A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN
FROM THE ARAWAK AND THE CARIB TO THE PRESENT

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A MERIDIAN BOOK (1994)
CHAPTER THIRTEEN:
THE BRITISH COLONIES

Slavery dominated every aspect of life in the Caribbean islands. It made sugar plantations possible, shaped social and familial relations, and dominated the laws and politics of the islands. Thus the abolition of slavery represented a radical and dramatic change in island life. Great Britain was the first European state to permanently end slavery in its Caribbean colonies. Many Britons now felt that slavery was both cruel and economically inefficient. They believed that the slaves only needed freedom to become happy and productive. Unfortunately, freedom was all the Abolitionists wanted to give the slaves. In 1846, Parliament adopted free trade and began to tax imports of West Indian sugar at the same rate as foreign sugars—which were cheaper precisely because they still were produced by slaves. Thus the British islands were forced to create an entirely new society while their incomes were rapidly falling. Many island governments failed this difficult test. From the 1860s, Britain thus abolished the island legislatures and ruled its colonies directly from London.

THE LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM

Until the 1780s, European statesmen and governments accepted slavery as inevitable and necessary. Through the labor of thousands of slaves, the island colonies produced extremely valuable exports of sugar and other tropical goods for European empires. Enormous amounts of capital invested in the sugar industry provided income to many Europeans and tax revenues for their governments. Since all European rulers agreed on the need for slavery, they let the planters rule their slaves and stood ready to help suppress slave rebellions. Events in Europe affected the islands, as we have seen, primarily when they led to international wars.

First in Great Britain and later on the continent, many Europeans came to believe that slavery was wrong and even evil. In most cases, they then forced abolition on island planters, who generally wanted to keep slavery. Even had they wanted to, the Caribbean whites could not abolish slavery until European governments turned against it. Except for Haiti and Santo Domingo, all of the islands were colonies, and their laws had to be approved by the European nation ruling over them. Beginning in 1792, European rulers began to force emancipa-
TABLE 19. THE ABOLITION OF AFRICAN SLAVERY IN THE CARIBBEAN, 1792–1886

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLONIAL POWER</th>
<th>SLAVE TRADE OUTLAWED</th>
<th>SLAVERY ABOLISHED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>March 1792 (partial ban effective ten years later); 1807 (total ban)</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>February 4, 1794 (reimposed 1802 for Guadeloupe and Martinique); April 15, 1818</td>
<td>February 4, 1794 (reimposed 1802 for Guadeloupe and Martinique); 1848 August 1834 (unpaid labor as &quot;apprentices&quot; required to 1838)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>1806 (bans sale to foreign colonies); March 25, 1807 (import of slaves into British colonies outlawed from March 1, 1808)</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>1814</td>
<td>1848 (Sint Maarten); 1863 (other colonies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Formally banned in 1820. But illegal trade tolerated to Puerto Rico (until the 1850s) and Cuba (to 1865) 1824</td>
<td>1846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...tion on their colonies. But the road to freedom was long. Almost a century passed before Caribbean slavery finally ended with its abolition on Cuba in 1886.

THE ANTI-SLAVERY CRUSADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

The British Empire was the first to put a permanent end to slavery, and emancipation was a momentous event in the history of the British colonies. In 1833, the British islands were inhabited by many black slaves and a few slave owners, and there were only a relatively small number of black and colored freedmen. Crops grown by slaves formed the only export. No one knew whether crops grown by free-wage labor could compete with those from regions where slavery still existed—the French islands, Cuba, and Brazil. Haiti provided the only earlier example of black freedom, and abolition in Haiti had ruined a once buoyant economy and caused the massacre of many thousand whites. In abolishing slavery, the British government thus took a decisive step with unpredictable consequences.

Most historians now agree that this extraordinary act resulted from a profound change in the moral values of ordinary men and women. During the last quarter of the 18th century, anti-slavery sentiment suddenly spread throughout Great Britain. Intellectuals had long attacked slavery as uncivilized, unjust, and unproductive, but the abstract arguments of philosophers have little influence in themselves. Abolitionism prospered in Britain because it became part of a great religious revival associated with John Wesley's Methodist movement and the Evangelical reformers in the Anglican church. Eighteenth-century revivalism stressed both sin and spiritual rebirth expressed in good works. The converted believed that God rewards the good and punishes sin and evil. Thus they became convinced that abolition would ensure God's blessings. But continuing the sin of slavery would call down God's wrath upon Britain.

The religious revival provided not only ideas but institutions that could bring pressure on the government. Methodists in Britain and North America—perhaps 300,000 strong by 1830—formed a vocal and highly organized pressure group. Moreover, compelled by their beliefs, Methodist and Baptist missionaries flocked to the British West Indies, where they began to convert growing numbers of black slaves. The black now was not only a brother—a fellow human—but also a born-again member of the same church.

THE STRUGGLE TO END THE BRITISH SLAVE TRADE

Anti-slavery forces formed the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. Given contemporary politics, they felt it would be easier to abolish the trade than to attack slavery head on. In abolishing slavery, the government would confiscate existing property rights, and laws passed by the colonial assemblies protected these rights. In contrast, Parliament alone had the power to regulate maritime commerce, and one law would thus end the slave trade.

The anti-slavery leaders thus began by asking supporters to send petitions against the slave trade. To their surprise, thousands responded, and Parliament received more than 100 petitions by the end of May 1788. William Wilberforce (1759–1833), a wealthy politician and close friend of the prime minister, William Pitt, became the chief parliamentary spokesman for the abolitionists. Because the number of petitions impressed the government, Wilberforce was able to accomplish a great deal, although later legends probably overstate his effectiveness.

Working behind the scenes with the king's ministers, Wilberforce initiated a series of parliamentary inquiries that brought out the horrors of the Middle Passage. To document its iniquities, Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846) provided expert witnesses and accumulated massive data on all aspects of the trade—as well as collecting shackles, thumb screws, teeth chisels, and branding irons that vividly demonstrated its horrors. Between 1787 and 1794, Clarkson collected information showing that the slave trade was one vast graveyard both for the slaves and also for British sailors, who died even faster than the Africans.

