestock, Indian corn, tobacco and tobacco seed into the free ports, since they were ‘the growth of the West Indies.’<sup>29</sup> The Standing Committee also kept up to date with the Acts and votes of the colonial assemblies, ordering their secretary, James Allen, to purchase copies of them for use in their meetings.

Until 1794 it is not certain how new members were elected to the Standing Committee. It is not stated whether they were elected via nominations from existing members. New members were not introduced in the minutes, other than their names simply appearing in the roster. Certain key members of the West India interest gained automatic membership. These included colonial agents, whose main function was to represent the interests of the colonial assemblies in Westminster on all issues such as the defence of the colonies, lobbying for lower sugar duties and trade legislation. Accordingly, Mr Brathwaite, agent for Barbados in 1785 appears on the list of attendees in that year; Charles Thompson, agent for St Kitts appears in 1787. Stephen Fuller, the agent for Jamaica for thirty years (1764-1794) attended merchant meetings from the 1770s and was one of the earliest members of the Standing Committee.<sup>30</sup> Robert Sewell (1795-1805), Fuller’s successor, and his successor, Edmund Pusey Lyon (1805-1812) automatically gained membership and were both active members.

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<sup>29</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1787

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of Fuller’s lobbying activities, see Andrew J O’Shaughnessy, ‘The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West India Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution’, *Historical*

Prominent merchants and planters also appeared to gain automatic membership. Robert Milligan, who later became chairman of the West India Docks, appears in the roster in 1787; Richard Beckford, Member of Parliament and illegitimate son of William Beckford, Jamaican planter and Mayor of London, is noted in the roster from 1786 onwards.<sup>31</sup> Bryan Edwards, the planter and historian of Jamaica is visible as a member from 1786; James Pinnock, a planter and former Advocate General of Jamaica, and Chaloner Arcedeckne, former MP and planter both attended from 1788; and Sir Philip Gibbes, the Barbadian planter, baronet and author of *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes*, attended meetings from 1785. New members were added to the Standing Committee at General Meetings from 1794.<sup>32</sup> Between 1794 and 1804, 36 men joined the Standing Committee, and from 1795, non- members were clearly marked as such by the secretary. There was also a large turnover of members. Out of the 160 men that served on this committee in the years 1785-1807, approximately 55 could be considered as the core group.<sup>33</sup> The occasional attendance of the other 95 members is explained by the gravity of the campaign to abolish the slave trade. The slave trader and pamphleteer Robert Norris attended a meeting in May 1791 that was considering the bill to establish a settlement in Sierra Leone; Isaac Gascoyne, Member of Parliament for Liverpool also attended these meetings and presented the merchants petition against the bill in Parliament.<sup>34</sup>

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*Journal*, Vol.40 No. 1 (1997), pp.71-95; *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000)

<sup>31</sup> Richard Beckford', History of Parliament Online <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/beckford-richard-1796> accessed 12th June 2013

<sup>32</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1794. Bryan Edwards, Sir Philip Gibbes and Chaloner Arcedeckne were active in the West India Lobby prior to its reorganisation

<sup>33</sup> A list of the most frequently attending members is in the Appendix below

<sup>34</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXIX, col. 430

## Chairs of the West India Committee 1785-1807

*Table 2.3 Frequency Distribution of West India Chairs May 1785-May 1807<sup>35</sup>*

Name	Number of times chaired	Percentage of times chaired	Island interest
Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn	135	47.7	Jamaica
Philip Dehany	37	13.1	Jamaica
William Chisholme	26	9.2	Jamaica
George Hibbert	8	2.8	Jamaica
Beeston Long	7	2.5	Jamaica
Richard Neave	7	2.5	?
James Chisholme	6	2.1	Jamaica
John Brathwaite	5	1.8	Barbados
Gilbert Francklyn	4	1.4	Tobago
Edward Long	4	1.4	Jamaica
Edmund Pusey Lyon	4	1.4	Jamaica
Chaloner Arcedeckne	3	1.1	Jamaica
Alexander Campbell	3	1.1	Jamaica
Bryan Edwards	3	1.1	Jamaica
John Elmslie	3	1.1	Jamaica
Samuel Long	3	1.1	Jamaica
William Long	3	1.1	Jamaica
William Mitchell	3	1.1	Jamaica
Edmund Thornton	3	1.1	Jamaica
Simon Taylor	2	0.7	Jamaica
Sir Francis Baring	1	0.4	
Charles Bosanquet	1	0.4	
Alderman Curtis	1	0.4	
Stephen Fuller	1	0.4	Jamaica

<sup>35</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, p. 62

John Greg	1	0.4	
Mr Harvey	1	0.4	
James Johnston[e]	1	0.4	Jamaica
William Knox	1	0.4	Dominica
Robert Sewell	1	0.4	Jamaica
Charles Spooner	1	0.4	Leeward Islands
Mr Townsend	1	0.4	
Henry Wildman	1	0.4	Jamaica
Sir William Young	1	0.4	Antigua/St Vincent/Tobago
Unknown	1	0.4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>100</b>	

The chairman of the West India Committee was an essential aspect to the undertaking of its operations, and acted as its foremost representative and spokesman. The chairman had multiple responsibilities. He presided over both the Standing Committee and the General Meeting, co-ordinated the Committee's activities and led the deputations that met and conferred with ministers. He issued the requests for ministerial conferences, and any resolutions made by the Standing Committee or the General Meeting were conveyed by him to the relevant ministers. It was his responsibility to assist in the drafting and presentation of all memorials, petitions and resolutions to ministers, or to Parliament. He was in constant communication with the government on all issues that were of importance to the Committee and reported back all communications to the Standing Committee and General Meeting. It was a demanding position that required an individual who was politically astute and experienced. Over the years under study, the West India Committee had four long-term chairmen. The events related to abolition and emancipation had an impact on their tenure.

Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn, had social prominence, wealth and political experience that made him a key figure in the Committee, holding the position from 1783 until his death in 1808.

The Pennants were members of Jamaica's political and planting elite. Penrhyn's great-grandfather Gifford received three grants of land in Clarendon parish from the Restoration government and acquired further land in St Elizabeth. His son Edward (1672-1736), Chief Justice of Jamaica, extended the family holdings to 8365 acres of land and 610 enslaved workers.<sup>36</sup> His son Samuel (1709-50) was Alderman of Bishopsgate and Mayor of London.<sup>37</sup> Penrhyn's father John Pennant further added to the Pennant holdings with the Clarendon properties of his wife Bonella Hughes.<sup>38</sup> Richard Pennant's marriage to Anne Susannah Warburton in 1765 led him to acquire the Penrhyn estate in Caernarvonshire. In 1781 he succeeded to his father's estates in Jamaica and he used the profits to expand the production of the slate quarry on the Penrhyn estate and from there transported slate to London, Liverpool, Bristol and Ireland.<sup>39</sup> He began his political career 1761, becoming MP for Petersfield in Hampshire. In 1767 he became one of the two MPs for Liverpool, where his business experience both as an absentee proprietor and head of the slate quarry enterprise meant that he was well placed to represent the interests of the planters, slave traders and ship owners.<sup>40</sup> He was returned as MP for Liverpool in 1768, 1774 and 1784.<sup>41</sup> Between 1784 and 1790, Pennant reportedly made over thirty speeches on matters concerning Liverpool trade

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<sup>36</sup> Trevor Burnard, 'Et In Arcadia Ego: West Indian Planters In Glory 1674-1784,' *Atlantic Studies* 9:1 (2012), pp. 22-23

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Pennant became Mayor of London in 1749, dying in office in 1750. *London Magazine, or Gentleman's Intelligencer*, XIX (1750) p. 236

<sup>38</sup> Jean Lindsay, 'The Pennants and Jamaica 1665-1808: Part 1', *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 43 (1982), pp.41-42; 46,

<sup>39</sup> 'Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21859?docPos=2> Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013

<sup>40</sup> Jean Lindsay, 'The Pennants and Jamaica', p.61

<sup>41</sup> 'Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn,' History of Parliament Online <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/pennant-richard-1736-1808>. Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013

and the West Indies, and presented petitions in the Commons on behalf of merchants who were experiencing economic difficulties as a consequence of the trade restrictions with the United States.<sup>42</sup>

During his tenure as chair, Penrhyn attended 133 of the 287 meetings that took place between 1785 and 1807, and chaired two thirds of the General Meetings and almost half of the Standing Committee meetings. Penrhyn was connected to all the groups that supported the slave trade through family or business connections, establishing him as part of the powerful proslavery network. From 1788, he chaired the subcommittee meetings that organised opposition to abolition of the slave trade. Its tactics included sponsoring petitions to Parliament and producing pamphlets that supported the slave trade and its economic benefits. In Parliament Penrhyn argued in defence of the slave trade and those involved in it and who profited from it. At each critical stage in the campaign he employed rhetoric that presented the economic, political and social benefits of the slave trade to Britain.<sup>43</sup> During the slave trade debates, Penrhyn represented the interests of the planter and merchant constituencies robustly and consistently.

As Table 2.3 indicates, the majority of the chairmen covered when Penrhyn was absent, or presided over subcommittee meetings. Two exceptions were Philip Dehany and James Chisholme. Dehany, described as ‘a considerable planter from the island of Jamaica’, and Member of Parliament for St Ives for 2 years (1778-1780) was active as chair from 1790 until 1795.<sup>44</sup> He became chair after Lord Penrhyn’s death in 1808 and stayed in the position until his death in 1809. William Chisholme is listed as attending the most meetings of the West

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid; *Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military and Literary Journal for the Year 1785*, Vol. 10 (J. Murray, 1785), p. 31

<sup>43</sup> These are explored in more detail in Chapter 3 below

<sup>44</sup> ‘Philip Dehany’, History of Parliament Online, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/dehany-philip-1720-1809> Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013

India Committee, attending on 136 occasions between 1785 and his death in 1802.<sup>45</sup> He presided over many subcommittee meetings, mainly those that co-ordinated the construction of the West India Docks.<sup>46</sup> He also chaired meetings that focused on the special interests of the Jamaican planters.<sup>47</sup> For example, it sponsored the chemist Bryan Higgins to travel to Jamaica to improve the quality of muscovado sugar and rum. Higgins, who founded the short-lived Society for Philosophical Experiments and Conversations, was well known in gentlemanly scientific circles for his patents on cement and freezing sea water as a means of desalination.<sup>48</sup> This committee also petitioned government for extra ships to patrol the sea around the island and against the introduction of enslaved Africans from St Domingue.<sup>49</sup>

### **The West India Committee, 1807-1833**

An analysis of the minutes of the West India Committee in the years between abolition of the slave trade and emancipation in the British West Indies produced three main findings. First, the Jamaican planting and merchant interest maintained its leadership of the organisation. Second, the organisation underwent a significant restructuring during the mid to late 1820s, with a decline of the General Meetings. Third, the Standing Committee membership increased more than four times over a 26 year period, affecting its role as an executive body. Consequently the organisation restructured itself to accommodate its new members and to function more efficiently to deal with the challenges it faced in the years leading up to emancipation.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.53

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Draper identified Chisholme as one of the leading subscribers of the West India Docks and one of the directors of the West India Dock Company. Nicholas Draper, 'The City of London and Slavery: Evidence from the first dock companies 1795-1800', *Economic History Review*, 61:2 (2008), pp.432-466;

<sup>47</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Jamaican Planters and Merchants Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1796; 15<sup>th</sup> February 1799; 30<sup>th</sup> January 1801

<sup>48</sup> 'Dr Bryan Higgins, 1741-1818,' *Dictionary of National Biography Online* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13228> Accessed 23rd April 2014

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 4 below

***Table 2.4 Chairmen of the Standing Committee 1807-1833<sup>50</sup>***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of times chaired</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Island Interest</b>
Charles Rose Ellis, Lord Seaford (1771-1845)	110	35.5	Jamaica
Charles Pallmer (1772-1848)	70	22.6	Jamaica
Marquis of Chandos	27	8.7	Jamaica
Philip Dehany (1720-1809)	23	7.4	Jamaica
George Hibbert (1757-1837)	11	3.5	Jamaica
Lord St Vincent	7	2.2	Jamaica
William Murray	6	1.9	Jamaica
William Mitchell 1742-1823	6	1.9	Jamaica
Sir Alexander Cray Grant 1782- 1854	6	1.9	Jamaica
William Robert Keith Douglas	5	1.6	Tobago
Sir WH Cooper	5	1.6	Antigua
Henry Bright	4	1.2	Jamaica
William Lushington 1747-1823	4	1.2	Grenada
Sir Henry Martin	3	0.9	Antigua
Sir Edward Hyde East	3	0.9	Jamaica
John Innes 1786-1869	3	0.9	Demerara
Lord Harewood	2	0.6	Barbados
Not specified	2	0.6	
James Johnstone	2	0.6	Jamaica

<sup>50</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2)



Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn	1	0.3	Jamaica
Charles Bosanquet	1	0.3	Leeward and Windward Islands
Joseph Marryat Senior (1757- 1824)	1	0.3	Grenada/Trinidad
Joseph Marryat Jnr (1790-1876)	1	0.3	Grenada/Trinidad
James Chisholme 1771-1837	1	0.3	Jamaica
Joseph Foster Barham	1	0.3	Jamaica
Lord Combermere	1	0.3	
Anthony Browne 1769-1840	1	0.3	Antigua/St Kitts/Montserrat
Sir Simon Haughton Clarke	1	0.3	Jamaica
William Dickinson	1	0.3	Jamaica
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>100</b>	

Between 1807 and 1833 Jamaica remained the most well represented colony in the Standing Committee - at least half of its membership. The leadership of the Committee continued to be represented by Jamaican absentees. The ratio of planters to merchants appears to be roughly the same, with 19 identified as merchants, 23 as planters and 7 as merchant/planters. After the abolition of the slave trade the issues that preoccupied the West India Committee were predominantly economic in their nature. The high drama of the 1790s behind them, the Committee settled down to the mundane tasks of negotiating duties and drawbacks, thinking of innovative ways to offload excess sugar and maintaining the West Indian sugar monopoly in the midst of new colonial acquisitions. As slavery became more contested in the 1820s the chairmen of the West India Committee directed or oversaw strategies that set them apart from their colonial counterparts. They assumed ameliorationist and abolitionist identities that they believed the public would find acceptable, and would allow the status quo to be maintained. However, the competing discourse over slavery highlighted the complexities and

contradictions of those identities, which compromised the Committee's ability to construct a convincing defence. By 1830 it embraced a more unequivocal stance on slavery which was more 'colonial' in its nature.

Charles Rose Ellis was a Jamaican absentee who had familial connections to prominent Jamaicans. His grandfather, George Ellis (1704-1740), a member of the Jamaican Assembly and Chief Justice of that island, married Ann Beckford, sister of William Beckford (1709-1770). His eldest son George married Susannah Charlotte Long, sister of Edward Long (1743-1813). His father John (d.1782) was a member of the Jamaican House of Assembly, and proprietor of significant holdings, including Montpelier in Westmoreland, which Charles inherited in 1782.<sup>51</sup> Becoming MP for Heytesbury when he was 22, he made his first speech in the House of Commons in 1797 in support of his own bill to ameliorate the living and working conditions of enslaved workers, and improve their 'moral sensibilities' through a series of policies including religious instruction and the encouragement of a 'natural' increase in their population as an alternative to abolition, which he recommended be carried out by the colonial assemblies.<sup>52</sup> The bill was Ellis's attempt to postpone or prevent the abolition of the slave trade in a manner that appeared to offer compromise rather than a counterattack or rigid rejection of abolition, which was at the core of the proslavery discourse. Ellis's motion was carried 99 votes to 63.

This inaugural public defence of slavery was a factor in the Standing Committee's offer to Ellis in 1810 to 'retain permanent chair and that he would decide the times and places of all meetings, allocation of administrative duties and men added to the Standing Committee'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> B. W. Higman, *Montpelier Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom 1739-1912* (The Press University of the West Indies, 1998), pp. 22-23

<sup>52</sup> The bill, passed in 1797 was ineffective which became evident by the laws passed by the colonial legislatures. See Dale H. Porter, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in England: 1784-1807* (Hamden, Conn: Archon, 1970), pp.100-101; *Parliamentary Debates* vol. 33, col 251-269; 'Charles Rose Ellis', Oxford Dictionary of Biography, [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) accessed 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013. Also see Chapters 3 and 6 below

<sup>53</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee minutes, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1810

Ellis was a close friend and political ally of George Canning, who described him as ‘a person, after my own family is the nearest to me in the world.’<sup>54</sup> The depth of their friendship was demonstrated when Ellis acted as Canning’s second in a duel with Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh in 1809.<sup>55</sup> The mutual support they lent each other provided political and economic benefits. In 1802 Canning had opposed the sale of Crown lands in Trinidad for cultivation by enslaved workers. Ellis, along with the Jamaican planting interest was anxious to prevent the sale, fearful of the competition of Trinidad produce with the older West Indian colonies.<sup>56</sup> In 1826 Canning nominated Ellis for a peerage and he was created Lord Seaford in July of that year.

Ellis was a ‘moderate’ West Indian; having left Jamaica as a child, he had no further connection with the colony other than through the attorneys who managed his plantations. He had little experience of Jamaican slave society, and no knowledge of how sugar was manufactured. He was representative of the absentees who had inherited their properties who were removed from the realities of the slave system, and had embedded themselves in the English gentry and aristocracy.<sup>57</sup> Ellis assumed leadership when the West Indian monopoly was threatened by the acquisition of formerly French territories; the early years of his tenure were untroubled by humanitarian activism.

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Arthur Aspinall, ‘The Canningite Party,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, 17 (1934), p. 178

<sup>55</sup> A dispute between Canning and Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary and Minister for War respectively, over the direction of the Napoleonic War led to Castlereagh’s challenge when he discovered that Canning had conspired to have him removed from office. The outrage following the duel led both men to resign from office. See ‘George Canning 1770-1827,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4556?docPos=4> and ‘Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh 1769-1822,’ <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26507?docPos=5> Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> June 2014

<sup>56</sup> Patrick C. Lipscomb, ‘Party Politics 1801-1802: George Canning and the Trinidad Question,’ *Historical Journal* 12:3 (1969), p. 448. Canning was unsuccessful in preventing the sales. Also see Canning to Pitt 16<sup>th</sup> December 1799, in John Holland Rose, *Pitt and Napoleon: Essays and Letters* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1912), p. 324

<sup>57</sup> Barry Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), pp. 17, 228

His impressive social and political connections were of value to the West India Committee in terms of his access to ministers, and he served as chair for almost 15 years, with a hiatus of five years between 1815 and 1820.<sup>58</sup> When he informed the Standing Committee of his decision to take a leave of absence, it refused to accept his resignation, suggesting that he nominate someone to act as chair until his return. The membership's willingness to wait for him demonstrates the importance of Ellis's prestige to the Committee.

The Committee membership appeared satisfied with Ellis's leadership, expressing an appreciation of his handling of the East India interest's attempt to acquire an equalisation on sugar duties.<sup>59</sup> However, as the public attacks on slave ownership became more pronounced, Ellis adopted an approach that the membership became increasingly troubled with: he supported amelioration and distanced the Committee from the colonists' intractability on amelioration. Sensitive to the abolitionist assaults on colonial slave ownership, Ellis took advantage of how distance from the colonies insulated absentees against direct attacks of cruelty levied at the colonial slave owner, and urged the government to identify the West India Committee as the organisation with whom they ought to consult on these issues. The deaths of Canning in 1827 and of Lord Liverpool in 1828 meant Ellis no longer possessed the political capital the Committee relied on for its success in influencing policy. His moderate stance became unacceptable to the Committee membership who wanted a more robust defence of slavery. His leadership no longer tenable, he was ousted in 1829.<sup>60</sup>

Charles Pallmer assumed the chair in Ellis's absence between February 1815 and March 1820, acting as deputy chair thereafter. He represented the West India interest in Parliament as MP for Ludgershall (1815-1817) and Surrey (1826-1830). Like Ellis, he was an absentee,

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<sup>58</sup> Ellis spent these years in France with his sick daughter Eliza until her death in 1820. F. Leveson Gower (ed.), *Letters of Harriet, Countess of Granville, 1810-1845, Volume 1* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1894), pp. 94, 109, 115. Ellis was related by marriage to Lord Liverpool, Prime Minister (1812-1827)

<sup>59</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), General Meeting, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1822

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 6 below

the proprietor of the Rose Hill plantation in Clarendon, Jamaica.<sup>61</sup> During the controversy over slave registration, Pallmer acted as the mediator between the parliamentary abolitionists and the West Indians. He was invited to attend a meeting by William Wilberforce in late January 1816, where William Smith outlined the abolitionists' plan of gradual emancipation:

He explained his expression, by saying that he did not mean immediate emancipation but such a system of religious improvement, of melioration of condition, of encouragement of manumissions, of enabling slaves to hold property and of promoting natural increase of population as would bear in his opinion immediately and directly upon the eventual emancipation of all negroes and that it was the duty of this country not to rest until that object was accomplished.<sup>62</sup>

Pallmer left this meeting fully apprised of the parliamentary abolitionists' future agenda in 1816. In 1823, when the West India Committee presented their policy for amelioration, it contained many of the points outlined above. This suggests that either both parties regarded emancipation in similar ways, agreeing upon how emancipation should be facilitated; or that the Committee appropriated the policy for their own political purposes.

As the debates became more pronounced in the 1820s Pallmer tried to demonstrate his involvement in ameliorationist efforts. As abolition became a leading election topic Pallmer asserted that he was an advocate for religious instruction, during the Surrey election campaign in 1826. He claimed that 'he had been the instrument of introducing within the pale

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<sup>61</sup> 'Charles Pallmer 1772-1845,' Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/24785/#cultural-summary> Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> June 2014

<sup>62</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), insert, Meeting with Charles Pallmer, Mr Babington, William Wilberforce and William Smith, Downing Street, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1816. William Smith (1756-1835) MP for Norwich was a member of the Clapham Sect and an associate of Wilberforce

of the Christian Church a thousand slaves, not nominally but really.’<sup>63</sup> The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* cast doubt on his extraordinary claims:

The statement from that gentleman surprised us not a little, because we can have no doubt whatever that is altogether untrue, and that he has suffered to be deceived by his informant...in any of the parishes where Mr Pallmer’s estates are situated...there has been little or no instruction.<sup>64</sup>

Both Pallmer and Ellis represented themselves as ameliorationist slave owners; Ellis endeavoured to influence Committee strategy with this perspective which was eventually rejected by the membership.

Richard Plantagenet-Temple-Brydges-Grenville, the Marquis of Chandos, and MP for Buckinghamshire was wealthy, titled and politically well-connected. Chandos’s great grandfather and great uncle had both been Prime Ministers; his father, the first Duke of Buckingham and Chandos had been the vice president of the Board of Trade in his uncle’s government.<sup>65</sup> Chandos’s closeness to the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington was a result of the latter’s friendship with Chandos’s grandfather, Lord Buckingham.<sup>66</sup> Since the West India Committee relied on political patronage to further its agenda his access to Wellington was seen as an advantage. However, when offered the position of chairman of the West India Committee, Chandos declined it. He feared that taking the position would mean he would be ruled out of any political appointments that the Prime Minister might offer him in the future. He sought Wellington’s advice on the matter:

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<sup>63</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* 13 ( 30<sup>th</sup> June 1826) p. 196

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196

<sup>65</sup> ‘Grenville, Richard Temple Nugent Brydges Chandos, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Buckingham and Chandos 1776-1839,’ Dictionary of National Biography <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11496/?back=,11497> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> - June 2014

<sup>66</sup> Wellington was Buckingham’s aide-de-camp during his tenure as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1787-1789. John Beckett, *The Rise and Fall of the Grenvilles: Dukes of Buckingham and Chandos, 1710 to 1921* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 66, 93 n5

If you think that in becoming their chairman I can be of any service to you and the Government, I will undertake it, but if not, and you feel it would interfere with any arrangement you may have in contemplation to make in regard to myself, I will decline their request.<sup>67</sup>

The Duke of Wellington recommended that he take the position. He noted that since Chandos' family were proprietors of one of the largest estates in Jamaica, 'the prosperity of the West Indies must be interesting to you.'<sup>68</sup> However, accepting the position would have no effect on any future political appointments that may come his way:

If anything should pass in the committee which should be disagreeable to you or if the duties are inconsistent with other duties imposed on you, there will be no difficulty in your resigning.<sup>69</sup>

A political opportunist, Chandos accepted the position, presiding over a Committee dinner held in honour of Wellington on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1829. A comparison of Chandos's tenure as chair to Ellis's demonstrates a different leadership style. A study of the meeting minutes indicate that Chandos did not lead in the manner of Ellis, but was instructed. The Acting and Standing Committees instructed him when to lead deputations and present petitions, which he took no part in drafting; he was not involved in directing strategy. Chandos's role was as figurehead of the Standing Committee; he was not empowered to make any key decisions. His position on slavery complicated his role as chairman. As the question of emancipation became more divisive, Chandos was anxious to keep his Buckingham seat in the 1831 election. He claimed to be in favour of abolition when pressed to make his views known:

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<sup>67</sup> University of Southampton, Hartley Library, Wellington Manuscripts WP1/1019/10, Chandos to Wellington, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1829

<sup>68</sup> Chandos's family owned the Hope and Middleton estates in Jamaica

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, WP1/1022/16, Wellington to Chandos, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1829

He told the electors, as an honest man that he was for the abolition of slavery – the charge against him of being a friend to slavery was unjust false and diabolical. He was equally disposed to do his duty both by blacks and whites.<sup>70</sup>

The planters and merchants' anger with Lord Chandos is evident in the fact that he chaired only two meetings in June and September 1831; after this date he disappeared from the records entirely. By early 1833, the West India planters and merchants found Chandos's support for abolition incompatible with its agenda. In a letter to the Duke of Wellington the Earl of Rosslyn passed on some news he had heard from Sir Alexander Cray Grant, a Standing Committee member:

Lord Chandos I hear, must either resign or be turned out of the chair of the West India Committee tomorrow. They resent his vote with Buxton against them last year and still more his speech at the Buckingham election, and I don't think his excuse likely to conciliate – that if he had voted according to his opinion he would have lost the election.<sup>71</sup>

Two days after this correspondence Chandos resigned the chair, citing differences of opinion between him and the Committee membership on the question of slavery.<sup>72</sup> Chandos's decision to support emancipation damaged the legitimacy of the West India Committee. Chandos's ownership of West Indian properties formed only a part of his family's wider wealth. He was not invested, financially or emotionally enough in slave ownership to commit himself to a robust defence of it. For him, the position of chair was a stepping stone to political advancement. As the individual stance on slavery decided whether one kept his parliamentary seat, Chandos chose his side.

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<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1831

<sup>71</sup> Earl of Rosslyn to Wellington, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1833, in John Brooke and Julia Gandy ed. *Wellington: Political Correspondence I, 1833-November 1834* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office), p. 45-46

<sup>72</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1833



### *Membership of the West India Committee, 1807-1833*

Table 2.5 is an estimated ranking of the most frequently appearing names in the minute books.<sup>73</sup> The minutes show that leading members maintained a high level of attendance; Charles Rose Ellis, (1810-1815; 1820-1829) and Charles Pallmer (chair 1815-1820; deputy chair 1820-1829) attended 114 and 147 times respectively. George Hibbert attended 138 times and was also an active member in the preceding period, attending 122 times between 1785 and 1807.

Baronets tended to have their names recorded in full and therefore the frequency of their attendance is accurate. Sir Alexander Cray Grant, Sir Edward Cust, Sir Simon Haughton Clarke, were all active members of the Standing Committee. Sir Edward Cust, who was elected to the Standing Committee in 1823, possessed plantations in Demerara. His motivations for participation went deeper than having a financial stake in the West Indies. His outlook was firmly embedded in the nineteenth century imperial world, through his military career, his slave ownership and his interest in forms of colonial government.<sup>74</sup>

Members who were MPs were always identified by the secretary, but the colonial agents were not identified as such in the roster, but in the minutes themselves. What is also noticeable is that many of the 'old guard', that is the prominent absentees of the late eighteenth century like the Longs, the Pennants and the Dehanys began to disappear by 1814 and a new generation started to appear. Lord Penrhyn, chairman of the Standing Committee was dead by 1808; Philip Dehany, acting chair after Penrhyn's death died a year later; and Beeston Long, chair of the West India Merchants and director of the Bank of England, maintained an active role at least 12 years after abolition, his activity tapering off by around

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<sup>73</sup> See the Appendix for Table 2.5

<sup>74</sup> 'Sir Edward Cust, 1794-1878,' Dictionary of National Biography <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6973?docPos=1> Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Cust contributed to the Durham Report, which investigated the causes of the twin rebellions in Lower and Upper Canada in 1838 which led to the union of the two Canadas into a single colony.

1819.<sup>75</sup> Samuel Long, treasurer of the Standing Committee, is recorded as attending 79 times between 1785 and 1807 and disappears from the records after that date.<sup>76</sup> Their cousin, the historian and author Edward is estimated to have attended 46 times.<sup>77</sup> This participation, and specifically the influence and knowledge that the Longs provided, ended with the death of Beeston Long in 1820. Any attendance by members of that family after that date is minimal. Charles Edward Long, the grandson of Edward Long attended nine times between 1829 and 1833, and Edward Beeston Long, Edward's eldest son, is recorded as attending twice in 1818.

The Committee attracted some members who maintained a lifelong association, which was often attributed to the position they held. Gibbes Walker Jordan's position as colonial agent for Barbados (1800-1823) meant that he maintained a regular attendance. William Manning (1763-1835), agent for St Vincent, governor of the Bank of England and West India merchant was similar in his commitment to the Standing Committee, attending 43 times prior to abolition and 54 times after. Most impressive in terms of attendance and commitment to the West India cause was George Hibbert, who spent 46 years in service to the West India interest, as colonial agent, Member of Parliament and director of the West India Dock Company. The son of a West India merchant, Hibbert, who was born in Manchester, joined his brothers Thomas and Robert in business in London, becoming junior partner in the firm Hibbert, Purrier and Horton, and by the 1790s he had assumed direction of the firm, renamed Hibberts Fuhr and Purrier.<sup>78</sup> Two of Hibbert's sons, George (1796-1882), and Nathaniel (1794-1865), were directors of the West India Dock Company, and attended Standing Committee meetings, but not nearly with the same kind of regularity as their father, both

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<sup>75</sup> Beeston Long attended 102 times between 1785 and 1807

<sup>76</sup> Both Samuel and Beeston Long's names were written in full, as treasurer and chair of the West India Merchants

<sup>77</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, pp. 55-57

<sup>78</sup> For the most recent study on George Hibbert, see Katie Donington, 'The Benevolent Merchant? George Hibbert (1757-1837) and the representation of the West Indian mercantile identity,' (Ph.D. thesis, University College London, 2013)

attending eleven times between 1824 and 1833. Samuel Hibbert, son of George's older brother Samuel (1752-1786) attended sixteen times in the same period.

Merchant and planter families continued to maintain a presence in the organisation, the majority with Jamaican affiliations. William Vaughan, whose father Samuel had extensive properties in Jamaica, was one the most active members during the 1790s along with his brother Benjamin, who was also an active member of the Standing Committee in the 1790s and the slave trade subcommittee before fleeing England in 1794 under threat of arrest for seditious behaviour, settling in the United States. William was one of the leading promoters of developing a dock in London, and became director of the London Dock Company.

William's nephew Petty (Benjamin's son) was also a merchant and was a very active member between 1818 and 1833.

Neill Malcolm Sr. (1769-1837), identified as possessing estates and pens in Hanover, Westmoreland and Lucea, used his wealth to build and furnish properties on his lands in Poltalloch, Scotland.<sup>79</sup> Malcolm attended at least 120 Standing Committee Meetings between 1785 and 1807.<sup>80</sup> His son Neill Malcolm Jr. is recorded as having attended only 10 Standing Committee meetings; however, Malcolm was a regular participant in the Acting Committee, an offshoot of the Standing Committee created in 1829, serving as one of its chairmen.<sup>81</sup>

The Baillie family, who built what Douglas Hamilton terms a 'transoceanic mercantile network' between the West Indies (Grenada, St Kitts, Demerara and St Vincent), North America and Britain, were active members of the Standing Committee between 1785 and

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<sup>79</sup> Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2005), pp.197-198

<sup>80</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, p. 53

<sup>81</sup> Neill Malcolm served as chairman of the Acting Committee on 12 occasions. ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/6), Acting Committee Minutes, 1829-1833

1807.<sup>82</sup> Hamilton's study of Scottish migration to the West Indies notes that the Baillies' foray into West Indian commerce established them as 'important actors on the mercantile stage.'<sup>83</sup> James Baillie (1737-1793) agent for Grenada and MP for Horsham, attended 68 meetings. Given that the Committee did not begin convening until 1785 this suggests an extraordinary level of commitment. His cousin George, a slave factor in St Vincent the 1780s and 90s, was also an active participant in the Committee. George Baillie authored an account of his business dealings with his family members and business partners in *Some Interesting Letters Addressed to Mr Baillie: Together with Two Reports on the Affairs of George Baillie* (1807). It gives a valuable insight into to connections between slave trading, slave ownership and mercantile activity between Britain and the West Indies before the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>84</sup> Evan Baillie's son James Evan Baillie (? 1781-1863) is recorded as attending 30 times. MP for Tralee (1813-1818) and Bristol (1830-1834), Baillie was the principal of Evan Baillie, Sons & Co. in Bristol and partner in J.E. Baillie, Fraser and Co. in London.<sup>85</sup>

### **Changes in the Standing Committee and General Meeting, 1807-1833**

***Table 2.6 Percentage Distribution of West India Committee meetings by type, June 1809-July 1833, from a total of 306 meetings<sup>86</sup>***

Type of Meeting	Number of meetings	Percentage Distribution
Standing Committee	225	73
General Meeting	34	11

<sup>82</sup> Douglas J. Hamilton, 'Local Connections, Global Ambitions: Creating a Transoceanic Network in the Eighteenth Century British Atlantic Empire,' *International Journal of Maritime History*, 23:2 (2011), p.1; Ryden, *West Indian Slavery*, p. 55

<sup>83</sup> Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p. 89

<sup>84</sup> The Baillies financial difficulties are discussed in S.G. Checkland, 'Two Scottish West Indian Liquidations after 1793,' *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 4:2 (1957), pp. 127-143

<sup>85</sup> Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*, p. 201. Baillie was a major recipient of slave compensation; he was awarded over £83,000. Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/> Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2014

<sup>86</sup> West India Committee Archives (M915), Standing Committee and General Meeting Minutes. The first General Meeting after abolition took place in 1809

Sub/Special Committee	26	8.4
General Planters Meetings <sup>87</sup>	4	1.3
Finance Committee	7	2.2
Managing Committee	5	1.6
Annual General Meeting	2	0.6
Unspecified	6	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>100</b>

After 1807 the frequency of General Meetings declined significantly and the Standing Committee over time increased. Of the 309 meetings estimated to have taken place between 1807 and 1833, 225 were Standing Committee Meetings and 34 were General Meetings (Table 2.4). This means that the General Meetings convened less than once a year in the period under study. Ryden explains the decline on the fact that the slave trade debates, intersected with the discussions on colonial rights and the treatment of slaves were highly emotive subjects that engendered large meetings, which were no longer necessary once the Abolition Act was passed.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the Haitian uprising, as well as concerns over the threat to West Indian security and property, had largely been resolved. The fact that the leadership of the Committee went through a transitional phase is also a possible explanation for the decline of the General Meetings.<sup>89</sup> The appointment of Charles Rose Ellis as permanent chair in 1810 and his cousin-in-law Charles Pallmer during a five year absence did not revive the General Meeting's function as a forum for large gatherings of West Indians. Instead, the Standing Committee took on this role over time; General Meetings retained the power to add members to the Standing Committee.

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<sup>87</sup> These meetings were for planters importing colonial produce into the Port of London, rather than specifically for Jamaican planters. The men that attended these meetings were not all Jamaicans; rather the majority were from Barbados and the other smaller colonies

<sup>88</sup> Ryden, 'Sugar, Spirits and Fodder: The London West India Interest and the Glut of 1807-15,' p. 44

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

***Table 2.7 Members added to the Standing Committee, 1807-1833<sup>90</sup>***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of members added to the Standing Committee</b>
1807	1
1809	3
1816	3
1810	3
1813	6
1814	7
1818	15
1822	20
1823	12
1824	44
1829	76
1830	40
1831	7
1832	23
1833	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>

Table 2.6 indicates the years when the Standing Committee made significant additions to the membership; over time, it began to resemble the General Meetings in terms of size.

Consequently, its efficacy as the executive arm of the West India interest was compromised because it had to accommodate a greater number of opinions on how strategy ought to be directed. These additions could be explained as a defensive strategy, based on the belief that a large executive body comprised of the most prominent West Indians would positively affect the outcome of the negotiations with the government. Another explanation could be that the West India interest was extremely concerned about the resurgence of the abolition movement

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<sup>90</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2 and 4), General and Standing Committee Minutes

and the continued economic distress of the planter as a consequence of competition from Cuba and Brazil and rising production costs and duties.

The addition of 44 members to the Standing Committee in February 1824 was a consequence of the crisis over the amelioration laws, which the interest held responsible for the rebellion in Demerara in 1823. It further expanded its membership with prominent members of the Jamaican planter interest and leading members of the colonial assemblies. From 1823, when Buxton called on Parliament to facilitate amelioration and eventually emancipation, the West India Committee argued that compensation had to be awarded in the case of the surrender of legally acquired property – in this case, enslaved workers. Compensation remained an issue that preoccupied the merchant and planter interest.<sup>91</sup>

A memorial to the King, urging him not to authorise any legislation that would affect the value of property in the colonies was presented for signatures, and by the chairman and Members of Parliament.<sup>92</sup> As David Lambert notes, memorials to the monarch became more prevalent during the abolition campaigns, as a consequence of the growing unpopularity of the proslavery position.<sup>93</sup> The King was believed to be more sympathetic to their interests, and this is borne out by the two petitions including this one presented to the respective monarchs at the high points of abolitionist campaigning urging him to consider the property rights of the planters.<sup>94</sup>

The level of concern among the planters and merchants is evident in the manner that the Standing Committee bolstered their numbers, drawing on, for example, recently returned

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<sup>91</sup> I discuss compensation in Chapter 6 below

<sup>92</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting Minutes, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1824

<sup>93</sup> David Lambert, 'The Counter Revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian petitions and proslavery networks,' *Social and Cultural Geography* 6:3 (2005) p. 410. Lambert is referring particularly to petitions sent by the colonial assemblies, but his analysis is applicable to the metropolitan ones. The other petition was sent in November 1830

<sup>94</sup> As Duke of Clarence, the future William IV, the recipient of the second petition was close to the Jamaican planters, having visited Jamaica in the 1780s and one of the attendees of the General Meeting convened to discuss the abolition question on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1805.

colonists. The Reverend John Brome of Barbados, and Dr Alexander Kidston (or Kidstone), a member of the Jamaican Assembly in 1817, are among the 44 new additions who became active participants in the Standing Committee.<sup>95</sup> Brome is recorded as attending 26 times; Kidston was more active, attending 59 times between 1824 and 1830, serving on a number of subcommittees and becoming a member of the Acting Committee, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

More noblemen were added. Among them was Edward Jervis, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl St Vincent, who had properties in Jamaica, and whose great uncle John had faced a vote of censure in Parliament at the request of the West India Committee for his extensive plundering for prizes during the expedition to the West Indies in 1795; and William Lascelles, son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Harewood, whose family wealth had been established in part through their properties in Barbados.<sup>96</sup> These men were probably added to give weight to the petition; while Lord St Vincent is recorded as attending 18 times, William Lascelles did not attend further meetings.

Also notable among these new additions was George Hay Dawkins Pennant, second cousin of Lord Penrhyn and inheritor of his estates. Dawkins-Pennant's great wealth and political connections – he was Member of Parliament for Newark and later New Romney, and was the son of Henry Dawkins (1728-1814) who owned 20,000 acres in Jamaica and had estates in Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, were considered as important assets to the lobby.<sup>97</sup> A study of Dawkins-Pennant's attendance record is useful in terms of how it provides an insight into how the Standing Committee utilised the presence and the political influence of its prominent

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, *Jamaica Almanac, 1817*. John Brome died in 1828; his son, also called John received £6542 for his enslaved workers on the Bromefield and Hannays plantations. *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* [www.lbs.ac.uk](http://www.lbs.ac.uk) Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2014

<sup>96</sup> See Simon D. Smith, *Slavery, Family and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) for a study on the fortunes of the Lascelles of Barbados.

<sup>97</sup> 'George Hay Dawkins Pennant 1764-1840,' History of Parliament Online [http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/dawkins-pennant-george-1764-1840#footnoteref4\\_1i26y6w](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/dawkins-pennant-george-1764-1840#footnoteref4_1i26y6w) Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014



members at times of crisis. While he was not an active participant, Dawkins-Pennant attended 14 meetings of particular importance. He first appeared in the minutes on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1823, as a member of the special committee appointed to draft a programme of amelioration for the enslaved workers in the West Indies. This was part of the West India Committee's strategy to pre-empt the parliamentary abolitionists, keeping amelioration under the control of the colonies, as well as determining the content of the programme.<sup>98</sup> In June 1830 deputations of the Standing Committee met with the Board of Trade to urge the government 'that the distress of the colonies was so overwhelming, as imperatively to demand relief.'<sup>99</sup> The saturated sugar market, abolition of the slave trade and the restriction of trade between the West Indies and the United States had taken its toll on the West Indian plantation economy, resulting in higher production costs.<sup>100</sup> The Standing Committee lobbied the government to open an inquiry into the commercial state of the West Indies. The government duly launched an investigation into the commercial, financial and political state of the West Indies, giving the British planter (Jamaican) the opportunity to describe the disadvantages he laboured under, in comparison to the Cuban planter, who was permitted to purchase enslaved Africans.<sup>101</sup> Dawkins-Pennant served on the deputations to the Board of Trade, lending his support as a leading West Indian proprietor and Member of Parliament to help achieve this outcome.

