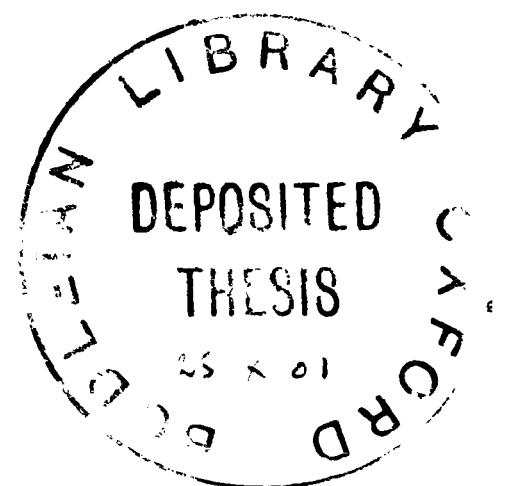


**"The Children of Africa in the Colonies":
Free People of Colour in Barbados
During the Emancipation Era, 1816-1854.**

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Faculty of Modern History, Hilary Term 2001.



This thesis is dedicated to my mother, with love.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACH	Association of Caribbean Historians
BDA	Barbados Department of Archives
BMBG	Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette
BMHS	Barbados Museum and Historical Society
BPL	Bridgetown Public Library, Barbados
CO	Colonial Office (records housed in the Public Record Office, London)
JBMHS	Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society
JCH	Journal of Caribbean History
JSH	Journal of Social History
Moravian Diary	Diary of the Negro Congregation at Mount Tabor Moravian Church, St. John
NCF	National Cultural Foundation, Barbados
PP	Parliamentary Papers
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts
UWI	University of the West Indies

**“The Children of Africa in the Colonies”:
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1816-1854**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of free people of colour during the era of emancipation in Barbados, with a particular focus on their relationships with and attitudes towards slaves. It examines the period between the 1816 slave rebellion and the 1854 cholera epidemic, encompassing the apprenticeship period of 1834-1838.

The thesis argues that differences of class, political ideology, gender and the specific nature of their relationships with slaves determined emancipation’s impact on free people of colour. At the same time, the thesis illustrates that pre-emancipation free people of colour as a group remained economically and politically marginal after emancipation, much as they had been during slavery.

Reforms to the island’s slave laws during the 1820s and early 1830s undermined the legal distinction between free people of colour and slaves. The abolitionism debate and increasing racial tension in the island led free non-whites to challenge openly the principle of racial subordination for the first time. After 1834, elite free people of colour forged a sense of “race consciousness”, and adopted emancipation as the key to their battle against racial inequality, asserting themselves as the legitimate protectors of ex-slaves’ interests.

However class differences and disagreements over emancipation policy led to political factionalism among people of colour. The absence of fundamental change in the distribution of land and wealth after emancipation left most pre-1834 free people of colour and ex-slaves with little hope of political enfranchisement or socio-economic betterment. By the early 1850s, many came to see emigration as the solution to their difficulties.

This thesis is the first study of pre-1834 free people of colour in post-emancipation Barbados, and one of few to examine both the periods of slavery and post-emancipation. By focussing on the intricate relations between free people of colour and slaves/ex-slaves, this thesis shows how emancipation transformed many aspects of social relations in Barbados — particularly with regard to race, class, labour and gender.

Introduction

This thesis examines the impact of the abolitionism debate and the emancipation of slaves on people of African descent in Barbados who were free before the end of slavery in 1834. It argues that the battle over slavery and the transition from slavery to freedom transformed the social, economic and political situation of free people of colour. By focussing on the changing relationships between free people of colour and slaves, and between rural and urban life in Barbados during the years of transition, the thesis challenges the prevalent historiographical claim that emancipation in Barbados produced little socioeconomic change.¹

As a group, free people of colour remained in an ambivalent, and frequently difficult, position as people who had reasons both to support and oppose the emancipation of slaves. Free people of colour shared a common position of political, and, in most cases, economic, marginality both before and after emancipation. This marginality was the result of their position as free people of African descent in a society whose socioeconomic structure was based on the bondage of the majority of African-descended people. Barbadian free people of colour were a diverse and often divided group, whose social relations and experiences of emancipation were influenced by a variety of factors other than just their skin colour and their legal status as free non-whites. Economic circumstances, gender and the specific nature of their personal connections with slaves and whites were factors related to, but separate from, race.² These factors shaped hierarchies among free people of colour and influenced their responses to emancipation.