Despite Clarkson's evidence, many in Parliament opposed the sudden interruption of a business long sanctioned by law. In April 1791, the Commons overwhelmingly defeated Wilberforce's first motion to introduce an abolition bill. The abolitionists only redoubled their campaign in the country. Pamphlets publicized the most telling evidence presented to the parliamentary commissions. Josiah Wedgwood sold 200,000 copies of a china medallion that showed a kneeling slave in chains with the inscription "Am I Not A Man and a Brother?"
Over 500 petitions from regional abolition committees reached Parliament. A second crushing defeat of abolition would be politically dangerous. Prime Minister Pitt, in what many consider his most eloquent speech, carried both houses for gradual, not immediate, abolition.

After much debate, the Commons decided to end the British slave trade on January 1, 1796. But the Jacobin reign of terror and the war with France in 1793 discouraged radical ideas. Pitt and other parliamentary leaders now gave only tepid support, and 1796 passed without an abolition bill. Some abolitionists charged that Pitt had lost interest because the British had conquered Dutch Guiana and Trinidad and were seeking to take Saint-Domingue from Toussaint L'Ouverture's black rebels. Thousands of new slaves would be needed to restore Saint-Domingue's prosperity as well as to grow sugar on the rich lands of Britain's new colonies.

The majority of politically influential Britons had accepted the goal of abolition, but fourteen more years of parliamentary maneuvering was needed to end the trade. The government first gained passage of the Foreign Slave Bill (May 1806), which prohibited the shipping of slaves to foreign colonies (like Cuba) or to Britain's new conquests, such as Trinidad. In 1807, Parliament finally abolished import of slaves into British colonies as of March 1, 1808, and imposed large fines on transgressors.  

THE ILLEGAL SLAVE TRADE TO THE FRENCH AND SPANISH ISLANDS

Abolition was much less popular on the continent than in Great Britain. In European countries the anti-slavery movement never became a religious crusade as it did in England. Only intellectuals and government officials joined groups such as the French Société des Amis des Noirs. Most were Protestants in Roman Catholic countries, and the pope did not condemn the slave trade until 1839. Without pressure from Great Britain, therefore, most European countries would have continued to permit the slave trade.

Britain's abolition of the trade affected all the islands, since British ships had carried most slaves imported by the Spanish and French colonies. Following its victory in the Napoleonic wars, the British government tried, with varying success, to persuade other states to end the slave trade. The 1806 law ending the slave trade in newly conquered colonies applied to the Dutch West Indies as well as to the Danish Virgin Islands, captured in 1807.  

Treaties with Sweden (1813) and the Netherlands (1814) confirmed the abolition of the slave trade to their Caribbean colonies.

It proved more difficult to suppress the slave trade in the French and Spanish islands. The British forced the defeated French to sign an 1814 treaty (confirmed in 1818), ending the trade. However, an illegal trade continued until 1831, delivering some 80,000 slaves to Guadeloupe and Martinique. The Spanish adamantly refused to conform to British demands, and continued to tolerate illegal traders. By a treaty in 1817, Spain agreed to end the slave trade in 1820. But Spanish officials refused to enforce laws passed under British pressure. The
British navy ended the minor trade to Puerto Rico during the 1850s, after some 55,000 slaves entered that island. In Cuba, slave prices soared since illegal traders had to bribe governmental officials at all levels. But Cuba's growing sugar industry demanded slaves at any price. Until it was ended in 1865, the illegal trade brought in more than 500,000 slaves.

SLAVE EMANCIPATION IN THE BRITISH ISLANDS

The British Empire was the first to end slavery. The slaves gained their freedom sooner than those in the United States and without the enduring bitterness caused by the Civil War. Nevertheless, emancipation was not achieved without great difficulty, and twenty-five years passed between the end of the slave trade in 1808 and the abolition of slavery in 1833.

The British government was now committed to improving the conditions of the slaves. Sir James Stephen (1789–1859), the son of a leading abolitionist, managed Caribbean matters at the Colonial Office and relentlessly exposed abuses by the planters. After the American Revolution, the government did not want to force emancipation on its West Indian colonies. Instead it sought to persuade the planters to accept abolition through a series of major initiatives—slave registration (1815), amelioration (1823), and emancipation (1831).

The abolitionists sought slave registration both to prevent illegal imports and also to provide statistics proving that slaves were badly treated. Pushed by the British government, all the colonial legislatures by 1820 required masters to register their slaves. The five-year struggle to impose slave registration convinced the abolitionists that Britain must bring stronger pressures to bear on island legislators. In January 1823, they formed the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery, whose name stated its goals.

The campaign to free the slaves repeated the tactics of the earlier crusade against the slave trade. The abolitionists set up local committees and solicited petitions from members of all parties, and especially from clergy. To whip up support, the Abolition Society published millions of pamphlets, won the support of newspapers, and sponsored public lectures across the nation.

Pressure from the Abolition Society forced Parliament to commit itself in May 1823 to eventual freedom. As an immediate goal, the government issued a series of Amelioration Proposals and began to press for their adoption by the colonial assemblies. These measures limited a master's control in many ways. New laws encouraged religious instruction and church marriages, restricted physical punishment, safeguarded a slave's private property, prohibited work (or markets) on Sundays, outlawed the breakup of families, and allowed slaves to testify in court under certain conditions. Despite their initial indignation, all island legislatures adopted at least some of the government's amelioration proposals. The legislatures of Barbados and Jamaica were the least willing to introduce these reforms, and the Jamaicans passed a Slave Act acceptable to the government only in 1831. During the 1820s, island assemblies also lifted the remaining restrictions on free coloreds, who could now vote and be elected to office.  

VIOLENT REBELLIONS END SLAVERY IN THE BRITISH ISLANDS

Abolitionists in Britain campaigned to end slavery, just as they earlier had pressed for an end to the slave trade. This time, however, the slaves themselves took an active role in the campaign. For the first time, slave revolts strongly influenced public opinion in Britain. Although they received freedom from the Crown in 1833, black slaves themselves played a major role in making abolition inevitable.