The next substantial addition of members coincided with the significant reorganisation of the West India Committee. The growth in numbers had resulted in long meetings which dragged on for hours with each member keen to give his opinion on strategy. For a lobby that consisted of men who were leaders of the mercantile community, whose time was precious,

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<sup>98</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6

<sup>99</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1830

<sup>100</sup> See Richard B. Sheridan, 'The West Indian Sugar Crisis and Slave Emancipation,' *Journal of Economic History*, 21:4 (1961) pp. 539-551

<sup>101</sup> Parliamentary Papers: *Statements, Calculations and Explanations to the Board of Trade, relating to the Commercial, Financial and Political State of the British West India Colonies, since the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1830* (1830-31), pp. 483-560

this was an extraordinary development. The efficiency of the Standing Committee was criticised by John Innes, agent for Berbice who remarked in 1825 that

The Standing Committee...has become so monstrous that it is impossible where there are so many to participate in the discussions which are frequently prolonged until three fourths of the numbers have left the Committee in despair...<sup>102</sup>

Innes proposed a more democratic executive, suggesting the establishment of an Annual Committee comprising the chair and deputy chair of the Standing Committee, the chair of the Committee of Merchants, and of ten planters and eight merchants to be elected from the Standing Committee to meet every week, with 'duties to be generally to concert measures for the benefit of West India interests and to investigate and consider whatever may be brought before them, it being clearly understood that every member of the Standing Committee may freely communicate...whatever may be thought deserving of the attention of the committee'.<sup>103</sup> This Annual Committee would allow for all work that demanded urgent action to be expedited. The Standing Committee would continue to operate, working on the more long term strategy and accommodating the larger numbers of members who wanted to attend meetings. Innes' proposal was considered and accepted in principle, but it wasn't instituted until 1829 when Charles Elis resigned as chairman, and under another name.

### **The Acting Committee**

The Acting Committee was another innovation of the governing structure of the West India Committee. It was a democratically elected body: 20 people, 10 merchants and 10 planters, with the chair chosen from that number, elected by ballot. Five of the members were to hold their position for one year only (which five were not specified), to be replaced by five new

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<sup>102</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1825. See Chapter 6 below

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

members from the Standing Committee.<sup>104</sup> The Acting Committee's function was to lobby more frequently, meeting weekly from November to July 'to attend to and consider all matters which may appear to them of importance to the West Indies interests.'<sup>105</sup> The Acting Committee approached its task with intensity and vigour. It met regularly with the Board of Trade regarding planter distress; it liaised with the newly created West Indian Association in Edinburgh and forwarded funds to the Literary Committee to publish pamphlets that reported the 'true' state of slavery in the West Indies.<sup>106</sup> Alarmed by the rebellion in Antigua, about which they received news in June 1831, they resolved to meet each week without pause in order to prevent 'any further agitation of the colonial question.'<sup>107</sup> The Standing Committee continued to convene during this period, meeting every two weeks from 1830 onwards. The West India Committee was now lobbying on two fronts, which indicated the level of concern among its membership.

### **The Standing Committee 1807-1833**

In the years immediately after abolition the urgent issue for the planters was the depression in sugar prices caused by the economic downturn of 1799, and by Jamaican muscovado being forced out of European markets by better quality sugar coming out of Cuba and Brazil, the remaining French West Indian colonies, and the newly conquered colonies of Demerara and Berbice.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), General Meeting Minutes, Resolutions made at the General Meeting of Planters and Merchants, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1829

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/6), Acting Committee Minutes, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1830, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1830

<sup>107</sup> ICS West India Committee Archives (M915/6), Acting Committee Minutes, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1831. Antigua's rebellion in 1831 was a consequence of its legislature passing a law abolishing its Sunday markets. See Garry David Gaspar, 'Slavery, Amelioration and Sunday Markets in Antigua, 1823-1831,' *Slavery and Abolition*, 9:1 (1988) pp. 1-28; Natasha Lightfoot, 'Race, Class and Resistance: Emancipation and its aftermath in Antigua, 1831-1858' (PhD thesis, New York University, 2007), Chapter 1

<sup>108</sup> Ryden, 'Sugar Spirits and Fodder,' p. 52

***Table 2.8 Items discussed at Standing Committee Meetings, 1807-1833<sup>109</sup>***

Item Discussed	Frequency	Percentage
Taxation	70	31.1
Sugar depression	47	30.8
Organisational issues	33	14.6
Amelioration	19	8.4
Abolition of Slavery	14	6.2
Slave Registration	10	4.4
West Indian economic distress	10	4.4
West India Dock Company	7	3.1
West Indian Security/Black troops	2	0.8
Compensation	4	1.7
Abolition of the slave trade	2	0.8%
Miscellaneous	7	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100</b>

A principal line of defence against these challenges was to encourage the government to reduce the duties on sugar as a form of relief. The Standing Committee drafted and passed six resolutions in February 1815 against the duties imposed on the re-exportation of British plantation sugar. The planters and merchants found the provisions of this act unacceptable, since the proposed duty added insult to the injury that rival colonial and American produce had free access to foreign markets and that British sugar only had access to falling prices in the home market. They further argued that this would encourage the rival colonial powers to extend their slave trading activities, purchasing more enslaved workers for their properties

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<sup>109</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes

‘that they may secure to themselves the inestimable advantage of supplying those markets on the continent to which the raw or refined sugar of Great Britain has hitherto had access.’<sup>110</sup>

The six resolutions urging a repeal of the act were sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer via Charles Pallmer, the chairman, and were also sent to the West India associations of the outports. Occasionally, resolutions accompanied with a deputation of planters and merchants and a quick negotiation with a prominent MP and planter, in this case William Manning, to add further pressure would be sufficient to gain some concessions from the government. In this case, Nicholas Vansittart, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, agreed not to introduce a duty on exported sugar but ordered that all existing duties on sugar as permanent.<sup>111</sup>

As illustrated in the above example, the Standing Committee returned to traditional lobbying engagement after abolition, utilising patronage and private conferences to achieve regulatory advantage. What is also noticeable is that MPs that were also members of the Committee were speaking more often in support of West Indian affairs. Joseph Marryat who joined the Standing Committee membership in 1806 became an important figure in the West Indian defence of slavery in Parliament and spoke often on other colonial, maritime and commercial issues.<sup>112</sup>

Ryden notes that between 1807 and 1815 12 out of the top 30 attendees were MPs, compared with only half as many represented in the earlier period.<sup>113</sup> My calculation of the period between 1807 and 1833 show that 19 of the top 50 attendees were MPs, with a total of 33 MPs attending over the whole period under study. This suggests that owing to the crises that they were experiencing the Committee began to rely more on their parliamentary membership to raise issues on its behalf and to defend the colonies of any criticisms. The Standing

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<sup>110</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1815

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1815. For information on William Manning, see table 4.1 below

<sup>112</sup> Marryat is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 below

<sup>113</sup> Ryden, ‘Sugar, Spirits and Fodder,’ p. 45; *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, pp. 53-56

Committee met when Parliament was in session, usually between February and July, with the exception of 1820 when they met only once in that year, to protest against the Emperor of Russia imposing a tax on imported British sugar.

Table 2.8 shows the extent to which the Committee membership was preoccupied with sugar duties and the depressed state of the sugar market. Both issues were discussed more frequently than amelioration, or the abolition of slavery. The West India Committee membership was particularly concerned with the East India interest's campaign for an equalisation of duties. In 1813 the East India Company Act ended its commercial monopoly, opening the trade to India to independent merchants. Anticipating the implications for West India sugar – that is, a further saturated market, compounding the depression in prices – Charles Ellis met with Lord Bathurst, to request an additional duty of 10 shillings on East India sugar as a protective measure.<sup>114</sup> Over the next eight years the Committee pressed the government for further increases to the protective duty; by 1821 they were requesting an additional 5 shillings and sixpence per hundredweight duty on East Indian sugar.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the 1820s the East India interest campaigned for an equalisation of sugar duties which inevitably drew comparisons between sugars produced by 'free' Indians and enslaved Africans, which became a significant aspect of the debates on emancipation.<sup>116</sup>

## Conclusion

The minutes of the London West India Committee demonstrate the effect that abolition and emancipation had on its lobbying strategies, structure and organisation. If we look at the organisation in two distinct periods (1785-1807; 1807-1833), we notice some important

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<sup>114</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1813

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, Standing Committee Minutes, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1814, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1821, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1821

<sup>116</sup> See for example, James Cropper, *Letters Addressed to William Wilberforce MP, recommending the encouragement of the cultivation of sugar in our dominions in the East Indies as the natural and certain means of effecting the total and general abolition of the Slave Trade* (Liverpool, 1822); Joseph Marryat, *A reply to the arguments contained in various publications recommending an equalisation of the duties in East and West Indian sugar* (London, 1823). I also make reference to this issue in Chapter 6.

trends. The General Meeting had a wider identification than acting as informational gatherings for the membership; it acted in tandem with the Standing Committee in ratifying strategy and its attendees provided evidence in support of its campaign against the abolition of the slave trade. Furthermore, it was utilised by members to lobby against threats to their commercial interests in the French West Indies. The decline of the General Meeting can be explained by the abolition of the slave trade; once the act was passed, the larger meetings were no longer necessary. The Standing Committee focused its efforts on the everyday issues of trade restrictions, duties and developing strategy to revive the weak sugar market. The West India Committee was dominated by the Jamaican planter and merchant interest, a trend that continued beyond abolition. Planter and merchant families that were in attendance prior to abolition maintained their presence and counted as some of the principal defenders of slavery in the years leading up to emancipation.

A study of its lobbying strategies suggests the West India Committee was highly organised. It engaged in private petitioning and public engagement via pamphlets and the press to justify its monopoly of the British sugar market and the benefits of regulatory advantage. An examination of the minutes between 1807 and 1833 reveals significant developments in the governing structure. Almost three hundred members were added to the Standing Committee in this period. As had occurred in the 1790s, the threat to planter and merchant interests attracted a large membership anxious to ward off the threat. The General Meeting was not revived to accommodate these new members. Instead the Standing Committee, normally composed of a maximum of 15 members expanded to a maximum of 35 to 40 members, with more members added at critical moments. This compromised its efficiency, and members called for a restructuring of the organisation as a means to regain it. As discussed in Chapter 6, dissatisfaction with its leadership resulted in the resignation of its long standing chairman, and the organisation underwent a further innovation that saw that role assume less authority

or responsibility. The Acting Committee was established to take on the central role of organising strategy. Along with the Standing Committee, these structures engaged in a more aggressive lobbying style, intent on halting legislation emancipating the enslaved workers. In the 1790s the West India Committee engaged its governing structures to combat the challenges of slave trade abolition and the impact of the French Revolutionary Wars on the West Indies. Both events presented threats to their property from different sources: from the humanitarian campaign in the first case, and from the enslaved in the other, which the next two chapters explore.



### Chapter 3

#### **‘Outraging the Deepest Human Sentiment’<sup>1</sup>: The Construction and Undermining of the Proslavery Stance**

This chapter examines the political opposition to abolition constructed by the West India Committee. The arguments advanced by the antislavery activists forced the merchants and planters to seek new ways to defend the slave trade and justify the use of Africans as enslaved workers, by developing a multifaceted rebuttal. It explores the defence it constructed that formed the basis of the proslavery justification of slavery and the slave trade that centred on its perceived humanity, legitimacy and importance to British commerce.

This chapter does not focus on how the anti-abolitionists orchestrated their campaign but questions whether the defence that the planters and merchants presented via pamphlets and petitions was undermined by the merchants and planters’ personal views on slavery. Did the actions of the ‘moderate’ West Indian MPs complicate the construction of a univocal stance against abolition?

The impact of alternative positions is explored in a case study of Joseph Foster Barham, absentee planter, MP and member of the West India Committee, the only planter to support and vote for abolition. Barham was part of a cohort of ‘moderate’ absentee planters who when faced with attacks on their character and with growing public opinion against the slave trade, sought to consider policies that relied less on the slave trade and more on a ‘natural increase’ of enslaved workers. What did Foster Barham understand about the slave trade that other planters and merchants were unwilling to admit? A study of his parliamentary and planter activities are important because they explain how he came to accept that abolition of

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Winter and D. M. Joslin ed. *R H Tawney’s Commonplace Book* (Economic History Society 1972), p. 12

the slave trade was a practical course of action, which weakened the legitimacy of the anti-abolitionist stance.

On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1789, William Wilberforce introduced the first motion to abolish the slave trade. He condemned it as a 'wretched' and 'inhuman,' practice in a three and a half hour speech to the House of Commons, and introduced twelve resolutions to ban the slave trade.<sup>2</sup>

Wilberforce condemned the wars that were instigated to encourage the Africans' capture and enslavement, 'the pestilence, disease and despair' of the Middle Passage, and once established as slaves in the West Indies how excessive labour, improper food and disease prevented a natural increase in the enslaved population.<sup>3</sup> He also criticised the effect of the trade on British seamen, noting the 'particularly injurious and destructive' instances of high mortality among those who were stationed on the African coast.

The compelling presentation of the statistics of the slave trade served two purposes: to inform Parliament and the public of the nature of the slave trade, and what the abolitionists intended to terminate. Its abolition was put to the consideration of the British legislature, who had to decide its fate. Furthermore, the resolutions - which outlined the inhumanity of the slave trade - introduced the foundation of antislavery rhetoric. Furthermore, they put the West India planters and merchants' character under public scrutiny, with them facing accusations of moral degeneration. They had become 'warped and blinded' by avarice and they owed it to Africa as much as their own moral characters to abolish the trade.<sup>4</sup>

The West India Committee had been alert to the impending debates on abolition and was active in organising opposition against it. At a General Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1789, attracting nearly 300 attendees, its membership considered what action they ought to take.

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<sup>2</sup> *Cobbetts Parliamentary History*, Volume 28. 12<sup>th</sup> May 1789, col 41-67

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, Volume 2 (London, 1808), p. 46

They first adopted four resolutions that laid the foundation for their defence of the slave trade, which emphasised the importance of enslaved workers to the cultivation of the West Indies; if the slave trade was abolished this would have serious consequences for the navigation, manufactures, trade and revenue of Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> The effect of abolition on London's commercial centre would be catastrophic. Richard Sheridan's exploration of the level of London's involvement in the slave trade demonstrated the importance of London to its commercial and financial organisation, illustrating how the commissioning agents, slave factors and the extension of credit to planters operated from the capital. So deep was the level of investment that Alderman Nathaniel Newnham reportedly remarked that 'if the slave trade were abolished it would render the city of London one scene of bankruptcy and ruin.'<sup>6</sup> London was also the entrepôt of local and regional manufacturing that exported goods to Africa; moreover, it was the leading importer of sugar into Great Britain, as the table below indicates.

***Table 3.1 Account of Sugar Imported into Britain, 1804-1806 (cwt.)***<sup>7</sup>

	London	Liverpool	Bristol	Glasgow and Greenock
1804	1,972,897	474,265	298.890	251,157
1805	1,965,880	646,460	352,707	309,750
1806	2,344,999	556,470	342,583	356,848

<sup>5</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting of West India Planters and Merchants, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1789

<sup>6</sup> Richard Sheridan, 'The Commercial and Financial Organisation of the British Slave Trade, 1750-1807,' *Economic History Review*, 11:2 (1958), pp. 249-263; *Parliamentary History*, Volume 28, col.76

<sup>7</sup> James A. Rawley, *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade* (Columbia, MO; London: University of Missouri Press, 2003) p.126

The London West India Committee took a central role in organising the defence of the slave trade.<sup>8</sup> At a General Meeting in May 1789 they constructed a detailed rebuttal to Wilberforce's resolutions with a set of their own.<sup>9</sup> They presented a defence of the slave trade in three ways. First, they emphasised the centrality of the slave trade to the prosperity and commerce of Great Britain. Second they argued that slave labour was a legitimate and accepted form of labour. Third, they justified the enslavement of Africans on humanitarian and racial grounds. Another key issue they campaigned for was compensation, which the planters and merchants asserted was their right to claim if their property was placed under threat.

These nineteen resolutions became the foundation of the proslavery discourse and an uncompromising defence of the slave trade that did not alter as a response to antislavery arguments.<sup>10</sup> That they were widely disseminated in the press, given as evidence and published in pamphlets suggests that they formed the univocal stance against slave trade abolition.

By considering each of the resolutions authored by the West India Committee it is possible to identify the principal arguments utilised in defence of the slave trade. This analysis is not concerned with the validity of the arguments, nor is the aim to contrast them with the arguments advanced by the abolitionists. The purpose is to examine the elements of the discourse that the proslavery lobby developed and refined as a series of counterarguments to the antislavery discourse.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ian Barrett argues that the defence of the slave trade went beyond the recognised proslavery networks

<sup>9</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1789

<sup>10</sup> The resolutions can be found in the Appendix

<sup>11</sup> Roger Anstey examined the West Indian parliamentary campaign; see *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975). For an analysis of the rhetorical strategies used in the slave trade debates see Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade – Rhetoric of British National Identity 1759-1815* (London: Ashgate, 2009). Swaminathan looks in more detail at the proslavery rebuttal of abolitionist rhetoric. Brycchan Carey's *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery 1860-1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) considers the theme of sentimental rhetoric present in

## **The slave trade's commercial and financial value**

The planters drew attention to the value of the trade, the amount currently invested in the West Indies and the inviolable property rights of British subjects. The sanctity of property was the most successful argument advanced by the proslavery lobby. The consequences of abolition to the economy were pessimistic, not least with respect to the merchants, planters and creditors of West India property. George Hibbert, whose family was prominent in the slave trade in Jamaica, the sugar commission business of London, and himself partner on two West India commission houses, was well qualified to voice the alarm and uncertainty felt in the City of London over the prospect of abolition. Predicting abolition's effect on credit advanced to planters by merchants and brokers, he testified that

I am certain that [abolition] would be followed by an immediate decay of the credit of such British merchants as have considerable engagements with the West Indies; and that they would be obliged to withdraw that indulgence which they have hitherto granted to their debtors in the sugar colonies; and in many cases foreclose mortgages and enforce judgement to their own present relief, but to the ruin of many considerable plantations, whose value upon a sale would be affected by the double circumstance of the quantity of similar property brought to market, and the notoriety of the new calamity occasioning their sale.<sup>12</sup>

With regards to those trading to Great Britain and the colonies he forecast that

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abolitionist discourses. For a study on the mobilisation of abolitionist opinion in England see John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)

<sup>12</sup> George Hibbert's testimony before the Committee investigating the slave trade, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1790, House of Commons Sessional Papers, Vol. 72 p.93

Those finding their profits diminish with the diminution of the produce in the islands, must of necessity also lessen those expenses by which they contribute to the revenue of their country, must look forward to an entire loss of that.<sup>13</sup>

The devastating consequence of abolition to British commerce was another argument presented by the proslavery lobby. Slave trading was an integral part of world trade, vital to the British marine. When Thomas Irving, the Inspector General of Imports and Exports for Great Britain, was called to give evidence before Parliament on the slave trade, he remarked that

The British Empire is a vast body composed of a multitude of fragments, of which our marine is the general cement. Destroy this cement, the empire is destroyed; and the last citadel, namely this island itself, is no longer safe.<sup>14</sup>

Irving also warned of the consequences if Britain relinquished her control of the sea if the slave trade was abolished:

A maritime and commercial system is never to be pursued by halves. What is widely adopted must vigorously supported otherwise what might have proved a source of strength may become the means of weakness and the sole consequence of half measures may be to render those who adopt them a richer and ampler prey to stronger maritime foes.<sup>15</sup>

The planters denied that a decrease in the population was a result of ‘too severe labour, or rigorous treatment’, or that enslaved Africans were open to mistreatment because they could be easily and inexpensively be replaced. Bryan Edwards explained the lack of natural increase was because the number of enslaved males brought into Jamaica was always

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.93

<sup>14</sup> *Remarks Upon the Evidence given by Thomas Irving, Esq. Inspector General of the Exports and Imports of Great Britain, before the Select Committee appointed to take the examination of witnesses on the slave trade* (London, 1791), p. 11

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 11

disproportionate to the females. Abolition would cause an annual reduction in the enslaved in the British West Indies of 10,500 a loss of 2.3 per cent.<sup>16</sup> This would have a devastating effect on West Indian production. Planters were reliant on the slave trade providing them with easy access to Africans. Consequently they could cope with excess of death in the colonies; it was more profitable to rely on purchasing to maintain the workforce than aim at natural production.<sup>17</sup>

### **The humanity of the slave trade**

The abolitionists' contention that the capture and enslavement of Africans was debasing Africa was rejected by the anti-abolitionists. Instead, they argued that they were alleviating human suffering and promoting happiness. As Justin Roberts argues, the planters and merchants appropriated Enlightenment principles and 'positioned themselves as part of humanitarian reform projects'.<sup>18</sup>

They were 'rescuing' individuals who would have been executed or sold by their own countrymen. Slave trading was therefore a humane act. Robert Norris underlined the assertion that Africans were brutal and uncivilised, describing Africa as 'terrible despotic country', in a general state of slavery and oppression, with no parental affections or an existence of love.<sup>19</sup>

He recounted the story of a king whom he described as an absolute ruler, whose 'area of bedchamber [was] paved with skulls of prisoners taken in war that he may daily enjoy the savage gratification of literally trampling on the heads of his enemies.'<sup>20</sup> In this narrative Norris clearly relished in this representation of this ruler to his readership, with the symbols

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<sup>16</sup>Evidence of George Hibbert, House of Commons Sessional Papers (72), p. 95

<sup>17</sup> Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1972) pp. 229-235

<sup>18</sup> Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 45

<sup>19</sup> Robert Norris, *A Short Account of the African Slave Trade, collected from local knowledge, from the evidence given at the bar of both Houses of Parliament, and from tracts written on that subject* (Liverpool, 1788)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.10

of his cruelty and barbarism beneath his feet. Consequently the slave trade advanced Africans by removing them from a brutal place.

As well as defending the slave trade, a transatlantic defence of slavery was required to promote its 'positive' aspects. Subsequently, the principal virtue of enslavement in the colonies was the Christianisation and civilisation of Africans. In his play *The Benevolent Planters*, Thomas Bellamy represented the debate through a narrative of the efforts of three planters, aptly named Goodwin, Heartfree and Steady, to reunite Oran and Selima, two enslaved African lovers separated by the slave trade and who believe each other to be dead. Bellamy's play propagated the proslavery claim that slavery nurtured and civilised Africans.<sup>21</sup> Heartfree's chronicling of how Oran came to be enslaved echoed the planter and merchant claims of African brutality and European benevolence. Oran, who had been captured by another African tribe who 'were on the point of setting fire to the consuming pile to which he was bound,' was rescued by a 'troop of Europeans [who] broke in upon them and bore away a considerable party to their ships...among the rest was a rescued Oran, who was happily brought to our mart, where I had the good fortune to become his master.'<sup>22</sup>

### **The legitimacy of the slave trade**

The planters and merchants aimed to demonstrate the impracticability of abolition by arguing that it would have a deleterious effect on levels of production in the West Indies. Slavery, it was argued, had been practiced by Africans long before European engagement; consequently they could not be condemned for engaging in a practice they did not originate. The African merchant Robert Norris noted that 'the Africans have been in the practice of time immemorial of selling their countrymen, and never entertained any more doubt of their right

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Bellamy, *The Benevolent Planters, A Dramatic Piece, as performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket* (London, 1789)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.4



to do so.<sup>23</sup> When questioned whether slavery was a known condition in Angola, James Fraser, a slave ship captain, replied that it was; adding that ‘the number of freemen was so small that many chuse (sic) to consider themselves vassals or slaves to the great princes, rather than be exposed to dangers from quarrels, which they are always involved in that country.’<sup>24</sup> Africans were racialised as being suited physically to carry out plantation labour; consequently, if the slave trade was abolished there would be an adverse effect on the levels of production of sugar and its by-products in the West Indies.

Planters exempted white people from this type of labour, arguing that they could not withstand the tropical climate. Bryan Edwards drew attention to the French attempt in 1763 to settle a colony of white labourers in Cayenne, where, by his estimation, 12,000 perished as a result of the ‘impolitic scheme.’<sup>25</sup> The ill effects of the heat [to] the 46<sup>th</sup> Regiment under Sir James Cockburne’, claimed a Jamaican planter, ‘destroyed them so fast, that the healthy survivors were not sufficient to render military honours to their deceased comrades.’<sup>26</sup>

Edward Long, whose writings promoted a racist agenda in order to protect the slave system, claimed that Parliament had independently provided a definition of Africans as ‘fit objects of purchase and sale, transferable like any other goods and chattel,’ that the planter was obligated to respect.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, ‘the advantages derived to this kingdom for her plantations and principally by means of Negroe labour, are so well known and understood...the failure of

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Norris, *A Short Account of the African Slave Trade*, p. 9

<sup>24</sup> Robert Norris, *A Short Account of the African Slave Trade* (London, 1789) p. 14; Evidence of James Fraser, *Minutes of the Evidence Taken before a Committee of the House of Commons for the Purpose of taking the Examination of such witnesses...against the abolition of the Slave Trade* (London, 1790) p.5

<sup>25</sup> Bryan Edwards, *A Speech Delivered at a Free Conference between the Honourable Council and Assembly of Jamaica, held 19<sup>th</sup> November 1789, on the subject of Mr Wilberforce’s propositions in the House of Commons, concerning the Slave Trade* (Jamaica Assembly, 1790), p. 49

<sup>26</sup> *West India Trade and Islands: Commercial reasons for the non-abolition of the slave trade in the West India islands, by a Planter, and merchant of many years resident in the West Indies* (London 1789), pp. 6-7

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4, 24

our West India trade would of course be followed by a great diminution in...the duties and customs upon which form no mean figure in the revenue account.’<sup>28</sup>

The slave trade and slavery was the employer of many British citizens. A West India planter pointed out that Africans traded for ‘articles such as toys, tools and hardware...the manufacturing of which thousands of industrious men in London, Birmingham and Sheffield etc. are employed, and give bread to all the tender dependencies of wife and children.’<sup>29</sup>

The amount of money generated also made a compelling argument. For example, goods exported from Britain to the West Indies from 1787 to 1788 amounted to £1,467,752; goods imported from the West Indies to Britain in 1786-1787 amounted to £3,613, 147.<sup>30</sup> The slave trade underpinned a lucrative branch of commerce; its legitimacy lay in the amount of wealth it generated.

The threat that Britain’s competitors would take up her share of the trade pointed to the enormity of financial interests at stake, and was a principal argument advanced by the proslavery lobby. Sir William Young, who owned over 800 enslaved workers in Antigua, St Vincent and Tobago, used the evidence gathered in the Privy Council to show how the French, Spanish and Danish were expanding their slave trading activities and argued that Britain’s withdrawal would make things worse for the enslaved Africans:

The misery in Africa is terrible but it will be made far worse – the French Spanish,

Danish and Americans would usurp our place and give the trade new spur and force.

To what actual extent the market for slaves might then be pushed and the miseries and

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<sup>28</sup>Edward Long, *Candid Reflections upon the Judgement Lately awarded by the court of Kings Bench on what is commonly called the Negroe cause* (London, 1773), p. 69. Although Long was writing in 1772 in response to the Somerset decision, his assertion of the importance of African slave labour remained a principal argument in the 1790s. For a discussion of the construction of the proslavery discourse prior to the abolition campaign, see Srividhya Swaminathan, ‘Developing the West Indian Proslavery Position after the Somerset Decision,’ *Slavery and Abolition*, 24:3 (2003), pp. 40-60

<sup>29</sup> *West India Trade and Islands: Commercial reasons for the non-abolition of the slave trade*, pp.2-3

<sup>30</sup> *House of Commons Sessional Papers* (Reports, Slave Trade 1790), volume 67, pp. 69, 223

cruelties dependant on the market, the vast islands and continental settlements as yet poorly cultivated and thinly peopled, belonging to the powers in question, leave us no room to surmise and much less to exaggerate.<sup>31</sup>

The planters, merchants and their associates produced a rhetorical context that implicated Parliament's sanctioning of the development of the colonies through its acts; rescinding or overturning them threatened to destabilize the colonies' position in the empire.<sup>32</sup> The memorials and petitions that were presented to Parliament by the West India Committee throughout the campaign repeated this assertion, reminding Parliament that

The trade to Africa for labourers has been for a great number of years sanctioned, approved and encouraged by royal charters and proclamations and by repeated acts of the legislative; which declare in the most forcible language a most anxious desire to regulate, extend secure and preserve this trade pronounced by parliament to be highly advantageous to Great Britain and necessary for supplying the colonies with a sufficient number of Negroes.<sup>33</sup>

James Baillie, agent for Grenada, MP, merchant and proprietor of the Hermitage estate that contained nearly three hundred enslaved workers, saw legal sanction as unequivocal as a defence. He argued that the acts passed proved that the trade was advantageous to Britain; therefore the colonies were entitled to its protection. He called this the compact that tied the colonies to the mother country, and abolition would be a breach of that compact.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 29. 18<sup>th</sup> April 1791, col. 302; 'Sir William Young', *Dictionary of National Biography* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30284?docPos=3> Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

<sup>32</sup> David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition 1783-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.188

<sup>33</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Petition of the West India Planters and Merchants to the House of Commons against Abolition of the Slave Trade, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1804

<sup>34</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXIX, col. 1079, 1081

## Compensation

The issue of compensation helps to explain the strength of planter opposition to abolition of the slave trade, and of slavery twenty five years later. It was a commitment to this principle that the planters required in order to accept abolition and it was on this point that they defended slavery in the 1820s.<sup>35</sup> Compensation was called for as early as July 1788, by a group of Liverpool Merchants concerned in the African Trade, during the reading of the bill to regulate the slave trade. They considered the one million pounds they had invested to be in the ‘utmost danger of being lost,’ and they pointed out ‘when any part of it has been found necessary to be wrested from the individual for the sake of the public, a full and adequate compensation has ever been made to such persons.’<sup>36</sup>

From 1792 the West India Committee raised the issue of compensation in its petitions to both Houses of Parliament, as motions to abolish the slave trade were presented each year. If the slave trade was going to be abolished, the merchants and planters asserted that ‘it was a leading principle of the British Constitution that no man’s property shall be injured by an Act of legislature without full compensation.’<sup>37</sup> These petitions have a larger significance. The sanctity of private property and the principle of fair compensation defined what the planters and merchants expected in return for their acceptance of abolition. William Pitt’s announcement that there would be no compensation ‘for any losses that might be incurred by the people of Liverpool or elsewhere’ was met with astonishment and anger. Crisp Molineux, MP for King’s Lynn, who had estates in St Kitts, was so angered by this decision that he and a number of other planters ‘determined to withdraw their money and property from the

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<sup>35</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 below

<sup>36</sup> Petition of Several Persons of the Town of Liverpool, carrying on or concerned in the Africa Trade, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1788, *Journal of the House of Commons* XXXXIII, p. 651

<sup>37</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Petitions read at General Meetings, 29th March 1792, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1796, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1804; 17<sup>th</sup> June 1806; 21<sup>st</sup> January 1807; 17<sup>th</sup> February 1807

islands ...they would transfer themselves, their trade and their capitals to France where they would be received with open arms.’<sup>38</sup>

The resolutions as arguments for the defence of property and commerce and the significance of the merchants and planters’ contribution to the country remained the most persuasive against the abolition of the slave trade, and were repeated in pamphlets, newspaper articles, petitions and private correspondence between 1789 and 1807. Proslavery writers used every economic, moral and social argument to defend slavery and the slave trade, claiming that it was morally unimpeachable and in accordance with a civilised nation. They appealed to the affluent and commercially competent Briton who understood the value of trade. The discourse on national identity, in particular the morality of Britons owning slaves became, as Srividhya Swaminathan argues, a critical issue in the dialogue between the pro and antislavery camps which compelled both sides to refine their own image of the Briton.<sup>39</sup>

### **Contesting the planter identity**

Anti-slavery writers made a case for abolition by attacking the character of the planter.

Trevor Burnard and Christer Petley note that the colonists created economically successful but socially disastrous societies, whose characteristics by the 1780s were seen as undermining the foundations of the British national identity.<sup>40</sup> As Kathleen Wilson argues, ‘Cultural regressions on the frontiers of Empire swelled anxieties about the contingent nature of Englishness abroad.’<sup>41</sup> Burnard notes that the abolitionists successfully changed public opinion against the planter, constructing a negative image that focused on what they saw as excessive and immoral behaviour. This was part of the evangelical strategy not only to end

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<sup>38</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume 28 col 99

<sup>39</sup> Swaminathan, ‘Developing the West Indian Proslavery position’, p.50

<sup>40</sup> Trevor Burnard, ‘Powerless Masters: The Curious Decline of Jamaican Sugar Planters in the Foundational Period of British Abolitionism,’ *Slavery and Abolition*, 32:2 (2011), pp. 185-198; Christer Petley, ‘Gluttony, Excess and the fall of the planter class in the British Caribbean’, *Atlantic Studies*, 9:1 (2012), pp. 85-106

<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge 2003), p. 14

slavery, but to improve the morals of the British people. Consequently they denied the notion of Britishness to a group that claimed to be British by claiming that their actions – slave ownership – were contrary to Christian ideals.<sup>42</sup> Abolitionists represented planters as irreligious, violent, greedy and sinful. The pioneering abolitionist James Ramsay was appalled at how in St. Kitts ‘it was a kind of fashion which prevails almost universally among our ranks of people to refrain from coming to church.’ He condemned them as brutal tyrants who ‘beat, abuse, main, ill-treat [his] slaves at the suggestion of his lust, his avarice, his malice, his caprice... leading them to become callous to all tender feelings which soften and dignify our nature.’<sup>43</sup>

Christer Petley examines how the social and cultural aspects of planter existence in the British West Indies, particularly their attitudes to food and drink, were utilised to heap further criticism on his character. Their reputation of hosting extravagant meals and possessing large appetites was seen as further examples of their excessive nature that was incongruent with British values.<sup>44</sup> As Christopher Brown observes, the proslavery lobby found it difficult to defend slavery before a public that was becoming more committed to the idea of liberty.<sup>45</sup> Instead the proslavery lobby sought to rescue the character of the planter by representing them as loyal citizens who were key commercial contributors to Britain, and celebrated the cultural, social and economic links between the metropole and colony. To counter the claims of inhumanity they pointed out that they and their ancestors, by locating themselves in the

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<sup>42</sup> Trevor Burnard, ‘Powerless Masters,’ p. 186

<sup>43</sup> James Ramsay, ‘Memorial Suggesting Motives for the Improvement of the Sugar Colonies,’ quoted in Burnard, ‘Powerless Masters,’ p. 187

<sup>44</sup> Petley, ‘Gluttony,’ pp. 89-91

<sup>45</sup> Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC; Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 369

Caribbean, had extended British values beyond British shores, values that were being instilled in their enslaved workers.<sup>46</sup>

Bryan Edwards, in his observations of colonial existence, sought to build the case that planters had created a form of ‘liberty’ for the enslaved workers. He claimed the assimilation of Africans into plantation life enabled them to attain a degree of autonomy, which resulted in ‘a happy coalition between master and slave.’<sup>47</sup> They were allocated grounds to cultivate their own produce, given access to markets to sell what they did not consume, to ‘indulge [in] fine clothes on holidays and gratify his palate with salted meats.’<sup>48</sup> They lived in cottages on the plantation that Edwards lauded as ‘pleasing and picturesque,’ further claiming that ‘allowing for the difference in climate they far excel the cabins of the Scotch and Irish peasants.’<sup>49</sup>

Edwards’ attempts to represent slavery as humane showed how he sought to find a middle ground between abolition and maintaining the status quo. Unfortunately this position threw up contradictions that were irreconcilable to the abolitionists. The claim that slavery could be ‘improved’ showed the weaknesses inherent in the proslavery argument, if the best defence offered by the planter class was pride in the provision of the most basic necessities.<sup>50</sup> Given the realities of the system of physical and mental brutality which formed the bedrock of plantation slave economy, constructing a ‘humane’ side to slavery was an important feature of the justification of slavery. These attempts to position slavery as an enlightened moral

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<sup>46</sup> Christer Petley explores these themes in his study of Simon Taylor’s attitudes towards abolition. Christer Petley, ‘‘Devoted Islands’ and ‘That Madman Wilberforce’: British Proslavery Patriotism during the Age of Abolition,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39:3 (2011), pp. 393-415

<sup>47</sup> Bryan Edwards, *A History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Volume 2 (London, 1794), p. 135

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 135

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp. 137-138

<sup>50</sup> This notion did gain traction in the West Indies – Justin Roberts argues that planters believed that moral and economic progress and slavery were compatible. These alternative ideas of progress shaped concepts of plantation management. Justin Roberts, *Slavery and Enlightenment in the British Atlantic*, Chapter 1

standard displayed what Christopher Brown has termed ‘status anxiety’ among the slave owners; they did not want to end slavery, nor did they want to be seen as oppressors.<sup>51</sup>

### **Undermining the proslavery stance**

The univocal proslavery stance was further complicated with criticisms by planters of plantation management in particular, and the slavery system in general. As noted earlier, the proslavery lobby had asserted that the exclusive dependence on Creole-born enslaved workers to work on sugar plantations was an experiment they could not afford to undertake. The abolition of the slave trade would result in economic ruin for those with investments in the West Indies. This assertion was contradicted in writings that defended slavery, also claiming that the constant extension of credit to purchase enslaved Africans was one of the principal causes of planters’ financial distress.

William Beckford (1744-1799), planter and writer, was a member of that Jamaican planting and slave owning dynasty. He was a cousin of William Beckford junior, whose father Alderman William Beckford (1709-1770) had been twice Mayor of London and has been described as ‘the uncrowned king of Jamaica’.<sup>52</sup> Peter Beckford the elder (d.1710) had been one of the early English settlers in Jamaica; by the time of his death in 1710 he had 20 estates and 1,200 enslaved Africans working on them. William Beckford senior inherited his father’s (also called Peter) estates and left his son, also called William, with a fantastic fortune with which he built the Gothic mansion Fonthill Abbey.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital*, p. 370

<sup>52</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p.48; Richard Sheridan, ‘The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century,’ *Economic History Review*, 18:2 (1965), p. 308

<sup>53</sup> For a brief history of Fonthill Abbey see J. Wilton Ely, ‘The genesis and evolution of Fonthill Abbey’, *Architectural History* 23 (1980), pp. 40–51. For a biographical study on William Beckford (1709-1770) see Perry Gauci, *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013)



William Beckford was the illegitimate son of Alderman Richard Beckford (William senior's younger brother), inheriting his father's plantations in 1765.<sup>54</sup> He moved to Jamaica in 1774 and lived there for thirteen years before returning to live at Somerley Hall in Suffolk. On the basis of his years in Jamaica and his experience of managing his own plantations, Beckford concluded that there was an element of economic lunacy in the plantation system, specifically the extension of credit which tempted many planters to purchase more enslaved workers than he needed: 'The extension of twelve or eighteen months' credit is a temptation to many to buy, who in fact ought not to purchase, and the consequences that will and most generally attend impunctuality (sic) are serious and destructive.'<sup>55</sup> Beckford was making an important point – planters had to contend with less productive soil, the rising cost of enslaved workers, whose upkeep was at a fixed cost. Some enslaved workers had specific skilled jobs but the majority were not trained to do anything but unskilled agricultural work. The planters could not command the capital for reinvestment in the plantation which might have enabled it to become more competitive.<sup>56</sup> Defending the necessity of an unlimited supply of enslaved Africans made no reference to these issues.