The thesis argues that race is a constructed category of political ideology and

¹ Trevor Marshall, "Post-emancipation Adjustments in Barbados, 1838-1876," in Alvin O. Thompson (ed.), *Emancipation I: A Series of Lectures to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Emancipation* (Barbados: NCF and the History Department, UWI Cave Hill, 1984), pp. 88-107.

² Raymond Smith, "Race, Class, and Gender in the Transition to Freedom," in McGlynn and Drescher (eds.) *The Meaning of Freedom: Economic, Politics, and Culture after Slavery* (Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), pp. 257-290.

social relations, which is produced and reproduced in response to the circumstances of a given place and time.³ Towards the end of slavery, pre-emancipation free people of colour in Barbados began to construct a political ideology of 'race consciousness' as part of their struggle against their legal and political subordination to whites. In the mid-1830s, free people of colour adopted emancipation as a justification for their own political battles, assuming a paternal role as the 'protectors' of the interests of ex-slaves. Consciousness of themselves as simultaneously "the children of Africa" and British imperial subjects became centrally important to their struggles for political and civil equality, particularly after full emancipation in 1838. Although race consciousness movements have been studied as predominantly twentieth century phenomena in the anglophone Caribbean, this study argues that the international anti-slavery movement and emancipation were critical contributors to the rise of a transnational conceptualisation of 'Africanness' as a potent source of community identity.⁴

The thesis focuses on the imperial slave amelioration period from the 1820s to 1833,⁵ the apprenticeship period from 1834 to 1838 and most of the first two decades of adjustment to freedom up to the 1850s. The bulk of the analysis begins in 1816, when the island's only slave rebellion occurred, and, concludes in the mid-1850s, just before the 1854 cholera epidemic which killed roughly 20, 000 people, or

³ See E. P. Thompson's discussion of 'class' and 'class consciousness' in *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 9.

⁴ For in-depth discussions of early twentieth century Afrocentrism see Sidney Lemelle and Robin Kelley (eds.), *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London: Verso, 1994); Kevin Yelvington, "The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad, 1935-1936," in Bridget Brereton and Kevin Yelvington (eds.), *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), pp. 189-246.

⁵ Amelioration was a loose term for a range of policies for the improvement of the legal code, living conditions and religious and educational systems of British slave colonies, which began informally with reforms in estate management. However, between 1823 and 1833, rather than seeing amelioration as a means of just reforming slavery, the British government adopted a policy of using ameliorative measures to achieve better imperial regulation of the West Indian colonies and as preparation for emancipation. See J.R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

one-fifth of the island's population.⁶ The epidemic has been chosen because its devastating impact was, in part, the result of the severely depressed and frequently unsanitary socioeconomic conditions, particularly post-emancipation urban overcrowding and slum expansion.

The Historiography of Free People of Colour in Slave Society

Since the mid-twentieth century, the public debate about race relations in the United States and about colonial rule in Africa and the Caribbean has stimulated scholarly discussion and writing on slavery. Scholars have sought to uncover the roots of inequality and tension between whites and blacks in the Americas.⁷

Scholars of the history of slavery challenged historical studies which focussed attention on the plantocracy, arguing that slaves' struggles for freedom were the driving force in Caribbean social history. Perhaps the most powerful example of this anti-imperial historiography remains C.L.R. James' classic study of the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins*.⁸ Subsequent scholars have sought to redress a historical imbalance which had assigned slaves a silent, passive role in the processes shaping slavery and emancipation.⁹

⁶ Richard Carter, "Public Amenities after Emancipation," in Woodville Marshall (ed.), *Emancipation II: Aspects of the Post-Slavery Experience in Barbados* (Barbados: The Department of History and the Barbados NCF, 1987), p. 54.

⁷ William A. Green, "The Creolization of Caribbean History: The Emancipation Era and a Critique of Dialectical Analysis," in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1993), pp. 28-40. Perhaps the most influential studies have been Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1939).

⁸ C.L.R. James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1994 [1938]).

⁹ See for example Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: the Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838* (Bridgetown: Antilles Publications, 1984); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), pp. 201-202.