Slave revolts significantly increased after 1815 on all the British islands.  Slaves rebelled both in the major sugar colonies and on the smaller islands. Unrest grew even in the Bahamas, which had no cane estates. Significantly, blacks no longer informed on conspiracies among their fellow slaves. During the 18th century, the planters usually heard about plots in time to arrest their leaders. From 1815 on, they stopped only one out of fourteen major revolts. The masters' position was becoming untenable.

In 1816, a revolt ravaged Barbados, which had not known a slave conspiracy since 1701. Slaves on seventy of the largest estates suddenly rose up on Easter Sunday. Within a few hours, a third of the island was in flames. Many believed rumors that the British governor was bringing a "free paper" and that imperial troops would not march against them. Although only one white civilian was killed, the Barbados courts reacted with the usual ferocity. Fifty slaves died during the rebellion and 214 were executed after it was crushed.

On some—but not all—of the estates, slave unrest grew out of worsening conditions following the abolition of the slave trade. Slaves did not reproduce themselves, and the slave population thus fell temporarily when the trade ended. Since they had fewer hands, some masters forced their slaves to work harder. For example, cane estates shifted women, children, and colored slaves from domestic service to the field gangs. However, we can attribute only part of the unrest after 1815 to harsher treatment. The Jamaican rebellion in 1831 occurred when conditions were improving, and revolts also took place on islands without cane estates.

The extremely rapid spread of Christianity among the slaves also contributed to unrest—or so the planters complained. The established Anglican church, which enjoyed a monopoly until 1754, had made little effort to convert blacks. On the islands taken from France in 1814, Roman Catholic clergy, who did baptize slaves, generally accepted slavery as licit. From the 1780s, dozens of Moravian, Methodist, and Baptist missionaries flocked to the West Indies. Most found it impossible totally to ignore slavery's manifest inhumanity. Moreover, their teachings emphasized spiritual rebirth in ways that increased a convert's self-esteem. Chapels with all-black congregations also provided black and colored deacons and preachers with a means of leadership. Several black deacons were at the head of the Jamaican revolt of 1831–32, often called the Baptist War.

These leaders gained the support of a large number of more ordinary slaves who could no longer endure slavery. Slavery remained intolerable even after
amelioration laws limited a master's powers during the 1820s. Indeed, amelioration probably made revolution more likely. Thus the right to assemble at black churches on Sundays made it possible for slaves from many estates to coordinate an uprising. The slaves now had more to lose, and they wanted to keep their gains. Many rebel slaves believed that the king soon would grant freedom or already had given it. They feared that the planters would use force to take it away.

The African slaves who rebelled during the 1700s had wanted to kill their masters and restore the African community they had left behind. The goals of the creole slaves in these rebellions were less extreme. They wanted to live in their own family groups on their own land. For most slaves, freedom now meant the right to live as self-reliant small peasants. They sometimes might work for a planter, but only for wages and only on their own terms.

Beginning in 1830, both British abolitionists and Caribbean slaves became increasingly impatient with the slow progress of the government's amelioration policies. But it was a Jamaican slave rebellion—and not the British anti-slavery movement—that finally brought slavery to an end. None of Jamaica's earlier slave rebellions matched the scale of this revolt. Led by the Baptist lay preacher Sam Sharpe, the uprising began on December 27, 1831. Before it was suppressed at the end of January, more than 60,000 slaves took part throughout an area of 750 square miles. Over 200 sugar estates in the northwestern parishes were burned and pillaged, the whites fleeing to Montego Bay and other coastal ports. Regular troops and militia put down the insurrection with the customary savagery, and 540 slaves and 14 whites died. The convicted leaders were members of the slave elite, and most were Baptists, including many black deacons. Blaming them for the revolt, incensed whites tore down the chapels of Baptist and Methodist ministers throughout Jamaica.

THE EMANCIPATION ACT OF 1834

News of the revolt and of its repression provoked outrage in Britain, and it especially energized groups, such as the evangelical churches, already recruited to emancipation. Missionaries who had fled Jamaica aroused audiences with graphic stories of the revolt. The new Parliament meeting early in 1833—the first after the Reform Act of 1832—received petitions signed by more than 1.5 million persons. Emancipation was ensured. Remembering the fate of Haiti, the government decided to compel the freed slaves to remain at work for a period of years. Justice also required that owners be compensated when the government seized property lawfully acquired.

The Abolition Act passed in August 1833 ordered the ending of slavery as of August 1834. Agriculture workers were compelled to work for their former masters as apprentices until 1840, domestics until August 1838—but they also could buy their immediate freedom. In return for food, clothing, lodging, and medical attendance, apprentices owed forty-five unpaid labor per week. Special magistrates from England (rather than local justices of the peace) would judge all disputes between masters and servants. Parliament voted an outright grant of £20 million—some £25 per slave on average—to compensate owners. Since these terms appeared to be the best they could get, the colonial assemblies quickly passed the Emancipation Bill. Bermuda and Antigua freed their slaves immediately. The other colonies enacted apprenticeship.

The Anti-Slavery Society continued to fight for complete emancipation, using its customary tactics. Thousands of pamphlets described such abuses as the employment of treadmills in the workhouses and the flogging of women. In April 1838, Parliament ended apprenticeship two years early, and the colonial assemblies approved the necessary laws. At midnight on August 1, 1838, the 750,000 slaves in the British colonies became free men and women. Thousands of blacks peacefully celebrated at churches, chapels, Thanksgiving parades, and public meetings throughout the islands. Their high hopes quickly evaporated, but few would have been willing to return to the hated system that had dominated the British islands since the 1640s.