Beckford's reflections on the hazards of planting, though not from a humanitarian perspective, revealed the reality that few planters were willing to publicly admit. Beckford accrued a large number of debts that led to his incarceration in Fleet Prison in 1786 as a debtor while on a visit to England. The situation in which he found himself was a

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Sheridan, 'Planter and Historian: The Career of William Beckford of Jamaica and England 1744-1799,' *Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. 4 (1964), p.45

<sup>55</sup> William Beckford, *A descriptive Account of a part of the island of Jamaica: with remarks upon the cultivation of sugar cane, throughout the different seasons of the year; also observations and reflections upon what would probably be the consequences of an abolition of the slave trade and the emancipation of the slaves*, Vol. 2 (T&J Edgerton, 1790), p.341

<sup>56</sup> Trevor Sudama, 'The Model of Plantation Economy: the Case of Trinidad and Tobago', *Latin American Perspectives*, 6:1, *Socialism and Imperialism in the Caribbean* (1979), pp. 65-83. James Ramsay argued that 'slaves are almost one third dearer (since 1774); the expense of supporting them has increased. Without taking into account the frequent accidents of hurricanes and bad crops, new slaves do not repay their first cost, interest expense and reduction of numbers in seasoning'. (*Objections to the abolition of the slave trade with answers to which are prefixed*, by Rev. James Ramsay, (J Phillips, 1788) p.6); David Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition 1783-1807*, p.186

consequence of ‘imprudences which I might have prevented, and of misfortunes that I could not foresee’.<sup>57</sup> His ‘imprudence’ was to act as security to a friend, and his ‘misfortunes’ originated with the hurricane that devastated Jamaica in 1780. While in prison he wrote *Remarks upon the situation of Negroes in Jamaica, impartially made from local experience of nearly 13 years on that island*, (1788) and two years later published *A descriptive account of the island of Jamaica* (1790). Both books defend slavery as an institution, and Beckford uses many of the standard proslavery tropes to defend the institution. However, he was very critical of the punishments meted out to enslaved Africans. Unlike many writers who attributed brutal treatment to a small percentage of overseers and plantation managers, Beckford wrote of it as a regular occurrence, where the purpose was not always to mete out discipline:

I am sorry to observe that punishments in Jamaica are often inflicted upon the bodies of Negroes without discretion, and very frequently rather to gratify revenge than for the sake of example...I am convinced that custom and bad example have a fatal influence upon the conduct of generality of white people in Jamaica, many of whom imagine that the appearance of discipline is a spur to labour, and that Negroes will not work unless roused by the sound of the whip.<sup>58</sup>

Beckford suggested that his fellow planters should follow a course of amelioration, and to be less acquisitive.<sup>59</sup> ‘If planters would be contented to make only half the quantity of produce’, he wrote, ‘their capital of Negroes would be better preserved, and upon some properties...the

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<sup>57</sup> William Beckford, *A descriptive Account of Jamaica*, Vol. 2, p.404

<sup>58</sup> William Beckford, *Remarks upon the situation of Negroes in Jamaica, impartially made from local experience of nearly thirteen years on that island* (London, 1788), p.41n

<sup>59</sup> Sheridan, ‘William Beckford, Planter and Historian,’ p. 43

number may certainly be kept up'.<sup>60</sup> This contradicted the claims of many slavery apologists.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, on plantations heavily burdened with debt, enslaved workers were more likely to receive harsh treatment in the form of being removed from plantations (and from their families) that fell into the possession of creditors. The planter historian Bryan Edwards commented at length on the hardships to which enslaved workers were often 'liable of being sold by creditors and made subject in the course of administration by executors both by to the payment of all debts both by simple contract and speciality'. He wrote that

'This grievance, so remorseless and tyrannical in principle and so dreadful in its effects though not originally created is now upheld and confirmed by a British Act of Parliament and no less authority is competent to redress it. It was an act procured by, and passed for the benefit of British creditors, and I blush to add that its motive and origins have sanctified the measure even in the opinion of men who among the loudest declaimers against slavery and the slave trade'.<sup>62</sup>

Edwards' remarks reveal the extent of the creditors' influence over West India production. William Beckford's writings also address the contentious relationship between the merchant and planter with some candour. The crucial factor that influenced this relationship was debt – if planters kept their debit balances low and made timely payments they could maintain control of the financial aspects of the West India trade. The merchant, however, was able to maintain control when the planter became indebted to him. Beckford's own experience followed a similar trajectory, and he was keen to make his views known no matter how controversial they were: 'I now stand on slippery ground, that the least false step

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<sup>60</sup> Beckford, *Remarks*, p. 74

<sup>61</sup> Enslaved Africans who remained unsold (which happened when there was a glut of enslaved) were very expensive, therefore the planter was extended a very long term of credit in order to purchase more enslaved to prevent the glut. *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal* (October 1804-January 1805), Volume 5 (D&G Bruce, 1814), pp. 235-6

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *A History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Vol. 2, p. 153

will help sink me, and that an absolute fall will reduce me to a situation rise perhaps no more...but [I] profess to speak from facts.' When the planter became indebted to the merchant,

From that moment he becomes dependent, perhaps for life if he gives perhaps a pledge that is worth £20,000 to cover a debt of £5,000; a judgement is obtained to secure the priority of all he has; he is ejected from his estate, it falls into the hand of the mortgagee in possession; the crops decrease, the value of the property sinks and the whole of it is perhaps sold at last to pay off the encumbrance (sic) and the creditor purchase for £5,000 what was worth at least double the sum, and this is a fact all too well established to admit of refutation.<sup>63</sup>

He warned against becoming indebted to merchants of an 'illiberal and parsimonious frame of mind', and 'to be particularly cautious of how planters were entrusted with a security that was of great magnitude compared to a small advance'.<sup>64</sup>

The absentee planter Joseph Foster Barham was also critical of the actions of the merchants and agents, and their practices regarding the sugar industry that pushed the planters to making more sugar than was needed. It encouraged planters to purchase more enslaved Africans, and land:

It holds out to the agents in the islands to give speculations that will ruinously divert the employers which offer them temptations which hardly leave it in their power to be honest, and above all it furnishes the means of producing a greater quantity of sugar than the markets can bear thereby rendering the whole mass of West India property of little value. These arguments are drowned out by the clamour of these very agents,

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<sup>63</sup> William Beckford, *A Descriptive Account of Jamaica*, p.357

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 371

who being approved by their constituents to have most information even more attended to – and their arguments were supported by some of the merchants who being more interested in the quantity than the price of sugar.<sup>65</sup>

### **Joseph Foster Barham: A Pragmatic Abolitionist**

When Joseph Foster Barham, planter, merchant and MP for Stockbridge, died in 1832, his obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* remarked on the extraordinary altruism he had displayed when he voted to abolish the transatlantic slave trade twenty five years earlier. Extraordinary, because 'though a West India planter himself, he fought side by side with Mr Wilberforce and rendered that cause most efficient support'.<sup>66</sup> Wilberforce's own assessment of Barham was that he was 'such an honourable exception to the conduct of his fellow planters...actuated by a warm spirit of patriotism and philanthropy.'<sup>67</sup> How true were the claims in the obituary? Did Barham and Wilberforce fight side by side to end the slave trade? Was the description of a 'conscience stricken West India proprietor' a fair one – did he choose humanity over profit?<sup>68</sup> Neither the obituary in *Gentleman's Magazine* nor Wilberforce's praise of Barham offer any explanation why he chose publicly to support abolition, the only planter to adopt an apparently abolitionist position.

Barham was representative of those planters who believed that the application of ameliorative policies towards the enslaved population would encourage their natural increase. Therefore, as a planter who employed 'humane' practices towards his enslaved workers, Joseph Foster Barham was acting in line with Enlightenment thought that invoked the principles of

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<sup>65</sup>University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit, Barham Papers. Ms Clar. Dep c.377, 'Letter from a Proprietor'

<sup>66</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Journal*, (Volume 102) September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1832, p. 573

<sup>67</sup> Robert and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce, in Four Volumes* (London: John Murray, 1838), p.337

<sup>68</sup> 'Joseph Foster Barham 1759-1832' History of Parliament Online

<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/foster-barham-joseph-1759-1832>

Accessed 18th June 2014

humanity and improvement. Barham was also a pragmatic planter who supported abolition for practical reasons, rather than humanitarian or religious ones. The political and economic developments as a consequence of the war with France led him to question the wisdom of the continued purchase of enslaved Africans for the purpose of producing sugar for a saturated market. In recognising that abolition was a practical solution to planter distress, he undermined the proslavery stance.<sup>69</sup>

Joseph Foster Barham was born in Trecwn, Pembrokeshire, in 1759. He was first cousin to Elizabeth Vassall Fox, Lady Holland, a Jamaican heiress and political hostess which reinforced his Whig and Jamaican connections.<sup>70</sup> He also possessed land and property in Wales through his mother Dorothea Vaughan.<sup>71</sup> Foster Barham was a third generation Jamaican absentee, whose ancestors had been among its earliest settlers. Colonel Thomas Foster was reputed to have served as an officer under Penn and Venables in the 1655 expedition, and established a plantation in St Elizabeth in Jamaica in the 1670s, to which his son, Colonel John Foster (1681-1731) added further estates. When he died, his widow married Dr Henry Barham (1692-1746), a physician. Henry Barham subsequently returned to England in 1736, joining the growing class of absentee proprietors, living off the incomes his six plantations produced, which Richard Dunn estimated at around £20,000 per year.<sup>72</sup> His stepson Joseph Foster Barham I (1729-1789) visited Jamaica in 1750; concerned with the rapid turnover of his enslaved workers, he began to keep detailed records to track the population changes, identifying each man woman and child by name and place of origin, their

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<sup>69</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c. 377

<sup>70</sup> 'Joseph Foster Barham,' History of Parliament Online  
<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/foster-barham-joseph-1759-1832>  
Accessed 18th June 2014

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Richard Dunn, 'A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica and Mount Airy in Virginia, 1799-1828', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 34: 1 (1977), p. 36. Henry Barham's wife died and all property reverted to him.

ages and physical condition.<sup>73</sup> A religious man, Barham I was a member of the Moravian Church, a Christian sect that was very active in overseas evangelism. Anxious to extend Christianity to his enslaved workers, he persuaded the Moravians to establish a mission at Mesopotamia that continued for more than seventy-five years, from 1759 to 1835.<sup>74</sup> Barham I adopted a relatively humane and benevolent policy on his plantations, his policies similar to those outlined in Samuel Martin's *Essay on Plantership* (1765). Martin believed that in order to maximise productivity and preserve the workforce, enslaved workers should be provided with food, clothing and shelter, as a way to reduce mortality and increase the birth rate. He recommended that it was in the planter's interest to treat his enslaved workers well, because 'he who feeds his Negroes well, proportioneth to their labour, to their age sex and strength and treats them with kindness and good nature will reap a much larger profit with infinitely more ease and satisfaction.'<sup>75</sup> Benevolence was therefore not meted out from the perspective of moral consideration but from the perspective of creating an efficient workforce.<sup>76</sup>

When Joseph II became the owner of Mesopotamia he instructed his attorneys to purchase more enslaved Africans to distribute work in an equitable fashion, having three enslaved workers doing the work of only two, and allocating more rest periods at the weekends. Furthermore, he instructed that pregnant women receive special care including light work duties.<sup>77</sup> By engaging in this enlightened management programme, Barham considered himself to be a 'good master,' concerned for the well-being of his enslaved workers.

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Dunn, 'The demographic contrast between slave life in Jamaica and Virginia, 1760-1865,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 151:1 (2007), p. 46

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Samuel Martin, *An Essay on Plantership* (London 1785), p.2; for a study of Martin's methods see Richard Sheridan, 'Samuel Martin, Innovative Sugar Planter of Antigua 1750-1776,' *Agricultural History*, 34:3 (1960), pp. 126-139

<sup>76</sup> See David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) Chapter 2 for his discussion of the 'enlightened' plantation management model as exemplified by the Barbadian planter Joshua Steele

<sup>77</sup> Richard S. Dunn, 'Dreadful Idlers in the Cane Fields: the slave labour pattern on a Jamaica Sugar Estate 1762-1831', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17:4 (1987), p.798. For a study on the work histories of

Mesopotamia was a plantation of 2,448 acres, located in Westmoreland Parish, five miles from the port town of Savannah La Mar. Established around 1700, it was absentee owned from 1736 and was ranked in the top third of Jamaican plantations in terms of size and population.<sup>78</sup> Mesopotamia also possessed one of the most detailed records of their enslaved workers as the Barhams kept a systematic record over a long period, between 1751 and 1832.<sup>79</sup> Barham I bought all his enslaved workers from African ships until 1786; his son, Joseph II, (the subject of this case study) who inherited the properties in 1789, was appalled at the sight of Africans being unloaded from slave ships when he visited the island, and stopped buying from slave ships in 1793, ordering that no new Africans should be bought, ‘a directive overlooked by a better man, but which I owed partly to some disgusting scenes I had witnessed and partly to the superior views which had been communicated to the world’.<sup>80</sup> He subsequently acquired his enslaved workers from neighbouring estates that were closing down or cutting back. According to Richard Dunn, this voluntary refusal to purchase newly arrived Africans was not typical estate management.<sup>81</sup> Barham’s decision to not purchase enslaved Africans directly from slave ships coincided with his entrance into Parliament in 1793, a time when the debates on abolition dominated.

In refusing to use newly imported Africans for his properties Barham showed his distaste at the horror of the African slave trade but did not share the same outlook towards commercial enterprise through the engagement of enslaved African workers. Barham’s ‘enlightened’

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enslaved women, see Richard Dunn, ‘Sugar Production and Slave Women in Jamaica,’ in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan ed. *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1993) Similar work on the demography of enslaved workers in Jamaica has been completed by Barry Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807-1834* (Barbados: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1995) and James Walvin and Michael Craton, *A Jamaican Plantation: The History of Worthy Park* (London: W. H. Allen, 1970)

<sup>78</sup> Dunn, ‘A Tale of Two Plantations’, p.37; Martin Forster and Simon D. Smith, ‘The Hazards of Slavery,’ *Significance* (Journal of The Royal Statistical Society) 8:4 (2011), p.179

<sup>79</sup> Dunn, ‘A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life at Mesopotamia in Jamaica,’ p.32. The reports regarding Mesopotamia can be found in the Clarendon Manuscript Deposit, Barham Papers at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in J.R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford; Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.214

<sup>81</sup> Richard Dunn, ‘Dreadful idlers in the cane fields,’ pp.797-798



approach to slave ownership reflected what David Lambert terms the ‘planter ideal’, which he maintains emerged during the debates over slavery and the slave trade as a defence that would undermine attacks from abolitionists.<sup>82</sup> The concept of the planter ideal predated the abolition campaign; as David Lambert notes, Barbadian planters had developed this discourse over a long period based on the knowledge that good treatment of the enslaved workers promoted high productivity.<sup>83</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Antiguan planter Samuel Martin recommended treating enslaved workers well to ensure high productivity and therefore higher profits. Sir Phillip Gibbes, a Barbadian planter, published in 1786 and 1797 a series of letters he wrote in 1771 to the manager of his plantation, Spring Head. Gibbes was anxious to show that planters had been committed to the amelioration of their enslaved workers’ conditions long before the abolition campaign. He maintained that his purchases were ‘occasional’, that he provided clean, well aired quarters for his enslaved workers and claimed that through his managers he eased newly arrived Africans’ anxieties, explained their condition and what was expected of them. ‘I recommend [making] the first two or three days as pleasant to them as you can to allay apprehensions and encourage hope’, wrote Gibbes, requesting that ‘these sentiments were entertained long before Ramsay wrote, or Wilberforce spoke.’<sup>84</sup> Gibbes’ use of the concept of the ‘planter ideal’ was a political tactic, an attempt to justify his slave ownership when it was becoming morally problematic.

Whether unconsciously or by design, Barham’s reformatory policies towards his enslaved workers was in line with abolitionist appeals for better treatment towards enslaved Africans. He continued to engage the Moravians in administering religious instruction to his enslaved

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<sup>82</sup> David Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, pp.65-72. Lambert’s analysis is part of a wider discussion on planter identity in Barbados

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.67

<sup>84</sup> Sir Philip Gibbes, *Instructions for the treatment of Negroes etc.etc. Reprinted with additions* (London 1797), pp. 4,129.

workers and maintained a close interest in conditions in his estates. James Ramsay, who called for the enslaved workers to be converted to Christianity, would have approved of his policies. While he maintained that a plantation ‘might be cultivated to more advantage and much less expense by labourers who were free men rather than slaves’, he did advocate that in the present time slave owners should provide and care for their enslaved workers.<sup>85</sup>

Barham’s policies therefore supported both positions within the debate. However, he was still a planter who expected productivity and profit. Richard Dunn estimated that between 1761 and 1831 the Barham estates produced 14,012 hogsheads of sugar and 8100 puncheons of rum grossing approximately £595,000 in Jamaican currency.<sup>86</sup> A breakdown of this sum over those 70 years means that the Barhams made on average £8,500 yearly from Mesopotamia. Richard Dunn’s examination of the accounts shows that they paid out approximately £60,000 for food, clothing and medical care for their enslaved workers during this period. As Dunn observes, ‘such figures suggest the rather modest limits of the Barham’s benevolence.’<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, he was able to live comfortably in London and Pembrokeshire off these profits, married Lady Caroline Tufton, daughter of the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Thanet and developed an interest in politics, becoming an MP in 1793, working actively for the sugar lobby.

An examination of Barham’s activity in the West India Committee suggests his ideas of the protection of West India interests were in line with the lobby. His early involvement was not in response to the abolition campaign, but a reaction to the threat to West Indian property as a consequence of the French Revolutionary Wars. The controversy over the conduct of Jervis and Grey during the British expedition to the West Indies is the first time that Barham was

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<sup>85</sup> James Ramsay, *An essay on the treatment and conversion of African Slaves in the British sugar colonies* (James Philips, 1784) pp.118-120

<sup>86</sup> Richard Dunn, ‘Dreadful idlers in the cane fields’, p.816.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 817

present in the minutes.<sup>88</sup> In May 1795 he was recorded as being present at two General Meetings and four Standing Committee meetings; that he was identified as not being a member of the Standing Committee suggests he had been invited, or had requested to attend these meetings.<sup>89</sup> It appears that he was approached to assist the Committee in their campaign to have Jervis and Grey censured for what the planters and merchants saw as illegal property seizure. As an MP, Barham could bring the issue to the attention of Parliament, and subsequently Barham played a part in the Committee's strategy by presenting an ultimately unsuccessful motion against the conduct of Jervis and Grey in June.<sup>90</sup> After this, his presence was irregular and unremarkable before 1807; after abolition, Barham was elected into the Standing Committee, remaining a member until 1825.

### **Barham and the politics of abolition**

In Parliament, Barham did not always agree with West Indian opposition to abolitionist proposals. Over time he saw West Indian intransigence as working against their interest and sought to establish an accord with the abolitionists by adopting a moderate stance on abolition, and by 1804 supported abolition based on the fact that the political and economic developments related to the war with France undermined many of the objections to abolition.

Barham supported abolitionist bills when he considered them practical and not likely to affect planter interest. This is illustrated in his support of Wilberforce's bill to abolish the supplying of foreign territories with slaves in 1794. Wilberforce proposed that British merchants should not supply foreign territories with enslaved workers, his argument being that since the slave trade no longer operated in that region it should not be revived, a position supported by

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<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 2 above

<sup>89</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1795

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1795. *Parliamentary History*, Volume XXXII, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1795 col. 54-74

William Pitt, who pointed out that war with France was responsible for its decline. A loss of this trade would be disastrous for the merchants trading to Africa. According to Joseph Inikori, the slave trade to foreign territories made up about two thirds of the total British slave trade.<sup>91</sup> The merchants and traders of Liverpool petitioned against the bill arguing that the trade of enslaved Africans to foreign islands was one of the most lucrative branches of trade, computing the total capital invested to be nearly two million pounds.<sup>92</sup>

The West India Committee also petitioned Parliament in support of the African merchants arguing that the bill threatened to divert a valuable branch of British commerce, raise the prices of enslaved Africans, and deprive the African merchants of access to different markets.<sup>93</sup> The West India Committee knew that if that portion of the trade was cut off, it could restrict supply to the British West Indies, as many Africa merchants' businesses would become unprofitable.

Barham disagreed with the popular argument of the dangers of foreign competition taking up the slave trade if Britain abandoned it, calling it 'an old hackneyed assertion'. He questioned whether 'we ought to continue to do what was wrong in order to keep others from doing worse; a proposition the reverse of every principle of morality'.<sup>94</sup> Barham opposed the general West Indian consensus because as long as the bill did not affect the importation of enslaved workers into the West Indies he saw the wisdom in supporting the bill.

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<sup>91</sup> Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 253

<sup>92</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, Volume XLIX, A Petition of the Merchants and Traders of the Town of Liverpool against the Bill for abolishing the supply of slaves to foreign colonies by British Merchants, p.236

<sup>93</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Petition of West India Planters and Merchants, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1794

<sup>94</sup> *Cobbett's Parliamentary History*, Vol. XXX (1794), col.1447. The planter Benjamin Vaughan also voted for abolition of the foreign slave trade which according to Roger Anstey created a division in the West Indian camp. Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 279. Ian Barrett discusses at length Benjamin Vaughan's motives for voting for abolition of the foreign slave trade. See Ian Barrett, 'Cultures of Proslavery: The Political Defence of the Slave Trade in Britain, c.1787 to 1807,' pp. 221-224

When Wilberforce brought another motion for abolition in 1795, Barham suggested that the discussion should be postponed for six months. What concerned him was the radical ideology and upheaval taking place in the French West Indies, which ‘powerfully argued’ against the motion. In February 1794 the French Legislative Assembly had introduced regulations which emancipated the enslaved workers of the French West Indies. Between 1789 and 1795 there had been 34 slave rebellions or conspiracies to rebel in colonies in both the British and French West Indies.<sup>95</sup>

He feared the transference of revolutionary ideas to the British West Indies by French emissaries, recommending the government be extremely cautious ‘how far we may allow them a handle for mischief by our discussion, since it is liable to be misrepresented by their means.’<sup>96</sup> The rebellion in St Domingue and the Navy’s blockade of French and Spanish ports led him to declare that ‘the slave trade could scarcely be said to exist, and if it did exist, it was decreasing very rapidly, for few persons would hazard their property in the trade when our possessions hung by a very slender thread’.<sup>97</sup> Barham was able to claim in 1794 that the slave trade was in decline as a consequence of the war. In that year no ships cleared out of Liverpool to Africa, in contrast to 133 ships in 1792 and 46 ships in 1793.<sup>98</sup>

Although Barham voted against abolition in 1795, papers located among his collection suggest that privately he felt frustrated that no common understanding could be found between the unequivocal stance of the planters and merchants on one side, and the abolitionists on the other. He felt the two options open to him and other moderate planters

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<sup>95</sup> David Geggus, ‘Slavery War and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean,’ in David Gaspar and David Geggus ed. *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 46-47

<sup>96</sup> *The Senator; or Clarendon’s Parliamentary Chronicle, Volume XI* (C Cooke London, 1795), p. 637.

<sup>97</sup> *Cobbett’s Parliamentary History* Vol. XXXI, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1795, col. 1329

<sup>98</sup> TNA, CO 37/8, ‘Ships Cleared out from the Port of Liverpool to the Coast of Africa to the time of the trade being abolished in May 1807’; ‘Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade in 1793’, in Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Volume 2 (New York: Octagon Books 1965), pp. 49, 625

were inadequate in terms of finding a solution. 'Moderate men' he remarked, 'are compelled to vote in a manner neither satisfactory to their feelings nor consistent with their opinions.'<sup>99</sup>

He and other planters, whom he did not name, did not anticipate the slave trade continuing for an unlimited period, principally because of the 'danger of adding to the immense superiority of number' of the enslaved population. They feared that the enslaved workers were becoming 'impatient' under slavery, and the potential loss of their labour force was making them more convinced that 'the trade should not be left open for ever to every new extravagant and unlimited speculation.' They endeavoured to find some kind of middle ground that would not injure the planters' rights and cause dissent among the enslaved workers. They wanted to find a spokesman 'of known judgement and dispassionate view and unsuspected impartiality,' that could make a proposal that both Houses of Parliament would accept.<sup>100</sup>

These proposals outlined in Barham's notes included how to introduce a limited abolition through encouraging the natural increase, purchasing enslaved Africans under proof of necessity only, and restriction of the trade from particular places or suspension of the trade for a limited time.<sup>101</sup> These measures were seen as ways to prevent another slave rebellion like St Domingue, and free up sailors who were engaged in slave trading to assist in the current war. In this way, the planters were underscoring their commitment to the mother country. By late 1796, Barham and a number of other 'moderate' West Indians began to publicly associate improvements in plantation practice with the natural increase in the enslaved population. They anticipated that in time the slave trade would no longer be necessary. Amelioration was thus linked with a gradual abolition.

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<sup>99</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c.377, 'Limited Abolition,' in Slave Trade and Abolition Folder, (2 of 2), not dated

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit, Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep. c.377, 'Slave Trade and Abolition,' folder 2 of 2

Sir William Young, MP for St. Mawes, was a vocal opponent to abolition, described by Dale H. Porter as ‘one of the more capable West Indians in Parliament’.<sup>102</sup> Young was one of the more moderate voices in Parliament, who had travelled to the West Indies in 1791-2, to view his plantations and the condition of his enslaved workers. Based on these observations he maintained that accounts of the treatment of enslaved workers were exaggerated, but conceded that the slave trade could not be defended in principle.<sup>103</sup> Accepting that ‘neither [the] Commons nor country will allow the matter to rest until some steps have been taken,’ Young was of the opinion that amelioration of the enslaved population, under the direction of the colonists themselves would render the slave trade eventually unnecessary.<sup>104</sup>

Meetings in late 1796 with Charles Rose Ellis, Sir William Young, Bryan Edwards and 22 other planters led to the creation of the Society of West Indian Landholders in Parliament who put forward a proposal of reform. They recommended instructing colonial governors to introduce ameliorative legislation to improve the condition of the enslaved population, with the intention to halt and reverse the decline in their numbers. The group were in agreement that if abolition should take place it should be with the co-operation of the colonial assemblies.<sup>105</sup>

The motion to pass a bill to ameliorate the condition of the enslaved population was introduced by Charles Ellis in April 1797. Ellis, who would become chairman of the West India Committee in 1810, was influenced by Edmund Burke’s *Sketch of the Negro Code* (1792) which advocated a gradualist approach to abolition through a strict regulation of the trade. Charles Ellis was not alone in recognising the efficacy of Burke’s ideas. His cousin George Ellis, MP for Seaford and co-founder with George Canning of the *Anti-Jacobin*

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<sup>102</sup> Porter, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, p. 18

<sup>103</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, ‘Sir William Young (1749-1815): Planter and Politician, with Special Reference to Slavery in the British West Indies,’ *Journal of Caribbean History*, 33:1&2 (1999), p. 15

<sup>104</sup> TNA, CO 152/78, Resolutions of the Society of West Indian Landholders in Parliament

<sup>105</sup> TNA, CO 152/78, Letter from Sir William Young to the President of the Council of Antigua, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1797, ff. 221

newspaper, was struck by the ideas presented in *Sketch*. He wrote to his friend William Windham, the Secretary of War, remarking that

Every West India planter in this country must as a careful investigation of the subject to see the utility ascertained by experiment [of gradual abolition], as such an experiment only can satisfy the public here with respect to the truth of our allegations and remove the odium that has been thrown on our character.<sup>106</sup>

He claimed that many of the points raised by Burke on amelioration ‘have long formed a part of the creed of every rational planter’, and anticipated a gradual conversion from slavery to servitude by the introduction of Christianity and marriage, which would ‘prepare them for a greater degree of freedom and would prove the best security for the lives and properties of the planters themselves.’<sup>107</sup> Ellis’s bill therefore presented clear reasons that if the enslaved workers in the West Indies underwent a process of ‘civilisation’ there would eventually be no need for a slave trade.<sup>108</sup>

Barham seconded the motion, and his speech emphasised that without the co-operation of the colonial assemblies, abolition would be impossible. He took Parliament to task for taking so long to acknowledge its own part in the brutality of the slavery system, through its sanction by law. ‘Should we have not said to the colonies, he asked, ‘the system which prevails for the purpose of cultivating your lands and maintaining your population is inhuman and unjust, we do not impute it to you, but we who have established it in common with you call you, in common with us, to put an end to it as soon as possible.’<sup>109</sup> He asserted that the planters should not be singled out for condemnation – slavery was a sin of which everyone in Britain was guilty.

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<sup>106</sup> British Library, Add MS 37887, Ellis to Windham, not dated, c. 1796-1801 (catalogue note)

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Chapter Six discusses these ideas further as part of the debate on amelioration and gradual emancipation

<sup>108</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. XXXIII, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1797 col. 253

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, col. 273



We began by charging on the colonies the system in which they were, at most, but equally guilty with ourselves. We next charged on them that guilt which was exclusively our own, imputing to them enormity which was committed in the exercise of the trade, a British trade, with British ships...could anything be expected from such treatment but the consequence that has ensued, namely, a determined resistance to everything that was proposed in the same quarter?<sup>110</sup>

Barham's rhetoric and Ellis's motion offered cooperation, and an alternative to the constant attacks being levied at the planters' character, and Ellis's address was approved by a vote of 99 to 63.<sup>111</sup>

Ellis's motion was problematic for the members of the West India interest who saw problems inherent in planter recognition of the need for gradual abolition, because it undermined their arguments for continuation. Robert Sewell, MP for Grampound and the colonial agent for Jamaica, interpreted Ellis's bill as a delaying tactic, recognising that it aimed to remove some of Wilberforce's support in the Commons with a view to averting a complete abolition. Sewell saw the political expediency of the action, but he also saw that the bill could push abolition closer:

I am not infrequently asked "what is likely to be the consequence if the agitation of the question is suffered to go on as heretofore without any shew of disposition to humanity on the part of the colonists?" This however, is at best but a begging of the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, col. 274

<sup>111</sup> *Parliamentary History* Vol. XXXIII 6<sup>th</sup> April 1797, col. 294

question. If the abolitionists can be quieted, a point is certainly gained: my objection turns on the weakness of the contrivance and the ultimate influence of its success.<sup>112</sup>

Sewell understood that by making the link between improved conditions on plantations and the end of the slave trade created problems for those who continued to argue against its abolition. The legitimacy of the anti-abolitionists was weakened by this break in the stance.

### **Considerations on limited abolition and compensation**

Barham's position on slavery and slave management was based on the compatibility of moral and economic progress that supported the concept of the improvement of enslaved conditions. With this in mind he drafted a communication to the West India Committee on the issue of whether the slave trade ought to be suspended.<sup>113</sup> Addressing it to Lord Penrhyn, he outlined his opinions on the abolition debates. Barham sought a middle ground between the West India interest and the abolitionists. He wanted the West India interest to resolve the tensions that existed between planters and merchants, and presented his reasons why suspension was a good solution for both abolitionists and West Indians. Barham admitted that anyone whose established way of life and doing business was attacked would go on the defensive: 'Under the circumstances it was not much to wonder that we were not willing to any plans of alteration and improvement from whom we could not but consider as our enemies, and who in their zeal for justice and humanity, seemed utterly truthful that justice and humanity might be due to us.'<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Robert Sewell to the Jamaica Committee of Correspondence, quoted in Ian Barrett, 'Cultures of Proslavery,' p.199

<sup>113</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c.377, 'Letter from a Proprietor on the Suspension of the Trade'. It is not clear whether this correspondence was ever sent to the West India Committee chair; the date of the document is also unknown, but is probably between the late 1790s and early 1800s.

<sup>114</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c.377 'Letter from a Proprietor'

He admitted that on the whole, the treatment of the enslaved population had not been ‘as equitable as humane circumstances admit’, and suggested that a gradual improvement was necessary, and that the trade ought to be restrained ‘as far as is compatible with means of supporting our properties, and can wish for nothing better than that this might ever be possible without importation at all.’<sup>115</sup> Barham was not saying anything new in suggesting gradual improvement of conditions amongst the enslaved population, but it was in contradiction to the proslavery position, in particular the right to property and the legality of slavery. Barham, who did not purchase enslaved Africans from slave ships, believed that he held a dispassionate position on the slave trade. This impartiality meant he was best placed to broker any accords with the abolitionists.

The principal claim of the planters, according to Barham, was that they had the right to cultivate their land which they had patented on the faith of an established system; however, if a planter had land that was not being cultivated or used, then he had no need to purchase enslaved Africans. The land could be retained ‘in case the Negroes should ever be found to increase by natural means, or any other mode of amelioration discovered’. A suspension of the trade is a ‘safe experiment’, as it would show the public that the planters and merchants are open to compromise; opposing it would ‘cover us with disgrace with the public...finding no excuse for our opposition, but will regard it as most unworthy motives and inveterate obstinacy; and will be the less disposed to side with us when we are actually in the right’.<sup>116</sup> Barham asked that they consider suspension as a matter of ‘mere profit and cold calculation’, given that the key objections to the slave trade by planters is the expense of purchasing enslaved Africans, and the danger of the ratio between the white colonists and the enslaved population; furthermore, ‘what arguments shall find against a suspension of the trade, at least

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> University of London, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c.377, ‘Letter from a Proprietor’

until the vigilance of the mother country shall be less engaged than it is by a war claiming her efforts in every part of the world'. The current situation in St Domingue should encourage planters to take a pause than to heap fresh fuel on a situation that 'we all fear will at last break forth in an inextinguishable blaze'.<sup>117</sup>

Within these reflections, Barham asked the West India Committee membership to consider a number of points: that the ethical questions around the treatment of the enslaved workers were overriding the right to property and the legal sanctioning of slavery; that the public perception of planters was under threat; and that it might be worth considering cutting back on excessive purchasing of enslaved workers.

Barham robustly advocated compensation for the planters if they were denied the opportunity to purchase enslaved workers, and he gave careful consideration to the types of claims that might be made and how compensation could be facilitated.<sup>118</sup> He supported compensation 'for the actual and present loss [planters] sustain,' which was identified as the present capital that they had invested in enslaved workers.<sup>119</sup> As Julian Hoppit observes, the powerful arguments advanced against slave ownership by the abolitionists were countered with the line of reasoning that Africans had been bought and sold; as far as the merchants and planters were concerned, they were property, and abolition of the slave trade was a challenge to their property rights.<sup>120</sup> Noting that capital in the West Indies 'consists almost entirely of land and of Negroes,' Barham observed that each proprietor belonged to one of five categories in terms of slave ownership. Either he owned enslaved workers only, hiring them out as jobbing gangs; he had an excess of enslaved workers; he owned enslaved workers in equal proportion to the land they worked on; he owned more land than his enslaved workers could manage; or

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid

<sup>118</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c.377 (Slave Trade and Abolition Folder). These loose papers have not been catalogued.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid

<sup>120</sup> Julian Hoppit, 'Compulsion, Compensation and Property Rights in Britain, 1688-1833,' *Past and Present*, 210 (2011), pp. 116-117

he had land, but no enslaved workers. In his opinion, proprietors who were in the first three categories would not be affected by abolition, but those in the last two would, since they would not be able to make any profit. Consequently it was these planters who he determined were eligible for compensation:

This determination is what the public is bound to make good to the proprietor, who acquired [the land], often by direct sale from the Crown on warranted expectation that he would not be deprived of rendering it available [for cultivation].<sup>121</sup>

He believed that planters should be able to return to the Crown any land they could no longer cultivate because of abolition, and receive compensation to the value of the land, which would be determined by a commission which he suggested could be set up for that purpose.

### **Supporting Abolition: 1804-1807**

In May 1804, Barham supported Wilberforce's latest motion for abolition. Throughout that year he pledged himself to support abolition with compensation of the planters as a condition.<sup>122</sup> His decision to support abolition was based on three factors. Firstly, the establishment of a black republic in Haiti was a key reason for his change of view. He remarked that 'the order of things that had taken place in St Domingo had brought us to a crisis which must determine us now either to totally abolish the trade, or renounce forever the design.'<sup>123</sup> Haiti brought a great urgency to the situation; the message was that without a universal abolition, revolution in British islands was inevitable.<sup>124</sup> Secondly, he felt reassured that a contraband trade would not take the place of the legitimate trade once it was abolished. In that period, he argued, colonists would be less disposed to enter in such a trade since 'their

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<sup>121</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep c.377 (Slave Trade and Abolition folder)

<sup>122</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 2, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1804, cols. 662, 663, 665; 27<sup>th</sup> June 1804 col. 865-866

<sup>123</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 2, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1804, col. 556

<sup>124</sup> See David Geggus, 'British Opinion and the Emergence of Haiti,' in James Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1982) pp. 123-149

profits were not one third of what they used to be, and their temptations to speculation were consequently curtailed'.<sup>125</sup> The sugar depression was the third reason for Barham's support of the current abolition bill. Since May 1799 there had been an excess of sugar as a consequence of the arrival of over a million hundredweight of sugar into the British market that had been delayed in the West Indies because of bad weather. As a consequence, a massive amount of sugar languished in British warehouses; between 1799 and 1807 2.1 million hundredweight of sugar remained unsold. A glut in the market ensued, plunging prices from 78s in 1800 to 34s per hundredweight in 1802.<sup>126</sup> Barham accepted that based on the current economic situation, abolition was the solution to planter distress, and security of the British West Indies.

In contrast, the West India Committee shared none of his insights and continued to doggedly resist any interference with the arrangements of their property. At a General Meeting, they expressed alarm at the news that Wilberforce intended to bring a motion for the immediate and total abolition of the slave trade and were considering what measures they could take 'in opposition to a project big with such importance and ruinous consequences to their interests'.<sup>127</sup> Edmund Pusey Lyon, the agent for Jamaica, moved that 'every legal and proper step should be taken to oppose the progress of any bill which may be brought into Parliament'.<sup>128</sup> The minutes recorded a clear difference of opinion among the membership as to whether to consider a suspension of the trade. Nevertheless, the West India Committee rejected both abolition and suspension of the trade, ignoring the position of Barham and other moderates.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1804, cols. 461-463

<sup>126</sup> Dale H. Porter, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade 1784-1807*, Appendix I, 'Average prices of Muscovado Sugar, 1793-1806'; Appendix II, 'Amount of Sugar Retained for Consumption in Great Britain, 1791-1806'

<sup>127</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting Minutes, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1804.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid* - A motion to consider suspension of the trade was negatived and the original motion was passed by a majority

His support of the Foreign Slave Trade Bill in 1806 earned Barham the praise of Wilberforce, who wrote to him thanking him for his efforts in getting the Foreign Slave Trade bill passed, and ‘begs for the favour of your endeavour to rectify any misconception that may prevail in the House of Lords as to the nature of effects of the measure’.<sup>130</sup> He was invited to attend meetings with Charles James Fox and other ‘principal gentlemen who favour to abolish the slave trade’.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, Joseph Foster Barham became associated with the leading parliamentary abolitionists and his identification as the planter with a conscience was established.

## **Conclusion**

As the ‘public face’ of anti-abolition, the West India Committee constructed an uncompromising defence of the slave trade and slavery. This defence centred on the trade’s commercial and financial benefits to the empire; national sanction of it by acts of Parliament; and the sacred rights of property. Rejecting abolitionist charges of inhumanity, it posited that the slave trade was a ‘positive good’ that liberated Africans from violent societies. Plantation life was represented as having a ‘civilising’ and ‘improving’ influence on the enslaved population.

This stance was undermined by planters who focused not on the moral considerations, but rather the negative effects of facilitating an unlimited supply of enslaved Africans to the colonies. They drew attention to how the slave trade was perpetuated by the extension of credit to planters which encouraged them to purchase more enslaved workers than they could afford or need, which resulted in indebtedness, bankruptcy and brutal treatment of the

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<sup>130</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms Clar. Dep. c. 366, Wilberforce to Barham, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1806, (Slave trade and Abolition folder)

<sup>131</sup> University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit. Barham Papers, Ms. Clar, Dep c.366, Wilberforce to Barham, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1806

enslaved. Only a suspension of the slave trade could alleviate planter distress; however, the majority of the West India interest refused to compromise on abolition.

Joseph Foster Barham further complicated the defence by advocating amelioration, and voting for abolition. He thought that an accord between the abolitionists and the planters could be struck where amelioration would replace the need for a slave trade. Barham's ambivalence towards slave ownership caused him to engage in an unorthodox management of his plantations. He believed that this 'enlightened' model could be applied to plantations, and along with other 'moderate' planters supported its implementation. This linking of amelioration with gradual abolition further undermined the proslavery stance.

Barham's support of the abolition bill was his way of protecting the economic interests of the planters. Influenced by the fact that sugar planting was becoming less and less profitable for those involved in it, and the deleterious effects of black majorities in the West Indies as exemplified by the Haitian Revolution, Barham demonstrated that the proslavery stance was gradually becoming viewed as problematic within its own ranks.



## Chapter 4

### **An Incompatibility of Interests: Lobbying against black soldiers**

The establishment of the West India Regiments during the French Revolutionary War created conflict between the slave-owner interest and the government's military requirements. The slave owners feared that arming enslaved workers would deprive them of their property and undermine the established social and racial hierarchies on which slave societies were built. By lobbying against the raising of black troops in the West Indies, the West India Committee, along with the colonial assemblies, fought to protect what Christer Petley describes as 'the freedoms of white men.'<sup>1</sup> Jamaica used its dominance of the lobby to pressure the Colonial Secretary to abandon the policy and revert back to earlier agreements. This chapter explores the reaction of the West India Committee to the establishment and stationing of West India Regiments in the colonies, assessing its strategies to prevent the introduction of what it saw as an anomalous element to the West Indies that threatened property and power structures. In his study of the impact of colonial wars on the West Indies, Richard Pares remarked on the West Indian colonists' attitude towards arming their enslaved workers in times of conflict, specifically how it reflected both the ambivalence and expediency of the measure:

It was more of a contested question whether Negroes could safely or usefully be armed in defence of their own masters...even the optimists who thought it would be prudent in particular cases hardly recommended it as a general principle. While each nation might think it could rely on its own slaves, it was not at all afraid that the enemy would derive any benefit from arming his.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), p. 35

<sup>2</sup> Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 253

Throughout the West Indies in the eighteenth century, the raising of temporary or ad-hoc units of armed slaves was always a controversial policy to pursue. Conclusions drawn by scholars exploring the policy of arming enslaved workers illustrate the complexities and contradictions inherent in it, and by extension, in the system of slavery in the Americas. Philip D. Morgan and Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy explore the scale of the practice of using enslaved Africans as soldiers in the American colonies and the West Indies during the American Revolutionary War. They note that as the conflict reached its critical phases and the British became more desperate for manpower, they employed the extraordinary policy of establishing separate units of manumitted and fugitive slaves to fight on their side. Despite being the world's greatest slave trading nation at the time, the threat to its position as a global power was the key motivation for the advocating a policy that complicated the principle of chattel enslavement.<sup>3</sup>

Douglas Egerton advances the argument that African Americans were subject to white authority, but they were not passive victims of it. He explores the motives of African Americans who fought on the side of the republicans and assesses the black contribution to the American victory. He explores the lives of African American soldiers to understand what the American Revolution meant to them, as being invested in the outcome of the struggle for independence, not outside it. He notes that the egalitarian ideals of the Revolution emboldened them to claim the same liberties as white Americans and sought their liberation through military service.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Philip D. Morgan and Andrew J O'Shaughnessy, 'Arming Slaves in the American Revolution', in Christopher L. Brown and Philip D. Morgan (eds.) *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press 2006) pp. 180-208

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). For an earlier study of African Americans in the American Revolution see Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (first published 1961, Williamsburg, Virginia: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1996)

Peter Voelz chronicles their use from the establishment of the colonies in the Americas and explores the extent to which whites came to depend upon their military contributions to protect the colonies from the threat of conquest and slave rebellions, and the Maroons. He notes the complexities and contradictions of arming enslaved workers, arguing that it challenged and conserved the slave system at the same time.<sup>5</sup> Voelz argues that the black soldiers' contribution to building and defending colonial societies in the Americas is too complex to relegate them to the role of either accommodator or resister; there existed 'many shades of accommodation and resistance that complicates these identifications'.<sup>6</sup>

David Geggus explores the extensive use of enslaved soldiers during the Haitian Revolution by the African insurgents and the European powers, and locates the motives for black enlistment on both sides. As Geggus notes, opportunities for emancipation in exchange for military service was the principal motivator.<sup>7</sup> He also explores the formats in which enslaved workers were armed during that conflict. He notes that in the case of Haiti the use of black soldiers was instrumental in France's decision to abolish slavery.<sup>8</sup> Roger Buckley's study of the West India Regiments is mainly a study of colonial administrative history, in terms of the costs of raising the regiments, logistical issues such as recruitment and disbandment.<sup>9</sup> He argues that the opposition to their establishment was for economic and commercial and economic reasons rather than out of fear of the consequences of arming slaves.<sup>10</sup>

The raising of the 12 West India Regiments contributes to the manner in which the white authorities subverted and supported the system of colonial slavery. Their creation has been

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<sup>5</sup> Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The military impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1993)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. xvi

<sup>7</sup> David Geggus, 'The Arming of Slaves in the Haitian Revolution,' in *Arming Slaves*, p. 226

<sup>8</sup> David Geggus, 'The Arming of Slaves in the Haitian Revolution,' in *Arming Slaves*, pp. 209-232

<sup>9</sup> Roger N. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments 1795-1815* (Yale University Press, 1979)

<sup>10</sup> I agree in part with Buckley's hypothesis, but as this chapter argues, the issue of colonial sovereignty is a significant factor

described by Roger Buckley as ‘the most revolutionary and significant measure’.<sup>11</sup> J.W. Fortescue, the great historian of the British army, hailed the West India regiments as ‘one of the most important facts in the military history of this period.’ He also noted the unease at the measure, remarking that it was still subject to ‘temporary limitations owing to the reluctance of white settlers to put arms in the hands of the coloured races.’<sup>12</sup>

The creation of the West India Regiment was significant for two reasons. Firstly, it was the first time that a regiment had been created entirely of enslaved Africans specifically for the defence and security of the British West Indian colonies. Secondly, its purpose was in contrast to that of the emancipated French West Indian soldier-citizens, who had been entrusted to defend the French West Indies from the prospect of re-enslavement by the British. The emancipation of the French enslaved transformed the whole nature of war and politics in the Caribbean.<sup>13</sup> It had, according to Laurent Dubois, ‘changed the war into a war over slavery by mobilizing large numbers of ex-slaves into the Republican army.’<sup>14</sup>

The West India Regiments were first raised at the insistence of Lieutenant General Sir John Vaughan, commander-in-chief of the Leeward Islands. He had observed that the French’s engagement of black troops gave them a significant advantage in the conflict, remarking that they had ‘gain’d Guadeloupe from arming and disciplining the Negroes and Mulattoes...we have been overlooking the support, which by exertions be derived from opposing Blacks to Blacks’.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Roger Buckley, ‘The Destruction of the British Army in the West Indies 1793-1815’, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 56:226 (1978) pp. 79-95

<sup>12</sup> J.W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army, Volume IV, Part II* (London: Macmillan, 1906), p.891

<sup>13</sup> Michael Duffy, ‘The French Revolution and British attitudes to the West Indian colonies’, in David Gaspar and David Geggus (ed.) *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1997) p.84

<sup>14</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p.224

<sup>15</sup> TNA, WO 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1794, Letter No. 6 (Secret), folio 57

## **The case for a West India regiment**

The metropolitan government's decision to engage armed black troops in warfare was based on three factors. Firstly, it was influenced by France's use of its emancipated black soldiers to defend its colonies against foreign invasion. Secondly, the devastating effect that tropical disease had on the mortality of white British soldiers.<sup>16</sup> And thirdly, the experience of using black corps in North America had set an important precedent. In 1794 the National Convention in France abolished slavery throughout the French Empire. This changed the nature of war in the West Indies, as the French joined slave rebels, free coloureds and groups such as the Black Caribs in St Vincent in attacking the British.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, emancipation had a significant outcome: the mobilisation of former enslaved workers into the Republican army was an indication of citizenship. This meant that they now had a stake in French West Indian society. Military service provided the opportunity for promotion to soldiers of all social classes – bringing twenty recruits into the army for example, could give a soldier the rank of sergeant.<sup>18</sup>

In St Domingue Toussaint L'Ouverture's primary objective was to resist the invading armies of France, Spain and Britain. Consequently, it was essential that the strength of the rebel army was maintained. To accomplish this it was necessary to alleviate the strain on the food supply, and reopen trade to raise funds. L'Ouverture therefore revived the plantation system. Military service became a route to landownership, as L'Ouverture awarded officers abandoned plantations to manage.<sup>19</sup> Former slaves fought not only to preserve their liberty, but also for the social mobility that it afforded. Furthermore, the French had in their army

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<sup>16</sup> See Philip D. Curtin, 'Epidemiology and the Slave Trade,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 83:2 (1968), pp. 190-216 on how disease similarly effected sailors

<sup>17</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A colony of Citizens*, p. 229

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.237

<sup>19</sup> Mats Lundahl, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture and the war economy of St Domingue, 1796-1802', *Slavery and Abolition*, 6:2 (1985), p.129

thousands of acclimatised and battle hardened soldiers who had developed immunity to the diseases that were destroying the British expeditionary forces.