THE PAINFUL TRANSITION TO FREEDOM IN THE BRITISH COLONIES

The British West Indies were totally unprepared for slave emancipation. The slave society had tailored governments, taxes, and laws to its particular needs. Island governments furnished few public services, since masters provided their slaves with what passed for justice, education, and medical care. Schools, hospitals, police forces, and jails simply did not exist in 1838. Island governments had to build them for the first time, just as legislators had to rewrite the law codes. Moreover, they had to pay for services to an ever larger number of citizens. Despite several severe epidemics, the population soared after emancipation. Overall, the British colonies had almost twice as many inhabitants in 1891 (1,607,218) as in 1841 (863,971).

Unfortunately, the British colonies found themselves forced to create a new, free society while their incomes were falling rapidly. Emancipation sharply increased a planter's costs precisely as his income from the harvest was dropping. When prices fell by half—as they did between 1840 and 1848—planters had to double their output merely to stay even. But cane production fell after emancipation—by 50 percent on Jamaica—as the former slaves fled from the harsh routines of field labor. Many plantations operated at a loss, and government revenues plummeted.

Labor on a cane estate is arduous and boring. But a comparison between Jamaica and Trinidad—the two largest islands—shows that there was no substitute for a prosperous sugar industry during the 19th century. The industry collapsed on Jamaica, while indentured laborers from India sustained it on Trinidad. As a result, individuals enjoyed a higher standard of living on Trinidad. The steady growth of tax revenues allowed Trinidad—but not Jamaica—to improve its economic infrastructure and public institutions.
| TABLE 20. POPULATION ESTIMATES, SELECTED BRITISH COLONIES, 1773–1911 |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                      | TOTAL  | WHITES | SLAVES | FREE NON-WHITES |
| Jamaica              |        |        |        |                |
| 1834                 | 376,200| 20,000 | 310,000| 46,200         |
| 1861                 | 441,300| 13,800 | —      | 427,500        |
| 1881                 | 580,800| 14,400 | —      | 566,400        |
| 1891                 | 639,500| 14,700 | —      | 624,800        |
| 1911                 | 831,400| 15,600 | —      | 815,800        |
| Trinidad             |        |        |        |                |
| 1834                 | 44,715 | 3,632  | 22,359 | 18,724         |
| 1851                 | 69,609 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1861                 | 84,438 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1871                 | 109,638| —      | —      | —              |
| 1901                 | 258,000| —      | —      | —              |
| Barbados             |        |        |        |                |
| 1833–1834            | 100,242| 12,797 | 80,861 | 6,584          |
| 1851                 | 135,939| —      | —      | —              |
| 1881                 | 171,860| —      | —      | —              |
| 1911                 | 172,337| —      | —      | —              |
| Saint Kitts          |        |        |        |                |
| 1861                 | 24,440 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1881                 | 29,137 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1891                 | 30,876 | 2,343  | —      | 28,533         |
| 1911                 | 26,283 | —      | —      | —              |
| Nevis                |        |        |        |                |
| 1861                 | 9,822  | 260    | —      | 9,562          |
| 1881                 | 11,684 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1891                 | 13,087 | 182    | —      | 12,905         |
| 1911                 | 12,945 | —      | —      | —              |
| The Bahamas          |        |        |        |                |
| 1773                 | 4,394  | 2,053  | 2,341  | —              |
| 1838                 | 21,779 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1851                 | 27,519 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1881                 | 43,521 | —      | —      | —              |
| 1911                 | 55,944 | —      | —      | —              |


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**THE IMPACT OF FREE TRADE IN SUGAR**

Sugar prices plunged as total world production increased 700 percent from the 1840s to the 1890s. Moreover, the British Caribbean now competed with regions that could produce sugar more cheaply and make a profit even as prices fell. The United States, Cuba, and Brazil increased production using slave labor. From the 1820s, European refiners also imported Asian sugar from the Dutch East Indies, the Spanish Philippines, and British possessions in India, Malaya, Mauritius, and (from the 1880s) Australia. Beet sugar also provided a cheap substitute for Caribbean cane. European governments heavily subsidized exports of beet sugar, and production increased tenfold between 1860 and 1895.

To offset the cost advantages of competitors producing with slave or near-slave labor, British planters had one remaining defense. Their products were protected in the British market by the Navigation Acts, which taxed imports of West Indian sugar at a lower rate than foreign sugar (page 108). By the 1840s, however, the Industrial Revolution had made Britain temporarily the world's leading producer of industrial and consumer goods. Manufacturers, workers, and consumers united in demanding an end to all import duties so that they could obtain raw materials and food at the lowest cost. From 1846, Parliament equalized the duties on West Indian and foreign sugar—whether grown by slaves or by free workers. The planters denounced the hypocrisy of this law, which came only eight years after emancipation.

**THE FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT PEASANTRY**

With emancipation, the freedmen sought to escape the drudgery of the sugar fields. For former slaves, "full free" meant ownership of at least a small plot of land. On this they might grow their own food and sell the surplus to the plantations or towns. Many also planned to work on the estates from time to time, thereby earning cash to buy land or imported products. But they were not willing to remain subservient field hands, and they left the estates when they had met their immediate goals. The freedman's natural desire for freedom only increased as plantations failed and the need for full-time employment fell on most islands.

At first most freedmen expected to remain in their cottages, which they had built with their own labor. They became outraged when owners began to demand that they pay rent in cash or in labor services for their homes. During the 1840s, freedmen moved to free villages everywhere except Barbados. But the rush from the plantations was especially striking on Trinidad and Jamaica. By 1847—only nine years after emancipation—almost half of Trinidad's laborers and fully two-thirds of Jamaica's had abandoned the plantations for free villages.

Individuals purchased land belonging to plantations or owned by the government ("Crown land"). Often entire villages moved together as missionaries bought up large estates and sold them to their congregations. Built with money borrowed from missionary societies or from sympathetic individuals, these planned villages mushroomed during the first decade after emancipation.
On Jamaica, 150 to 200 free villages on 100,000 acres sprang up between 1838 and 1842. Most set aside land for a church and clergyman, and some required good behavior and forbade gambling and liquor.