A soldier's greatest enemy were tropical diseases such as yellow fever and malaria. Yellow fever had been identified as a predominantly urban disease, most often found in port cities, since the mosquitoes that carry this virus tended to flourish where people stored water in artificial containers, which was usually on board ships. A yellow fever outbreak could bring 85 percent mortality among those infected; those who survived would acquire lifetime immunity.<sup>20</sup> Its continual presence in the Caribbean meant that most of the colonists and enslaved population had been exposed to the disease and were therefore immune. Newcomers to the Caribbean, in particular expeditionary forces, were not immune and subsequently died en masse. The British occupation of St. Domingue between 1793 and 1798 resulted in the deaths of about 62 percent of the troops sent there.<sup>21</sup> Hector McLean, the assistant inspector of hospitals with the British forces in St Domingue, spent three years in Port au Prince witnessing the effects of yellow fever on British soldiers and made several observations regarding their vulnerability to the disease. He concluded that keeping the British forces in the capital, surrounded on all sides by the enemy exposed them to the disease and its sources. He attributed the source of the disease to water stagnation, upon which 'a vigorous sun acts daily and evaporates its noxious particles which are conveyed to the lungs of everyone that breathes'.<sup>22</sup> Arriving from a cooler climate, finding it difficult to cope with the heat, excessive consumption of rum, low morale and the extra duties assigned to the survivors made them more susceptible to fever.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John R. McNeill, 'The Ecological basis of warfare in the Caribbean, 1700-1804', in Maarten Ultee (ed.), *Adapting to Conditions: War and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1986) pp.29-31

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.37

<sup>22</sup> Hector McLean, *An Enquiry into the nature and causes of the great mortality among the troops at St Domingo* (London, 1797), p.12

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.40

David Geggus estimates that fewer than 10 percent of military deaths in St Domingue during the occupation of 1793-98 were attributable to combat; rather, that the majority of deaths were caused by disease.<sup>24</sup> Army and medical considerations in warfare were not often the same. John Hunter, the physician in charge of military hospitals in Jamaica between 1781 and 1783, wrote in 1788 that

Notwithstanding these repeated losses, and the West Indies having been a principal seat of war during the last two ruptures between this country and France, and being likely to become so again in case of another war, no steps have been taken to guard against the mortality...it would seem to be a proper time...to collect the useful lessons...and deduce from them the best regulations from preventing similar misfortunes in future.<sup>25</sup>

The insurgencies on the islands of Grenada, St Vincent and St Lucia in 1795-6 further complicated the British expedition to conquer the French forces. Accounts of the circumstances, causes and consequences of the insurgencies in these colonies have been explored in contemporary and secondary sources.<sup>26</sup> It has been noted that as a consequence of being ceded to the British in 1763, each contained a notable French population, both white

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<sup>24</sup> David Geggus, *Slavery War and Revolution: The British occupation of St Domingue 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp.364-365

<sup>25</sup> John Hunter, *Observations on the diseases of the Army in Jamaica* (London, 1788), p.13

<sup>26</sup> Contemporary accounts of Fédon's Rebellion include Gordon Turnbull, *A Narrative of the Revolt and Insurrection of the French Inhabitants in the Island of Grenada* (Edinburgh, 1795) and Thomas Wise, *A Review of the Events Which have happened in Grenada, from the commencement of the insurrection to the 1<sup>st</sup> May* (St George's Grenada, 1795). Secondary interpretations include Edward L. Cox, *Free Coloureds in the Slave Societies of St Kitts and Grenada 1763-1833* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), pp. 79-85; 'Fédon's Rebellion, 1795-6: Causes and Consequences', *Journal of Negro History*, 6:7 (1982), pp. 7-19; also see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p.188. For St. Vincent, see Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 190; Julie Chun Kim, 'The Caribs of St Vincent and indigenous resistance during the Age of Revolutions,' *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11:1 (2013), pp. 117-132. For St Lucia, see Claire Robertson, 'Claiming Freedom: Abolition and identity in St Lucian History,' *Journal of Caribbean History*, 34:1-2 (2000), pp. 89-129 Laurent Dubois, 'Vive libre ou mourir! Haiti and Guadeloupe in the Revolutionary Era,' *Jamaican Historical Review*, XXIII (2007), pp. 1-15

and coloured, who had been for cultural, racial, religious and political reasons marginalised by the British authorities.

General Sir John Vaughan predicted that ‘the French blacks will invade us and gain ours by the promise of freedom.’<sup>27</sup> What motivated the black population to fight was the knowledge that slavery would be re-established once the British regained control of the islands. General Vaughan had prior to evacuation from St Lucia sent over the Black Carolina Corps from Martinique to St Lucia to attempt to remove the ‘revolted Negroes’ from a mountain post ‘which being judged to be a service of more fatigue than danger, was a proper enterprise on which to employ the Blacks, and to save our own soldiers.’<sup>28</sup> Organised in 1779 from loyalist slaves and free blacks in South Carolina during the American War of Independence, the Carolina Corps were an imperial unit, going wherever the army needed its assistance.<sup>29</sup> The black troops were used extensively during the campaign in St Lucia. Vaughan had written to Henry Dundas, Secretary of War about the effectiveness of the black corps before the British evacuated:

It is to the lately raised corps of blacks under Captain Malcolm that we have been able to retain our footing in St Lucia...had it not been for the services of these two provincial troops both these islands (St Lucia and Martinique) would before now been lost.<sup>30</sup>

The British forces regained control of St Lucia in 1796; however, they now understood that maintaining control of the island would be difficult, because the emancipation decree had changed the nature of the war. The black insurgents were able to resist re-enslavement,

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<sup>27</sup> TNA, WO 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, Secret Letter No. 13, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1795

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.107

<sup>29</sup> Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, p.183; George F. Tyson, ‘The Carolina Black Corps: Legacy of Revolution 1782-1798,’ *Revista/Review Interamericana* 5 (1975-76)

<sup>30</sup> TNA, WO 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1795



having access to arms and supplies from Guadeloupe.<sup>31</sup> Also, they seldom engaged the British in large battles, preferring to engage in a type of guerrilla warfare. General Sir John Moore, governor of St Lucia noted in his journal that

The Negroes in this island are to a man attached to the French cause; neither hanging, threats, nor money would obtain for me any intelligence from them. Those upon the estates are in league with and connected with those in the woods...against the spirit and enterprise of the Republic we have no chance.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, the circumstances of yellow fever, the occupation of St Domingue and the French Republican-supported insurgencies in Grenada, St Vincent and St Lucia forced the metropolitan government to rethink how war in the Caribbean should be directed.

Emancipation had become the catalyst for revolt throughout the British colonies, and the reluctance to relinquish the freedom bestowed on the enslaved population of the French Caribbean resulted in a highly motivated and committed army – one that the British army had never encountered. The wisdom and cost effectiveness in sending substantial expeditionary forces subsequently had to be reassessed. General Sir John Vaughan, commander in chief of the Windward and Leeward Islands became convinced that more European troops were not the solution to the defence of the colonies. A general return of the sick and wounded in military hospitals throughout the Windward and Leeward Islands, in the years 1799-1803 reported that the proportion of mortality among Europeans was one in ten. The proportion of mortality among Caribbean African soldiers was one in twenty two.<sup>33</sup> All of these factors

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<sup>31</sup> David Barry Gaspar, 'La Guerre des Bois: Revolution, War and Slavery in St. Lucia, 1793-1838', in Gaspar and Geggus (eds.), *A Turbulent Time*, pp. 117, 119

<sup>32</sup> British Library, Moore Papers, Add MS 57326, p.231

<sup>33</sup> TNA, CO 318/32, *General Return of the sick and wounded in His Majesty's Hospitals, general garrison and Military throughout the Windward and Leeward Islands, under the direction of Dr Theodore Gordon, Inspector General of Hospitals, December 1799-January 1803*. General Vaughan died in 1795, but would have been familiar with the use of black soldiers in warfare, as the Carolina Corps, which was later incorporated into the 1<sup>st</sup>

were strong enough evidence to support the decision of the imperial government based on the recommendation of the army to use black soldiers for the defence of the British West Indies.

The service of the Carolina Corps in Grenada, St Lucia and St Vincent had convinced General Vaughan of the utility of a black corps. It was the realisation that sustained black resistance was the main obstacle to the conquering of the West Indian islands that eventually convinced the government to endorse the idea of a black regiment.

### **The British Government: purchasers and owners of slaves**

It has been estimated that the imperial government purchased approximately 13,400 Africans to serve in the West India Regiments between 1795 and 1808, costing £925,000.<sup>34</sup> This enormous amount of money used to purchase enslaved Africans made the government one of the largest customers of the African slave trade.

***Table 4.1 – Slaves purchased by the Windward and Leeward Islands Command, 1795-1808<sup>35</sup>***

Year	Number of slaves	Average price in £	Total cost in £
1795-1797	1,366	56	76,496
1798	1,053	63	66,443
1799	810	58	47,720
1800	763	74	57,049
1801	407	77	31,689
1802	19	54	1,042
1803	-	-	-
1804	914	71	64,929

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West India Regiment, a corps he spoke to Secretary of War Dundas very highly. See WO 1/83, Secret Letter No. 13, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1795

<sup>34</sup>Roger N. Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, p. 55

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p.55. The prices are in pounds sterling and inclusive up to March 1808, the final date ships leaving England by 1<sup>st</sup> May 1807 were allowed to arrive in the West Indies under the terms of the Abolition Act. The reduction in purchases from 1801 and absence of purchases in 1803 can be explained by the peace negotiations that commenced in 1801, culminating in the Peace of Amiens (March 1802-May 1803)

1805	1,238	75	91,821
1806	1,554	75	115,887
1807-1808	800	69	60,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8,924</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>613,076</b>

The British government extended substantial funds to the army to purchase enslaved Africans for recruitment into the West India Regiments. As the table above shows, the Windward and Leeward Islands' command spent over £600,000. The average price paid for an enslaved male was approximately £70 which was paid in bills drawn on the Treasury. A study of the prices for enslaved workers in the West Indies between 1795 and 1807 calculates the average price at approximately £65.<sup>36</sup> In this same period 420,589 enslaved Africans were transported into the West Indies, at an average of 32,000 per year.<sup>37</sup> If we accept Roger Buckley's estimation of 13,400 enslaved workers purchased by the government, then it was responsible for purchasing over 3% of the total number of enslaved Africans in the 14 year period culminating in the Abolition Act. This made it one of the largest single customers of the African slave trade, an important reason why abolition was delayed until 1807.<sup>38</sup>

Had the government's activities been made public, it could have been extremely embarrassing; it was a policy irreconcilable with Pitt's support of abolition. Interestingly, only on one occasion was he ever confronted with questions regarding the government's actions – by MPs with West Indian interests. As Wilberforce moved for a second reading of the abolition bill in Parliament in 1805, General Gascoyne, John Fuller and Earl Temple asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to explain the government purchase of 5000 Africans for military use. As it was when the issue of abolition was raised, its opponents pointed to the

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<sup>36</sup> David Eltis, Frank D. Lewis and David Richardson, 'Slave Prices, The African Slave Trade and Productivity in the Caribbean, 1674-1807,' *Economic History Review*, 58:4 (2005), p. 679

<sup>37</sup> Estimation from the Slave Voyages Database [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org) Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014

<sup>38</sup> Roger Buckley advances this argument – see Roger N. Buckley, 'The British Army's African Recruitment Policy 1790-1807,' *Contributions in Black Studies*, 5 Article 2 (1981), pp. 1-16

danger of discussing such incendiary topics in front of the enslaved population, and also cited the establishment of the black republic Haiti as the terrible consequence of contemplating abolition.

General Isaac Gascoyne, MP for Liverpool and future commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> West India Regiment, first raised the subject in Parliament, calling the purchase a ‘remarkable circumstance.’ Gascoyne had no objection to a black regiment, or purchasing enslaved Africans to furnish it, but he questioned the double standard inherent in the action. Why was it acceptable, he asked, to purchase enslaved workers for military purposes, but not civil ones?<sup>39</sup> John Fuller, MP for Sussex and a member of the powerful Fuller family of Jamaica, was critical of the government’s activities.<sup>40</sup> He confirmed that a contract ‘is actually entered into by government to procure slaves as troops at £55 per man,’ and criticised the government for its hypocritical stance on abolition. How could it ‘support the measure in one way and oppose it in another’.<sup>41</sup> Earl Temple, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Buckingham and Chandos and a Jamaican absentee proprietor, said that he understood that the government had approached a number of West India merchants that if they produced by a certain time 5000 men to be taken up as soldiers in a black corps for which the government would pay £55-60 per man.<sup>42</sup>

What were the reasons for raising this topic at this particular time? One explanation could be that the timing of the second reading of the Abolition Bill prompted these men to use this information to suspend the bill. They may have been instructed to raise the question by members of the Jamaican Assembly, who were still protesting against the stationing of the 2<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume 3, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1805 col. 643

<sup>40</sup> Arthur Beckett, ‘Mad’ Jack Fuller, the honest Sussex squire’, *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 2 (1928), pp24-26; David Beck Ryden, *West Indian slavery and British abolition, 1783-1807*, p. 59. Ryden identified Fuller as possibly having attended 14 meetings

<sup>41</sup> *Parliamentary History* Volume 3, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1805, col. 656

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, col 674. Earl Temple’s son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Chandos would become the chairman of the West India Committee in 1829

West India Regiment on the island.<sup>43</sup> However, the news did not have a particularly revelatory impact; in fact no other MP made any comment on it.

Pitt claimed that the terms of the policy had been misunderstood. He denied that his government had entered into any contract with any merchants to purchase any slaves, admitting only that the government had planned to purchase the ‘redemption’ of these slaves from a state of slavery with the intention of employing them as soldiers, which was different from the allegation being made.<sup>44</sup> Gascoyne rejected this explanation, insisting that he was not mistaken – he was aware that a Liverpool merchant had been contracted to make the purchases. Pitt could not afford to admit to his government being actively involved in the slave trade. He instead moved away from the central argument – that he and members of his government were being duplicitous and hypocritical – by offering a weak excuse in an attempt to avoid a potentially humiliating situation.

By not pressing the government more robustly on its activities, did the West India Committee miss an opportunity to strengthen its position against Pitt? An important consideration is that the government could not deprive itself of access to enslaved workers and abolish the slave trade at the same time. By delaying abolition, they were in fact helping the planter interest. Another consideration is that the West India Committee needed to maintain good relations with the government, and with the current sugar depression their main preoccupation, did not want to risk losing the government’s ear at such a critical time.<sup>45</sup>

### **Metropolitan obstruction to black regiments: 1795**

The West India Committee received the news of the government’s intention to use black troops alongside white troops with deep alarm. As far as they were concerned, the use of

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<sup>43</sup> The agent for Jamaica at that time was not a member of Parliament

<sup>44</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Volume 3, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1805, col. 668

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 3 above

armed black soldiers did not conform to their concept of maintaining a strong defence for the West Indies. The government's decision to concentrate white troops towards the European theatre of war had produced a very aggressive form of lobbying on the part of the West India Committee. Deeply concerned that the deployment of troops away from the West Indies would render it vulnerable, they petitioned the government almost weekly, mainly through deputations, to ensure that 'each island possess a force sufficient for its protection against predatory attacks of an active and destroying enemy fully acquainted with the strength or resources of our West India colonies.'<sup>46</sup> The 10,000 troops originally destined for the Caribbean were reduced to 6,000 owing to Dundas's determination in 1793 to try and defeat the French in Europe, where he felt that 'they would be forced to make sacrifices as may be thought necessary for our future safety'.<sup>47</sup> They complained strongly against the reduced number of troops assigned to guard the islands and requested that an additional naval force be assigned to each island.<sup>48</sup>

In May 1795 the West India Committee continued to petition William Pitt over what they perceived as the weak state of the defence of the colonies owing to the system of general emancipation introduced by the French, which had created 'a very formidable accession of strength to themselves.'<sup>49</sup> Nothing could guard against these dangers apart from a strong military force. It is clear from the tone of Secretary Dundas's reply to the Committee that his patience was wearing thin with its continual applications, and its complaints that the government's effort to protect the West Indies was insufficient:

I feel much satisfaction in recollecting that at no period since the commencement of war has there been a deficiency of exertions in furnishing the West India possessions

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<sup>46</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting Minutes, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1794

<sup>47</sup>Quoted in David Geggus, 'The British Government and the St. Domingue slave revolt, 1791-1793', *English Historical Review*, 96:379 (1981), p.301

<sup>48</sup> ICS West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Petition to William Pitt, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1795

<sup>49</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1795

with a supply of naval and military defence...you are aware that in sending reinforcements to the West Indies must of necessity be attended to, and permit me to take the liberty of suggesting...how far such frequent public discussions on their own supposed weakness is not calculated to increase rather than diminish their danger.’<sup>50</sup>

On receiving the news from Lord Penrhyn in early June 1795 that a black regiment was to be confined to the Windward Islands and St Domingue, and that a further two regiments would be assigned to Grenada and St Vincent, the Standing Committee was immediately spurred into action. Meetings with Dundas and the Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Portland, were arranged to obtain as much information about the nature and extent of the plan. Gilbert Francklyn was elected to co-ordinate these meetings and report back to the Standing Committee.

A wealthy absentee planter from Tobago, Francklyn (1733-1799) had used his old career in the colonies to create a new one in the metropole as a polemical defender of slavery, denouncing humanitarians and reformers in a series of pamphlets, and giving evidence in support of the slave trade.<sup>51</sup> He sought membership into the West India Committee, and became an active member of the Standing Committee. Francklyn resettled in England after spending over twenty years in Antigua and Tobago working in the intercolonial trade between the West Indies and the former American colonies in partnership with Anthony Bacon, a government contractor who supplied provisions for soldiers in Senegal and the Royal Navy in the West Indies. Francklyn, responsible for superintending leased slaves to commissioners, governors and surveyors in the Ceded Islands, was appointed by the Board of Trade on to the Council of Trade for Tobago. On dissolving his partnership with Bacon he

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<sup>50</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2) Standing Committee Minutes, Letter from Dundas to Lord Penrhyn, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1795

<sup>51</sup> Francklyn’s pamphlets include *An Answer to the Rev. Mr Clarkson’s Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of Human Species* (1789); *Observations, Occasioned by the Attempts made in England to affect the abolition of the slave trade* (1788) and *A Candid Enquiry into the Nature of Government and the right to Representation* (1793)

attempted to become governor of New Hampshire in 1773. Francklyn had spent time living in Paris in 1790 and saw the plight of the French planters as a common cause. Francklyn was also a friend of Lord Hawkesbury, President of the Board of Trade, and played a small and ultimately unsuccessful role in encouraging Britain to come to the assistance of St Domingue in the early stages of the rebellion. He had hoped for government intervention and encouraged it on the basis that it would be to Britain's political and commercial advantage if it did so. To that end he brokered a meeting between Hawkesbury and Venault de Charmilly, a St Domingue planter who also wanted British intervention into the revolted French colony.<sup>52</sup> Francklyn's knowledge of the West Indies, his extensive political and commercial connections were consequently important assets that he contributed during his membership of the West India Committee.<sup>53</sup>

Francklyn, and William Hutchinson, the agent for Antigua, waited on the Duke of Portland, to discuss the matter. They expressed their apprehensions in the strongest terms. The duke rather disingenuously assured both men that the engagement of enslaved workers in the army was only in an auxiliary capacity:

He considered these people rather as persons who were to be attached to the Army intended to be employed in those parts to act as pioneers and to perform such laborious services as might prevent the health of the soldiers suffering, but that he was not able to speak with certainty upon the subject.<sup>54</sup>

Francklyn and Hutchinson stated that if the Africans were employed only as attendant labourers, they would have no objections, but if they were armed, then the West India planters and merchants would continue to object to their existence. Portland's answers to

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<sup>52</sup> Geggus, 'The British Government and the St Domingue Slave Revolt,' p. 290

<sup>53</sup> Charles Royster, *The Fabulous History of the Dismal Swamp Company: A Story of George Washington's Times* (New York: Borzoi Books, 1999) pp. 75, 111, 178, 195

<sup>54</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1795



Francklyn and Hutchinson suggest that he deliberately withheld from the West India Committee the fact that the black soldiers would be armed. As Colonial Secretary, it would be doubtful that he would not have been informed that this regiment of Africans would be an armed unit.

As a conciliatory gesture, Portland offered to show them the circular forwarded to the colonial governors, to apprise them of the instructions sent to the governor – to assist in raising the corps of black soldiers. Over the next week Francklyn attempted to meet with Mr King, Portland's secretary to see this circular; King, possibly under directions by his superior to stall them, made himself mysteriously unavailable or claimed that he was unable to provide them with the circular.<sup>55</sup> Finally managing to see him on the 25<sup>th</sup> June, Mr King informed Francklyn that the black troops, 3000 of whom would be sent to St Domingue and 3000 to St Vincent and Martinique, would 'most certainly' be armed.<sup>56</sup>

### **The case against a black regiment – challenging the social, racial and legal hegemonies**

The West India Committee made the strongest objections to the Colonial Secretary regarding the creation of black regiments. It sent nine resolutions expressing the view that enslaved workers had to remain under the control of their masters, citing that the objection to the black regiments was a defence of the social and racial order that defined the British West Indies. The West India Committee made the case that black soldiers, at a time of such instability in the region, was potentially fatal for two reasons. Firstly, the revolutionary ideas being circulated meant that blacks now considered themselves 'equal to white men', an action which had produced the most fatal consequences in St Domingue. Secondly, the elevation in the status from enslaved to soldier would subvert that order, 'making them consider

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<sup>55</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes 27<sup>th</sup> June 1795

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, Standing Committee Minutes, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1795

themselves equal or superior to the whites...the moment the Negroes shall lose their opinion of the superiority of white men the authority of white men shall become precarious.’<sup>57</sup>

The policy subverted the key characteristics of the planter’s world as explained by Bryan Edwards. He observed that the predominant character common to white residents of the West Indies was an ‘independent spirit which rose from the pre-eminence and distinction attached to the complexion of a white man, in a country where the complexion generally speaking distinguishes freedom from slavery.’<sup>58</sup> Christer Petley observes that the necessity of white solidarity was paramount; that class and social hierarchies were suspended in the colonies to perpetuate white domination over the black population.<sup>59</sup> The colonists had absolute control of the slavery system and *de jure* jurisdiction over their slaves’ bodies.<sup>60</sup> They would not tolerate or co-exist with any alternative system; consequently, any alternative had to be isolated or controlled. For example, the Antigua Militia Act of 1793 stipulated that slaves were forbidden from even carrying the ammunition and weapons of militia men.<sup>61</sup>

The West India Committee was convinced that no legislature would supply enslaved workers to join the regiments. Governor Lindsay of Tobago informed the Home Secretary that the idea of black soldiers would ‘destroy in the negroes all confidence and attachment towards their masters’, and moreover, ‘it would be extremely dangerous as well as impolitic in the master to infringe in any of those rights and privileges which long usage has established in

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<sup>57</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, Resolutions to the Duke of Portland, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1795

<sup>58</sup> Bryan Edwards, quoted in Christer Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica*, p.35

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 36. Conversely, Natalie Zacek explores the social hierarchies among the white population in the Leeward Islands to argue that there was a large degree of social diversity among this group in the middle of the eighteenth century. See Zacek, *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands 1670-1776* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Introduction

<sup>60</sup> Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its ideological aspects* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p.104. Also see Hilary Beckles’ discussion on the control of the black female body in Barbadian slave society in *Centering Women: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Ian Randle; Markus Weiner; James Currey, 1999), Chapter 2

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Alan C. Burns, *A History of the British West Indies* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), p.490

favour of the slaves.’<sup>62</sup> Lindsay’s letter requesting that the slaves of Tobago not be part of a black regiment explained why most planters were unwilling to part with a valuable enslaved worker. More importantly, the removal of that slave from the control of his master was the real concern. Removing the enslaved workers from the plantations would disrupt the ‘tranquillity’ of the current system.

A black regiment existed outside the West Indian system of slavery, and in view of the contemporary political climate in the West Indies, filled the colonists with dread. In their resolutions, the planters and merchants argued that

By giving Negroes an establishment as soldiers they would be taught to consider themselves as equal...they shall lose their opinion of the superiority of white men [who] will be marked by the Negroes for an enemy.<sup>63</sup>

The planter historian Bryan Edwards had warned that

an army of Negroes willed with the pride of their profession and in the midst of a slave population of their own expatriated countrymen would be dangerous to the tranquillity of the island [Jamaica] and totally subversive to the present inevitable system of colonial subordination.<sup>64</sup>

‘Master and slave’, wrote the abolitionist James Ramsay, ‘are in every respect opposite terms; the persons to whom they are applied are natural enemies to each other.’<sup>65</sup> Planters feared their slaves because of their propensity for resistance; Mark Steele argues that in Jamaica this fear manifested itself into a repression that made the society there arguably one

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<sup>62</sup>TNA, CO 285/3, Lindsay to Portland, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1795

<sup>63</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2) Standing Committee Minutes, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1795

<sup>64</sup>Quoted in Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, p.360

<sup>65</sup>James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), p.173

of the most Draconian regimes in the British West Indies.<sup>66</sup> The forces of law and order, specifically military power and authority, were always entrusted to whites. Further, slave control was the duty of the slave owners, since slaves were considered to be the principal internal threat to social order and stability.<sup>67</sup> Colonists were therefore comforted by the presence of garrisoned imperial soldiers, as it strengthened their control over the slaves and at the same time weakened the slaves' position by reducing the possibility of revolt. The war in the Caribbean meant that it was even more vital that the colonists maintained, and were seen to maintain, their power and authority over their enslaved. The introduction of a black regiment would put the assumption of white authority into question.

Another cause for concern was that it was unclear whose jurisdiction the West India Regiments would be under. The slave laws that governed the British Caribbean were designed to ensure obedience among the slaves, and were 'an immediate reflection of what the slave owner conceived to be the necessities of the slave system.'<sup>68</sup> When asked what was the legal powers that master had over their slaves during the inquiry into the slave trade and slavery William Hutchinson, the agent for Antigua made the following remarks:

The laws of the island of Antigua...leave their masters every other power [over their slaves]; first, because masters having an absolute property in their slaves, the laws suppose them worthy of being entrusted with such a power; and in the second place because the common safety of the white inhabitants and the very existence of their plantations depend on the masters having every authority over their slaves that is

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<sup>66</sup> M. J. Steel, 'A Philosophy of Fear: The World View of the Jamaican Plantocracy in Comparative Perspective,' *Journal of Caribbean History*, 27:1 (1993) p.4 The issue of violent repression is applicable to all West Indian colonies, but I am arguing from the perspective of fear of resistance, rather than oppression as a consequence of rapid development of plantations in colonies such as Grenada and Demerara

<sup>67</sup> Gad Heuman, 'Social Structures of the Slave Societies', in Franklin Knight ed. *UNESCO General History of the Caribbean Vol. 3: The slave societies of the Caribbean* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.195

<sup>68</sup> Elsa V. Goveia, *The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century* (Barbados: Caribbean Universities Press, 1970), p.19

necessary to enforce their implicit obedience and keep them under due subjections on all occasions.<sup>69</sup>

Elsa Goveia observed that the unlimited power masters had over slaves and property stemmed from the fact that slaves were subject to what she termed 'police regulations.' The laws that controlled them were rigidly and consistently upheld, and were designed to make sure that the enslaved remained subordinated to the interests and control of the white authorities. Before the law, an enslaved person was always viewed as a potential criminal. If an enslaved person was always viewed thus, that they were to be assigned the role of colonial protector was unacceptable.<sup>70</sup>

Both the military and the colonial legislature were responsible for the government of British soldiers based on the principle that the soldier was also a British subject, and therefore subject to military and civil law.<sup>71</sup> Since the black British West India soldier was not a citizen, went the argument; they were subject to slave laws. Brigadier General Thomas Hislop, a military commander in the West Indies and governor of Trinidad, made a series of remarks on the subject that reveal the dilemma faced by the army, in terms of their wish to treat the black soldiers as white enlisted men, and how subjugation to the slave laws would affect their ability to serve as efficient soldiers:

I have understood the principle has been acted upon, that Soldiers of West India Regiments are amenable to the Slave Laws, and therefore subject to every degradation, that the unfortunate and wretched Slave is doomed to endure. If such a principle were established, how could confidence be justly placed, or indeed with

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<sup>69</sup> *Report of the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council dealing with the Slave Trade and West Indian slavery* Vol. 26 (1789), part III, p.319

<sup>70</sup> Elsa Goveia, *The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century*, p.125

<sup>71</sup> Roger N. Buckley, 'Slaves or Freedmen: The Question of the legal status of the British West India Soldier, 1795-1807,' *Caribbean Studies* 17 (1977-78), p.87

what Justice could it be expected from such Soldiers. The same Duties fall to their lot to perform, as are confided to the European Troops. The same vigilance and exactness in the discharge of them is alike expected, and the same degree of punishment awaits their disobedience or neglect. How then could it be possible, if such were admitted as a fact, that a West India Soldier could with safety to himself perform his Duty? For instance, if a white Man insults him on his Post, or attempts to act there contrary to the orders he has received, he could not resist him, and if even struck, or any attempt is made to disarm him, he could not oppose with the firmness his duty as a Soldier would demand, and for the neglect of which, the Law by which he is governed, would award him a severe punishment.<sup>72</sup>

Hislop understood that regarding black soldiers as slaves would leave them at the mercy of the authorities and the enforcement of the slave laws. His argument was that those slaves who had been purchased by the government through African factors for enlistment were the King's slaves, and as such should be subject to different laws:

Africans purchased for soldiers certainly were not in the contemplation of any of the West Indian legislatures when the slave laws were enacted, and are not, therefore, I apprehend, within their operation.<sup>73</sup>

The confusion over the legal status of the black soldier persisted, and was never satisfactorily resolved until the 1807 Mutiny Act, which contained a clause which declared all blacks in the King's service as free after their discharge.<sup>74</sup> In 1799 the Duke of Portland consulted barristers at Lincoln's Inn on the issue. Their answer was that black soldiers continued to be

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<sup>72</sup>TNA, WO 1/95, *Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments written in the year 1801*, by Brig. Gen. Thomas Hislop

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Buckley, 'Slaves or Freedmen', p.29

subject to slave laws, unless they were manumitted by an act of Parliament.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the black soldier most probably would have considered himself to be of an altered status and superior to those slaves on the plantation. This appeared to be the outcome the army had anticipated:

The new African recruit becomes gradually initiated into the habits of a military life, and ere long discovers the superiority of his situation above the slave whose debased state he has never been subject to. He likewise feels himself proportionally elevated from the rank which his officers hold in society and the respect which he sees is paid to them.<sup>76</sup>

It was the fear of the ‘superiority of situation’ that prompted the Antiguan, Barbadian and St Kitts legislatures to protest vehemently against a West India Regiment being stationed on their islands. Echoing the sentiments of Bryan Edwards, it was not the fear of violence to people or property that the Antiguan assembly feared, but

Their mere residence in this country ...the introduction of ideas subversive of those long established notions which rendered them contented with the station in which they were placed and submissive to the dominion exercised over them...what a wonderful revolution will take place in their minds when they see their fellow slaves...dressed in showy uniforms, furnished with splendid arms and spending their time in idleness and dissipation...<sup>77</sup>

The Barbados legislature presented a similar set of resolutions as the Antigua Assembly when requested to raise five regiments of black soldiers by Captain General Governor George Ricketts. As Goveia argued, their perception of slaves was as criminals. Consequently, the

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<sup>75</sup> TNA, WO 1/86, John Scott and John Mitford to the Duke of Portland, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1799

<sup>76</sup> TNA, WO 1/95, *Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments*

<sup>77</sup> TNA, WO 1/88, *Report of Joint Select Committee of both houses of the Antigua*, January 1799

introduction of a criminal element into the colony's defence mechanism was prohibitive. They maintained that the only able bodied slaves that the planters were able to provide would be 'of the worst character, villains hardened in the act of plunder...without hope of their being reformed to labour or a life of honesty, and ripe for every species or degree of mischief.'<sup>78</sup> Their position was so intractable that even a reassuring letter from Sir Ralph Abercromby, the commander of the West Indies forces, left the Barbadians unconvinced.<sup>79</sup>

The St. Kitts assembly did not trouble themselves drafting reports to commanding officers or memorials to government ministers that articulated the possible consequences of having a black regiment on their island. They removed the black regiment from their island by issuing a charge on the men of the 4<sup>th</sup> West India Regiment stationed at Brimstone Hill for high treason, a charge without any evidence, causing the island's attorney general to hand in his resignation when he publicly stated that there was no evidence that the men had conspired to commit treason.<sup>80</sup>

In July 1795 Gilbert Francklyn and Evan Baillie, younger brother of James Baillie, met with Pitt again to remonstrate over the black troops. They presented letters from planters in the British and French West Indies protesting against the policy, claiming it was filled with danger, that enslaved workers had no attachment to those who commanded them.<sup>81</sup> Pitt's response was to inform the two men that the measure had been pursued on the recommendation of the officers serving in the West Indies, that it was necessary in the present situation of the islands.<sup>82</sup> Effectively closing the discussion on the matter, the only thing the Standing Committee could do was continue to monitor the situation in the West

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<sup>78</sup> TNA, WO 1/86, Ricketts to Abercromby, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1797

<sup>79</sup> *General Evening Post*, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1797; letter from Abercromby to Barbados Assembly, March 20<sup>th</sup> 1797

<sup>80</sup> TNA, CO 152/78, W. P. Georges to Portland, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1797 f.345

<sup>81</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1795

<sup>82</sup> Ibid



Indies, regularly inviting officers that had served there to their meetings to ascertain the state and condition of the islands.

**Destroying ideas of colonial subordination: Jamaica, black soldiers and the principle of legislative non-interference, 1797-1800**

Jamaica's campaign to prevent black soldiers being stationed there was the second occasion of the West India Committee's involvement over the dispute. The origins of Jamaica's dissatisfaction lay not only in the belief of the great threat black soldiers posed to the social and racial hierarchies that have been discussed above, but also because the Jamaican planters, in colony and metropole, felt betrayed by the government on the principle of a broken contract over Jamaica's defences.

Jamaica's vulnerability to slave revolts made it dependent on a strong military presence for their security. Consequently in early in the eighteenth century Jamaica had offered an allowance to meet the expenses of the troops stationed there, known as 'island pay.' In 1773 they had pledged this assistance for any number of regular troops up to three thousand. In exchange for this contribution Jamaica demanded and received local control over the military establishment and consequently over the governors and all their military policies.<sup>83</sup>

Governors therefore were regularly forced to submit to the assembly's demands whenever that body threatened to withhold the subsistence it provided for the troops in the island.

Jamaica was used to getting its own way on defence and until now, the government had accommodated them.

Earlier metropolitan attempts to seek the cooperation of the Jamaican assembly to use armed slaves in wartime had produced similar responses. During the siege of Havana in 1762 where the raising of black troops was seen as essential to the success of the campaign, a similar

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<sup>83</sup> Helen Taft Manning, *British Colonial Government after the American Revolution, 1782-1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 221, 245

scenario of indecision, obfuscation, delay and outright refusal was played out by the Jamaicans that frustrated the British military leaders.<sup>84</sup> The threat of war with Spain in 1790 led the imperial government to again consider raising black troops. It authorised Lord Effingham, then governor of Jamaica, to purchase enslaved soldiers on the public account. That the correspondence was secret and that Effingham was instructed to circumvent the Assembly to raise the troops speaks to the strength of feeling against the measure on the part of the Jamaican colonists.<sup>85</sup>

The demand for troops to deal with the situation in St Domingue and the Maroon uprising in Jamaica coincided with the order to raise a black regiment. This threat to internal security and property meant that for two years the colonists resisted the directive. The policy to provide island pay meant that black troops could not be raised without their consent, or without them being in control of those troops. This was evidenced by their acceptance of the raising of three thousand black pioneers to act on duty of fatigue, with the government paying a hiring fee of three shillings per day per slave.<sup>86</sup> As long as they were not sent to St Domingue or permitted to enlist in the West India Regiment, the Jamaican planters found these black soldiers acceptable for West India service.

However, by 1797 the Duke of Portland instructed the governor, Lord Balcarres, to raise a 6<sup>th</sup> West India regiment consisting of free blacks or people of colour: 'I should hope and believe that your lordship would be able not only to reconcile the legislature of Jamaica to this measure', he wrote, 'but to induce them to bear a considerable share of the expense if it.'<sup>87</sup>

As a professional soldier who had seen service in the American Revolutionary War, Balcarres probably understood far more than the planters the wisdom in raising a black regiment. It was

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel E. Walker, 'Colony versus Crown: Raising Black troops for the British siege on Havana, 1762', *The Journal of Caribbean History* 33 (1&2, 1999), pp.74-83

<sup>85</sup> TNA, CO 137/88/38 'Statement of Proceedings in Jamaica from the period of Lord Effingham's government relative to the Security of that island from the commencement of that year 1790-1799' (No 14)

<sup>86</sup> TNA, CO137/95, Balcarres to Portland 25<sup>th</sup> August 1795

<sup>87</sup> TNA, CO 137/98, Portland to Balcarres, January 1797, read out to the Jamaican Assembly July 27<sup>th</sup> 1797

something that he had often urged publicly, but knew that the planters ‘would rather lose their all than admit the idea of arms being placed in the hands of a slave.’<sup>88</sup>

The black corps was unacceptable to the Jamaicans not only because of their fear of them but also because housing and supporting such a unit was against Jamaican law. The Board of Public Accounts refused to comply with the government’s order to provide rations to the 6<sup>th</sup> West India Regiment, because the assembly had not approved it. Subsequently, they refused to acknowledge the black soldiers as troops.<sup>89</sup>

The real issue was that their presence subverted colonial society. ‘The distinction and subordination of ranks’, found the Committee of Enquiry set up to investigate the plan to raise the 6<sup>th</sup> West India regiment, ‘by which the peace, good order, and safety of this island have hitherto in a great measure been preserved...will be destroyed by the adoption of this plan.’ Furthermore, continued the Committee, the inhabitants of Jamaica consisted of four classes: whites, free people of colour having special privileges granted by private acts, free people of colour not having such privileges, and slaves. When employed in public service, they were kept separate. The militia had distinct companies for whites, free blacks and persons of colour, and slaves were used only as pioneers or partymen. West India regiments would be on an equal footing with the British regular soldiers, and the understanding of their place in the social structures would be destroyed.<sup>90</sup> On the basis of these assertions, they forced Balcarres to remove soldiers from the 5<sup>th</sup> West India Regiment who had been brought there by an ‘event of war’, as well as a regiment ‘composed of French Negroes’ and a regiment of Guadeloupe rangers destined for St Domingue.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Balcarres, quoted in A.P. Kup, ‘Alexander Lindsay, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Balcarres, Lt. Governor of Jamaica 1794-1801’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 5:2 (1975), p.348

<sup>89</sup> TNA, CO 137/98, Balcarres to Portland June 6<sup>th</sup> 1797

<sup>90</sup> TNA, CO 137/98, Jamaica Privy Council 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1797, p.289

<sup>91</sup> TNA, CO 140/89, Jamaica Journal of Assembly, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1797, pp.204, 263

The Assembly put forward another proposal in late 1797 that both parties, for a while at least, could agree with. Two thousand white British troops would be stationed in Jamaica for five to nine years, and the Assembly would grant pay and subsistence to these soldiers plus subsistence for another thousand men, if the government abandoned the plan of having a black corps on the island, at an annual expense of £32,000.<sup>92</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> West India Regiment was sent to Honduras to help fight against the Spanish and black Caribs.

Simon Taylor, one of the richest planters on the island, an Assembly member, and who participated in the activities of the West India Committee when he was in England, expressed his relief and his contempt for the Home Secretary to his friend and business partner

Chaloner Arcedeckne:

You will see that the black corps has been unanimously rejected here...and the black gang are gone to Honduras. I am convinced that no measure more fatal to the interests of the island could be fallen upon than to arm Negroes ...the minister is so puffed up by his self-sufficiency that he harkens to nothing but his vanity and ignorance.<sup>93</sup>

The government's accommodation of the Jamaicans was at the expense of other areas in need of defence. It had agreed to allow the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the 60<sup>th</sup> Regiment to be appropriated for the exclusive use of Jamaica. Its exasperation with the Assembly, as articulated by Portland, however, was evident:

I cannot allow myself to think that the Assembly will object to the above battalions as not coming within the description of the force expressed in their resolutions, because

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<sup>92</sup> *Votes of the Honourable House of Assembly of Jamaica, in a session begun October 31<sup>st</sup> and ended December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1797*, (St Jago de la Vega 1798), pp.92-93; Kup, *Alexander Lindsay, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Balcarres*, p.358

<sup>93</sup> University of Cambridge Library, Taylor and Vanneck-Arcedeckne Papers, (Vanneck-Ar/3A/1798/7), Simon Taylor to Chaloner Arcedeckne, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1798. Simon Taylor chaired two Committee meetings during stays in London, see Beck Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition*, p.62 For studies on Simon Taylor see Richard Sheridan, 'Simon Taylor, Sugar Tycoon of Jamaica 1740-1813,' *Agricultural History*, 45:4 (1971) pp. 285-296; Christer Petley, 'Devoted islands' and 'that madman Wilberforce': British proslavery patriotism during the Age of Abolition,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 393-415

if not expressly within it I am persuaded they will be found to be so nearly so as not to admit of a question being raised between parties mutually desirous of attending to each other's wishes; and should there be found to be individuals not coming within the description contained in the resolutions of the Assembly, and which may be the case in so large a number of troops, they may be easily replaced by others who may fall more exactly within that description.<sup>94</sup>

Despite having agreed to the Assembly's last proposal, the government went back on their word two years later. There are two explanations for this: it was convinced of the efficacy of the black soldiers, and it wished to reign in the Jamaicans back into imperial subordination. Dundas informed Robert Sewell, the agent for Jamaica, that he considered Jamaica's charges against a black regiment 'speculative and unfounded', in view of the testimony of the inhabitants of Dutch Surinam, who owed their lives to

the active zeal and invariable fidelity of its Negro chasseurs, the only force which could, as they state, and as I firmly believe, be successfully opposed to the predatory and destructive warfare in which that colony was frequently involved by the revolts of the fugitive slaves and natives occupying the woods and uncultivated parts of that colony.<sup>95</sup>

Dundas informed Sewell that he would be sending one of the most efficient black regiments currently stationed in the Windward Islands to Jamaica to reinforce the current garrison. A.E. Furness' assessment of George Hibbert's tenure as agent noted that the Jamaican agency 'had a complete monopoly of representing the views of the colonists...this made him almost a competitor with the governor of Jamaica for the ear of the secretary of state.'<sup>96</sup> Given the

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<sup>94</sup>TNA,CO 137/99, Portland to Balcarres, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1799

<sup>95</sup>TNA, CO 138/39, Dundas to R Sewell Esq. 14<sup>th</sup> March 1800.

<sup>96</sup> A.E. Furness, 'George Hibbert and the Defence of Slavery in the West Indies,' *Jamaican Historical Review*, 5:1 (1965) p.61

Jamaican Assembly's bullish stance on imperial interference and the agent's access to the ministry, Sewell had secured several meetings with Dundas, expressing 'strong and earnest remonstrances' against black troops. Dundas took the view that the black soldiers 'had a very strong view of their public duty and a conviction that they should not discharge their responsibility in a point of the greatest moment to the safety of Jamaica, and the general interests of the Empire.'<sup>97</sup>

While Dundas was convinced of the advantages the black soldiers would provide to the safety and internal peace of the island, Sewell was not. He called a meeting of the planters and merchants interested in Jamaica informing them of his meetings with Dundas and the outcome. Lord Penrhyn personally began to lobby the Duke of Portland, and presented the Jamaican planters' petition against the policy, which expressed dissatisfaction with the way the dispute was being handled. The fact that 97 of the principal absentee planters signed the memorial is an indication of how serious the matter was for them.<sup>98</sup> Sir John Wedderburn, a Jamaican landowner and frequent attendee of the Standing Committee, wrote to Dundas 'speaking as a private person', as one Scot to another, urging him to reconsider his decision, stating that the Jamaican colonists were resisting the measure out of concern for their own safety.<sup>99</sup> Wedderburn was particularly concerned about the French Africans who determined to 'destroy and ruin their enemies at any expense', who would encourage the black regiments to desert.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>TNA, CO 138/139, Dundas to R Sewell Esq. 14<sup>th</sup> March 1800

<sup>98</sup>CO 137/104 – a copy of the memorial of 18<sup>th</sup> April 1800, first located in the West India Committee archives. This copy has the signatures of over 90 planters and merchants connected to Jamaica

<sup>99</sup>John Wedderburn is estimated to have attended meetings on 91 occasions between 1785 and 1807. Douglas Hamilton discusses the power and interest of Henry Dundas in relation to Scottish West Indians. See Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2005) pp. 171-77; and 'Defending the Colonies against Malicious Attacks of Philanthropy': Scottish Campaigns against the Abolitions of the Slave Trade and Slavery,' in Allan Macinnes and Douglas J. Hamilton ed. *Jacobitism Enlightenment and Empire, 1680-1820* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014) p. 198

<sup>100</sup>National Library of Scotland, Melville Papers, MS 9370 (55), Sir John Wedderburn to Henry Dundas, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1800. I am grateful to Douglas Hamilton for providing me with this source.

Within the petition there were four points on which the government and the Jamaican planters could agree. Firstly, Jamaica's proximity to St Domingue exposed it to possible invasion. French agents had entered Jamaica in November 1799, in an unsuccessful attempt to gain support among the French refugees and the Blue Mountain Maroons. Secondly, they could both agree that neither of them wanted to entertain a black republic in the West Indies. Thirdly, they agreed that the health and lives of the British soldiers was of the greatest importance. And fourthly, they had agreed to the stationing of 2000 British soldiers and to paying for their subsistence, on condition that the black troops were withdrawn.<sup>101</sup>

The incompatibility of interests that existed between the metropolitan government and the planters were such that despite the evidence of the efficiency, courage and expediency of the black troops, the planters continued to call for their expulsion. In their view, having black soldiers would be an indication that the British had a weak army, and therefore a weak colony, and would be an incentive for the enslaved population to rebel. As far as the Assembly was concerned, their presence was against Jamaican law, and more serious than the disregard of the law was that 'the apparent harshness of a perseverance which must have the effect of degrading the legislative bodies of Jamaica in the estimation of the whole of that community.'<sup>102</sup> Jamaica's constitutional right to self-govern was threatened by the government's insistence on the use of black troops; in the past, the Jamaican Assembly had been able to assert their constitutional rights against the imperial government successfully.<sup>103</sup> On this occasion, the government refused to acquiesce, and the memorial was rejected. The Jamaica planters made further remonstrance by sending a further six resolutions, the contents

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<sup>101</sup> David Geggus, 'The enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on the Causes of Slave Rebellions', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 44 No. 2 (1987), p.287

<sup>102</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Memorial of the Jamaican Planters to the Duke of Portland, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1800

<sup>103</sup> See Jack P. Greene, 'The Jamaica Privilege Controversy 1764-66: An episode in the process of constitutional definition in the early modern British Empire,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 22:1 (1994), pp. 16-53; George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political Conflict in Jamaica 1729-1783* (London: Longmans, 1965) is an assessment of Jamaican governors that studies the political struggles between Jamaica and the metropolitan government

of which reveal the irrational views of the planters, and a number of claims about the black soldiers that the government, through their communications with the army, would have known to be false. The third and fourth are of particular interest and will be examined here.<sup>104</sup>

The planters tried to prove that the black regiments were untrustworthy, citing cases of the alleged conspiracy to mutiny in St. Kitts, as well as the unwillingness of other colonies to accommodate the black regiments due to there being no proof of their fidelity. Commentators on the war, mainly soldiers serving in the West Indies gave a different view. ‘The transport of black troops sent to St Vincent [under General Hunter] which was reported to be in a dangerous state...this force was effectual to save the land’, was the opinion of one report.<sup>105</sup>

The failure of an expedition against St Lucia was due to in part to not having a corps of black troops, asserted another.<sup>106</sup> ‘How can the merchants of London be so wrong’, wrote an officer of high rank in Jamaica in 1795, ‘as to urge the Duke of Portland to stop General Vaughan from raising and embodying Negroes – surely we on the spot are better judges than they can be of what is the proper means of defence or offence...one regiment of Negro soldiers are worth, for real service, any two of the British now in the West Indies.’<sup>107</sup>

Comparing the assertions of the planters with these well informed appraisals of the black regiments abilities reveal the weakness of the claims of the West India Committee.

That the planters would cite the cases of St Kitts and Antigua was not surprising, since they all had the same view regarding black soldiers. However, the government knew what had happened on St Kitts: that there was no conspiracy; St Kitts was determined to remove the 4<sup>th</sup> West India Regiment from the island. The Chasseurs of Dutch Surinam were different from the black soldiers because they were under the control of their masters rather than the army.

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<sup>104</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Resolutions of the planters interested in Jamaica, , 5<sup>th</sup> May 1800

<sup>105</sup> *General Evening Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1796

<sup>106</sup> *The Telegraph*, June 28<sup>th</sup> 1796

<sup>107</sup> *The Star*, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1795



Once again the planters emphasised their key objection – that they preferred their slaves to be under their subordination rather than those who did not understand the workings of West Indian society.

The fourth resolution argued that there would be no need for a black regiment if Jamaica had a respectable force of European soldiers. The susceptibility of European soldiers to disease, in spite of its devastating effects in this war, was irrelevant. These resolutions seem on the surface extraordinary in their obtuseness; however, the point that is really being made here is that the Jamaican planters and merchants took exception to the fact that they had since 1773 provided funds for a strong military presence to prevent insurrection and to maintain control over their enslaved workers. The imperial government had broken their agreement not to send black troops provided that the assembly paid for white ones. The fact that the government was attempting to assert control over Jamaica is what offended and upset them most.

If one is to consider the planters' claim that the health of the soldiers could be preserved, the Jamaican planters were both right and wrong. It was possible to have a healthy European garrison in Jamaica; white colonists were just as likely to develop immunity to yellow fever as the enslaved African population. Further, if these soldiers were stationed in areas that were far from swampy land, they had a less chance of contracting disease. Dr John Hunter, an army doctor who was in charge of military hospitals in Jamaica during the American Revolutionary War, recommended that troops that served in the West Indies should be comprised of experienced soldiers, not newly enlisted men, sent at a time when the West Indies was at its coolest to allow them to become accustomed to the climate before the sickly season commenced.<sup>108</sup> During active service this seldom happened, and during the French Revolutionary Wars it is unlikely that preparing troops for acclimatisation would have taken place, and the mortality rates of soldiers in this period bears this out.

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<sup>108</sup> John Hunter, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Jamaica* (London, 1788), p.27

Hunter observed that half of the four regiments sent to Jamaica in August 1780 died of disease within six months of arriving in Jamaica, ‘and a considerable part of the remainder were unfit for service.’ General Dalling, commander of the West Indian forces in 1781 corroborated this, but he was certain that they would not have died had they had proper barracks erected for them. He also observed that Jamaican barracks at that time were in a very poor state, unable to house more than 1200 men close to marshy grounds, making the soldiers susceptible to disease.<sup>109</sup>

George Metcalf described the Jamaican planter as ‘individualistic and notoriously lacking in public spirit...community efforts were undertaken resentfully and performed only to the bare minimum of satisfaction.’<sup>110</sup> In summary, well- built barracks away from marshy land helped soldiers to survive. In 1781, in the height of war it had not been attended to. Who was responsible for building them, the government or the Assembly was a contentious issue.

Dalling wrote:

Whether the barracks are to be erected at the expense of this country or of Jamaica is not for me to determine; suffice it to say that from the discredit the office of the receiver general is under, no tradesman will contract for work if bills upon that office are to be the mode of payment; from whence we may conclude that in the first instance, government must assume the sole discretion and payment, though the expense may ultimately fall on Jamaica.<sup>111</sup>

The planters did not waver from their position; they were filled with indignation at how they felt they were being treated by the government. George Hibbert’s letter to Simon Taylor

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<sup>109</sup> British Library, Add. MS 12411, General Dalling’s plan for the security and defence of Jamaica 1781

<sup>110</sup> George Metcalf, *Royal Government and Political conflict in Jamaica*, p.13

<sup>111</sup> British Library, Add. MS 12411, General Dalling’s plan for the security and defence of Jamaica, 1781

giving him the news of the outcome of the petition indicated his belief that the government in London did not respect Jamaica's right to control her own affairs:

You will hear from other quarters how indecently the minister has treated the very respectable body of Jamaica Planters who signed the memorial I now enclose concerning the transmission of Black Troops to Jamaica – you will see by the signatures to this Jamaica memorial what the West India interest is calculated to be if it should be united and act with spirit. Another representation has been made but I do firmly believe that the black troops are already ordered down to Jamaica...if the island should positively oppose their landing it will be justified and perhaps as strongly marked as that is needful in order to teach the ministers a lesson of diffidence and constitutional proceeding.<sup>112</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The West Indian colonies were still regarded as Britain's most valuable overseas possessions. It was for that reason that immense resources were committed to the region to crush rebellions and eliminate French revolutionaries. However, the magnitude of the casualties from disease, and the determination of the former slaves in the French Caribbean to retain their liberty compelled the government to engage in a new policy of using black soldiers to preserve European lives. It was not the government's intention to subvert or undermine colonial society, but by raising the twelve black West India Regiments they introduced an anomaly into the British West Indies: black men who were soldiers, not under the jurisdiction of the planter. This engagement of enslaved Africans outside of their established use made the interests of the government incompatible with colonists even though they shared the same goal: to preserve the colonies from attack and invasion. From the

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<sup>112</sup>ICS, 'Plantation Life in the Caribbean: The Simon Taylor Papers', Reel 17, George Hibbert to Simon Taylor, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1800

colonist, and absentee planters' perspective, the government did not fully appreciate, or understand the importance of maintaining the status quo in the planter/slave power dynamic. Black soldiers challenged the myths of white supremacy and black inferiority, which threatened to unravel the world that the planters had made.

Jamaica's pre-eminence as the largest and in its view the most important of the West India colonies allowed it to appropriate the West India Committee as the channel for their grievances in a way that the other colonies, who also opposed the black troops, did not. The Committee's inability to persuade the government to remove the black troops was another indication of its waning influence on government policy. The strong opposition and obstructionism to the recruitment of the black soldiers by the colonial assemblies and the West India Committee caused the government to question the utility of the system of colonial government; and on the issue of defence at least, it became more difficult for the West India planters and merchants to have their interests put first.

## Chapter 5

### Slave Registration and the War of Representation over Slavery

In the years following the abolition of the slave trade, the West India Committee became increasingly concerned with the level of abolitionist influence on colonial policy. They noted, with apprehension, that the newly established African Institution was determined that the provisions of the Abolition Act were enforced not only in Africa, but also in the West Indies. Consequently at the close of the parliamentary session in 1815, William Wilberforce introduced a motion of his intention to introduce a Bill to establish slave registers in the West Indies, aimed to close off the slave trade by monitoring the movements of the enslaved population.<sup>1</sup> His motion was fiercely opposed by the West India Committee, who interpreted the bill as urging the ‘expediency and necessity of assuming by the legislature of the Mother Country a direct control independently of the Colonial Legislatures over the internal legislations of the colonies with a view of eventually affecting thereby an Emancipation of the Slaves.’<sup>2</sup> It was concerned that the government intended to encroach upon the constitutional privileges of the colonies, as a consequence of the continued representation by the African Institution of the West Indies as a space of brutal transgression with a corrupted white population. Further, the hoped-for amelioration of slave conditions had not been facilitated by ending the trade; consequently, action was now required against slavery itself. The attacks on the planters’ character contradicted their claims of the fair and humane treatment of the enslaved population. A ‘war of representation’ emerged, seeking to establish the truth about slavery.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Higman draws on the data from the slave registration returns to provide a demographic study of aspects of West Indian slavery. B.W. Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984)

<sup>2</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), General Meeting, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1815

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p. 108

Accusations of slave trading in Sierra Leone by Robert Thorpe, former Chief Justice of Sierra Leone (1811-1813), provided the West India Committee with the opportunity to attack the character of the African Institution membership. Joseph Marryat, a senior member of the Standing Committee, wrote a series of pamphlets attacking the policies, influence and the competency of the Institution. He asserted that based on its poor record in Sierra Leone it was unqualified to recommend or introduce any policies that impacted upon the West Indies. These assertions instigated a pamphlet war between himself and Zachary Macaulay, the principal pamphleteer for the abolitionists. Marryat's writings turned the focus away from the West Indies and towards the Institution and Sierra Leone, using it, as David Lambert has described, as the location of 'displaced debates about Caribbean slavery.'<sup>4</sup> This chapter explores how the West India Committee reacted to the proposed Registry Act, and how it engaged not only in traditional lobbying methods to prevent the legislation, but also relied on what was at the time an unconventional discourse beyond the parliamentary sphere into the public domain.

### **The origins of Sierra Leone: an overview<sup>5</sup>**

In 1786, the naturalist Henry Smeathman's plan for a settlement on the West African coast advocated it would be free from the slave trade and encourage free labour.<sup>6</sup> Granville Sharp and the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor were attracted to the plan on the basis of their concern with the plight of London's black inhabitants, a diverse group of seamen,

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<sup>4</sup> David Lambert, 'Sierra Leone in the War of Representation over Slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 64 (2007), p.108

<sup>5</sup> Studies on Sierra Leone include Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (London: Faber, 1969), and James W. S. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press 1992). For studies on Sierra Leone and antislavery see Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Houndmills; Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> For a study on Smeathman's involvement in the establishment of the colony see Starr Douglas, 'Natural History, Improvement and Colonisation: Henry Smeathman and Sierra Leone in the Late Eighteenth Century,' (PhD thesis, University of London, 2004)

refugee loyalists from America, former servants and runaway enslaved workers.<sup>7</sup> Securing funding from the Treasury to finance the settlement, Sharp and the Committee sent 400 settlers to Sierra Leone, arriving in May 1787. Naming the settlement the 'Province of Freedom,' 'holding any kind of property in the persons of men as slaves and from selling either man woman or child' was forbidden.<sup>8</sup> The first settlement failed as a consequence of disease and local hostilities.<sup>9</sup>

In 1791 the Clapham Sect, an influential group of social reformers and abolitionists, revived the idea and incorporated the Sierra Leone Company. They sought to undermine the slave trade by developing a legitimate commerce in agricultural produce in the settlement. In an effort to attract investors, the Company's report boasted of an abundance of tropical products to rival and compete with the West Indies.<sup>10</sup> The Company competed with slave traders on the African coast not only to acquire legitimate produce, but, as Suzanne Schwarz has argued, 'to win hearts and minds and change the outlook of indigenous and European traders resident upon the coast towards the transatlantic slave system.'<sup>11</sup> Thus Sierra Leone became a symbol of abolition, through its establishment of 'legitimate' commercial objectives. In 1807 the Company petitioned for its transfer to the Crown, and Zachary Macaulay and Henry Thornton, chairman of the directors of the Company, worked hard to ensure that the colony maintained its abolitionist principles.<sup>12</sup> In the aftermath of abolition, Sierra Leone became the testing ground for the suppression of the slave trade in Africa. A Court of Vice Admiralty

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of founding of the first Sierra Leone Settlement and the Black Poor's involvement in the expedition, see Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London's Blacks and the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), chapters 1 and 2

<sup>8</sup> Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, composed from his own manuscripts and other authentic documents in the possession of his family, and of the African Institution* (London, 1820) p.265

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, pp.20-25

<sup>10</sup> *Substance of the Report of the Court of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company to the General Court, held at London, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1791* (London, 1791), pp.26-27

<sup>11</sup> Suzanne Schwartz, 'Commerce, Civilisation and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company,' in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Tony Tibbles ed. *Liverpool and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007) p.253

<sup>12</sup> Michael J. Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition: Government, Saints and the 'African Question', c.1780-1820', *English Historical Review*, 112: 446 (1997), p.331

was established that year for the adjudication of slave ships captured as prizes, and the authorities became responsible for the resettlement of the 'liberated' Africans, many of whom who settled in the capital, Freetown.<sup>13</sup> The colony therefore retained its abolitionist ideals, and its transition from private to state control exemplified Britain's moral authority and its representation as a 'beacon of freedom' in its campaign to suppress the slave trade.<sup>14</sup>

That the abolitionists were involved in the development and management of the colony was enough reason for proslavery commentators to condemn it. Accusations of self-interest and hypocrisy on their part dated back to the 1790s when the directors of the Sierra Leone Company petitioned Parliament for a monopoly of trade with the colony and a crown grant of land.<sup>15</sup> The colony's creation was seen as a step towards abolishing the slave trade and to undermine the West Indian colonies and its monopoly by cultivating sugar with free labour. To counter this, The West India Committee argued powerfully against its establishment, citing legal precedence and appealing to the public via pamphlets.

### **The African Institution**

The African Institution's objective was to repair the wrongs that Africa had suffered through its encounters with Britain, and to implement 'such measures as are best calculated to promote Africa's civilisation and happiness.'<sup>16</sup> These measures included the dissemination of useful knowledge across Africa to encourage Africans to virtuous industry through religious conversion and formal British education. It also planned to facilitate an eventual end to slavery through the encouragement of civilisation, and cultural exchange between Europeans

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Wills, 'The Royal Navy and the suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade, c.1807-1867: Antislavery, empire and identity,' (PhD thesis, University of Hull 2012), p.16

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.16; Allen M. Howard, 'Nineteenth Century Coastal Slave Trading and the British Abolition Campaign in Sierra Leone', *Slavery and Abolition*, 27:1 (2006), p. 23

<sup>15</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists* pp. 236-241

<sup>16</sup> *Report of the Committee of the African Institution, Read to the General Meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1807* (London, 1807) p.1 For a study of the African Institution see Wayne Ackerson, *The African Institution (1807-1827) and the Antislavery Movement in Great Britain* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005). Also see J. R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013), Chapters 7 and 8



and Africans. From the Institution's point of view, the slave trade had disturbed and corrupted Africa. However, their natural condition was not ideal; under the right circumstances (European direction) they could develop into normal (European-type) people. Institution members were also involved in contributing to British diplomatic efforts to guarantee the abolition of the French slave trade by providing representatives at the Congress of Vienna. Wilberforce had written to the Prime Minister Lord Liverpool, stating that the return of any slave colonies to France should not be without a condition of abolition.<sup>17</sup> The Institution proudly reported that the efforts of Castlereagh (Foreign Secretary) and the Duke of Wellington at that conference had 'in no small degree been assisted by communications from members of [the] board.'<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the Institution continued to build on its reputation as the principal defenders of Africa and its inhabitants.

### **The Thorpe Controversy**

Robert Thorpe's criticisms of the African Institution threatened to undermine that influence and reputation. A contemporary of the Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh, (the two men had both been law students at Trinity College, Dublin), Thorpe had been appointed as Chief Justice of the Court of Vice Admiralty in Sierra Leone in 1808. During his appointment he had been preoccupied with the legal complications that characterised his role as Chief Justice. He was also horrified with prevalence of slave trading taking place.<sup>19</sup> While on leave in

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, Vol. 4, p.172

<sup>18</sup> *Special Report of the African Institution made at the Annual General Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1815, respecting the Allegations contained in a pamphlet entitled 'A Letter to William Wilberforce' by Robert Thorpe*, (London 1815) p.126

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion of Robert Thorpe's enforcement of the 1807 Abolition Act in Sierra Leone and how he managed the legal complexities he encountered, see Tara Helfman, 'The Court of Vice Admiralty at Sierra Leone and the Abolition of the African Slave Trade', *Yale Law Journal*, 115: 5 (2006), pp. 1122-1156. The African Institution had been accused of sanctioning slave trading in the colony in 1809. Thomas Perronet Thompson, the first Crown appointed governor, had clashed with the Institution over apprenticeship, which he regarded as slavery in another name. See Michael J. Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition: Government, Saints and the 'African Question', c.1780-1820', *English Historical Review*, 112: 446 (1997), pp. 319-357; Hull History Centre, DTH/1/102: Thomas Perronet Thompson, 'A Narrative of the facts connected with the colony of Sierra Leone, with observations on the propriety of enforcing the Acts for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in that

England in December 1813, Thorpe informed the African Institution of his allegations of abuses in the colony. A committee investigated his claims and dismissed them as false and without basis. Angered by what he perceived as their indifference, Thorpe publicised his allegations in a pamphlet entitled *A Letter to William Wilberforce*, (1815) which was also a fierce attack on the operations and character of the Sierra Leone Company and the African Institution membership. These allegations were informed by Thomas Perronet Thompson, the first Crown-appointed governor's observations during his tenure as governor of Sierra Leone and on Thorpe's efforts as judge to suppress the illegal slave trade. Thorpe echoed Thompson's charge that apprenticeship was slavery, and that the Company employees were complicit:

Here is a permanent sedentary slavery for life, under the name of apprenticeship established this liberating Act of our legislature and the seat of this new slavery is Freetown, exalted as the freest spot on earth, to enlighten benighted Africa; and displayed to the world as the finest example of British liberty and British philanthropy!<sup>20</sup>

His pamphlet undermined representations of Sierra Leone as a progressive and successful social experiment expressed in the Institution's Annual Reports, which he described as delusive and false. During his time in the colony, Thorpe denied that he had ever seen the cultivation of hemp, rope, cotton, silk or sugar, as claimed in the Annual Reports.<sup>21</sup> Thorpe criticised what he called the 'wilful misconstruction' of the 1811 Slave Felony Act. In

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colony and the Impolicy of continuing the purchasing of Negroes for the purpose of introducing the cultivation of tropical produce into the colony of Sierra Leone and other settlements upon the coast of Africa...addressed to the friends of the abolition of the slave trade and to the West Indian planters' (not dated, not published, pages not numbered)

<sup>20</sup> Robert Thorpe Esq, L.L.D, *A Letter to William Wilberforce, Vice President of the African Institution, containing Remarks on the Reports of the Sierra Leone Company and the African Institution: with hints respecting the means by which a universal abolition of the slave trade might be carried into effect* (F, C and J Rivington, 1815)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.11

principle, this Act made the removal, or assisting in the removal, transportation or shipment of enslaved Africans by British subjects or in British territories a felony, punishable by up to fourteen years transportation, or three to five years hard labour.<sup>22</sup> He was compelled to apply this law to foreign slave traders who were operating outside of British jurisdiction. The cases of Samuel Samo and Charles Tuft were given as an example of what Emily Haslam calls ‘the allegedly oppressive exercise of jurisdiction against slave traders by the authorities in Sierra Leone.’<sup>23</sup> The colony, according to Thorpe was a legal, social and political disaster as a consequence of the Institution’s incompetency. Thorpe was questioning the organisation’s ability to improve the situation of Africa.

The content of this pamphlet was critical of the abolitionist project in Africa, and similar to those expressed by proslavery commentators in the 1790s. These criticisms were potentially damaging for the African Institution. It had pledged to improve the social conditions in Africa once the slave trade was banned, which would be in keeping with the British moral framework. The proslavery lobby, who viewed abolition as endangering the concept of private property and damaging significant parts of the British economy, wondered whether the moral results were worth the loss. In the parliamentary slave trade debates in 1791 Sir William Young had expressed this concern succinctly:

The probable attainments on the side of philanthropy and moral obligation ought to be sifted out since the sacrifice proposed was nothing less than a considerable portion of British Commerce and an ultimate surrender of the British colonies.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ‘An Act for rendering more effectual an Act made in the Forty Seventh Year of His Majesty’s reign, entitled An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade 1811’ (51 Geo III c.23)

<sup>23</sup> Emily Haslam, ‘Redemption, Colonialism and International Criminal Law: The Nineteenth Century Slave Trading Trials of Samo and Peters’, in Diane Kirby (ed.), *Past Laws, Present Histories* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2012), p.14

<sup>24</sup> Sir William Young, quoted in *The Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, April 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 1791* (London, 1792) p. 67

Thorpe's pamphlet made the Institution more vulnerable to criticisms by its opponents, by claiming it had failed to make these moral results tangible. Reactions to the pamphlet included questions about the integrity of its membership, about what they knew or did not know about Sierra Leone:

If the African Institution has been so egregiously duped or so criminally inattentive to the duties they undertook to fulfil as not to enquire into the practices of their agents and that these things are repressed, it is in vain that we cry out against the avarice of other nations, and in vain that we profess ourselves to be zealous in this great work of humanity.<sup>25</sup>

Some commentators felt vindicated by the revelations. An anonymous contributor, writing in *Cobbetts Weekly Register*, claimed he had tried 'draw to the attention of the public of the proceedings of the Sierra Leone Company' several years earlier. He took delight in being vindicated:

I endeavoured, in vain, to make the public perceive that the whole thing was a deception, originating in folly or in a desire to gain popularity – I now have a pamphlet by Mr Thorpe, which proves that my opinion of this thing was perfectly correct.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of the Thorpe affair was that it was the latest round in the war of representation over slavery, albeit in a different location. Thorpe was not associated with the proslavery lobby and his criticisms were not intended to support their discourse on slavery. The dispute between Thorpe and the African Institution was based on who knew the 'truth' about slavery in the colony, and whether it was correct to represent it as a slave free space. The African Institution had staked its reputation on Sierra Leone being represented in this

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<sup>25</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1815

<sup>26</sup> *Cobbetts Weekly Political Register*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1815

way. That it was being questioned by a supporter of abolition – which is how Thorpe described himself – was used to the West India Committee's advantage.

On 13 June 1815, at the end of the parliamentary session, Wilberforce informed the House of Commons that he intended to introduce a bill 'for better preventing the illegal importation of slaves into the British colonies', which was to be modelled on the 1812 Trinidad Order in Council. In each colony a registry was to be established and all slave owners were to deliver to an appointed registrar a list of their enslaved workers, which was to be renewed every three years.<sup>27</sup> A General Registry of Colonial Slaves was to be established in London, where all copies of the registries would be housed.

### **The West India Committee mobilise**

In late 1814, the Standing Committee appointed a managing committee with a budget of £500 'to repel unjust and injurious attacks as may appear in the Daily Papers or otherwise upon the character of the West Indian planters and merchants, and to awaken the public attention to the interests and value of the West Indian possessions.'<sup>28</sup> The Committee were aware that negative representations of the West Indian colonists and their apparent refusal to institute ameliorative reforms were having an impact on public opinion and subsequently on Parliament. It knew it was up against the Institution's determination to arouse popular interest and disapproval in slavery by reporting on the worst excesses of a corrupt and brutal group. The cases of Edward Huggins and Arthur Hodge, two planters who were indicted for excessive punishment and murder respectively, presented, as Christer Petley has argued, planters as persons who fell firmly outside what was considered to be normal British

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<sup>27</sup> Robert L. Schuyler, 'The Constitutional Claims of the British West Indies', *Political Science Quarterly* 40:1 (1925), p.10

<sup>28</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1814

behaviour.<sup>29</sup> In March 1812 a central slave registry had been introduced as an experiment in Trinidad as a way to prevent the illegal smuggling of enslaved Africans into that island through an Order in Council.<sup>30</sup> Ownership of an enslaved person depended on his or her being registered; deaths, casualties, runaways and mutilations also had to be registered, consequently preventing abuses and encouraging planters to treat their enslaved workers less harshly.

For the West India Committee, the Eighth Report of the African Institution was the most alarming, as it announced its intention to extend the policy to the other West Indian colonies.<sup>31</sup> Remarking on the registration of slaves being carried into effect in Trinidad, the Institution claimed to have in its possession a ‘number of facts [that] will prove the necessity and policy of adopting a register of slaves in all our colonies’, and reported William Smith’s motion in Parliament for copies of all the laws currently in force in the West Indies: ‘documents [that] will tend to the elucidation of West Indian policy and assist in its improvement.’<sup>32</sup> What the African Institution was attempting to do was to bring the West India colonies in line with acceptable British moral behaviour.

The potential value of Thorpe’s pamphlet was brought to the attention of the managing committee at the end of March 1815. Joseph Marryat reported that a review of the pamphlet would appear in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Noting that the pamphlet ‘appears to be calculated to promote the objects of the committee’, the Committee secretary was instructed to purchase

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<sup>29</sup> Christer Petley, ‘Gluttony, excess and the fall of the planter class in the Caribbean,’ *Atlantic Studies*, 9:1 (2012), p. 86 For the Edward Huggins case see *The Case of the King v. Edward Huggins Sen. Esq., Fifth Report of the Directors of the African Institution, read at the Annual General Meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1811; to which is added an appendix and list of subscribers* (London: Hatchard, 1811) pp. 53-86; for the Arthur Hodge case see *Sixth Report of the Directors of the African Institution, read at the Annual General Meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1812; to which is added an appendix and list of subscribers* (London: Hatchard, 1812). pp. 59-66. Also see Angel Smith, ‘An Anatomy of a slave society on transition: The Virgin Islands, 1807-1864,’ (PhD thesis, University of Hull 2011), pp. 28-32

<sup>30</sup> Trinidad had been ceded to the British in 1797 and retained in the treaty of Amiens in 1802. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (Kingston, Jamaica; London: Heinemann 1981)

<sup>31</sup> *Eighth Report of the Directors of the African Institution, read at the Annual General Meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1814* (London: Ellerton and Henderson 1814), p.12

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p.12

copies 'and distribute it to circulating libraries and reading societies to the utmost extent possible without it appearing to be a distinct proceeding of the West India Body.'<sup>33</sup> The committee's dissemination of Thorpe's pamphlet and its review was a strategy that characterised West Indian lobbying. The *Anti-Jacobin Review*, a conservative periodical with its origins in the backlash against the ideals of the French Revolution, was by 1815 less passionate in its criticisms, but still wary of perceived dangerous ideas.<sup>34</sup> This publication therefore supported what David Lambert terms the West Indian lobbying networks, as 'counter-revolutionary,' in that it was in opposition to the radical reformist and abolitionist politics.<sup>35</sup> Its criticisms of Wilberforce and other members of the African Institution deflected attention away from criticisms of West Indian character, forcing them to explain their actions, giving the planter some respite.

In June 1815 the West India Committee responded to the news of the motion to establish slave registrations with a three-stage campaign. First, there was parliamentary condemnation of the motion. West Indian MPs denied categorically that clandestine importations were taking place in the West Indies. They contended that the bill was a threat to the colonists' private property, and it would operate as yet another tax on that property. They moved for a committee of enquiry to investigate the claims of illegal importation, a delaying tactic typically used by the West Indian MPs. They darkly reminded the house of the 'opinions that had been delivered on the subject of colonial rights during the American war.'<sup>36</sup> Second, the Standing Committee bought copies of *Reasons for a registry of slaves* and disseminated them among the membership, and copies were sent to the colonies via the agents. The Standing Committee wanted the colonists to show the government that the attacks on their characters

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Iain McCalman, John Mee, Gillian Russell (eds.), *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.435

<sup>35</sup> David Lambert, 'The Counter-revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian petitions and proslavery networks,' *Social and Cultural Geography* 6:3 (2004), p. 408

<sup>36</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 31, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1815, cols. 775-785

were unfair and without basis. Five resolutions were drafted, authorised and sent to the colonies instructing the colonists to show their commitment and solidarity with the mother country. They recommended to the assemblies that if there was an illegal trade taking place they should end it. Further, they urged the assemblies to prove that the laws currently in place were sufficient to protect the enslaved population. They advised the assemblies to send declarations to the Colonial Department

of their readiness to give the fullest effect within the colonies to the laws which have been passed for the abolition of the slave trade and of their disposition also to adopt any legal means for preventing an illicit traffic of slaves within the islands or detecting the same if in any instance it be shown to exist.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to these declarations, they recommended that the assemblies send strongly worded petitions against the bill that expressed ‘the sentiments of the resident colonists against interference by Acts of the British Legislature on the internal regulations of the colonies.’<sup>38</sup> To further promote opposition to the bill, the resolutions were forwarded to the West India associations in the outports.<sup>39</sup> The third stage of the campaign was public engagement. Prior to the new session of parliament in February 1816 the Standing Committee appointed a subcommittee to ‘draft a set of resolutions to be submitted to the public.’ The resolutions were filled with the rhetoric of doom and referred heavily to colonial autonomy. They asserted that the colonies were capable of investigating claims of illegal importation without metropolitan assistance; they were capable of instituting their own laws preventing the practice, if indeed the practice was taking place and there was no foundation to the allegations that it was. The bill, it was asserted, was nothing more than the project of

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<sup>37</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1815

<sup>38</sup> ICS West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1815

<sup>39</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1815



revolutionaries and fanatics, and if implemented would lead the colonies down the bloody path of St Domingue.<sup>40</sup>

### **Joseph Marryat: Acting on behalf of the West Indians**

The West India Committee's public engagement strategy against registration was represented in part by the activities of Joseph Marryat. He was an outspoken and influential member of the mercantile elite, defending the interests of the West Indies in trade, maritime law and insurance.<sup>41</sup> A successful merchant and colonial agent for Trinidad (1807-1815) and later Grenada (1815-1824), Marryat entered Parliament primarily to represent the needs of his colonial constituents, serving as MP for Horsham (1808-1812) and Sandwich (1812-1824). In Parliament he spoke frequently on aspects of slavery and the slave trade, petitioning the government on behalf of Trinidad against the abolition of the slave trade in February 1807. He was also the parliamentary spokesman for Lloyd's, of which he was chairman, and campaigned successfully to maintain their monopoly of marine insurance against rival companies.<sup>42</sup> After he died in his office in January 1824, his obituary acknowledged his long service to both the West Indies and Lloyd's, writing that 'the most lasting monument of his usefulness would be perhaps be felt at Lloyd's...and equally with the West India proprietors, [who] will ever owe to him the deepest obligations.'<sup>43</sup>

Marryat was an important figure in the West Indian defence of slavery in Parliament and through his association with the West India Committee. From his admission to the Standing Committee in 1806 until his death in 1824, he was one of its most frequently attending

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<sup>40</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M9915/2), Standing Committee Minutes 19<sup>th</sup> January 1816

<sup>41</sup> 'Joseph Marryat,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/marryat-joseph-1757-1824> Accessed 16th May 2014

<sup>42</sup> History of Parliament Online [www.historyofparliament.org](http://www.historyofparliament.org) Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013; see *The substance of a speech delivered by Joseph Marryat Esq. in the House of Commons...upon Mr Manning's motion for the appointment for a select committee to consider the act of the 6<sup>th</sup> of George the First and of our present means of effecting Marine insurances* (London, 1810)

<sup>43</sup> *Gentlemen's Magazine*, vol. 94 (1824), p.374

members, who the Standing Committee regularly appointed to represent the interests of the planters and merchants before the Treasury, Board of Trade and the Colonial Department. The West India Committee minutes provide a detailed account of Marryat's contribution to its lobbying activities, showing that he was a very active member of the Standing Committee.<sup>44</sup> His expertise in West India commerce, parliamentary politics and maritime insurance was highly valued. Marryat was a self-made man who had travelled to Grenada in 1782 and eventually became a successful merchant and ship owner with interests in Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad, Martinique Guadeloupe and North America. When he died, his wealth was estimated at 'nearly half million sterling.'<sup>45</sup>

Marryat used his writings to defend West Indian interests, in particular to demonstrate how strongly the sugar economy was integrated with the domestic economy, that it was the government's duty to provide assistance to the West Indies in times of crisis. In his pamphlet *Concessions to America the Bane of Britain*, for example, he identified the cause of the glut of West Indian sugar on the influx of sugars from the newly conquered colonies into the British markets, and blamed neutral shipping for putting planters at a disadvantage. During the war France was moving its colonial produce via American neutral ships to the different continental markets at a rate of freight and insurance that the British West Indian planter could not compete with. Britain was locked out of access to the continental markets by the Berlin Decree of 1806, subsequently French produce could move freely, while British West Indian produce became saturated in the home market.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Marryat is calculated to have attended 67 meetings between 1807 and 1824

<sup>45</sup> *Bells Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1824; TNA, PROB/11/1681/288; 'Will of Joseph Marryat', February 1824.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Marryat, *Concessions to America the Bane of Britain, or the cause of the present distressed situation of the British Colonial and Shipping Interests and the proper remedy suggested* (W.J. and J. Richardson, 1807), pp. 2, 5, 6, 8

The commercial restrictions between the United States and the West Indies put planters at a further disadvantage. They were forced to pay inflated prices for supplies and unable to sell their rum because brandy transported on neutral ships was cheaper.<sup>47</sup>

Marryat gave evidence to the committees investigating the commercial state of the West Indies and on the distillation of sugar and molasses, asserting the points made in his pamphlets.<sup>48</sup> He was a member of the deputations sent by the Standing Committee to lobby ministers to prevent French colonial produce entering the continental markets and was at the centre of the Standing Committee's strategic meetings.<sup>49</sup> As a Member of Parliament he also argued for the exclusion of sugar from conquered colonies.<sup>50</sup> Joseph Marryat and the West India Committee's shared views on the West Indies demonstrate that his strong outspoken manner was an important asset to the Committee. Marryat's commitment to West Indian affairs through a series of mediums suggests that any defence that he conducted would have the approval and support of the Committee.