The creation of planned villages slowed during the 1840s as economic conditions worsened and the British government decided to sell Crown lands only in large parcels. Individuals now squatted on Crown land or on abandoned estates—especially in the interior regions of Trinidad and Jamaica, where the government was incapable of evicting them. Their legal situation became more secure at the end of the 1860s when the governors on Trinidad and Jamaica made it easier to buy or rent Crown lands at fair prices.

THE VARYING FORTUNES OF THE SUGAR ISLANDS

Except in a few marginal areas, such as the Virgin Islands, planters tried to maintain production. Their success depended on the availability of laborers willing to work regularly for wages that permitted a profit. Overall, the ratio of population to arable land—land that can be used to grow either food or export crops—largely explains why sugar estates survived on some islands and not on others. When an island had many people and little land, planters could find laborers. Where the ratio was low—in the Windwards and especially on Jamaica—most men became independent peasants. Laborers demanded high wages or refused to work during harvest time. Unable to produce at a competitive cost, planters abandoned their estates, and production plummeted.

<p>| TABLE 21. SUGAR PRODUCTION OF SELECTED CARIBBEAN ISLANDS, 1820–1929 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (Annual Averages in 1,000 U.S. tons) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1820–1824</th>
<th>1850–1854</th>
<th>1890–1894</th>
<th>1925–1929</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Kitts</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martinique</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Croix</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>13.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadeloupe</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>287.0</td>
<td>859.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Saint Kitts's production figures include Nevis after 1883. Average for two years only: Saint Croix (1890–1894), Puerto Rico (1850–1854). Average for three years only: Puerto Rico (1890–1894).

SOURCE: Averages for 1820–1929 compiled from annual data reported in Deerr, History of Sugar, volume 1.

HARD TIMES ON JAMAICA

Jamaican planters could not attract laborers on an island with an abundance of vacant land. Sugar production fell off sharply, with devastating effects on Jamaica's people. Exports dropped by half immediately after emancipation; and one-third of the estates were abandoned. Most planters had to use their slave compensation payments to repay estate debts. Since profits were low (or nonexistent), they could not obtain loans for new technology, and large modern mills were introduced only after 1900. When sugar prices fell even further during the 1870s, many of the remaining planters also abandoned their estates. The island had exported almost 80,000 tons of sugar in the 1820s. By the 1900s, it shipped barely 13,000 tons a year. The pre-emancipation level of production was regained only in 1934.

Jamaicans found no alternative source of income as sugar exports fell. The coffee industry also collapsed as labor became scarce and foreign competition increased. Increased exports of new crops by black farmers—including logwood, pimento, ginger, and bananas—could not compensate for the loss of sugar and coffee revenues. Total exports were lower in 1890 than in 1832, while the population had doubled.

Sugar's decline brought hard times to Jamaica's black population. As the estates failed, the free peasantry could no longer earn wages or find a market for...
its food crops. Without income, Jamaicans could not buy imported goods, and revenues from import and property taxes also fell. Neither individuals or the colonial government had the money to pay missionaries, teachers, or medical doctors. Schools and churches closed, and entire districts had no qualified physicians.

From the 1860s, there really were two Jamaiicas. Along the coasts, the remaining white and colored planters elected the legislative assembly and maintained limited public services. In the interior, free villages originally built next to active estates now were totally isolated. The villagers struggled to survive on the produce of their tiny and often eroded plots. Hunger, disease, and theft became common. Prejudice on both sides intensified the division between the races. Black villagers had no say or interest in government and less faith in Jamaican justices of the peace, generally white and colored men of property. Racial relationships had been unusually hostile on Jamaica, where slaves rebelled more frequently than on any other island. Economic decline only increased the conflict between two incompatible cultures.

NEW IMMIGRANTS AFTER EMANCIPATION

The flight of creole laborers threatened to destroy plantations on several islands. Migrations from one island to another met only part of the need. Most migrants sought jobs in construction, while the better-educated looked for work as policemen, teachers, and nurses. Few wanted full-time work on the cane estates. Thus Caribbean planters and British officials resorted to various schemes of large-scale immigration to supply additional workers. The most successful of these brought 144,000 Indian laborers to Trinidad under five-year contracts or indentures.

While the 19th century saw vast numbers of European laborers immigrate to the United States and Canada, very few were attracted to the Caribbean. The islands were deadly for whites, who also shunned the forms of estate labor that freed blacks so obviously despised. Jamaican planters recruited some 2,500 northern Europeans, and 6,000 workers also immigrated to several islands from Portuguese Madeira. Many died of disease during their first year, and immigration from Europe practically ceased by 1860.

A small number of immigrants also arrived from Africa and China. The British government encouraged settlement by African slaves it liberated from captured Cuban and Brazilian ships. By 1865, some 23,000 Africans were placed as free wage-workers in Jamaica, Trinidad, and the Windwards. Entitled to a free return passage after five years' work, about a third went back to Africa. The others often settled in separate villages and cultivated small farms. About 8,000 Chinese also came as indentured laborers to Jamaica and Trinidad before 1893. Most bought out the final years of their indentures, left the plantations, and set up small shops or farms. Like the Indians on Trinidad, many succeeded in retaining their ethnic identity into the 20th century.

INDENTURED INDIAN LABOR HELPS TRINIDAD PROSPER

Europe, Africa and China had added new elements to the already diverse peoples of the islands. But these small influxes did not satisfy the needs of disciplined field workers, and other sources were sought. After 1850, most immigrants were indentured laborers from India, Britain's most populous colony. Indians made ideal farm laborers, and the British government also preferred Indians since its officials could closely supervise recruitment and prevent abuses. Despite these advantages, indentured labor was costly, and island governments had to subsidize transportation to and from India. Trinidadian planters supported the scheme, but the Jamaican legislature was less enthusiastic. Altogether, between 1838 and 1917, almost 144,000 East Indian laborers came to Trinidad. Jamaica brought in 39,000, while smaller numbers reached Saint Lucia, Grenada, Saint Vincent, and Saint Kitts.

Like Jamaica, Trinidad had been hit hard by labor shortages. To attract workers, planters had to offer high pay for each task they performed, and most laborers could complete two or three tasks a day. Some also forced laborers to work in return for their cottages and grounds. But neither high wages nor coercion could keep workers on the cane estates, and most estates ran at a loss in the 1840s. In 1851, the British government offered to guarantee loans made to transport immigrants, and Trinidad's planters turned to Indian labor as their only salvation.

The British and Trinidad governments subsidized the indenture system, and they also closely regulated it. An Indian laborer had to work for five years, and signed an initial three-year contract on arrival. After ten years of residence, he received a subsidized return ticket to India. The indenture system contained a great deal of deception and injustice. Some planters skimmed on housing and medical care, and planters also ignored laws guaranteeing Indians the same wages paid to creole workers. In practice, the regulations tended to favor the master. The courts fined or jailed workers found to be negligent, absent, or frequently tardy. Yet planters breaking the ordinances only paid a small fine.

As some masters might be, the indenture system—unlike African slavery—ended after five years. Perhaps one-third of the workers returned to India. Many saved significant sums of money and established shops and businesses. Others bought land and sold cane to the large central mills that began to dominate Trinidad's sugar industry during the 1880s. East Indians made up almost one-third of Trinidad's population when the Indian government ended the indenture system in 1917. They formed a permanent and settled community that voluntarily segregated itself from other groups. Almost all married other Indians and continued to practice the Hindu (accepted by 85 percent) or Muslim religions. Their language, food, and culture also remained distinctly Indian, although obedience to caste rules inevitably weakened over time.

The Indians staying in Trinidad presumably felt they had profited by immigrating as indentured laborers. Their labor fostered a long period of economic growth. Many took part as small farmers or contractors during the cocoa boom that lasted from the 1870s to the First World War. However, it was
the sugar industry that gained most from Indian immigration, and its prosperity after 1854 largely was due to Indian laborers. When prices fell again in the 1880s, British capitalists—confident that the industry would survive on Trinidad—financed larger and more efficient mills. By 1897, eleven central factory units produced most of Trinidad’s sugar. They purchased cane from independently owned farms, thus creating something like the Cuban central-colono system (page 204).

A flourishing sugar industry promoted the island’s economic well-being. The influx of Indian workers allowed planters to expand cultivation, thereby increasing the demand for creole workers. Moreover, the plantations also afforded creole farmers and traders a profitable market for food and provided work to skilled artisans. With their wages, Trinidad’s peoples could import needed goods. As tax revenues steadily increased, the legislature could create a rudimentary medical service and build hospitals, public baths, roads, sewer systems, and railroads.

**CROWN COLONY GOVERNMENT REPLACES THE OLD REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM**

When emancipation came in 1838, British colonies were governed in two different ways. Most operated under a system of representative government that had evolved since the 1640s. Each island had a governor who appointed a council with limited powers. An elected legislature or assembly made local laws and raised taxes to pay officials. An assembly’s statutes could not contradict British laws and could be vetoed by the Crown. But it had almost total control over its own taxes. On most islands, the legislative assembly levied taxes, supervised their collection, approved expenditures, supervised many legislative boards, and audited its own accounts.

The island assemblies often proved incompetent during the wars of the 18th century. Nevertheless, after some hesitation, Britain also extended representative government to the Windward islands—Grenada, Dominica, Saint Vincent, and Tobago—it occupied in 1763. However, after Britain seized Spanish Trinidad (1797) and again took Saint Lucia from France, it did not create elected assemblies for these new conquests. For a time, the British government retained the laws and courts already in force. In 1810 it decided that direct rule by the British Crown was needed to end the slave trade and to protect the free people of color.

Trinidad and Saint Lucia thus became the first Crown colonies. An appointed governor, a number of top officials, and a few local advisors formed an executive council responsible for the day-to-day running of the colony’s affairs. A slightly larger body, known as the Legislative Council, advised the governor and passed local laws. In addition to the governor himself, the Legislative Council was made up of British officials and a number of “unofficial members” chosen by the governor. By 1898, Crown colony government had replaced elected legislatures everywhere except in Barbados, the Bahamas, and the Cayman Islands. With some exceptions, elected representatives did not again participate in island governments until the 1920s.

The extinction of representative government in the West Indies ran counter to the general trend in Britain and in its colonies with a white majority. Throughout the 19th century, the British Parliament steadily lowered voting requirements. All men over twenty-one received the vote in 1918, all women in 1928. Parliament also extended representative government to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Cape Colony in South Africa. By contrast, authoritarian government replaced legislatures throughout the West Indies. Here the British government suspended democracy both to rescue the white planters from their own ineptitude and to protect them against black majority rule.

Emancipation in 1838 made 750,000 former slaves free British citizens, able to vote if they passed the same tests as whites and colored freedmen. On most islands, voters had to own only a small amount of property. Over time, the rules would have allowed many blacks to vote in elections to island assemblies. To prevent this, assemblymen throughout the Caribbean revised the laws after 1838. They raised property qualifications for new voters, while allowing existing voters (usually whites) to qualify under the old rules. In practice only white or colored landowners, merchants, lawyers, and other professional men could vote in elections to the island assemblies.

As plantations were abandoned on many islands, the number of voters meeting these property tests sometimes fell to ludicrous levels. By the 1850s, Barbados registered 1,350 voters. Grenada had 191 voters, Saint Vincent had 273, and Tobago registered 135. In the 1863 election for the Jamaica assembly only 1,457 persons voted out of a population above 440,000. Not all were white. In Dominica, Montserrat, and Nevis, middle-class men of color dominated public affairs. On Jamaica, one-third of the representatives were men of color from the 1850s.

The Colonial Office did not protest the undemocratic nature of island legislatures. But it strongly objected to their financial carelessness and failure to provide needed governmental services. Many islands labored under huge debts because their assemblies did not operate under a budget, and any member could introduce bills to spend money. In 1849 and again in 1853, all government stopped on Jamaica because the assembly refused to approve taxes.