### **An assault on abolitionist projects**

Marryat's pamphlet *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* was one of several published by members of the West India Committee to strengthen opposition against slave registration.<sup>51</sup> The central theme of these pamphlets was the constitutionality of interfering

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>48</sup> Parliamentary Papers, *Report from the Committee on the Commercial State of the West India Colonies* (65) (14<sup>th</sup> April, 1806), pp. 18-22; *Report from the Committee on the Distillation of Sugar and Molasses* (83) (13<sup>th</sup> April 1808) pp. 251,261

<sup>49</sup> I have calculated that Marryat attended 25 meetings on this issue

<sup>50</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 14. 15<sup>th</sup> May 1809, col. 581

<sup>51</sup> George Chalmers, *Proofs and Demonstrations of how much the projected registry of colonial negroes is unfounded and uncalled for; comprehending the reports and resolves of the Bahamas Assembly on the principle and detail of the proposed registry* (1816); Gibbes Walker Jordan, *An examination of the principles of the Slave Registry Bill and the means of emancipation proposed by the authors of the bill* (1816); Gilbert Mathison, *A short review of the reports of the African Institution, and of the controversy with Dr Thorpe, with some reasons against the registry of slaves in the British colonies* (1816); George Hibbert, *Brief remarks on the Slave Registration Bill and upon a report of the African Institution recommending the measure* (1816)

with the internal regulation of the colonies. It was the focus on Sierra Leone that differentiated Marryat's argument from these and with which this chapter is interested. This strategy to disparage abolitionist special projects would be extended in the 1820s by James MacQueen, a Grenadian planter and editor of the *Glasgow Courier*.<sup>52</sup> David Lambert explores how MacQueen, an anti-abolitionist writer in the 1820s and 30s focused on Sierra Leone as a site of the war of representation over slavery, rather than focusing on the enslaved and slave owners in the West Indies. He argues that MacQueen, a self-taught geographical expert on Africa, used his knowledge to condemn Sierra Leone in terms of its financial cost to Britain, moral character, healthiness and its location in the period when Britain was taking on a greater role in West Africa.<sup>53</sup> In the 1820s the West India Committee commissioned MacQueen to publish a series of pamphlets to refute abolitionist discourse on slave amelioration and antislavery in general.<sup>54</sup>

It is not explicitly stated in the Standing Committee minutes that Marryat was commissioned by the West India Committee to write his pamphlet. However, three observations support the suggestion that the West India Committee acted as an outlet for Marryat's views. As mentioned earlier, Marryat's was one of several pamphlets written by Committee members against the bill. It was normal practice for the Committee to publish pamphlets, often authored by its members that were favourable to their position.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, Marryat and George Hibbert's works were singled out by the Standing Committee for purchase and

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<sup>52</sup> David Lambert, 'Sierra Leone in the War of Representation over Slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 64 (2007), pp.103-132

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.103. Also see David Lambert, *Mastering the Niger: James MacQueen's African Geography and the struggle over Atlantic Slavery* (University of Chicago Press, 2013)

<sup>54</sup> David Lambert, The 'Glasgow King of Billingsgate': James MacQueen and an Atlantic Proslavery Network, *Slavery and Abolition*, 29:3 (2008), pp. 397, 399

<sup>55</sup> Pamphlets authored by Standing Committee members during the abolition campaign include Bryan Edwards, *A Speech Delivered at a Free Conference between the Honourable the Council and Assembly of Jamaica held 19<sup>th</sup> November 1789 on the Subject of Mr Wilberforce's propositions in the House of Commons concerning the Slave Trade* (1789); Sir Philip Gibbes, *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes* (reprinted 1797); Gilbert Francklyn, *Observations occasioned by the attempts made in England to effect the Abolition of the Slave Trade, shewing the manner in which Negroes are treated in the British Colonies* (1789); William Knox, *A Letter from W.K. Esq. to W. Wilberforce Esq.* (1790)

dissemination.<sup>56</sup> The pamphlets seemed to complement each other in terms of tone; Hibbert's was measured in its reasoning, while Marryat used much more combative language which reflected the outrage many planters felt.<sup>57</sup> Thirdly, the Standing Committee had successfully prevented the passing of the African Goods Bill, which aimed to permit the importation of rum, cocoa, coffee and cotton (not sugar) from Africa on payment of the same duties as West Indian produce. The bill had successfully passed the bill stage in the Commons and was about to be passed into law by the Lords.<sup>58</sup> Initially, the Standing Committee had ignored the bill, believing that dyewood, gum, beeswax, palm oil and ivory were the only goods exported. On reading the bill in full they immediately petitioned the Lords and requested to be heard by their counsel at the bar and were able to have the bill thrown out.<sup>59</sup> The Standing Committee was outraged at the attempt to encroach upon its monopoly. Marryat made specific reference to a significant objection that the West India Committee had to Sierra Leone: the fear that the colony would be recognised on an equal footing and thus be in competition with the West Indies.<sup>60</sup> In 1791 it had protested against Sierra Leone's establishment on the grounds that its produce would compete with West Indian goods. Its members had argued that no one group could have a monopoly of trade with Sierra Leone because it would be an infringement of the law, and went as far as petitioning the prime minister to prohibit its settlement.<sup>61</sup> They even

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<sup>56</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1816

<sup>57</sup> Katie Donington provides a fine analysis of George Hibbert's pamphlets regarding slave registration. See 'The Benevolent Merchant? George Hibbert (1757-1837) and the representation of West Indian mercantile identity,' (PhD thesis, University College London 2013), Chapter 4

<sup>58</sup> See *Journal of the House of Commons*, LXX, pp. 302, 309, 315, 334, 340, 344, 348, 352; *Lords Journal*, L pp. 289, 296, 313, 321, 333

<sup>59</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1815.

<sup>60</sup> See Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labour versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press 2002) Chapter 6

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Reasons against giving a territorial grant to a company of merchants to colonise and cultivate the peninsula of Sierra Leone on the coast of Africa* (London, 1791), p.9; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), General Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> May 1791

lobbied ministers to insert a clause in the Sierra Leone Bill to prohibit the cultivation of sugar.<sup>62</sup>

Marryat claimed that the African Goods Bill was a deception on the part of those with investments in Sierra Leone, who wanted to see the colony on the same footing as the West Indies. He alleged that the customs officials were seizing ships for alleged infractions of the Navigation Laws, claiming that they were foreign vessels and therefore not permitted to trade with British colonies. Fearing that they would have to return the goods they had kept as prizes, the officials needed to prove that Sierra Leone was recognised as a British colony within the meaning of the Navigation Laws.<sup>63</sup> The African Goods Bill would have provided the colony with this recognition, exempting them from returning seized goods. The West India Committee was angered by the attempt to introduce this bill, which they regarded it as an underhanded attempt on the West Indian monopoly, and agreed with the interpretation advanced by Marryat.<sup>64</sup>

Marryat's critique of the African Institution was presented as of national interest to the public. The Thorpe affair had provided the public with a greater understanding of its operations bringing 'to light the views and objects of the leading members of that society.' Marryat cast doubt on the credibility of the African Institution's position, and challenged what he perceived as their false representations of Sierra Leone and the 'success' of abolition. His reading of the claims and counterclaims in the pamphlet war of 1815 led him to make a number of assertions about the African Institution and abolition: that the abolitionists in their organisational capacity were guilty of suppressing important facts about Sierra Leone from

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<sup>62</sup> *The Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1791. Stephen J Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*; Chapter 5 pays particular attention to the West India Committee's opposition to the Sierra Leone Company, in and out of Parliament

<sup>63</sup> Joseph Marryat, *Thoughts on the abolition of the Slave Trade, and the civilisation of Africa, with remarks on the African Institution and an examination of the Report of the Committee recommending a general registry of slaves in the British West India Islands* (London, 1816) pp. 63-70. I have not been able to ascertain who introduced this bill into Parliament

<sup>64</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 8<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1815

the public and promulgating false truths; that the financial cost to the public purse was considerable, and a waste; that corruption and misrule were rife in Sierra Leone; and that the Institution's Annual Reports were filled with inconsistencies. Marryat constructed this negative representation of the abolitionists in an attempt to direct attention away from West Indian slavery, and to represent the planter as an unfairly maligned figure, a special target of the abolitionists.

The recent revelations of the African Institution's conduct required that its credibility had to be questioned. Could an organisation that had been proved to be incompetent, hypocritical and ignorant as to the true state of its own colonial projects be qualified to counsel on the future of the West Indian colonies, to advise government to legislate for them in contravention of its constitutional claims? Marryat's approach was to use a combination of parliamentary reports, first-hand accounts of Sierra Leone, and the Institution's reports to condemn the colony's failure. He extensively referenced these sources in his text to substantiate his claims, and carefully selected his quotes to give it legitimacy. Marryat's intention was to damage the image that the African Institution had constructed for itself: religious, moral, disinterested advocates for Africa and Africans. In the same way that the African Institution had characterised the planter as brutal tyrants, Marryat intended to characterise the abolitionists as at best, incompetent and ignorant of what was occurring in Sierra Leone, and at worst, hypocritical and dishonest.

One of the principal tactics he engaged was to use their own correspondence against them. He reproduced the letters made public by Zachary Macaulay in a pamphlet he wrote to defend his character against Thorpe's attacks to the Duke of Gloucester as proof that the true effects of abolition had been deliberately suppressed by the abolitionists. Charles Ludlam, then governor of Sierra Leone had written to Macaulay in April 1807, less than a month after the Abolition Act was passed in Parliament, expressing his doubts over the efficacy of the

Abolition Act, and admitted that many supporters of abolition would be disappointed if they knew that little benefit would arise from it.<sup>65</sup>

Ludlam had written that

The abolition itself will not prevent the Africans from still remaining a savage and uncivilised people. To abolish the slave trade is not to abolish the violent passions which now vent in that particular direction...the abolitionists leave a contrary impression...they speak of the darkness in which we have kept Africa, and the happiness which she may now look forward to, as if it were an unquestionable fact that Africa would have been civilised had it not been for the slave trade...<sup>66</sup>

For Marryat, here was the proof from their own pens that there were widely differing private views on Sierra Leone and abolition that were in contradiction with the public ones. These letters were important, argued Marryat, because they expressed ‘the deliberate sentiments of the man who, perhaps of all others...had the best means of forming a sound judgement on the effects of Abolition.’<sup>67</sup> The suppression of such an important letter, argued Marryat, was proof that the abolitionists had misled the public. Had they known the truth, it ‘would have abated much of the enthusiasm with which the public mind had been filled in support of that cause and much of the popularity that had been lavished upon its leaders and champions.’<sup>68</sup>

To strengthen his claims, Marryat showed that Ludlam’s predictions had been borne out by using the reports of the Sierra Leone Company, who had noted a decline in agriculture and the idleness of the ‘natives’ as a consequence of abolition.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the claims in the Ninth report of the African Institution, that the ‘liberated’ Africans had made positive

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<sup>65</sup> Ludlam to Macaulay, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1807, quoted in Joseph Marryat, *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, pp. 19-20

<sup>66</sup> *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, p.19

<sup>67</sup> *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* p.18

<sup>68</sup> *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, p.21

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, pp.54-56



progress was another lie, asserted Marryat. These same individuals, who had made such progress in the arts of social life, had joined with the neighbouring community in a conspiracy to murder all the white inhabitants of the settlement.<sup>70</sup> These reports confirmed, according to Marryat, that abolition had produced no positive outcomes, had not altered the ‘savage’ and ‘lazy’ character of the African.

That the slave trade had not diminished was a reality that the West India Committee was familiar with in terms of its challenges to West Indian sugar output. British abolition had turned the slave market over to their international competitors. David Beck Ryden noted that by the 1810s, Cuba was producing two thirds of Jamaica’s sugar output, and Brazil was producing twice as much sugar as Jamaica and two thirds of British output.<sup>71</sup> What positive effects, therefore, had resulted from British abolition? Marryat furthered his point by referring to the report of the Commissioners appointed to investigate the state of settlements and governments on the coast of Africa, which stated that 40,000 enslaved had been brought into Brazilian ports and 40,000 into Cuban ports from 1810 onwards. The evil had been aggravated, not diminished, argued Marryat.<sup>72</sup>

The argument that the slave trade would change hands rather than diminish had been a well-used practical objection to the abolition of the slave trade used by members of the West India Committee in the 1790s. Bryan Edwards, for example, had expressed grave doubts that British abolition alone would deter other European powers from slave trading on the African coast; Joseph Foster Barham had argued against the abolition of the slave trade in 1796 on the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>71</sup> Ryden, ‘Sugar, spirits and fodder’, p.56

<sup>72</sup> Marryat, *Thoughts on the Abolition of the slave trade*, pp. 27-29

same principle.<sup>73</sup> It was an argument that Marryat himself had employed on previous occasions, to express that the current legislation on the slave trade was ineffective.<sup>74</sup>

Criticism of the financial cost of Sierra Leone was another tactic often used by its detractors to discredit the settlement, and its eventual bankruptcy was quickly seized upon. On the debate over the Sierra Leone Company Bill in 1807, for example, John Dent, MP for Lancaster, had claimed that ‘Parliament should not pay for the fanciful notions of any set of men,’ insisting that the government grant of £109,000 be refunded. John Fuller, MP for Sussex and member of the Standing Committee, echoed this suggestion, stating that it was impossible for the Committee of Finance to overlook so flagrant a waste of public money.<sup>75</sup>

Turning away from the issue of government grants to international law, Marryat described the Institution as Christian zealots, who extended this fervour to influencing the government to seize Portuguese and Spanish vessels that operated outside of British jurisdiction. He blamed the African Institution for its ‘ignorant and muddy headed confusion’ in costing Britain £300,000 in compensation to Portugal for confiscating her ships. The Institution’s assumption ‘to themselves the exercise of official functions’ had cost Britain not only this sum of money, but had also cost them in trade.<sup>76</sup> Marryat believed that the contradictory statements made on the most serious charges against them were evidence of the Institution’s dishonesty. On one of the most serious allegations made, that of the selling of two shiploads of captured Africans by Governor Ludlam, Marryat pointed out the inconsistency of their responses to the allegation:

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<sup>73</sup> Bryan Edwards, *A History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London 1794), Book IV, Chapter IV, pp.179, 180-181

<sup>74</sup> See Marryat’s contributions in *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XVII, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1810, col. 676, Felony Slave Trade Bill debate

<sup>75</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. IX 29<sup>th</sup> July 1807, col. 1001-2; 1003

<sup>76</sup> Marryat, *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, p.33

The Report observes, ‘that there are solid objections to the transaction...although it is a gross and culpable misrepresentation to call it a sale of slaves’, and then admits to the propriety of applying this term to it by quoting a letter from Mr Macaulay to Governor Ludlam, in which he says, it tells ill, because it looks something like a sale.’<sup>77</sup>

That the group acting as the advocate for Africans was being charged with allowing slavery to take place in the colony, was the worst kind of hypocrisy. He accused them of claiming to rescue Africans from enslavement but cynically engaging in the same practices, but calling it by a different name. Quoting Thorpe, he remarked that, ‘Whenever Mr Macaulay and his friends go into Africa to purchase Negroes they *redeem or ransom natives*; but when other traders go for the same purpose *they buy slaves*.’<sup>78</sup>

He echoed Thorpe’s assertion that since the settlement was established little progress had been made in terms of education, morality and industry of the settlers. Marryat blamed the lack of progress on an absent directorate, managing a colony from a great distance:

Most of the members, so much engrossed by their various avocations...have little leisure to devote to the objects for which the society was formed and therefore are obliged to see with the eyes of others... [They have] no local knowledge of Africa nor the habits, manners, and character of its inhabitants, they are ill qualified to judge the proper line of conduct to be pursued towards them.<sup>79</sup>

Thorpe had criticised Zachary Macaulay and his multiple roles in the Company and in the Institution.<sup>80</sup> Macaulay was secretary of the Institution and was also a merchant who invested heavily in trade with the colony, acting as chief supplier of goods to the colony. This conflict

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.8

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.9; emphasis author’s own

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 15

<sup>80</sup> Robert Thorpe, *A Letter to William Wilberforce*, pp. 29-30

between his humanitarian work and his commercial interests had left him vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy and corruption.<sup>81</sup>

These accusations were used by Marryat and presented as evidence that the African Institution was guilty of corruption and of circumventing the law for its financial gain. It was its intention, he asserted, to apply the colonial system to Sierra Leone which he claimed would be financially beneficial to certain members of the Institution, what he called their 'grasps at power and profit.' He 'proves' these claims by citing the number of petitions to the Treasury complaining of vessels seized in Sierra Leone 'for alleged infractions of the Navigation laws' that benefitted gentlemen in the settlement who would share the goods seized.<sup>82</sup> The act of philanthropy, argued Marryat, was used as a cover for private gain. Further, the application of the Institution to manage government estates in Essequibo was a means to add to their commercial holdings rather than ameliorate the situation of the enslaved workers, and extending their operations into the West Indies.

Marryat used these inconsistencies and failures to claim that the African Institution and the Sierra Leone Company had failed to keep the promises they made to the public to elevate the status of Africans and Africa. Thorpe's attack had 'given a rude shock to their popularity.' To regain that popularity, 'some other magnificent project was necessary...to dazzle the minds of the vulgar and obliterate the remembrance of their past miscarriages. The magnificent project was slave registration, 'intended as a preparatory step to [the slaves'] ultimate emancipation'.<sup>83</sup>

If it was Marryat's intention to represent Sierra Leone as a philanthropic and financial disaster, and the African Institution membership as corrupt and duplicitous, then the African

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<sup>81</sup>Thorpe, *A Letter to William Wilberforce*, p.29; Iain Whyte, *Zachary Macaulay 1768-1838: the steadfast Scot in the British anti-slavery movement* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2011) , p.194

<sup>82</sup> Marryat, *Thoughts on the Abolition of the slave trade*, p. 70

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.89

Institution's rebuttal was to discredit Marryat's knowledge of Sierra Leone, and to highlight his lack of credibility in condemning the activities of the African Institution. The author of the rebuttal was Zachary Macaulay, the pamphlet's anonymous author. He characterised Marryat's claims as 'singularly inaccurate', and 'founded in error and misrepresentation.'<sup>84</sup> He noted that many of Marryat's so called facts were erroneous, implying that his assertions were not trustworthy. He accused Thorpe of being an agent of the West India Committee, describing him as their 'friend and witness'. Macaulay responded point by point to Marryat's claims; it is a detailed list of counter-facts. In aiming to represent the 'truth' about Sierra Leone, he points out his errors on fact and his method of omission.

To discredit Marryat's assertions, Macaulay claimed that since he was associated with the West Indies, it was impossible for him to argue objectively about slavery, because his interpretation of justice were distorted by that association.<sup>85</sup> His assertion that the apprentice system was forced servitude 'whether for a limited or unlimited period' was rejected by Macaulay. There was a huge difference he argued, between apprenticeship, which offered some basic rights, and chattel enslavement, which offered none, and the public could not be fooled into thinking otherwise:

This ingenious argument will hardly avail to convince the people of England that a person bound as an apprentice for seven years...protected by law from all undue exaction of labour on the part of his master, with the right of complaining to the magistrate, and of tendering his own evidence in support of that complaint, is to be

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<sup>84</sup> *An Exposure of some of the numerous Misstatements and Misrepresentations contained in a pamphlet commonly known as 'Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and the Civilisation of Africa, with remarks on the African Institution, and an examination of the report of their committee recommending a General Registry of slaves in the British West India islands'* (Ellerton and Henderson, 1816), p.2 [Hereafter 'An Exposure.'] Zachary Macaulay has been identified as the anonymous author of the pamphlet, which is discussed in Ackerson, *The African Institution*, p130, n.390

<sup>85</sup> *An Exposure*, p.3

regarded as placed on a footing with the slave in the West Indies, who is doomed to a bondage which does not even end with life, but is transmitted...to his descendants.<sup>86</sup>

Macaulay attacked Marryat on his method of omission and misrepresentation to negatively represent the African Institution. For example, he asserted that key passages from Ludlam's correspondence had been omitted to infer that it was his belief that abolition would have no positive effect in Africa. To prove this, he printed out the letter from Ludlam with the missing text in italics: 'The abolition of the slave trade will be of little benefit to Africa *unless plans for its improvement and civilisation are acted upon.*'<sup>87</sup> Rather than show that abolition was a failed project, Ludlam was concerned that abolition would fail if it was not enforced. Moreover, its contents were vulnerable to misconstruction. As a supporter of the slave trade, Marryat's criticisms were typical and invalid in view of the mass of support given to abolition and to the civilisation of Africa.

On the charge of the Institution's erroneous reading of the international treaties with Portugal, Marryat was again accused of misrepresentation. With reference to the £300,000 paid by England to Portugal for condemning their ships in the Court of Vice Admiralty, Macaulay stated that the money was paid not because of illegal seizures, but as part of the diplomatic negotiations of the Treaty of Commerce between the two countries in 1810.

Macaulay did not respond directly to the charge of slave trading except to say that it had been a 'much represented transaction', sufficiently accounted for in the Special Report, admitting only that Governor Ludlam was guilty only of not condemning as prizes the enslaved Africans as stipulated in Sections VII and VIII of the Abolition Act.<sup>88</sup> Macaulay's strategy was to draw attention to Marryat's West Indian connections to cast doubt on the accuracy of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-6

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>88</sup> Ships caught during war that had captured Africans on board were considered prizes and enlisted into the army or Navy; the bounty of forty pounds was placed on each man, thirty pounds on each woman and ten pounds on each child. 47 Geo 3 Sess 1 c.36 (Abolition Act)

his allegations. He reminded his readers that the proslavery lobby were responsible for postponing abolition by using these kinds of tactics, and were using them again to prevent reform.

Marryat was undaunted by the accusations of omissions and misrepresentations expressed in *An Exposure*. In fact, he published another pamphlet, in which he intensified his attack on the African Institution, and on Sierra Leone.<sup>89</sup> Where he had earlier criticised the colony for its cost, and for corruption, he now attacked it for being unhealthy.

The insalubrity of that settlement is so great, that according to accounts...brought home by Captain Grey, only fourteen or fifteen of the white troops landed there last spring were alive and doing duty, and between forty and fifty more lying in the hospital: the rest were all dead. The whole civil population of whites is said to have consisted of seventeen men and three women as under.<sup>90</sup>

Marryat then listed the names of military and civilians alleged to have died in Sierra Leone. His message was clear – look at this list of British men and women who have perished in this terrible colony. The image of Sierra Leone as a ‘white man’s grave’ had not yet emerged as a key objection to the colony, even though it had been recognised as ‘not a healthy place.’ The death rate for Europeans sent to the Province of Freedom during the 1780s had been 46 percent. In contrast, the Sierra Leone Company had lost 49 percent of its European staff.<sup>91</sup> Marryat’s referencing the mortality rate was the first time that mortality was used as an argument against the colony, and would become part of the broader debate on its healthiness.

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<sup>89</sup> Joseph Marryat, *More Thoughts, occasioned by two publications which the authors call, An Exposure of some of the numerous misstatements and misrepresentations contained in a pamphlet, commonly known by the name of Mr Marryat’s Pamphlet entitled Thoughts etc. and A Defence of the Bill for the Registration of Slaves* (London 1816)

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, p.38

<sup>91</sup> Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, Vol. 1 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 178

What is of particular interest in this pamphlet is a description of a dinner attended by subscribers of the African Institution and members and friends of the African and Asiatic Society. Marryat, who claimed that a gentleman present recounted the details of that evening to him, used the event to show that the Institution had an inverted sense of philanthropy, choosing to reserve it for ‘foreigners and savages’, rather than their fellow Englishmen.<sup>92</sup> The dinner’s guests included a number of ‘Africans and Asiatics’, street beggars and Lascars, that dined away from the other guests in another room, separated by a screen.<sup>93</sup> After dinner, toasts were drunk to the health of the king and the royal family, but, claimed Marryat, ‘*without rising from their seats*’.<sup>94</sup> He noted that James Stephen praised the King of Haiti, Christophe, describing him as ‘an ornament to the African name.’ A toast to his health was proposed, ‘but the waiter who repeated the toast from behind the chair of Mr Wilberforce, being apparently not conversant in the new black dynasty, gave, in a loud voice, King Henry the Eighth, which occasioned much laughter and confusion.’<sup>95</sup> The secretary of the Society called on Mr Paul, an African American minister to give a speech which was constantly interrupted by some ‘party coloured’ children (of African and European heritage) loudly ‘delivering their sentiments on the relative merits of the nuts, figs and oranges for dessert.’<sup>96</sup> As part of the entertainment, a black man with his white wife and their ‘party coloured child’ parade the room as proof of the happy result of that union of colours and races, which all true philanthropists are so anxious to promote.<sup>97</sup>

Marryat’s lurid account of this dinner expressed his contempt for the African Institution as short-sighted and meddling. It was a threat to the established order – could it be, asked

Marryat

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<sup>92</sup> Marryat. *More Thoughts*, p.96

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, pp.100, 106

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*. Marryat wrote this in italics to emphasise how he saw this behaviour as scandalous.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p.103

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105



That these Africans and Asiatics, who have seen and heard an assembly of white men, some of them distinguished characters of this country pay honours to the name of King Henry of Hayti...who have heard them express admiration of the superior eloquence and talents of the coloured races, will not, when they return to either the West or East Indies...endeavour to overthrow the established order of things and contend for that equality to which they are told they have such just pretensions?<sup>98</sup>

The description of this dinner inspired Marryat's son, the naval captain and novelist Frederick Marryat, to produce a satirical vision of the event entitled *The New Union Club*.<sup>99</sup> The sustained opposition to slave registration began to take effect. By 1817, the abolitionists realised that continuing to press for the legislation would not be to their advantage.

Wilberforce wrote to Macaulay that

It is very grievous to be harassed with a set of snarling calumniators...I am very sorry not to have written something in answer to Marryat. I have for some time been unwillingly yielding to a secret suggestion that it would be better perhaps to lie upon our oars in the Registry Bill, and West Indian cause...we should especially guard against appearing to have a world of our own and to have little sympathy with the sufferings of our countrymen...compared with our sensibility when a black skin is in question.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.114

<sup>99</sup> For a fine analysis of this engraving, see Temi Odumosu, 'Abolitionists, African Diplomats and the 'Black Joke' in George Cruikshank's *The New Union Club*', in Elizabeth McGrath and Jean Michel Massing eds, *The Slave in European Art: From Renaissance Trophy to Abolitionist Emblem* (London; Turin: Warburg Institute, 2012) pp. 333-35; Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual representations of slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 164-166

<sup>100</sup> *Life of William Wilberforce*, Vol. 4, p.307

Marryat's exertions on behalf of the West India lobby were recognised by the West India Committee, who voted to spend 1000 guineas on a piece of plate as an expression of their gratitude.<sup>101</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Joseph Marryat's pamphlets were a significant aspect of the West India Committee's campaign against slave registration. They represented a development in its tactics that were a departure from the traditional lobbying methods that the Committee usually engaged in. Marryat's polemic was not intended to proselytise; rather, his objective was to strengthen the resolve of the merchant and planter interest, to shore up opposition to any proposed legislation that impacted on the right of the colonies to govern themselves, or that would emancipate the enslaved population. The West India Committee was unwilling to accept any further legislation towards the West Indies; as Douglas Hamilton observes, 'abolition of the slave trade was the line in the sand beyond which they would not cross.'<sup>102</sup>

This chapter has given significant attention to Marryat's criticisms of antislavery because they reflected the sentiments of the West India interest, and were sanctioned by the West India Committee. They demonstrated a specific set of criticisms that would gain further traction as debates on emancipation became more prevalent in the 1820s. Marryat represented Sierra Leone as a financial and philanthropic failure to deflect attention from the West Indies and to focus attention on the actions of the African Institution, accusing its membership of corruption and incompetence. Robert Thorpe's 'exposé' of Sierra Leone's improprieties assisted Marryat in constructing a devastating critique of the African Institution, revealing the anxiety of the West Indians and their sensitivity to the assaults on their character that they

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<sup>101</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/2), Standing Committee Minutes, 8<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1818

<sup>102</sup>Douglas J. Hamilton, 'Defending the Colonies against Malicious Attacks of Philanthropy': Scottish Campaigns against the Abolitions of the Slave Trade and Slavery,' in Allan Macinnes and Douglas J. Hamilton ed. *Jacobitism Enlightenment and Empire, 1680-1820* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014) p.200

feared would instigate public condemnation and calls for greater metropolitan involvement in the colonies.

Marryat's overall strategy, on behalf of the West India Committee, was to halt the advancement of emancipation by casting doubt on those who intended to institute it.

Macaulay's response to these allegations was to represent them as inaccurate or false, and drew readers' attention to Marryat's West Indian links. Both protagonists used the same information to convince the public of their authority on slavery through the controversies of Sierra Leone and the Slave Registration Act.

In the 1820s, the West India Committee commissioned James MacQueen to further develop the strategy of utilising similar rhetoric to condemn Sierra Leone and refute abolitionist arguments advanced by Thomas Clarkson and Zachary Macaulay.<sup>103</sup> He based his arguments on knowledge acquired through the reports of the African Institution, government reports and first-hand accounts. In 1816 Marryat diverged from standard objections to slave registration to introduce new critiques against the abolitionists and abolition. Consequently he was first in using Sierra Leone as a site in the war of representation over slavery. The next chapter explores a shift in the rhetorical tone of the West India Committee in the 1820s, that cast it in an ameliorationist light that had unforeseen consequences for its structure and leadership.

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<sup>103</sup> James MacQueen, *The Colonial Controversy, containing a refutation of the calumnies of the anti-colonists, the state of Hayti, Sierra Leone, India, China, Cochin China etc.; the production of sugar etc. and the state of free and slave labourers in those countries, fully considered in a series of letters to the Earl of Liverpool, with a supplementary letter to Mr Macaulay* (Glasgow: Khull Blackie & Co, 1825)

## Chapter 6

### The West India Committee and the politics of amelioration

1823 witnessed ‘a fundamental shift in British anti-slavery strategy and expectations.’<sup>1</sup> The abolitionists’ objective was now the gradual abolition of slavery in the West Indies, and a new strategy to press the government to have a more direct engagement in colonial affairs. They wanted new laws that would improve the moral and civil status of the enslaved, and transform West Indian society into a civilised and industrious space. They wanted to see an emergence of a literate, Christian population of freed persons that would eventually render them eligible and worthy in their eyes of that status. The West India Committee membership endeavoured to halt an abolitionist-led reform of the West Indies by introducing their own gradualist ameliorative proposals that they recommended the colonial legislatures adopt.

The gradual abolition discourse was severely criticised; the enormity of the evils of slavery necessitated its immediate end. In 1824, the Quaker and radical abolitionist Elizabeth Heyrick presented a blistering denunciation of gradual abolition. Astonished that anyone could advocate gradualism when confronted with the horrors of slavery, Heyrick powerfully argued for its swift elimination.<sup>2</sup> Her ire was directed both at the opponents and supporters of slavery. She condemned the abolitionists’ cautious approach, for wasting time ‘reasoning and declaiming and petitioning’ parliament for gradual emancipation, asserting that it had ruined

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<sup>1</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 12. Also see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chapters 8 and 9; Roger Anstey, ‘The Pattern of British abolitionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,’ and James Walvin, ‘The Rise of British popular sentiment for abolition, 1787-1832,’ in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher ed. *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone: W.M. Dawson and Sons, 1980)

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition: Or, An Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest and most Effectual means of getting rid of West Indian Slavery* (Boston, I Knapp 1838, reprint of the 1824 edition) See Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992) for a study of women’s participation in the antislavery movement. Midgley argues that Heyrick was the earliest proponent of immediate emancipation, and an alternative antislavery vision that included slave agency – see pp. 103-107

their cause by allowing the ‘miseries they deplore to remain unmitigated.’<sup>3</sup> She argued that the principal objectors to emancipation, the planters, were ‘culprits in the strictest sense of the word,’ who used gradual abolition as a ploy to maintain the status quo. Aware of the growing hostility to slavery, the planters offered up the policy because it would ‘beget a gradual indifference to emancipation.’<sup>4</sup> Calling it the ‘very masterpiece of satanic policy’, it had achieved its aim in deceiving the public:

[The planter] saw very clearly that if public justice and humanity could be brought to demand a gradual extermination of the slave system, if they could be brought to acquiesce but for one year or for one month in the slavery of our African brother...then they could be imperceptibly be brought to acquiesce in all this for an unlimited duration.<sup>5</sup>

Was Elizabeth Heyrick correct in her assertions of planter cynicism? Was it their intention to prolong enslavement as long as possible, or did they anticipate its end and set about trying to control the conditions under which it happened? This chapter first explores the West India Committee’s advocacy and support of gradual emancipation and amelioration, and considers its motives for that support and how it attempted to convince the colonial assemblies to institute reform for its own benefit. It also considers the reaction of the colonies to amelioration and lastly its impact on the membership and governing structure of the West India Committee.

In 1823 William Wilberforce re-opened the debate on slavery by forcefully arguing the case for slavery’s gradual extinction. Lamenting that the abolition of the slave trade had not facilitated the amelioration the abolitionists had anticipated, he condemned the moral,

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27 Heyrick’s concept of immediatism and its impact on American antislavery thought is discussed in David Brion Davis, ‘Emergence of Immediatism in British and American antislavery thought,’ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49:2 (1962), p.220

<sup>4</sup> *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition*, p. 11, 21

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13

physical and intellectual degradation of the enslaved in the West Indies. According to Wilberforce, colonial laws rendered the enslaved population objects of exploitation, and enabled the slave owner to remain beyond the law's reach. He appealed for new laws that would protect the enslaved and improve their lives:

The treatment of the Negro must be made to depend upon law and unless this is done, we shall look in vain for any real amelioration of their condition ... And though I confess that it is of less concern to a slave under what laws he lives than what is the character of the master, yet if the laws had extended to them favour and protection instead of degradation this would have tended to raise them in the social scale, and operating insensibly on the public mind might, by degrees have softened the extreme rigour of their bondage.<sup>6</sup>

The inadmissibility of slave evidence in court; the driving system that compelled work under threat of severe punishment; the punishment of enslaved female workers, and the constant threat of being sold to pay the debts of planters rendered the enslaved subject to the control and whim of the planter, and consequently denied the enslaved the opportunity to become British subjects.<sup>7</sup> Most fundamental to that identity were the barriers to religion and to marriage, which Wilberforce saw as the pathway to a civil status. 'In my estimate of things, he remarked, 'though many of the physical evils of our colonial society are cruel, odious and pernicious, the almost universal destitution of religious and moral instruction among the slaves is the most serious of all the vices of the West India system.'<sup>8</sup>

Amelioration would prepare the enslaved for liberty. They would gradually emerge as a literate Christian society, 'a free and industrious peasantry.' Moreover, the preparation for

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<sup>6</sup> William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, on behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London: J Hatchard and Son, 1823) p.10

<sup>7</sup> See Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*, which discusses the Baptist project to make the enslaved/free population into British subjects

<sup>8</sup> *An Appeal to the Religion*, p.24

this liberty should not be entrusted to the colonial legislatures, but it was ‘the duty of the legislature of this country to interpose for the mitigation and termination of a state in which the ruin of a moral man has been one of the sad consequences of his bondage.’<sup>9</sup>

In April 1823 Thomas Fowell Buxton, the new leader of the parliamentary abolitionists, wrote to Robert Wilmot Horton, the under-secretary of state for the colonies, outlining an eleven point plan for improvement in the West Indies, that the activists expected the government to implement. In addition to the reforms suggested in Wilberforce’s pamphlet, Buxton’s suggestions aimed for a complete change in the slavery system. It demanded a system where after a generation, the enslaved would be free by liberating children born after a certain age; that they were given Sundays to attend church, rather than going to market; that colonial administrators attended to the rights of the enslaved as impartial servants by not owning enslaved persons; and most controversially, by introducing compulsory manumission, the right to purchase their liberty without their owner’s consent.<sup>10</sup>

The imperial government was reluctant to compel the colonial legislatures to adopt an amelioration programme. It presented a potentially serious and damaging rift in colony and metropole relations. The Declaratory Act of 1766 acknowledging the colonies to be ‘subordinate unto, and dependent on, the Imperial Crown and Parliament of Great Britain, the ‘transcendent power of parliament to make laws for every part of the British Empire’ had never been enforced for three reasons. Its implementation was considered as ill-advised with regard to vested British settlers and not at all conducive to trade; the responses of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.24

<sup>10</sup> Derbyshire Record Office (DRO), D3155/WH2757, Wilmot Horton Manuscripts, Thomas Fowell Buxton to Wilmot Horton, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1823

American colonists had precipitated a war; and the colonists themselves refused to recognise that such a prerogative existed at all.<sup>11</sup>

Since his appointment in 1812 the Colonial Secretary Earl Bathurst had steered a careful course of respecting the perceived constitutional prerogative of the colonial legislatures, and the pressure of the parliamentary abolitionists who agitated for more direct parliamentary intervention. D. J. Murray observed that Bathurst consequently adopted a reformist gradualist approach, forwarding proposals, amendments and Orders-in-Council, and trying to persuade the colonial legislatures to act in their own interests in a rational manner.<sup>12</sup>

It was within this context of the gradual shift in the relationship between colony and metropole, as instigated by the abolitionists, and the resurgence of the antislavery movement, that the West India Committee supported amelioration to advance three agendas. The first was to protect the rights and property of the West Indian colonists. The second was to preserve the economic protection that the government afforded the West Indian interest, and the third was to appease public opinion on slavery.<sup>13</sup> British planters were suffering under the restrictions of the mercantile system. Sugar produced in Cuba and Brazil was unimpeded by a slave trade ban and consequently planters in those territories were able to import vast numbers of enslaved Africans.

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<sup>11</sup> D. J. Murray, *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government, 1801-1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) pp.2-3; *Parliamentary Debates*, New Series, Volume 10, cols 1091. Also see Jack P. Greene, 'The Jamaica Privilege Controversy, 1764-66: An Episode in the process of constitutional definition in the Early Modern British Empire,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 22:1 (1994) pp. 16-53

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 5 above for a discussion of the Slave Registration Act; Murray, pp. 89-108

<sup>13</sup> See Kathleen Mary Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823-1843* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), Chapter 1



**Table 6.1 Estimation of enslaved disembarked in West Indies and Brazil by country<sup>14</sup>**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Enslaved disembarked in British West Indies</b>	<b>Enslaved disembarked in Cuba</b>	<b>Enslaved disembarked in Brazil</b>
1791-1807	551,358	3,407	423,541
1808-1823	8,076	114,892	653,492

The Spanish and Portuguese could also sell their produce to any market as well as their home market, giving them a significant advantage over the British by depressing the price of their produce.<sup>15</sup> In 1822 the Standing Committee had considered how to reduce their import costs. They acknowledged that the government was no longer willing to give a large bounty to undersell Cuba and Brazil; consequently, they had to think of other ways to raise the price of sugar in the home market.<sup>16</sup> Of the 290,000 hogsheads of sugar being imported into Britain and Ireland, 220,000 were being consumed, leaving an excess of 70,000 hogsheads, unable to be sold or re-exported. To prevent the excess, the Standing Committee suggested that the planters in the West Indies reduce their cultivation of sugar and diversify into other crops such as ginger, pimento or coffee. They urged the colonial assemblies to ‘follow the example of the mother country in making such reductions as may be found practicable.’<sup>17</sup>

The demands of the East India interest for equal duties on sugar with West India produce became, as Andrea Major notes, ‘a point of convergence for abolitionist, consumer and East Indian economic interests.’<sup>18</sup> In the 1820s, the abolitionists began to highlight the economic inefficiency of the slave system which was beginning to look outdated in view of Britain’s

<sup>14</sup> Estimated figures from Slave Voyages Database [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org) Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014

<sup>15</sup> L.J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833* (New York; London: American Historical Association, 1928), p.337

<sup>16</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, *Plan for Reducing the import of Sugar from the British West Indies by Claying a portion of that article*, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1822

<sup>17</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1822

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772-1843* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012) p. 305

changing economic values that the end of the Napoleonic War had brought.<sup>19</sup> James Cropper, a Liverpool-based East India merchant and abolitionist, explained the advantages of ‘a competition of free labour and beneficial effects of fair prices on the condition of the slaves.’ He asserted that slavery could be abolished through the free introduction of East India sugar, and that a fair competition in the process would make slavery unprofitable.<sup>20</sup> Free trade would benefit the consumer by lowering the cost; West Indian sugar, which was subsidised by the consumer at the cost of £2 million per year, would not be able to compete in an open market. The West India interest jealously guarded its protective tariffs that levied sugar duties, and raised the price of East Indian sugar. They argued that any equalisation would be a violation of the protection of their produce in the home market.<sup>21</sup>

The role of public pressure had been central to the success of the campaign to abolish the slave trade. Consequently, when the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions was launched in January 1823 it re-established a nationwide network of supporting committees.<sup>22</sup> By the close of the 1823 parliamentary session, 220 societies had been formed throughout the country, and 600 petitions had been presented to parliament for the amelioration of the enslaved.<sup>23</sup> Of the effects of public pressure through petitions on Parliament, Thomas Clarkson noted that

Each committee enlighten those in its own County and neighbourhoods and continued to enlighten them, till almost all within its district *high and low*, had gained

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<sup>19</sup> James Walvin, ‘The Propaganda of Anti-slavery,’ in James Walvin ed. *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.66

<sup>20</sup> David Brion Davis, ‘James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement 1821-1823’, *Journal of Negro History*, 45:4 (1960), p.245

<sup>21</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Petition to the Commons against the equalisation of Sugar Duties, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1823

<sup>22</sup> James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986) p. 146

<sup>23</sup> *Report of the Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions* (London, 1823) p.18

knowledge of the evil. Hence, petitions founded on *knowledge* were sent in unexampled numbers to Parliament.<sup>24</sup>

The anti-slavery campaign advanced the arguments that slavery was an affront to Christian feelings, morally wrong and economically unsupportable. These were arguments that were becoming difficult for the West Indians to defend. Consequently the Standing Committee resolved to endorse an amelioration programme. It was essential that any suggestion of colonial reform came from West India Committee. The membership correctly surmised that any interference by the government would be interpreted by the colonial assemblies as an infringement of their constitutional prerogative, and any suggestion of the improvement of the lives and condition of the enslaved as another step toward their emancipation. The Standing Committee, under the leadership of Charles Rose Ellis, sought a way to pre-empt the abolitionists. They resolved that the

best course of action would be for the executive government to undertake some systematic plan for the improvement of the condition of the Negroes which are in their immediate jurisdiction and to recommend and enforce with all their influence the adoption of a similar plan by all those colonies which are governed by local legislatures.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the adoption of an amelioration programme would remain under the control and supervision of the colonial assemblies, and the Crown colonies (Trinidad, St Lucia, Demerara and Barbice) would receive instructions from London. The Standing Committee found themselves in the unenviable position of accommodating public opinion and the obstinate West Indian colonists, and devising a programme of amelioration that would be acceptable to both parties.