In 1853 the British government offered Jamaica a low-interest loan if the assembly would vote permanent taxes, place its finances in the hands of responsible salaried officials, and allow its accounts to be audited. The assembly gave in, setting up a three-member Executive Committee with responsibility for financial matters. Six islands in the Lesser Antilles also set up executive committees by 1859. However, this reform did not solve the main problem—the ease with which a small faction could prevent an assembly taking desperately needed actions. By the 1860s, the Colonial Office had lost patience with Caribbean legislatures and looked for an excuse to destroy the old representative system. Its chance came in 1865 with a tragic rebellion at Morant Bay in Jamaica.
MORANT BAY: THE END OF AN ERA

Economic and racial tensions in the British colonies were aggravated by the American Civil War, which sharply increased food prices. Riots broke out on several islands, including Saint Vincent and Barbados. Because Jamaica was the largest and best-known colony, British public opinion was most strongly affected by a rebellion in 1865 at Morant Bay, east of Kingston in Saint Thomas parish. Disturbances began at the Saturday market on October 7. The local justices found a young black man guilty of assaulting a black woman. When the court ordered the arrest of a disruptive spectator, the crowd rescued him and beat the police.

The following Tuesday, eight black policemen set off to arrest Paul Bogle (1822–1865), the alleged leader of the riot. Bogle was a local property owner and a deacon and preacher in the Native Baptist church. He also was a close associate of George Gordon (1820–1865), a colored member of the Jamaica assembly who enjoyed considerable influence in the neighborhood. Several hundred armed men quickly overpowered the police. Bogle then sent them back to Morant Bay with his threat to bring his forces to the vestry meeting scheduled for the following day. The Custos, the chief official in the parish, notified Governor Edward Eyre, who sent one hundred men to Morant Bay on a small British warship.

On Wednesday, October 11, Bogle arrived in the town with a group of about four hundred men, armed with guns, cutlasses, pikes, and bayonets. They attacked the local police station, seized the weapons kept there, and marched toward the courthouse where the vestry was meeting. The parish Custos appeared on the stairway calling for peace, but the mob began to throw stones at perhaps two dozen volunteer militiamen stationed before the courthouse. The volunteers fired, but the crowd quickly drove everyone back inside the courthouse. The mob set the building on fire and brutally beat to death many of its occupants as they fled into the open.

In all, several dozen were murdered at Morant Bay, including the Custos, several other magistrates, the entire volunteer force, and two sons of the Anglican priest. The mob then looted the village and released the prisoners in the jail. Parties of rebels fanned out in several directions, killing four white plantation owners and several colored magistrates who attempted to reason with them. Whites and colored fled their homes, many escaping to Kingston on ships. There they told Governor Eyre stories of horrible atrocities at the battle of the courthouse.

Panic swept the island, as many planters feared that the Morant Bay massacre was part of a conspiracy to turn Jamaica into a second Haiti. Governor Eyre declared martial law, dispatched troops to the area, and appealed for reinforcements. He also enlisted the aid of the Maroons, whose trackers captured and executed Bogle. The government forces quickly crushed the rebels, who apparently enjoyed limited popular support. Without suffering a single casualty, soldiers marched through the parish killing any blacks they came across.

White and colored planters and the Jamaican newspapers applauded Governor Eyre. However, his handling of the rebellion provoked intense controversy in England. There, influential clergymen, professors, authors, and scientists formed rival committees attacking Eyre as a murderer and defending him as a hero. For three years, the media and Parliament debated the issue, which provoked riots in the streets.

Eyre's arrest and execution on October 23 of George William Gordon aroused the greatest controversy. Gordon, the son of a Scotch planter and a slave, had made money as a produce broker in Kingston. Driven by religious fervor, he was a leader of the Native Baptists and had many followers among the black laborers. Hating both the Custos of Saint Thomas and Governor Eyre, he used his immunity as a member of the assembly to attack them in long, unrestrained tirades. In one speech, Gordon called on the people of Jamaica to throw out Eyre, the oppressor.

When a Governor becomes a dictator; when he becomes despotic, it is time for the people to dethrone him. . . . I have never seen an animal more voracious for cruelty and power than the present Governor of Jamaica. . . . If we are to be governed by such a Governor much longer, the people will have to fly to arms and become self-governing.

Gordon had his largest following in Saint Thomas, where he worked closely with Paul Bogle, leader of the rebels. During the months before the riot, he had called on the parish's black poor to speak and act out against its vestry. Eyre and other Jamaican officials believed he had been involved in the uprising, even though he had not been in Morant Bay when it occurred. Gordon was arrested in Kingston, where martial law was not in effect. Eyre then had him taken to Morant Bay, where he was hanged after a grossly unfair court martial.

The British government suspended Eyre in 1866 and then dismissed him from office. Before he left Jamaica, he presided over the assembly's suicide. Under pressure from the Colonial Office, the assembly abdicated. On December 12, 1865, it asked the queen to set up whatever form of government she thought best. The following June, Britain imposed the Crown colony form of government with a nominated legislative council. The British government soon forced most other island legislatures to follow Jamaica's lead. By the end of 1875, only Barbados and the Bahamas retained their old constitutions. After a period of transition, a legislature named by the governor existed on all other British islands by 1898.

The Morant Bay rebellion uprising was confined to one small section of Jamaica, and it did not involve a large segment of the population. Indeed, few would remember Morant Bay if Governor Eyre had not so vigorously suppressed the uprising. Strictly speaking, it was not a war between the races. The rebels beat and killed black men, while black troops, Maroons, militiamen, and judges joined in suppressing the uprising. But both the Jamaican assembly and the British government viewed the riots as racially motivated. Thus the public outcry
over Eyre's actions gave the Colonial Office an excuse to abolish representative
government.

By 1865, the government was convinced that only direct rule from Britain
could protect the black laborers, who could not yet govern themselves. The
planters and merchants in the island assemblies were financially incompetent
and did not represent the interests of the black majority. But the latter were
equally unready for democracy. Thus only authoritarian government by British
officials could protect the interests of the entire community. An official dispatch
in 1868 clearly expressed the British view.