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Clarkson, quoted in Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom*, p. 147

<sup>25</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1823

## The April 25<sup>th</sup> Committee

The Special Committee appointed to consider the amelioration programme was comprised of the most prominent absentee planters and merchants. Of the fifteen men appointed to the Committee, the majority of them represented Jamaican interests; two were colonial agents and ten of them held seats in Parliament.<sup>26</sup> This Special Committee drafted 13 resolutions shared only with senior ministers. The secretary of the Committee was instructed to print copies marked ‘confidential’, and the Committee members were instructed not to speak about the resolutions to anyone.<sup>27</sup>

The contents of the amelioration programme are attributed to the chair of the West India Committee, Charles Rose Ellis. From the time he first spoke in defence of the West India interest, Ellis had represented himself as a humane and benevolent absentee planter. He had defended slavery and the slave trade as a necessary evil, and had argued it was connected with Britain’s political and commercial system that deeply involved the interests of the country and individual property alike.<sup>28</sup>

As a young MP in 1796 his first speech was in support of his own motion to ameliorate the condition of the enslaved population in the West Indies. His approach was not to consistently appear as defensive against the abolitionists, but to offer compromise or alternatives to their demands. Ellis proposed a plan ‘to produce the same effect by different means.’ He maintained a natural increase in the enslaved population would be ‘the civilisation of the Negroes in the West India islands to a degree which, by obviating the causes of a decrease in

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<sup>26</sup> The men that served on the Special Committee were: Sir Alexander Cray Grant (Agent for Antigua), Joseph Marryat (Agent for Trinidad), William Manning, John Plummer, George Hay Dawkins-Pennant, John Ward (later Lord Dudley), Edward Cust, James Blair, Charles Ellis, Henry Bright (MPs), Sir Simon Haughton Clarke, George Carrington (Agent for Barbados), Sir Henry Martin, John Ellis, Lord Holland, John Mitchell (latter two attended once only), Sir Edward Hyde East and Charles N. Pallmer. ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Special Committee Minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1823

<sup>27</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Special Committee Minutes, 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April 1823

<sup>28</sup> *Parliamentary History* Vol. XXXIII, col. 251-290

the population will render the supply unnecessary.’ Central to his plan was ‘a reform in the manners and the morality of the Negroes’, through mild and gradual means: moral and religious instruction, encouraging marriage at an early age, ‘by the proprietor taking upon himself the little details of expense which may attend their first establishment and annual rewards for women in proportion to the number of their children.’<sup>29</sup>

In the 1790s Ellis’s motion to ameliorate slave conditions was framed to continue the slave trade until the enslaved population was able to regenerate itself. As Barry Higman observes, Ellis showed his pragmatism by advancing a moderate plan that was consistent with the safety and property of the colonists.<sup>30</sup> The similarities between the measures suggested by Ellis 30 years earlier and those advanced in 1823 suggest that he was their author.

Furthermore, the minutes of the West India Committee explicitly stated that it was the chairman who presented these resolutions to the Standing Committee.<sup>31</sup> These proposals were quite remarkable for the extent to which they aimed to facilitate the social and moral advancement of the enslaved. It was a programme that was so enlightened that it could have been written by the abolitionists themselves.

Like the abolitionists, the Committee, or more specifically Ellis, took the view that amelioration was a necessary preliminary to emancipation, and it required a significant period to prepare the enslaved population for this goal. They agreed on the necessity for religious instruction and worship, recommending that Sunday markets should be abolished and that Presbyterian and Episcopalian churches were built. The use of the whip was to be abolished and replaced by another symbol of authority. Floggings were to be meted out in the presence

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<sup>29</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. XXXIII, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1797, cols. 255

<sup>30</sup> Barry Higman, *Montpelier Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom 1739-1912* (Barbados; Jamaica; Trinidad and Tobago: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998) p.34

<sup>31</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1823. The minutes clearly state that ‘the subject had engaged his serious consideration and that he had prepared resolutions on the subject’

of the overseer and punishments were to be recorded. Female enslaved workers were no longer to be punished and a Council of Protection was to be established to hear the complaints of slaves against their masters. Enslaved workers who were married could hold personal property. The practice of selling enslaved workers to raise money for their owners' debts was to be prohibited. Enslaved workers' evidence was to be made admissible in colonial courts, and given the right to purchase their own freedom at a price to be fixed on a valuation in each particular case.<sup>32</sup>

Even as recommendations to be adopted by the colonial assemblies, they were contentious. They were designed to improve the enslaved population's legal rights, regulate the brutality of slavery, and to improve and encourage Christianisation. Even more controversially, they made it easier to gain freedom. The West India Committee believed that if the popular objections to slavery were removed, and the enslaved were prepared for emancipation over a long period, the anxieties of the colonists would be eased, and the public would be reassured that the West Indians were taking the necessary steps toward reform.

### **Proceeding with caution and prudence: softening the blow of amelioration**

In May 1823, representatives of the West India Committee met with the Prime Minister Lord Liverpool, the Colonial Secretary Earl Bathurst, and the Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons, George Canning. Both parties were in agreement that amelioration should be kept under the control of the government. The ministers present consulted with the West Indians on the details of the amelioration programme, agreeing that if the government

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<sup>32</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, Resolutions of the Special Committee appointed 25th April 1823

approved of the resolutions drawn up by the Special Committee, it would adopt them as their measures and recommend them to the colonial assemblies.<sup>33</sup>

The meeting wished to move cautiously; it was agreed that ‘emancipation should arise out of the altered situation of the slaves and as they might be fitted to receive it, and not to any positive enactment as to time.’ ‘By proposing regulations’, George Canning (a close friend of Ellis who was elected to Parliament on the interest of the Demerara planter John Gladstone) was recorded to have remarked, ‘we may keep the matter in our hands, and proceed in it with caution and prudence.’<sup>34</sup> The West India Committee understood, in making these arrangements, that it was no longer a matter of if slavery would end, but rather, when; and that the debate was now about under what circumstances it should end.

Subsequently, when Buxton presented his resolutions and called for the gradual abolition of slavery on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1823, George Canning countered with three alternative ones. Those resolutions stated that it was expedient that measures were introduced to ameliorate the conditions of the enslaved; that these measures would be progressive and administered in a ‘judicious and temperate manner’, with the ultimate goal being that the enslaved population were fully prepared to participate ‘in those civil rights and privileges that are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty’s subjects’; and that this would be accomplished at the earliest time compatible with the well-being of the enslaved, the safety of the colonies and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property.<sup>35</sup> Canning laid out the government’s commitment to amelioration which would be accomplished with the cooperation of the West Indians, rather than forcing them to comply. He warned the West Indians in Parliament that

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Fletcher, *Autobiographical Memoirs of Thomas Fletcher of Liverpool* (privately printed, 1843) pp. 133-134

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.134

<sup>35</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (New Series), Vol. 9, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1823 col. 285-286

Any resistance which might be manifested to the express and declared wishes of Parliament, any resistance, I mean which should partake, not of reason, but of contumacy, would create a case (a case however, which I sincerely trust will never occur) upon which His Majesty's Government would not hesitate to come down to Parliament for counsel.<sup>36</sup>

With this commitment from the government, Buxton withdrew his motion and Canning's resolutions were passed. The abolitionists had mixed feelings about the outcome. 'We have an acknowledgement on the part of the government that the grievances of which we complain do exist and that a remedy ought to be applied', Wilberforce wrote to Zachary Macaulay, '[but] I frankly confess that if the colonial legislatures would make the reform...how is it possible for me to expect that they will do it? Does not all our experience show that they will not do their duty?'<sup>37</sup> *The Times* editorial expressed its scepticism more explicitly. 'The reform managed between ministers and colonies are likely to fail', it predicted, 'because the West Indian legislatures have always proved refractory.'<sup>38</sup>

The outcome was a victory for the West India Committee. They had managed to weaken the abolitionists' proposals for emancipation and most crucially had secured a pledge to consider property if amelioration had a negative impact on colonial property. George Hibbert, the agent for Jamaica, was generally pleased with the outcome, but acknowledged that slavery would not continue indefinitely, remarking to Robert Wilmot Horton that

Mr Canning's speech was most eloquent, and in some respects subverted in a masterly manner the arguments advanced by Mr Buxton – but consistent with a determination which the cabinet ministers had previously adopted it holds out in express terms a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, col 288

<sup>37</sup> Robert and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce, With Extracts from his Diary, Journal and Correspondence*, Volume 5 (London: J. Murray, 1838) pp.177-178

<sup>38</sup> *The Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1823



pledge for the adoption of measures which at a time more or less distant, is to terminate in a general emancipation of all the slaves in the colonies.<sup>39</sup>

### **Urging Colonial Reform**

The West India Committee understood that to secure the protection of their properties, and to continue to benefit from the protection of the imperial government, the planters in the West Indies had to demonstrate a willingness to reform the slavery system. In June 1823 it sent them, via their colonial agents, ‘a detailed description of the situation in which they were now placed.’

It explained to the colonial legislatures their options in frank terms:

They endeavour to recommend to their most particular consideration the points of melioration of the colonial system which may be suggested by the government, urging in the strongest terms the danger which must inevitably follow from anything which may separate the opinion of the government and the colonies upon their affairs and which may have the effect of withdrawing or even weakening that protection which has successful averted Parliamentary interference and which may release the government from the important pledge adopted by parliament at Canning’s suggestion.<sup>40</sup>

The Standing Committee believed that public opinion was strong enough to influence the government to exercise its right to legislate for the colonies if they refused to adopt

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<sup>39</sup> DRO, D3155/WH2814, Wilmot Horton Mss, George Hibbert to Robert Wilmot Horton, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1823

<sup>40</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1823

amelioration laws.<sup>41</sup> The consequences would be devastating for the West Indies, commercially and politically:

No West India question, not even commercial ones will be listened to with favour or common justice by the British public. The proposition of equalising the duties on East and West India sugar, though rejected by a large majority has been announced as intended to be renewed – and any further irritation of the public mind might produce a fatal change in the decision of Parliament.<sup>42</sup>

Since public opinion was on the side of the abolitionists, the colonists had to be realistic about their situation. ‘We must trust to reason – and the only way of getting that weapon into our hands is by doing of ourselves all that is right to be done – and doing it speedily and effectually.’<sup>43</sup> George Hibbert reinforced this view to the Jamaican Committee of Correspondence, pointing out that if the West India Committee had not acted, the ‘Philanthropists’ would have instituted reform on their terms ‘from which the worst consequences might have been dreaded.’<sup>44</sup> The Standing Committee, despite its *realpolitik* stance, was divided over the resolutions. They were so controversial that Sir Simon Haughton Clarke asked for his name to be removed from the Committee which had drafted them.

It was important to the Standing Committee to present a ‘positive’ image of West Indians, and to be seen as facilitating the enslaved population’s moral improvement. To accomplish this it made a contribution of £1000 to the Society for the Conversion and Religious Instruction and Education of the Negro Slaves in the British West Indies. The Society was

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<sup>41</sup> James Walvin observes that such was the volume of anti-slavery tracts by the mid-1820s politicians assumed that the abolitionists had overwhelming support on their side. James Walvin, ‘The Propaganda of British Anti-Slavery,’ in James Walvin ed. *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.60

<sup>42</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Report of Special Committee, Standing Committee Minutes, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1823

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1823

<sup>44</sup> DRO D3155/WH2814, Copy of letter from George Hibbert to the Jamaica Committee of Correspondence, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1823

founded in 1794 by Beilby Porteus, then Bishop of London, and it actively promoted the Christianisation of the 'Empire's Negroes' through missionary work in Jamaica, St Kitts Nevis and Antigua.<sup>45</sup> Committee members Charles Ellis, George Hibbert, William Manning, Gilbert Mathison, Charles Pallmer and James Colquhoun were on its board of governors, later providing an annual stipend of £100, which paid for the engagement of two chaplains in Demerara and a catechist in Barbados.<sup>46</sup> The Bishop of London thanked them for their contributions, praising their 'spirit of enlightened humanity ... from a body so intimately acquainted with the state of the colonies and so deeply interested in their prosperity.'<sup>47</sup> The Standing Committee expressed their 'highest satisfaction' of the government's appointment of bishops and archdeacons to Jamaica and Barbados. However, in encouraging this policy, it was acting in opposition to the planters who were resident in the West Indies.

Charles Ellis eagerly embraced the policy of religious instruction of the enslaved workers, to show that their Christianisation was compatible with slavery. He was anxious that as many churches and chapels as possible would be built without delay in the West Indies, suggesting to Robert Wilmot Horton that if they could not engage Anglican missionaries then the Wesleyans or Moravians should be sent, despite the engagement of Wesleyans being 'looked upon with a jealous eye by my countrymen in the colonies.'<sup>48</sup> Ellis did not appear to fully appreciate the extent to which the planters identified the Christianisation of the enslaved with the humanitarian cause. Ellis regarded religious instruction as a key aspect of the slow and gradual amelioration of the enslaved. He agreed with the abolitionists that it was fundamental to their moral advancement. Joseph Foster Barham, whose family had engaged the Moravians

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<sup>45</sup> *Some Account of the Society of the Conversion of the Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands* (R Gilbert, 1823), p.11

<sup>46</sup> *Incorporated Report of the Society of the Conversion of the Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands* (London, 1825), p.22

<sup>47</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, Letter from the Bishop of London to Charles Ellis, dated 7<sup>th</sup> August 1823, read on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1823

<sup>48</sup> DRO, D3155/WH2871, Charles Ellis to Robert Wilmot Horton, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1823

on their estate since the 1750s, regarded moral improvement as a prerequisite for freedom.<sup>49</sup> Christianity was essential to the maintenance of moral order and the pathway to freedom, ‘the hinge that everything must turn ... when it is sufficiently advanced, civil rights may be freely granted and emancipation will have no danger.’<sup>50</sup> However, from the colonists’ perspective, moral advancement through religious instruction, in the words of Harry Bennett, ‘smacked of advancing status, growing civil rights, and eventual freedom’ for the enslaved workers.<sup>51</sup>

Ellis had engaged an Anglican missionary, Rev. Henry Beams, to bring Christianity to his enslaved workers on Montpelier, his estate in St James, Jamaica, instructing 300 enslaved workers from the estate and surrounding properties.<sup>52</sup> Typically for many properties that engaged chaplains in Jamaica, Beams was an Anglican minister who taught a restricted Gospel that emphasised obedience. Mary Turner noted that the Anglicans were actively engaged in slave management, and were a necessary appendage to white society.<sup>53</sup>

News of the amelioration programme based on Canning’s resolutions, and the anti-slavery campaign were circulating throughout the island. Beams wrote to the Society that there were many enslaved workers who were discontented and wanted their freedom – for this reason he was reluctant to follow Ellis’s instructions to teach the enslaved children how to read. Not only was there a ‘violent feeling of opposition’ to this among the planters; Beams feared that teaching them to read would ‘at once give them a power of gaining intellectual knowledge that they will at once be able to arrange their measures with secrecy and effect.’<sup>54</sup> This was precisely what planters had argued before this point as a reason not to encourage the spread

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph Foster Barham, *Considerations on the Abolition of Negro Slavery, and the Means of Practically Effecting It* (London, 1823) p. 4

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>51</sup> J. Harry Bennett Jr., *Bondsmen and Bishops: Slavery and Apprenticeship on the Codrington Plantations of Barbados, 1710-1838* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), p.91

<sup>52</sup> Barry Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica*, p.259

<sup>53</sup> Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 10

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica* p.259

of Christianity; yet Ellis was insisting that reading was introduced amongst his enslaved workers.<sup>55</sup> Beams' fears were realised when a rebellion broke out on the Argyle, Golden Grove and Alexandria estates, only four miles from Montpelier in July 1824. Convinced that they had been granted freedom by the King, but that it was being withheld by the planters, the enslaved workers on these estates conspired to set fire to them and murder the whites. While the damage was minimal, reprisals were immediate and severe. Six of the plotters were hung at Argyle and five at Golden Grove and the others were transported off the island.<sup>56</sup>

Beams blamed the Dissenting preachers for the rebellion – the Wesleyans and Baptists – whose doctrines were 'highly improper for the Negro minds – for whatever they possibly understand by Election, Foreknowledge, Predestination and Adult Baptism.'<sup>57</sup> He noted that the appeal of the Baptist doctrine was attracting many of the enslaved in the parish to convert. In 1831 it was the Baptist faith that was associated with the rebellion of 1831-32. Montpelier, the estate of the lead spokesman of the West Indians, was one of the main sites of battle between the insurgents and government forces.<sup>58</sup>

### **Resistance to reform**

In late May 1823 Earl Bathurst sent out a general circular to the colonial governors and the Crown colony administrators. Displaying the imperial government's customarily cautious approach, he made clear that these resolutions were 'not to be understood as affording a full development of what His Majesty's Government have in contemplation on this important subject; it is my purpose to point out such changes in the laws that may be conveniently

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 297-321

<sup>56</sup> Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 111; Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica*, p. 260

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, p.260-1

<sup>58</sup> Mary Reckord, 'The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831,' *Past and Present*, 40 (1968), pp. 117, 120; Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 298; Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'The Slave Rebellion of the Great River Valley of St James: 1831-2,' *Jamaica Historical Review* XIII (1982), p. 21

adopted at present.’<sup>59</sup> He also made it clear that the resolutions had received the concurrence and approbation of the majority of the individuals in England most deeply interested in the West Indies.’ The resolutions circulated were so similar to those drafted by the Special Committee that they are evidence that the government and the Special Committee consulted on its contents. They indicated that both parties accepted that slavery would not continue indefinitely; Bathurst had communicated to George Hibbert that ‘it will not now be endured to give out that the slaves and their progeny are to remain in a state of slavery for ever.’<sup>60</sup>

The contents of the dispatch sent to the colonial governors made, from the perspective of the planters, disturbing reading. If the enslaved population were, as stated in Canning’s resolutions to be prepared ‘for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty’s subjects’, the recommendations showed that the status quo had to be dramatically altered.<sup>61</sup> Bathurst expanded on the resolutions drafted by the Special Committee, explaining more fully what he anticipated the reforms would engender in slave society. In addition to greater protection, suggestions such as the establishment of a savings bank for enslaved workers based on the English model served to undermine the slave holding society and the exclusive privileges that the white colonists enjoyed.

Each reform was a threat to planter hegemony. As Natalie Zacek argues, enslaved workers occupied a liminal position with respect to the law. They were barred from enjoying the rights and privileges enjoyed by the white population, such as giving evidence for or against free persons. Roger Buckley made the observation that to give the enslaved ‘the solemn opportunity to publicly challenge the integrity of white persons by bringing evidence against them in an institution dominated by and for whites only was widely believed would weaken

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<sup>59</sup> TNA, CO 29/30, Circular Dispatch, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1823

<sup>60</sup> DRO, D3155/WH2814 George Hibbert to Robert Wilmot Horton, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1823

<sup>61</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 9 15<sup>th</sup> May 1823, col. 286

the very foundation of colonial society.<sup>62</sup> The Jamaica Assembly regarded the introduction of these laws as undermining their authority:

If we adopt such an innovation on the established usages of the colony, the slaves will imagine that our conduct has been disapproved of by the King and that we have been compelled to relinquish the whip and with it every means of punishment and restraint.<sup>63</sup>

Scholars have considered the paradoxical nature of colonial reform. Cecilia A. Green examined the issues involved in the question of slave marriage, looking at whether the bestowing of a spiritual personality was compatible with civil nonentity.<sup>64</sup> Amelioration also complicated the perceived customary rights of the enslaved. David Barry Gaspar examined the enslaved workers' response to the Antigua legislature's decision to abolish their Sunday markets. As a consequence, the enslaved workers saw the abolition as 'an act of open aggression by the legislature...which fuelled insubordination and protest.' The interference with the enslaved right to engage in commercial activity highlighted the value that enslaved workers placed in the Sunday market and their role in the island's internal economy.<sup>65</sup>

The rebellion in Demerara in 1823 was blamed on the resolutions from London and on abolitionist agitation. The planters' refusal to implement the instructions sent from London convinced the enslaved workers that their emancipation was being withheld. The enslaved workers in Demerara were emboldened by the news arriving from Britain. Emilia da Costa writes that the enslaved 'spoke of laws coming out of England. They spoke of rights. They

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<sup>62</sup> Natalie Zacek, 'Voices and Silences: The Problem of Slave Testimony in the English West Indian Slave Courts,' *Slavery and Abolition*, 24:3 (2003), pp. 24-39; Roger Buckley, 'The admission of slave testimony at British military courts in the West Indies, 1800-1809,' in David Barry Gaspar and David Geggus (eds.) *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1997) p.231

<sup>63</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, 12, iii (May 1830), p.200

<sup>64</sup> Cecilia A. Green, 'A Civil Inconvenience? The Vexed Question of Slave Marriage in the British West Indies,' *Law and History Review*, 25:1 (2007), pp. 1-59

<sup>65</sup> David Barry Gaspar, 'Slavery, Amelioration and Sunday Markets in Antigua 1823-1831,' *Slavery and Abolition*, 19:1 (1988), pp. 1-28

spoke of the King, of Wilberforce, and of the powerful men in England.’<sup>66</sup> The Demerara planters asserted that the rebellion was a consequence of the enslaved worker’s belief that they had been emancipated. They also blamed the influence of the missionaries, whose brand of Christianity empowered the enslaved with a certain amount of religious knowledge that helped them to develop an argument defending their right to free themselves. They accused John Smith, a popular nonconformist missionary whose church many of the leaders of the rebellion attended, of complicity and sentenced him to death. He died in prison of consumption in February 1824.<sup>67</sup> Gelien Matthews argues that the enslaved workers were more politically astute than driven by religion; they were informed ‘by the articulations of the British antislavery movement to make their demands...they were exercising political curiosity and seeking out their interests.’<sup>68</sup>

The Standing Committee called the rebellion ‘an awful warning’ and an illustration of the very perilous state of the West India Colonies.’<sup>69</sup> They blamed the abolitionists, claiming that the whole affair was a consequence of their agitating the question of emancipation in Parliament. ‘I hope, rather than expect that what has happened at Demerara may teach this party some discretion and that we shall not witness a repetition of those inconsiderate petitions and provocations which formed their activities in the last session [of Parliament],’ John Gladstone wrote to William Huskisson.<sup>70</sup>

The colonial legislatures reacted angrily to the proposals from London, which they interpreted as a programme to facilitate the emancipation of the enslaved workers. The West India Committee’s accomodationist approach was unpopular amongst the white colonists.

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<sup>66</sup> Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.197

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 199

<sup>68</sup> Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolition Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), pp. 44,45

<sup>69</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1823

<sup>70</sup> British Library, Add MS 38745, Gladstone to Huskisson, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1823



They maintained that ‘the absentee owners were not only separated by distance, but by class, culture and political circumstance.’<sup>71</sup>

In Jamaica they reasserted their often expressed right to the control over their local affairs, and immediately adopted an attitude of non-compliance. The Governor of Jamaica, the Duke of Manchester, wrote to Earl Bathurst that the proposals had generated ‘so great a feeling of irritation...that at present I am almost inclined to apprehend that the Assembly will not take up the subject of an improvement of the slave code...the prospect of anything done by the Assembly...is at present very unpromising.’<sup>72</sup> He added that public meetings were being held throughout the island recommending resistance to any interference in their internal legislation.

Earl Bathurst was disappointed that the Jamaican Assembly had refused to consider adopting the suggested amelioration propositions into law. He confided to the Duke of Manchester that the West India Committee, not the government, was the author of the improvements. He explained that weeks before the debate in Parliament the Standing Committee ‘were so fully impressed with the conviction of adopting some system of melioration that they selected eight propositions which they felt fully assured might be safely adopted and which in their opinion were calculated to produce the most beneficial effects.’<sup>73</sup> He further confided that ‘out of the nine propositions, eight of them...went further than the government were prepared to suggest.’<sup>74</sup>

Bathurst, who had been present at the meeting in May between the government and the West India Committee, knew that it had drafted the amelioration resolutions and brokered the Canning resolutions. By this action, Bathurst had understood that the Committee acted as the

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in David Lambert, *White creole culture, politics and identity during the age of abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005) p.147

<sup>72</sup> TNA, CO 137/154, Duke of Manchester to Earl Bathurst, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1823

<sup>73</sup> TNA, CO 138/47, Earl Bathurst to Duke of Manchester, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1824

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

de facto representative of the colonists in the West Indies and had assumed that they had their acceptance to act on their behalf.

The Standing Committee's decision to consult the government was not well received by the colonists; the general view was that they were unqualified to speak or act with authority on the 'complicated nature of West Indian speculations and politics.' Major Moody, a gentleman with twenty years' residence in the tropics and acquainted with the details of slave labour in all the islands, wrote to the government that

The members of the West India Committee in England who recommended the eight measures suggested in Lord Bathurst's circular of 9<sup>th</sup> of July were themselves practically ignorant of the subject and had abstained from communicating with members of their own body who were better informed...they ought to have been considered by the government as unsafe advisors...a West Indian proprietor is no more by virtue of his character to understand slave labour and the slave system in detail, than a land proprietor in England to understand the science of agriculture.<sup>75</sup>

Charles Ellis expressed disappointment and dismay with the Jamaican reaction to the proposals. In a letter to George Hibbert, Jamaica's colonial agent and a member of the Standing Committee, he defended the course of action pursued by the Committee in response to Buxton's proposed motion. 'Such a feeling could only have arisen', he wrote, 'from a misconception of both the motive and effect of that line of conduct.'<sup>76</sup> Ellis assured Hibbert that the intention was to keep the government from imposing its control over the colonial legislatures, to keep them in control by making sure that they adopted the proposals into law themselves. 'No other course could have given the colonial legislatures a voice in the question you will yourself, I am sure you will not hesitate to vouch...and there never existed

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<sup>75</sup> DRO, D3155/WH2760, Wilmot Horton to George Canning, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1826 or 1827

<sup>76</sup> DRO, D3155/WH2939, Charles Ellis to George Hibbert, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1823

a moment when such important consequence depended on our friends in the Assembly of Jamaica...and a cordial understanding with the Executive Government.’<sup>77</sup> It was clear that Ellis was concerned that the colonists’ recalcitrance would negatively impact on public opinion. He surmised that the absentee planters, particularly those who had seats in Parliament and were members of the West India Committee, understood the public mood better than the colonists; that it was important that the planters represent themselves as committed to the improvement of the lives and condition of the enslaved population.<sup>78</sup>

Ellis’s comments demonstrate that between the colonies and the metropole there was a large gap in their perceptions as to how West Indian interests ought to be defended and protected. As a British politician he was removed from West Indian realities and knew that it was politically expedient to soften the brutal aspects of enslavement for an increasingly conscious British public. The colonists, on the other hand, were deeply offended at what they interpreted as the imperial government’s intention to legislate for them and at the lack of a definite pledge of compensation.

‘I have understood’, remarked James Colquhoun, agent for Antigua, ‘that one of the reasons given by Antigua for not passing an amelioration bill was that by so doing she would weaken her claim to compensation, but if forced on her, the Parliament which compelled the sacrifice could not in justice refuse to pay the cost.’<sup>79</sup> For this reason, the Antiguan Assembly had no confidence in amelioration. This lack of confidence was also prevalent among planters resident in Britain. The planters gathered to discuss the current state of affairs in the West Indies, and to vent their fury at what they perceived as the misrepresentation of the condition of the enslaved population of the West Indies. They wanted to defend their right to property

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. George Hibbert was not part of the committee that drafted the amelioration proposals. As agent for Jamaica he may have felt there would have been a conflict of interest.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> DRO, D3155 WH/2769, James Colquhoun to Wilmot Horton, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1825

in slaves, a right recognised by the law, and to assert their right to compensation should that property be interfered with or deteriorated by the law. So serious was the situation in the West Indies that the planters decided to draft a petition to the king, requesting him ‘not to sanction or authorise any acts that would impair the value of property in the West India colonies.’<sup>80</sup>

The General Meeting held in early February 1824 was a highly-charged affair. Reporters for the *Times* and the *Morning Chronicle* were surprised and affronted when they were threatened with violent ejection from the meeting by Mr Holden, the Committee’s secretary, for sitting in seats ‘reserved for gentlemen with an interest in the business of the day.’<sup>81</sup> The petition contained all the familiar tropes that constituted the planter defence, including those that had been employed during the slave trade debates. Specifically pointed out was that under the law, enslaved workers were recognised as property – and these laws were passed by the colonial legislatures and by the imperial government. The other argument advanced was that the rebellion in Demerara was a consequence of the enslaved population’s assumption that their freedom had been granted by the imperial government, and withheld by the planters. The confidence in security had been shaken, and subsequently was destroying the value in West Indian property.<sup>82</sup> Planter after planter stood up to concur with the sentiments of the petition, and to condemn the interference of the imperial government into colonial affairs. One planter, a Major D’Albaic, expressed a view that was similar to that expressed by the Special Committee in 1823. He suggested that ‘West India interests would never rest on a firm base until slavery was abolished,’ and that the enslaved workers should benefit from

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<sup>80</sup>West India Committee General Meeting reported in *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1824. For a discussion of Parliament and property rights see Julian Hoppit, ‘Compulsion, Compensation and Property Rights in Britain, 1688-1833’, *Past and Present* 210 (2011), pp. 115-120. Nicholas Draper examines the Slave Compensation records to map the extent of slave ownership in Britain. Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the end of slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Also see the Legacies of British Slave Ownership database, [www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs)

<sup>81</sup>West India Committee General Meeting, *The Times*, and *Morning Chronicle*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1824

<sup>82</sup>*The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1824

moral advancement 'to be worthy of being admitted to the condition of free labourers,' was greeted with boos and hisses, and accusations of being 'a Saint.'<sup>83</sup> The audience was so hostile to the amendments he presented to the meeting, and acted in such a threatening manner towards him, that Ellis had to call for order.

The General Meeting revealed the fury of the planters towards the ameliorative measures adopted by the government by what they perceived as a consequence of the public being misled by the abolitionists as to the true state of the West Indies. However, that the planters went on *ad infinitum* about their property rights bemused some commentators, since they knew the right to property was one of the most fundamental British rights. 'England has paid the most sacred attention to the rights of property, [it could not] be possible to find a single member of the legislature who would be hardy enough to openly recommend the violation of those rights in the case of the West India proprietors,' remarked the *Morning Chronicle* in its editorial on 13<sup>th</sup> February. It was further noted that there had been no discussion on the exact situation in the West Indies or 'a more systematic development of the sentiments and views of the planters on the question of ameliorating the condition of the slaves.'<sup>84</sup> The *Chronicle's* editorial suggests that it assumed the decision to support amelioration was undertaken by the whole West India body. It suggests also that when the West India Committee negotiated amelioration with the government they did not consult the general West Indian body. The course of action pursued by the Committee, under the leadership of Charles Ellis, led to its fragmentation.

The colonial agents disavowed any support for amelioration. In a letter to Bathurst in March 1824 they disputed the government's claim that the amelioration plan had been approved by

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1824

the West India Committee.<sup>85</sup> This is an extraordinary claim on two points. Firstly, George Carrington, agent for Barbados and one of the individuals involved in this exchange, was a member of the Special Committee that drafted the recommendations. Secondly, in Parliament in May 1823, Charles Ellis had stated that ‘no objection would be offered on the part of the planters of the West Indies’ on the proposed amelioration plan laid out by Canning. The agents claimed to be ‘unconnected...with any proceedings of the planters resident here, relative to the internal regulations of the colonies, and claimed that the ‘measures which came under the consideration of the gentlemen who conferred with His Majesty’s ministers did not pretend to pledge, and could not pledge either the whole of the colonial interest or the colonial legislatures to amelioration or to emancipation.’<sup>86</sup>

### **The Compulsory Manumission Controversy**

The amelioration experiment had begun, as Melanie Newton observes, to further complicate the ‘complex social landscapes of the societies which amelioration was meant to transform.’<sup>87</sup> The introduction of the clause of compulsory manumission, the right of the enslaved person to purchase his or her freedom without the owner’s consent, into the consolidated slave laws of the Crown colonies of Demerara, Berbice, Trinidad, St Lucia and the Cape of Good Hope was a controversy that saw the Demerara planters engage in a protracted campaign against its enforcement.

Compulsory manumission struck at the heart of the planter-slave relationships; the right to decide to free one’s enslaved property was an extremely valued aspect of the slave-owning culture. Manumission as a policy occurred at the discretion of the planter, usually on his deathbed. The conditions of an enslaved person’s manumission depended on the relationship

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<sup>85</sup> Letter from colonial agents to Earl Bathurst, dated 9<sup>th</sup> March 1824, published in *The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1824

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Melanie J. Newton, ‘The King v. Robert James, a Slave for Rape: Inequality, Gender and British Slave Amelioration 1823-1834’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47:3(2005), p.585

he had with the master, or on the years of 'faithful' service he had given. It was not recognition of the humanity of the enslaved but rather a legal condition that the slave owner chose or chose not to bequeath.<sup>88</sup> The abolitionists wanted to see the introduction of compulsory manumission, as practiced in the Spanish slave system. The *Siete Partidas*, an early legal view of slavery, regarded the enslaved person as a 'persona', and not simply as property.<sup>89</sup> Slavery in the British system was based on the principles of the absolute right to property. The enslaved worker was the object of property and property rights. From the planter's perspective, the clause of compulsory manumission as part of amelioration undermined this right. Consequently, it was argued as being incompatible with the second and third of Canning's resolutions, that amelioration should be compatible with consideration of the wellbeing of the enslaved, and the safety of the colonies and consideration of the interests of private property.

The West India Committee had supported the idea of manumission with certain strict limitations: it was to be granted with the full consent of the slave owner, rather than the enslaved worker attaining freedom without it. Charles Ellis and Robert Wilmot Horton, under-secretary of state for the colonies, maintained a correspondence on a range of issues regarding the West Indies. Wilmot Horton, who was also MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, often spoke in support of the West India interest in Parliament, so much so that Thomas Fowell Buxton 'considered him a leading member of the West India body.'<sup>90</sup> It appears that Wilmot Horton gave Ellis access to government drafts on colonial legislation. In one letter he asked Ellis's opinion on a regulation on manumission he was drafting; Ellis forcefully

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<sup>88</sup> Robert E. Luster, *The Amelioration of Slaves in the British Empire, 1790-1833* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995) p. 129

<sup>89</sup> Elsa Goveia, *The West Indian Slave Laws of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (Barbados: Caribbean University Press, 1970) p. 12

<sup>90</sup> Quoted from 'Robert Wilmot Horton,' *History of Parliament Online* [www.histparl.ac.uk](http://www.histparl.ac.uk) Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2014

expressed his position on the matter, emphasising the importance of a planter led transition to freedom, as articulated by leading ‘Saint’ James Stephen:

I consider the true sound philosophical principle to adopt with respect to manumission ... is one which has been laid down in a report of the African Institution ... in which the abolitionists look forward to the extinction of slavery ... as that of voluntary manumission ... emancipation of which the master, not the slaves shall be the willing instruments.<sup>91</sup>

Charles Ellis believed that the imperial government had made an error in adopting compulsory manumission, because firstly, it went against his perception of how amelioration was to be facilitated; and secondly, it created what he saw as perverse incentives on the part of both enslaved and owner. The slave owner would remove all opportunities for the enslaved worker to accumulate any money, for his manumission or otherwise, which for Ellis was ‘at variance with the improvement in the condition of the slave,’ which would induce the enslaved worker ‘to effect the strongest possible temptation to become idle and worthless, for the purpose of depreciating his value.’<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, if an enslaved worker could purchase his freedom he would save everything to achieve this end and live in poverty, which was also not conducive to his moral progress. And what would happen if after the enslaved worker purchased his freedom and then suffered an injury that disabled him and prevented him from working?<sup>93</sup> For Ellis, compulsory manumission was a process that was laden with difficulties, not least because it interfered with his vision of amelioration which facilitated a limited advancement of the enslaved workers under the control and supervision of the planter.

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<sup>91</sup> DRO, D3155/WH 2871 Wilmot Horton Mss, Ellis to Wilmot Horton, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1826

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Ibid



George Hibbert anticipated that the best and most valuable enslaved workers would be emancipated under this clause. It was impossible, he argued, to replace the manumitted enslaved with another possessing exactly the same value and abilities. ‘An appraiser may measure a man and ascertain his strength’, he wrote to Wilmot Horton, ‘but it is impossible that he can adequately estimate the importance of that man in every relation towards the plantation upon which he has been residing.’<sup>94</sup>

James Colquhoun, colonial agent for the Leeward Islands, feared that in the colonies that he represented compulsory manumission would result in an excess of freed people of colour that would render the land ‘valueless to the planters and the mother country.’<sup>95</sup> As far as Colquhoun was concerned, this was clear grounds for compensation for two thirds of the enslaved worker’s value. Compulsory manumission, seen as an evolutionary way to the demise of slavery, was highly contested.