The population at large, consisting of uneducated negroes, neither had, nor could
have, any political powers; they were incapable of contributing to the formation of
any intelligent public opinion; and the consequence was that the Assemblies
performed their office of legislation under no real or effective responsibility. They
became aware apparently that irresponsible legislation by small local bodies was
not for the interest even of the members of those bodies themselves, or of the class
which they represented, and still less of the inhabitants at large. 13

THE RECORD OF CROWN COLONY GOVERNMENT

The unrepresentative governments that ruled Britain's Crown colonies until the
Second World War generally met the relatively limited goals they set themselves.
They maintained public order, provided courts, and made useful improvements
in the economic infrastructure and public services. They placed less emphasis
on economic growth, and many islands stagnated. No substitute product was
found to replace sugar, and American companies generally preferred to invest
in cane estates on Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Crown colony government put an end to the bickering that had stalemated
the former assemblies. The governor, who ruled the nominated legislatures, had
both clear responsibilities and the power to achieve them. Whether or not the
system worked thus depended on the energy and character of individual
governors. The most successful—such as Sir John Peter Grant in Jamaica
(1866–1874) and Sir Arthur Gordon in Trinidad (1866–1870)—came immedi-
ately after the Morant Bay riots, when the British government expected improve-
ments. Over time, colonial government became less active, and it fell into the
lazy habit of routinely following precedents.

Basic public services were provided throughout the colonies. Public works
departments were created, which built roads, bridges, and railroads. By the First
World War, every British colony—including the smaller Leeward and Wind-
ward islands—had a police force and fire department, a government medical
service, and at least one hospital. Nearly all had public libraries. Noticeable
improvements were made in the towns, and especially in the capital cities.
Sewage systems and public water supplies did much to cut the death rate. As
one consequence, European and North American tourists began to visit some
of the islands, especially the Bahamas and Jamaica.

THE BRITISH COLONIES

Crown colony governments also carried out legal and social reforms, espe-
cially during the early years. They simplified the court system and modern-
ized law codes. Because of streamlined procedures and lower costs, more peasant
farmers could obtain clear titles to their lands. The Anglican church was
disestablished on Jamaica, where it primarily served the tiny white population.
In Trinidad, the government began to allot funds to the Roman Catholic as well
as to the Anglican church, in proportion to the number of members each served.

One of the first aims of the Crown colony governments was to increase the
number of elementary schools. The government gave grants to private and
denominational schools according to the results they achieved. However, since
most schools charged fees, fewer than half the black children attended, and only
52 percent of Jamaicans could read and write according to the 1921 census. A
small number of secondary schools also were established. A few of the brightest
students—including several future West Indian leaders—won a scholarship to a
British university, where most studied law or medicine. Perhaps the greatest
weakness of public education was its lack of attention to technical and scientific
subjects, such as tropical agriculture.

Any argument in favor of democracy can be used with justice against the
Crown colony system of government. Under the former system, with all its
faults, at least some non-whites had achieved influence as judges or members
of the assemblies. Now officials thousands of miles away made major decisions.
Educated blacks could be teachers or lower-level civil servants, but posts as
senior administrators usually went to whites, frequently sent from Great Britain.
The lack of representative institutions contributed to low self-esteem among
many islanders. The Crown colony system strengthened the belief that the black
"natives" could not rule themselves and needed the help of white men from
Great Britain.

THE LEEWARD AND WINDWARD FEDERATIONS

The British government had tried to bring the Leeward islands under one federal
government at the end of the 17th century. From 1671, one governor supervised
Saint Kitts (with Anguilla), Nevis, Antigua (with Barbuda), Montserrat, and the
Virgin Islands—with Dominica added from 1770 to 1940. However, each island
retained its own deputy governor, council, and assembly, and thus had its own
laws and treasury. Six legal systems and six civil governments served fewer than
100,000 residents.

In 1869, the Colonial Office again tried to impose federation, primarily to
cut costs. However, the relatively more prosperous islands (especially Saint Kitts
and Nevis) did not want to share their funds with Antigua and Montserrat, which
both were bankrupt. After eighteen months of negotiations, a quasi-federal
system was set up in 1871. A federal legislative council and appellate courts
unified many laws. But each island maintained a separate treasury and taxes.
Britain did unite Saint Kitts and Nevis in 1882, over the bitter opposition of
many on the smaller island.
Born to a slave mother and a planter father who was attorney to several sugar estates in Jamaica, George William Gordon was self-educated and a landowner in the parish of St. Thomas.

In the face of attempts to crush the spirit of the freed people of Jamaica and again reduce them to slavery, Gordon entered politics. He faced severe odds, as the people whose interests he sought to serve did not qualify to vote.

He subdivided his own lands, selling farm lots to the people as cheaply as possible, and organised a marketing system, through which they could sell their produce at fair prices.

Gordon urged the people to protest against and resist the oppressive and unjust conditions under which they were forced to live.

Gordon was arrested and charged for complicity in what is now called the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865. He was illegally tried by Court Martial and, inspite of a lack of evidence, convicted and sentenced to death. He was executed on October 23, 1865.

Source:
http://www.jis.gov.jm/special_sections/Heroes/Heroes.htm#Paul
Paul Bogle, it is believed, was born free about 1822. He was a Baptist deacon in Stony Gut, a few miles north of Morant Bay, and was eligible to vote at a time when there were only 104 voters in the parish of St. Thomas. He was a firm political supporter of George William Gordon.

Poverty and injustice in the society and lack of public confidence in the central authority, urged Bogle to lead a protest march to the Morant Bay courthouse on October 11, 1865.

In a violent confrontation with full official forces that followed the march, nearly 500 people were killed and a greater number was flogged and punished before order was restored. Bogle was captured and hanged on October 24, 1865; but his forceful demonstration achieved its objectives. It paved the way for the establishment of just practices in the courts and it brought about a change in official attitude, which made possible the social and economic betterment of the people.

Source: http://www.jis.gov.jm/special_sections/Heroes/Heroes.htm#Paul