The concept of compulsory manumission threatened the development of Demerara as an emerging significant sugar colony. Since its acquisition from the Dutch in the last French war, the colony had been intensifying its plantation system towards sugar production and had attracted what Michael Craton has termed ‘an aggressive new breed of venture capitalists’, such as John Gladstone, James Blair, William King and Hugh Hyndman.<sup>96</sup> This intensification had a devastating effect on the enslaved. In 1828, a Mr J. Carmichael Smyth wrote to the Prime Minister the Duke of Wellington, giving his observations on the state of the enslaved population in that colony. He remarked that

The situation of the people here I conceive to be very different from the slaves in Jamaica – the greater number of the Berbice and Demerara slaves are Negroes who

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<sup>94</sup> TNA, CO137/66, ff. 78-80. George Hibbert to Wilmot Horton, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1827

<sup>95</sup> DRO, D3155/WH2769 James Colquhoun to Robert Wilmot Horton, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1825

<sup>96</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 267. Gladstone, Blair, King and Hyndman were all members of the Standing Committee

have been imported from Africa during the war ... the profit of the planter is very great, but the labour of the Negro is incessant and more severe ... their comforts are less than the other colonies.<sup>97</sup>

***Table 6.2 Slave Returns of Demerara enslaved workers, 1817-1826***<sup>98</sup>

<b>1817</b>	<b>1820</b>	<b>1823</b>	<b>1826</b>
Enslaved males (African and Creole) 43,771	Enslaved males (African and Creole) 43,227	Enslaved males (African and Creole) 41,224	Enslaved males (African and Creole) 38,758
Enslaved females (African and Creole) 33,392	Enslaved females (African and Creole) 34,149	Enslaved females (African and Creole) 33,753	Enslaved females (African and Creole) 32,624

The enslaved population, half of whom were African born, were unhealthy, unable to sustain a natural increase. The returns of the Slave Registry for Demerara between 1817 and 1826 illustrated above shows an overall decline. Moreover, in 1820, 7140 deaths were recorded against 4868 births, and in 1823 7188 deaths were recorded against 4512 births.<sup>99</sup> Since the colony had been intensifying its production in sugar, enslaved people were extremely valuable in these colonies. Therefore, it was against the interests of the Demerara planters to accept compulsory manumission, and the Court of Policy (the legislature of that colony), refused to include it into their amelioration programme. When Earl Bathurst had proposed in

<sup>97</sup> University of Southampton, Hartley Library (Special Collections), Duke of Wellington Mss, WP 1/922/4, J Carmichael Smyth to Wellington, March 1828,

<sup>98</sup> Parliamentary Papers (700), *General Summary of the Slave Population of the District of Demerara and Essequibo, of the Colony of British Guiana, agreeably to the registers of the returns for the years 1817, 1820, 1823 1826 and 1829* (London, 1832)

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

February 1826 that the enslaved workers could purchase their freedom without the consent of their masters, the Court of Policy refused to implement the clause.<sup>100</sup>

The imperial government had issued two Orders-in-Council to the Demerara Court of Policy. It preferred, however, that the planters adopt the clause without being compelled to do so.<sup>101</sup> For two years, the Colonial Office and the Court of Policy were at an impasse over the adoption of the manumission clause. In response, proprietors and mortgagees from Demerara appointed a Committee of Demerara Planters, a separate body to the West India Committee, to protest and lead a campaign against the provisions for compulsory manumission. The Committee comprised of members of the Standing Committee who possessed estates in the colony; John Innes, (agent for Berbice), Charles M’Garel, Andrew Colvile, James Blair MP and William King. They drafted a petition to the Privy Council setting out their opposition to the clause; each member contributed £150 to set up a fund to cover the fees of their counsel and printing costs.<sup>102</sup>

In this situation, the influence of the West India Committee was minimal. This was made clear when George Hibbert, who expected to represent the Glasgow planters at the appeal, was asked by the judge if he acted for a separate party. The judge told him that no more than two counsel was heard from the same interest (the Demerara planters had both their counsel present); did Hibbert mean to set up a separate interest? ‘I do not mean to set up any separate interest my Lord’, answered Hibbert, ‘our interests are identically the same,’ and was forced to withdraw from the proceedings.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), Demerara and Berbice Committee Minutes, Petition of the Committee of Demerara Planters, 1826

<sup>101</sup> D. J. Murray, *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government*, p.134-135

<sup>102</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), Demerara and Berbice Committee Minutes, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1827

<sup>103</sup> *The Proceedings before the Privy Council Against Compulsory Manumission in the Colonies of Demerara and Berbice* (London, 1827), pp.1-2

The West India Committee played no part in the activities of this Committee but offered their support and was invited to cooperate; it donated £1000 towards its expenses.<sup>104</sup> The Privy Council referred the case to a committee of enquiry – another way of postponing a decision on the issue for almost two years, declaring in 1829 that ‘no sufficient reason had been shown why His Majesty should rescind the said ordinance...as enables the slaves within the said colony to effect the purchase of their freedom in cases where the owners of any such slaves might not be consenting.’<sup>105</sup>

Nicholas Draper has stated that British politics were not dominated by the interests of the new colonies in the 1820s.<sup>106</sup> However, the fact that the Demerara planters chose to represent their interests rather than depend on the representation of the West India Committee indicated a shift in its function and purpose. As Draper notes, the Demerara planters challenged the will of Parliament and the Colonial Office and ‘stood off the British state.’<sup>107</sup>

### **Tensions and fissures**

The West India Committee’s endorsement of amelioration was undermined by the colonies’ refusal to adopt them into law. The parliamentary abolitionists, emboldened with the growth of public support, began to question the slow pace of amelioration and why the government had not, as pledged in 1823, bypassed the legislatures if they refused to adopt the plan. The Standing Committee expected the government to protect the planters from the invectives of the abolitionists, just as they expected commercial protection. It complained about the

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<sup>104</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), Demerara and Berbice Committee Minutes, not dated but probably 1826; Standing Committee Minutes, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1827

<sup>105</sup> *Order of King in Council for consolidating the several laws recently made for improving the condition of slaves of His Majesty’s Colonies of Trinidad, Berbice Demerara St Lucia, The Cape of Good Hope and Mauritius*, reported in *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1830

<sup>106</sup> Nicholas Draper, ‘The rise of a new planter class? Some counter currents from British Guiana and Trinidad, 1807-33’, *Atlantic Studies*, 9:1 (2012) p. 77

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p.77 See Douglas J. Hamilton, ‘ ‘Defending the Colonies against malicious attacks of Philanthropy’: Scottish Campaigns against the Abolitions of the slave trade and slavery,’ in Allan Macinnes and Douglas J. Hamilton ed. *Jacobitism, Enlightenment and Empire 1680-1820* (London: Pickering and Chatto 2014), pp.93-209 for the Glasgow planter campaign against compulsory manumission

increasingly hostile nature of the abolitionists, and appealed to the government to defend them ‘against the unfairness of the statements brought forward against the planters.’<sup>108</sup>

In Parliament, the planters were able to successfully block Henry Brougham’s motion that the colonies should be censured for not implementing amelioration in accordance with the Canning resolutions. Accepting that many of the colonies with assemblies had not enacted many of the laws recommended by the Colonial Secretary, he also listed the laws that had been passed.<sup>109</sup> Ralph Bernal, MP for Rochester (1820-41) and member of the Standing Committee, argued that it had been agreed by the Parliament of 1823 that amelioration should be slow and cautious. He promised members that Jamaica was changing its view, albeit slowly, and implored them not to condemn what had not been done in three years, but what had been accomplished over the past twenty.<sup>110</sup> Ellis represented himself as in trying to do the right thing he had made himself very unpopular in Jamaica. Despite being condemned by the Jamaican Assembly, he maintained that they had done good work in reforming the church establishment. In his opinion ‘the only safe preparation for civil rights was the aim of House and Country.’<sup>111</sup>

The West Indian interest was increasingly concerned with the attention that the West India question was receiving in Parliament. The West India Associations of the outports and in Glasgow and Edinburgh contacted the Standing Committee, suggesting the whole West India interest should present joint petitions providing evidence of the improved conditions of the enslaved population and how the debates were negatively impacting on their property. The Standing Committee rejected the suggestion that petitions and deputations from the colonies should form part of its appeals, arguing that ‘it did not appear to them to have any material

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<sup>108</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Meeting, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1826

<sup>109</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, (New Series) Volume 15, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1826, cols. 1321-1323

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, cols. 1331

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, cols 1341-1343

advantage' to pursue this course of action.<sup>112</sup> The Standing Committee realised that they had no influence over the colonial assemblies and knew that a deputation from the colonies would demonstrate their opposition to the amelioration plan conflicted with their own position of compromise. The extraordinary manner in which the Standing Committee rebuffed the colonists' participation in defending the West Indies created tension within the organisation. Charles Ellis moved to appoint a subcommittee to prepare a communication to the colonies apprising them of the public mood towards slavery, and of the government's determination to legislate without their consent. This attempt to manipulate the colonial assemblies was blocked by several members, including George Carrington, the colonial agent for Barbados, and the motion was withdrawn.<sup>113</sup>

## **A Coup**

During the 1820s, members of the West India Committee began to express frustration with the way it operated, and began to call for its reform. The well organised abolitionist assaults on slavery were having an impact. Through the sheer volume of pamphlets published by the Anti-Slavery Society – over two million between 1823 and 1831 – the abolitionists were able to claim they had universal support.<sup>114</sup> It has been earlier noted that in 1824, 33 men, mainly titled absentee planters were added to the ranks of the Standing Committee to add weight to the king's petition. Each year, more and more members were being added to the Standing Committee as the planters and merchants grew more concerned with the effect of the antislavery campaign on the West Indies.<sup>115</sup> In 1825 John Innes, agent for Berbice complained that the growth in the Standing Committee membership affected its efficiency, at

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<sup>112</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1825

<sup>113</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 1<sup>st</sup> June and 6<sup>th</sup> July 1826

<sup>114</sup> James Walvin, 'The Propaganda of Anti-Slavery' in James Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846*, p. 60

<sup>115</sup> See Chapter 2 for a breakdown of the types of Committee meetings, and the number of members added to the Standing Committee

a time when a strong organised defence was needed. He argued that this view was the general consensus of the Committee:

Such a system is obviously objectionable for common times, and under common circumstances, for a period like the present, unexampled in importance, whether considered in reference to property or character it is the opinion of almost every member of the body that a change is absolutely necessary.<sup>116</sup>

This statement was a veiled criticism of the leadership of the chairman, Charles Ellis. His control over the Standing Committee had become problematic for some members in light of his support for amelioration. Since his appointment to the chair in 1810, Ellis had used the leadership of the West India interest in Parliament to further his own political ambitions. As Barry Higman observed, Ellis ‘played politics on the metropolitan stage, abandoning the sideshow of the Colonial Assembly for the grander theatre of Empire.’<sup>117</sup> He had dominated the Committee, leading every deputation for every ministerial conference and headed every subcommittee that dealt with drafting petitions, fundraising, finance, and so on. This position had brought him prestige in the form of a peerage. By 1827 his position on amelioration was becoming incompatible with the membership who wanted to resist colonial interference. Innes proposed a more ‘democratic’ Standing Committee empowered to appoint a permanent ‘Annual Committee’ that handled all business instead of subcommittees dealing with each separate issue. Perhaps he also hoped that Ellis would not have such a controlling interest over the Committee. Innes succeeded in getting an Annual Committee elected in principle, given the task of preventing imports of Mauritian produce; the Standing Committee continued to appoint subcommittees.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1825

<sup>117</sup> Higman, *Montpelier Jamaica*, p. 29

<sup>118</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1825

In the late 1820s the issue of slavery was one among what James Walvin has termed ‘the rising tide of democratic sensibility’.<sup>119</sup> Catholic emancipation and intensified demands for parliamentary reform were other important topics being discussed in Parliament and among the public.<sup>120</sup> In March 1829 the Committee of the Privy Council gave its verdict on the petitions from Demerara and Berbice and ruled in favour of the compulsory manumission clause, and the government was taking a more decisive role in those colonies, no longer seeking the co-operation of the colonists to make improvements in the enslaved workers’ condition.<sup>121</sup>

At a General Meeting in April 1829, where a further 64 men were added to the Standing Committee, Robert Gordon, a Jamaican absentee and MP for Cricklade, did not believe that the addition of names to the Standing Committee would have any beneficial effect on the depressed state West India trade. Moreover, he believed to ‘render the Standing Committee more efficient’ the chair and deputy chair should be elected annually.<sup>122</sup> Gordon insisted it was not a criticism of Ellis’s leadership, but that something ought to be done to render the interests of trade more active. Other Committee members delivered a requisition to the chairman – it is worth noting that of the 15 signatories, 7 were from Demerara. They requested a revision of the Standing Committee constitution, giving it more powers. What the members were stating explicitly was that the Standing Committee, not the chairman, should be empowered to make the decisions on its strategy and direction.

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<sup>119</sup> James Walvin, ‘The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics: 1787-1838,’ in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies* (New York Academy of Sciences, 1977), p. 350

<sup>120</sup> For a discussion on the impact of the Reform Act on colonial representation in Parliament, see Miles Taylor, ‘Empire and parliamentary reform: The 1832 Act Revisited,’ in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes ed. *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 295-312. Also see Peter Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform: The Duke of Wellington’s Administration, 1828-1830* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998) and Michael J. Turner, *British Politics in the Age of Reform* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)

<sup>121</sup> D. J. Murray, *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government*, p.159

<sup>122</sup> *The Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1829



Ellis saw this as an attack on his leadership. He immediately resigned as chair and requested the removal of his name from the Standing Committee, claiming that the proposal was ‘at variance with a sound sense of the West India Body.’<sup>123</sup> His response suggests he did not agree with the Committee membership that a restructuring of the organisation, or a more ‘colonial’ defence was required. His rejection of colonial input in 1826 demonstrated that he preferred the crisis was handled from the metropole, under his leadership. Charles Pallmer also requested that his name was removed from the Standing Committee, saying that he was rendered ineligible for any situation under the proposed new arrangements. With Ellis and Pallmer removed, the Standing Committee took a more ‘democratic’ approach to the handling of West India affairs. It elected an Acting Committee, whose chair and members served on rotation, meeting on a weekly basis to handle a daily lobbying regime aimed at relieving the planters’ economic distress. The Standing Committee met quarterly, or as and when necessary. From this point the West India Committee began to lobby more aggressively for the rights of the planters, abandoning the pledges and assurances of the earlier years.

## **Conclusion**

The abolitionists wanted a well-managed emancipation of the enslaved population in the West Indies that was facilitated by greater imperial intervention. The West India Committee endeavoured to prevent government interference in colonial matters. Fearing that the government would be less accommodating to its needs, it adopted an ameliorationist stance as its political strategy, supporting a slow and gradual emancipation that would be facilitated by the colonial assemblies. Recognizing that emancipation was inevitable it lobbied the government to commit to compensation when emancipation eventually occurred. That it was unable to immediately secure this pledge probably prolonged slavery in the West Indies.

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<sup>123</sup>ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1829

Regarding themselves as the representatives of the West India colonists, the Committee membership felt qualified to dictate the terms of amelioration. However, these terms, which were adopted by the government, resulted in a colonial backlash that the Standing Committee unintentionally provoked. Almost immediately it became apparent that there was no consensus on amelioration between the West Indian colonists and the Standing Committee, which the colonists saw as not only an infringement on their rights but also a challenge to their authority over the enslaved population. It became clear that Charles Ellis's 'moderate' stance and opposition to a 'pro-colonial' position troubled many of his colleagues, creating tension within the West India Committee membership. The tensions within the Standing Committee and between the colonists precipitated the resignation of its long-standing chair. Amelioration also revealed the complexities and realities of colonial existence making it clear that over time these policies would not be sustained by the white colonists. Therefore, Elizabeth Heyrick's assertion that gradual abolition was a cynical ploy oversimplified a complex situation. The colonists did not want to adopt an amelioration programme. They saw it as another step towards full emancipation. The West India Committee, more sensitive to public opinion and the decline in its own influence, supported amelioration as a way to survive.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has presented a more comprehensive account of the activities and changing political agenda of the West India Committee. It explored how it conducted its operations and reactions to the events that threatened its political and commercial interests. By focusing on these activities in order to chart the political changes that the Committee experienced the author employed a methodological approach that drew on political structures, biographical and prosopographical approaches and textual analysis. To conclude this study of the West India Committee's activities, and its membership's attitudes and beliefs on slavery, abolition and emancipation, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the lobby is necessary.

The central task of the Committee was to represent their commercial interests as synonymous with the national interest. This formed the basis of the political arguments it advanced in and out of Parliament. Over the fifty year period under study, it asserted that sugar and slavery were vital to the overall economy of Great Britain. As the plantation economy declined, it sought sympathy from the government for the plight of the West Indies, reminding it of its obligation to serve its interests by lobbying for economic relief. As emancipation became more of a reality this argument was adapted to lobby for compensation.

Lobbying was complicated, expensive and time consuming. The West India Committee had developed an understanding of its processes over many years' engagement with the government. It had learned the importance of having advanced notice of proposed colonial policy, whether it was favourable and if it was necessary to petition against it. It knew that its members had to solicit support from potentially sympathetic MPs and government ministers,

which was cultivated through private meetings and letters. When the conditions for successful lobbying were disrupted - a misalignment of interests or underdeveloped political networks for example – it left the lobby unable to intervene to successfully monitor policy and influence the passage of favourable legislation. Despite the Committee's experience and knowledge of the political process, its influence was conditional on whether the government was predisposed to act in its favour. The West India Committee's failure to convince the government to restore trade links with the United States illustrates this point.

The West India Committee's political influence was not solely through debate and influence in Parliament, but also through the cultivation of personal relationships with political figures, particularly via the political and social connections of its chairmen. Lord Penrhyn's extensive political, social and economic ties with many members of the merchant and planter class made him a powerful advocate. His consistent attendance of senior politicians after the Revolutionary War and during the slave trade campaigns were significant contributions to its lobbying strategy. Charles Ellis used the position to acquire social and political capital. He relied on his friendships with leading ministers and politicians to influence colonial policy and until the deaths of George Canning and Lord Liverpool; the West India Committee tolerated his moderate stance. His support for amelioration in the 1820s demonstrated that he was prepared to recognise the enlightenment of the age to ensure governmental support of the West Indies. Acknowledging that the slave owner's position in the metropole was weakening, his views put him at odds with many of the merchant and planter interest that he claimed to represent. His distance, geographically and emotionally, from the West Indies undermined his authority to speak on behalf of the West Indian colonists.

The West India Committee failed to recognise the impact of abolitionist discourse on its membership. Its selection of Lord Chandos on the basis of his association with the Duke of Wellington was a spectacular own-goal. As slavery and colonial reform became more absolute in the 1830s and the basis on which to maintain a parliamentary seat, Chandos elected to denounce slavery. In doing so, he denounced the organisation, damaging its authority and legitimacy.

The membership of the West India Committee consisted of highly educated men, leading figures in the City of London, the West Indian community and Westminster. Some were astute political operators; others experienced in colonial trade and commerce, holding positions in the leading insurance and merchant houses. Others were historians, political pamphleteers, fellows of the Royal Society, had government positions or seats in Parliament. This considerable wealth of experience was used to counter abolitionist attacks, draft petitions and assign members to deputations with the appropriate expertise to strengthen their case before government ministers. They disseminated news on events in the West Indies and changes in mercantile and colonial policy. Chapter 2 demonstrated that there was a core group of members that consistently lobbied on behalf of the West India interest, giving many years of service. This gave the Committee a sense of continuity that reinforced their commitment to the West Indies. Other members who appeared to be fleeting in their attendance were also important contributors to the Committee's objectives; often their social position helped give weight to important petitions, or their presence on a subcommittee would reflect the importance of the issue being approached. George Hay Dawkins-Pennant, Lord Harewood and Viscount St. Vincent are examples of those attendees who showed their support in this way for the defence of slavery, or when requesting government assistance.

During the antislavery campaigns, the abolitionists set the agenda. Consequently the Committee was constantly on the defensive, acting in a 'reactive' rather than an 'active'

manner to their strategies. It adopted the language of its liberal and progressive opponents in an attempt to represent itself as sympathetic to the plight of the enslaved workers and slavery as a positive good. Some absentee planters were critical of the slave trade, supporting its gradual abolition. A move towards improved plantation conditions to encourage population growth was adopted, effectively weakening the argument that supported the benefits of the slave trade. Moreover, realising that overproduction of sugar, planter indebtedness and fears of black majorities were compelling arguments for abolition Joseph Foster Barham went further than his fellow moderates and voted for it.

The decline in the political influence of the West India interest is also illustrated in the government's refusal to remove black soldiers stationed in the West Indies. The successful deployment of black soldiers against emancipated black French forces was the principal motivation for the establishment of regiments consisting of black troops. Saving European lives overrode West Indian fears of upsetting the established racial hierarchies by introducing anomalous elements into colonial society. Preoccupied with the larger issue of winning the war by any means necessary, the government rejected their arguments as false or exaggerated.

The debates on slavery that persisted after 1807 were characterised by representations of the West Indies as a site of aberration. The intention to discourage illegal slave trading in the West Indies by establishing slave registers again put the Committee on the defensive. A key strategy it used to reject metropolitan interference was to represent Sierra Leone, the abolitionists' colonial project, as a failure. Consequently, Sierra Leone was used to articulate proslavery criticisms of the abolitionists, becoming a site in the war of representation over slavery. Chapter 5 showed that this proslavery strategy, by marshalling the use of the public platform of the pamphlet predates James MacQueen's utilisation of Sierra Leone in this manner in the 1820s. This strategy was another 'reactive' response by the Committee to the

agenda set by the abolitionists who determined to close off the slave trade by introducing slave registration.

The debates on emancipation had a profound impact on the structure and organisation of the Committee. Having operated efficiently during the 1790s via its governing structure of the General Meeting and Standing Committee, its effectiveness was compromised by continuous additions to the Standing Committee. Being situated in the metropole meant that the Committee membership was more exposed to the political and public waves of disapproval over slavery. Consequently it supported amelioration to deflect attack and preserve colonial authority. The colonial backlash over the policy complicates the assumption that the metropolitan planter and merchant interest acted on the colonies' behalf. The Committee's willingness to accept gradual emancipation cast it in humanitarian light which put it in conflict with the colonists. The West India Committee leadership did not fully appreciate that slavery for the colonists was more than an economic institution; it was the social, political and cultural institution that defined colonial society.

The West India Committee's strategy was complex. In one way it was fluid, responding to the external forces it encountered at any given time; in another, the manner in which it lobbied government did not change, because the fundamental belief that the West Indies was the source of Britain's wealth and power remained. The argument whether economic concerns or humanitarian discourses served as the impetus for abolition has not been a central theme of this study. However, the key point is that the West India Committee could not overcome the immorality of slavery. No matter how much it claimed colonial society had changed or could change, no matter how 'progressive' it represented itself, colonial society

was unequal in its nature which restricted its ability to change itself into an enlightened and inclusive one.

This thesis has shown that the proslavery position was complex, and that it is important not to categorise the defenders of slavery as one in their actions and thought. Planters and merchants often disagreed with each other and the common values they shared evolved and changed over time. Consequently it is difficult to present a view that encompasses the whole planter class. Therefore, its decline did not occur as a sudden historical event; rather, it was the build-up of subtle changes within colonial and metropolitan society over long periods of time that had the large-scale consequences of eventual emancipation.



*Appendix I: Estimated Standing Committee Attendance for the most frequently appearing individuals, May 1785-July 1833*

Name	Frequency	Island interest	Details (where known)
1.George Hibbert (1757-1837)	260	Jamaica	Alderman for London (1798-1803); First Chair, West India Dock 1799-1837); MP for Seaford (1806-1812) Agent for Jamaica (1812-1831); Hibbert, Purrier and Horton, Merchants; Hibberts Fuhr and Purrier, Merchants
2.Neill Malcolm, Snr. (1769-1837)	149	Jamaica	Merchant/Planter
3.William Chisholme (d.1802)	136	Jamaica	
4.Gibbes Walker Jordan (1757-1823)	134	Barbados	Agent for Barbados (1800-1823)
4.Richard Pennant, Lord Penrhyn (1737-1808)	133	Jamaica	Chair of West India Committee (1783-1807); MP for Petersfield (1761-1767) MP for Liverpool (1767-1790); created Lord Penrhyn (1783)
5.Charles Pallmer (1772-1848)	133	Jamaica	Chair and deputy chair of standing committee; attorney for Charles Rose Ellis; Crown Solicitor, Jamaica 1806; MP, Ludgershall, 1815-1817; Surrey, 1826-1830 <sup>1</sup>
6.Anthony Browne (1769-1840)	133	St. Kitts/Antigua/ Montserrat	MP, Hedon 1806-1818; Agent, Antigua (1798-1840); St. Kitts (1808-1811); Montserrat (1790-1840); partner, Bowles, Browne, Ogden Cobbs

<sup>1</sup> 'Charles Pallmer,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/pallmer-charles-1772-1848> Accessed 25th March 2013; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

			and Stokes(67 Lombard Street); collector of customs, Trinidad and Tobago; 32 Pembroke Square, Kensington <sup>2</sup>
7.Beeston Long (1757-1820)	132	Jamaica	Merchant, Long, Drake and Long; chair, West India Merchants; deputy governor, Bank of England 1804-1806 <sup>3</sup>
8.William Vaughan (1752-1850)	120	Jamaica	Merchant; Director, London Dock Company, Royal Exchange Assurance <sup>4</sup>
9.Charles Rose Ellis, Lord Seaford (1771-1845)	114	Jamaica	Absentee owner of Montpelier plantation, Jamaica; Chair, West India Committee 1810-1814; 1820-1829; MP for Heytesbury 1793-96; Seaford 1796-1806; East Grinstead 1807-12; Seaford 1812-26 <sup>5</sup>
10.William Knox (1732-1810)	105	Dominica	Agent for Dominica, pamphleteer, undersecretary of state for America
11.James Colquhoun (1780-1855)	104		Planter, diplomatic agent for Lubeck Bremen Hamburg; consul general for Saxony; colonial agent, St. Kitts( 1825-1851); Dominica (1816-1852); Nevis (1821-1848); Anguilla, Tobago (1842-

<sup>2</sup> ‘Anthony Browne,’ *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/browne-anthony-1769-1840> Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013; Lillian Penson, *The Colonial Agents of the British West Indies: A Study in colonial administration, mainly in the eighteenth century* (University of London Press, 1924) p.250; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

<sup>3</sup> Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.53

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Draper, ‘The City of London and Slavery: evidence from the first Dock Companies’, *Economic History Review*, 6:2 (2008), p.4

<sup>5</sup> ‘Charles Rose Ellis,’ *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/ellis-charles-1771-1845> Accessed 25th March 2013 B.W. Higman, *Plantation Jamaica 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (University of the West Indies Press, 2005), p.227

			1850); secretary to Henry Dundas in 1806, author <sup>6</sup>
12.Sir Alexander Cray Grant (1782-1854)	103	Jamaica	MP for Tregony (1812-1818); Lostwithiel (1818-1826); Aldborough (1826-1830); Westbury (1830-1831); Cambridge (1840-1843);  Member, Jamaican colonial assembly 1810-1811; colonial agent St Kitts (1818-23); Antigua (1819-20), 1 Privy Gardens, London <sup>7</sup>
13.William Manning (1763-1835)	97	St. Kitts/St. Vincent/Danish W.I.	Merchant, initially with father W.C. Manning, then Benjamin Vaughan & later partner in Manning, Anderdon & Bosanquet.  Director, Bank of England (1792-1810); MP, Plympton Erle (1794-1796); Lymington (1796-1806); Evesham (1806-1818) Agent for St. Vincent 1792-1806. <sup>8</sup>
14.Philip Dehany	94	Jamaica	
15.Sir David Wedderburn	83	Jamaica	
16.William Lushington (1747-1823)	81		Agent for Grenada (1795-1815); director, West India Dock 1803-8' MP London (1795-1802) <sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Penson, *Colonial Agents*, pp. 252-254; W. Innes Addison, *Roll of the Graduates of the University of Glasgow, from 31<sup>st</sup> December 1727, to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1897* (James MacLehose and Sons 1898), p. 116; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee minutes, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1825

<sup>7</sup> 'Sir Alexander Cray Grant,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/grant-alexander-1782-1854> Accessed 25th March 2013

<sup>8</sup> 'William Manning', *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/manning-william-1763-1835> Accessed 28th March 2013

<sup>9</sup> 'William Lushington,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/lushington-william-1747-1823> Accessed 28th July 2013

17.Stephen Fuller (1716-1799)	81	Jamaica	Agent for Jamaica (1764-1794), Stephen and Rose Fuller, Merchants
18.Samuel Long	79	Jamaica	Treasurer, West India Committee; Long, Drake and Long, Merchants
19.George Carrington (1782-1855)	79	Barbados	Colonial Agent for Barbados (1823-1831) <sup>10</sup>
20.Joseph Marryat Jr. (1790-1876)	78	Grenada/Trinidad	Merchant, Joseph Marryat and Son, 2 Laurence Pountney Lane;  MP, Sandwich (1826-1834)  Colonial Agent for Grenada (1831-1849) <sup>11</sup>
21.John Anthony Rucker (d. 1846)	78	Antigua/Tobago/St. Vincent	Merchant, J.A. and D.H. Rucker, 29 Mincing Lane <sup>12</sup>
22.Charles McGarel (1788-1876)	78	British Guiana (Demerara)	Merchant, Hall McGarel 7 Austin Friars <sup>13</sup>
23.Edmund Pusey Lyon	77	Jamaica	Agent for Jamaica (1803-1812)
24.William Hutchinson	71	Antigua	Agent for Antigua (1790-1798)
25.Robert Milligan (1746-1809)	70	Jamaica	Merchant, principal planner of the West India Docks; Chair, West India Dock Company
26.John Pollard Mayers (1777-	70	Barbados	Colonial Agent Barbados

<sup>10</sup> Penson, *Colonial Agents*, p.251; 'George Carrington', *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/1064672179> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014

<sup>11</sup> 'Joseph Marryat,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/marryat-joseph-1790-1876> Accessed 24th July 2013

<sup>12</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831; David Beck Ryden, 'Sugar, Spirits and Fodder: The London West India Interest and the glut of 1807-15', *Atlantic Studies*, 9:1 (2012), pp.41-64; *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146632144> Accessed 14th August 2014

<sup>13</sup> *Proceedings before the Privy Council against Compulsory Manumission in the colonies of Demerara and Berbice* (London 1828), p.277; *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/6914> Accessed 5th March 2014

1853)			1831-1848 <sup>14</sup>
27.Sir William Windham Dalling (1775-1864)	69	Jamaica	2 <sup>nd</sup> baronet; owner of Donnington Castle plantation, St Mary's, Jamaica; inherited from father, Sir John Dalling, governor of Jamaica 1777-81 <sup>15</sup>
28.Andrew [Wedderburn] Colville (1779-1856)	69	Jamaica	Merchant, Wedderburn, Webster and Co, 35 Leadenhall Street; Colville and Co; governor of Hudson's Bay Company <sup>16</sup>
29.James Baillie (1737-1793)	68	Grenada/St. Kitts	Merchant/Planter, MP Grampound (1762-93) Agent for Grenada (1792-93)
30.Joseph Marryat Snr. (1757-1824)	67	Grenada/Trinidad	Merchant and colonial agent, Trinidad (1807-1815); Grenada (1815-1824); MP, Horsham 1808-12; Sandwich 1812-24; Joseph Marryat and Son, 2 Laurence Pountney Lane; chair of Lloyds committee <sup>17</sup>
31.Sir Edward Hyde East (1764-1847)	66	Jamaica	MP, Great Bedwyn (1792-96); Winchester (1823-31) Judge and Chief Justice for Calcutta (1813-23) <sup>18</sup>
32.Benjamin Vaughan (1751-	65	Jamaica	Planter/Merchant MP. West India merchant.

<sup>14</sup> Penson, *Colonial Agents*, p.251; Bruce M. Taylor, 'Our man in London: John Pollard Mayers, agent for Barbados and the British Abolition Act', *Caribbean Studies*, 16:4 (1976-1977) pp.60-84

<sup>15</sup> 'Earsham Hall built on slavery' (BBC Norfolk website)

[www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/content/articles/2007/03/01/norfolk\\_abolition\\_earsham\\_hall\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/content/articles/2007/03/01/norfolk_abolition_earsham_hall_feature.shtml) Accessed 16th February 2013

<sup>16</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

<sup>17</sup> 'Joseph Marryat', *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/marryat-joseph-1757-1824> Accessed 25th March 2013

<sup>18</sup> 'Sir Edward Hyde East,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/east-sir-edward-1764-1847> Accessed 25th March 2013; Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave ownership, Compensation and British Society at the end of slavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.173

1835)			Political radical; fled country 1794 under threat of arrest for seditious behaviour
33.Sir Henry William Martin, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Bt. (1768-1842)	63	Montserrat/Antigua	57 Upper Harley Street, London, author, <i>A counter appeal, in answer to "An appeal" by William Wilberforce: designed to prove that the emancipation of the Negroes in the West Indies, by a legislative enactment without the consent of the planters, would be a flagrant breach of national honour, hostile to the principles of religion, justice, and humanity, and highly injurious to the planter and to the slave.</i> Grandson of Samuel Martin, author, <i>An Essay on Plantership</i> <sup>19</sup>
34.John Higgin (d. 1846)	63	Jamaica	Merchant/planter, Higgin, Crawford and Co., London Fields, Hackney <sup>20</sup>
35.John Fuller (c.1756-1834)	62	Jamaica	MP, Southampton (1780-1784); Sussex (1801-1812); nephew of Rose and Stephen Fuller (planter and colonial agent and merchant respectively); inherited Jamaican properties from Rose Fuller <sup>21</sup>
36.William 'King' Mitchell (1742-	61	Jamaica	Planter, MP Plympton Erle (1796-1799)

<sup>19</sup> John Burke, *A General Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire, Volume 2* (Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), p.147 ; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915) Standing Committee Minutes

<sup>20</sup> Ryden, 'Sugar, spirits and fodder', p.48

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Beckett, 'Mad' Jack Fuller, the honest Sussex squire', *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 2 (1928), pp24-26

1823)			
37.Ralph Bernal (1783-1854)	60	Jamaica	Planter; MP, Lincoln (1818-20); Rochester (1820-41) <sup>22</sup>
38.Petty Vaughan (1788-1854)	60	Jamaica	Son of Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835), and nephew of William Vaughan (1752-1850), merchant, 70 Fenchurch Street <sup>23</sup>
39.Dr Alexander Kidston[e]	59	Jamaica	Planter <sup>24</sup>
40.John Innes (1786-1869)	54	Demerara	Merchant, Director, London Dock Company in partnership with Nathaniel Winter and Co,  author; honorary secretary of British West India Company (1846), 3 Copehall Chambers <sup>25</sup>
41.William Robert Keith Douglas (1783-1859)	53	Tobago	Merchant/Planter, MP, Dumfries Burghs (1812-1832); colonial agent, Tobago (1823-27); Lord of Admiralty (1824-1827); 95 Eaton Square <sup>26</sup>
42.William Innes (1719-1795)	53	Jamaica	Merchant, MP Ilchester 1774-1775), author, <i>A Letter to the Members of Parliament Who Have Presented Petitions to the Honourable House of Commons for the Abolition of the Slave</i>

<sup>22</sup> 'Ralph Bernal,' History of Parliament Online <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/bernal-ralph-1784-1854> Accessed 25th March 2013 Higman, *Plantation Jamaica*, p.114

<sup>23</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15) List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

<sup>24</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/4), Standing Committee Minutes, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March 1825

<sup>25</sup> *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Courts of Exchequer and Exchequer Chamber, Volume 4* (London 1839), p.455; *Demerara after fifteen years of freedom, by a landowner* (London 1853), p.105; Review, *Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. 5* (1836), p.273

<sup>26</sup> 'William Robert Keith Douglas,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/douglas-william-1783-1859> Accessed 25th March 2013; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M95/15), List of Standing Committee members compiled c.1831

			<i>Trade.</i> ( London, 1792)
43.Sir Simon Haughton Clarke, 9 <sup>th</sup> Baronet (1764-1832)	51	Jamaica	Planter, author
44.Robert Lang Snr. (1765-1828)	50		West India merchant
45.Samuel Blois Turner (1745-1818)	48	Antigua/St Kitts	Merchant
46.Henry Bright (1784-1869)	48	Jamaica	MP, Bristol (1820-1830); 2 Stone Buildings, Lincolns Inn (barrister) <sup>27</sup>
47.William Burge (1786-1849)	47	Jamaica	Attorney General, Jamaica, planter, colonial agent, Jamaica (1832-1846) MP, Eye, (1831-32), 7 New Square, Lincolns Inn <sup>28</sup>
48.Gilbert Francklyn (1733-1799)	47	Tobago	Merchant, Member of Council of Tobago, pamphleteer
49.Robert Sewell (1751-1828)	46	Jamaica	Attorney General, Jamaica (1780-95); MP, Grampound (1796-1802); Agent for Jamaica (1795-1805); Uncle of Matthew 'Monk' Lewis, novelist
50.Edward Long (1734-1813)	46	Jamaica	Planter, Historian, essayist
51.William Peatt Litt (1769-1840)	45	Jamaica	Merchant, founder of Liverpool West India Association 1799; partner, Timperon, Litt and Harrison; W.P. Litt and Steele; Timperon and Dobinson <sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

<sup>28</sup> 'William Burge,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/burge-william-1786-1849> Accessed 25th March 2013; Penson, *Colonial Agents*, p.251; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee members, c.1831

<sup>29</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 14 (London 1840), p.108; 'William Peatt Litt,' *Legacies British Slave Ownership* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/730472069> Accessed 25th March 2013



52.George Whitely	41	Jamaica	Merchant, 18 London Street <sup>30</sup>
53.John Lavicount Anderdon (1792-1874)	39		Merchant, Manning and Anderdon, New Bank Buildings son of John Proctor Anderdon, son-in-law of William Manning <sup>31</sup>
54.Joseph Foster Barham (1759-1832)	38	Jamaica	Merchant/Planter, Plummer and Barham; MP, Stockbridge (1793-1799; 1802-1806); Okehampton (1806-1807); Stockbridge (1807-1822) author <sup>32</sup>
55.Charles Armstrong	38		Merchant, 9 Clements Lane, Lombard Street <sup>33</sup>
56.James Johnston[e]	37	Jamaica <sup>34</sup>	
57.William Mitchell (1742-1823)	36	Jamaica	Planter MP, Plympton Erle (1796-1799) <sup>35</sup>
58.J[ohn] Daniel	35	Barbados	Merchant/planter, Thomas Daniel and Sons, 4 Mincing Lane <sup>36</sup>
59.John Wood Nelson (1770-1844)	34		Commission agent, Adam Whalley and Nelson; Nelson and Adams, 26 Savage Gardens, Crutched Friars; London agent for Edward Lascelles, 1 <sup>st</sup> Earl Harewood <sup>37</sup>

<sup>30</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee members, c.1831

<sup>31</sup> 'John Lavicount Anderdon', *Dictionary of National Biography* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/460?docPos=1](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/460?docPos=1) Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013

<sup>32</sup> 'Joseph Foster Barham,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/foster-barham-joseph-1759-1832> Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013

<sup>33</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

<sup>34</sup> Beck Ryden, 'Sugar, spirits and fodder', p. 46

<sup>35</sup> 'William Mitchell,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/mitchell-william-1742-1823> Accessed 25th March 2013 ; Ryden, 'Sugar, spirits and fodder', p. 47

<sup>36</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c.1831

<sup>37</sup> 'John Wood Nelson,' *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/46788> Accessed 18th February 2013

60.George Chalmers (c.1742-1825)	34		Chief clerk to Committee of Privy Council on Trade and Plantations (later the Board of Trade); political writer, agent for the Bahamas (1792-1825) <sup>38</sup>
61.[William] Dickinson (1771-1837)	34	Jamaica	Planter, MP, Ilchester (1796-1802); Lostwithiel (1802-1806); Somerset (1806-1831) <sup>39</sup>
62.John Rock Grosett (c.1784-1866)	32	Jamaica	Planter, MP, Chippenham (1820-1826); member of Council and Assembly of Jamaica (1831-1844); author <sup>40</sup>
63.James Cavan (1771-1859)	31	Barbados	Merchant, James Cavan and Co., Cavan Brothers, 8 Park Crescent,
64.[James Evan] Baillie (1781-1863)	30	St. Vincent/British Guiana/ Trinidad/St Kitts	Planter/merchant, MP, Tralee (1813-1818); Bristol (1830-1834); Seymour Place, Mayfair <sup>41</sup>
65.George Shedden(1769-1855)	28		West India merchant, partner, Robert Shedden and Sons, 6 Bedford Square <sup>42</sup>
66.Marquis of Chandos (1797-1861)	27	Jamaica	Chair of Standing Committee (1829-1833), MP, Buckinghamshire(1818-1839); Pall Mall <sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> 'George Chalmers', *Dictionary of National Biography* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5028?docPos=2](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5028?docPos=2) Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2013

<sup>39</sup> 'William Dickinson,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/dickinson-william-ii-1771-1837> Accessed 25th March 2013

<sup>40</sup> 'John Rock Grosett,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/grosett-john-1784-1866> Accessed 25th March 2013

<sup>41</sup> Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, The Caribbean and the Atlantic World 1750-1820* (University of Manchester Press 2005), p.201; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c. 1831

<sup>42</sup> ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c. 1831

<sup>43</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Richard Plantagenet Temple Nugent Brydges Chandos Grenville', [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11497?docPos=11](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11497?docPos=11) Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2013; ICS, West India Committee Archives (M915/15), List of Standing Committee Members c. 1831

67.J[ames] Cunningham (1781-1863)	27	St. Vincent/Tobago	Merchant, partner, Cunningham and Robeley <sup>44</sup>
68.Charles Marryat (1803-1884)	27	Grenada/Trinidad	Planter, brother of Joseph Marryat Jnr <sup>45</sup>
69.Reverend John Brome (1767-1828)	26	Barbados	Planter, owner of Bromefield and Hannays plantations <sup>46</sup>
70.Charles Thompson	26	St. Kitts	Colonial agent, St. Kitts (1790-1808) <sup>47</sup>
71.Abraham Redwood	26	Antigua	Merchant/planter, Dorset Street, Dorset Square
72.John H. Deffell	25	Jamaica	Merchant/planter, John Henry Deffell and Co, Billiter Square, director, West India Dock Company <sup>48</sup>
73.Roger Kynaston	24	Jamaica	Merchant/Planter
74.John Plummer (1780-1839)	24	Jamaica	Plummer and Wilson, Plummer and Co, Plummer and Barham; MP, Hindon (1820-1826) <sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> 'James Cunningham,' *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/46762> Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013

<sup>45</sup> 'Charles Marryat,' *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/42069> Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013

<sup>46</sup> Draper, *The Price of Emancipation*, p. 309, n20

<sup>47</sup> Penson, *Colonial Agents*, p.252

<sup>48</sup> Ryden, 'Sugar, spirits and fodder', p.49

<sup>49</sup> 'John Plummer,' *History of Parliament Online* <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/plummer-john-1780-1839> Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013; *Legacies of British Slave Ownership Database* <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/23815> Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2013

***Appendix 2: Resolutions of the West India Committee 19<sup>th</sup> April 1789***

1. That slavery has existed as a condition of mankind in Africa, from the earliest times, before the Europeans carried on the slave trade on the Western coast of the continent.
2. That, of the slaves purchased by the British merchants part appear to be prisoners of war, who would otherwise be massacred on the spot, or sacrificed to the superstition and cruelty of their conquerors; that others are convicts, whose punishments are commuted from death to slavery. Others again are born slaves, or made so for debt.
3. That a trade to Africa cannot be carried on to any great extent or natural advantage except in the article of slaves, the purchase of which does not necessarily tend to promote wars among the natives or retard the progress of civilisation.
4. That the proprietors in the sugar colonies have an equal right with all the other subjects of the realm to be protected in the free enjoyment of a property legally acquired.
5. That their title to the property they possess is founded on grants and sales of the crown, and on charters and acts of parliament.
6. That the capital now vested in the sugar colonies, in land, Negroes, buildings, live and dead stock amounts to seventy millions of pounds sterling. –
7. That the value of the whole depends solely on the cultivation of the lands, any system, therefore, which tends to deprive the proprietors of the means of cultivation, affects and depreciates the value of this capital.
8. That it has been the universal practice from the infancy of the colonies in all the islands British and foreign, to cultivate the lands by Negroes.
9. That the constitution of Europeans has been found by experiences to be unequal to the labours of agriculture in the West Indies, and consequently, if sufficient supplies of Negroes cannot be procured for that purpose, cultivation cannot proceed.

10. That, from natural causes and accidental calamities to which the West India islands are unfortunately subject, there is a constant, and at times rapid decrease in the number of Negroes which cannot be guarded against or provided for by births.

11. That to depend solely on internal Negro population for cultivation is to vest the interests not only of the planters but also of mortgages, annuitants, femmes couvertes, widows, infants and various other West India creditors in Great Britain, on the uncertain issue of untried speculative experiment, which, if it fails in the ends proposed, must cause great loss, if not total ruin to numbers of innocent individuals, who are purchasers for a valuable consideration, on the faith of a system long established on the colonies, sanctioned and corroborated by many acts of Parliament.

12. That the manufactures, shipbuilding, navigation and revenues of Great Britain are materially interested in the trade to Africa and the sugar colonies and as far as they are supported by it, must decline or prosper in proportion as the planters are enabled to carry on the cultivation of the West India islands.

13. That it appears from the report of His Majesty's Privy Council that the custom house value of the exports to Africa and the sugar colonies in 1787 amounted to £2,306,959. The imports from the sugar colonies, according to the valuation of the Inspector General in 1787 amounted £5,389,054 + from Africa £117, 817 =£5,506,871

14. The tonnage of the ships cleared outwards in the sugar colonies and entered inwards from Africa in 1787 amounted 249,351 tons. The seamen in the West India navigation alone in 1787 amounted to 21,000 men. And the revenue, in 1787 amounted to £1,627,142

15. That the West India and African trade is a nursery for seamen.

16. That the French now give a bounty of 46 livres per ton on every vessel fitted out from any port in France to Guinea and from 160 to 230 livres upon every Negro imported into their colonies

17. That the Spaniards have recently opened several ports in South America for the importation of Negroes, duty free, by foreigners and in foreign bottoms, expressly as is declared in the Cedula, for the encouragement of agriculture in their colonies.

18. That the Americans have fitted out several vessels to prosecute this trade.

19. That the declaration of the minister, that no compensation shall be made to the parties who manufacturer [is] a declaration so repugnant to every principle of justice [which] can only arise from a sense of the magnitude of the mischief which eventually may ensue, and has a tendency, if adopted by the legislation, to prevent all future reliance in commercial undertakings, either on the stability of royal charters or the faith of parliament.

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