In comparison with the enormous body of work produced on slavery, there remains comparatively little on the post-emancipation period. Much of the work which has been produced on the post-emancipation anglophone Caribbean still concentrates on labour conflicts between field labourers and planters, paying less attention to other aspects of social relations.¹⁰

Additionally, people who were free before emancipation, but were not part of the plantocracy, have received relatively little attention. In comparison with the hundreds of books on slaves produced since the 1960s, only a handful of monographs on free people of colour in the Americas has been produced during the same period.¹¹ The existence of free people of colour in slave societies illustrates the permeability of the racial and legal boundaries of slave societies. As Sidney Mintz and Richard Price noted in 1976, "the emergence of freedmen sectors intermediate between the European freemen and the African slaves was, apparently, inevitable; it constitutes one of the most critical problem-areas in the historical study of Afro-American

¹⁰ This argument has been made by Barry Higman, in "Post-Emancipation Historiography of the Leeward Islands", in Karen Fog Olwig (ed.), *Small Islands, Large Questions: Society, Culture and Resistance in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean* (Great Britain: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 9. See for example O. Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination After Slavery: The Control of Land and Labour in the British West Indies After 1838" and Michael Craton, "Continuity not Change: The Incidence of Unrest Among Ex-slaves in the British West Indies, 1838-1876," in Beckles and Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom*, pp. 107-123 and 192-206; Emmanuel Riviere, "Labour Shortage in the British West Indies after Emancipation," *JCH*, vol. 4 (May 1972), pp. 1-30; Mary Turner (ed.), *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: the dynamics of labour bargaining in the Americas* (London: James Currey, 1995). To date, Claude Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism: Barbados and the British West Indies* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1980) is the only social history monograph on post-emancipation Barbados, and it focusses on rural labour relations.

¹¹ Carl Campbell, *Cedulants and Capitulants: The Politics of the Coloured Opposition in the Slave Society of Trinidad, 1783-1838* (Port-of-Spain: Paria Publishing, 1992); Mavis Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in Slave Society: A Socio-political History of the Free Coloreds of Jamaica, 1800-1865* (London: Associated University Presses, 1976); David Cohen and Jack Greene, *Neither Slave Nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1972); Edward L. Cox, *Free Coloreds in the Slave Societies of St. Kitts and Grenada* (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1984; Jerome Handler, *The Unappropriated People: Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, politics and the free coloreds of Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Oxford: Greenwood Press, 1981); Jane Landers (ed.), *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1996).

societies.”¹²

A few scholars have explored the role and position of free people of colour in societies deeply divided by the race and labour conflict between white planters and black slaves. As Stephen Small notes, concern with the issue of “miscegenation”, and, by extension, with people who were of mixed racial origin, has dominated the literature.¹³

There were a number of factors besides sexual relations between whites and blacks which contributed to the appearance and growth of free populations of colour, such as self-purchase, purchase by other free non-white family members, and manumission as a gift or in old age. In 1974, in a seminal work on free people of colour in Barbados, Jerome Handler pointed out that the origins of free populations of colour are difficult to ascertain.¹⁴ Rosemarijn Hoeffte and Kimberley Hanger argue that, however important “miscegenation” may have been initially, manumission as a result of family connections with free people of colour was a more important long term factor in the growth of free populations of colour in the Americas.¹⁵ Furthermore, throughout the slave societies of the Americas, the majority of mixed-race people born slaves were never freed.

¹² Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), p. 3.

¹³ Stephen Small, “Racial Group Boundaries and Identities: People of ‘mixed race’ in slavery across the Americas,” *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1994), p. 17. *Cedulants and Capitulants, Dynamics of Change* and *Between Black and White*, for example, are predominantly studies of mixed-race free people. In his comparative discussion of race in the Americas, Winthrop D. Jordan’s discussion of Jamaica and Barbados focusses on “mulattos”, arguing that different attitudes among whites towards “miscegenation” made mixed-race people more “acceptable” to whites in Jamaica than in Barbados (See Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 174-178). Arnold Sio challenges this claim, saying that mixed-race people faced less severe legal discrimination in Jamaica than in Barbados because Jamaican whites were less secure in their position than their Barbadian counterparts, and sought to “co-opt” mixed race people to preserve their own position (See Sio, “Race, Colour and Miscegenation: The free coloured of Jamaica and Barbados,” *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1976), p. 21.

¹⁴ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵ Kimberly S. Hanger, “Patronage, Property and Persistence: The Emergence of a Free Black Elite in Spanish New Orleans” and Rosemarijn Hoeffte, “Free Blacks and Coloureds in Plantation Suriname” in Landers (ed.), *Against the Odds*, pp. 44-64 and pp. 102-129.

Nevertheless, the historiographical emphasis on mixed-race people manumitted by white relatives has endured. Historiographical debate has centred around whether or not mixed-race free people in the Caribbean could have a “complete” sense of identity if they were neither black nor white. Their position has been contrasted with that of their counterparts in the United States, where, it has long been asserted, individuals were either socially and legally white or black, with no in-between.¹⁶ Scholars have argued that, in some Caribbean slave societies, mixed-race people developed a distinctive “mulatto” or “coloured” identity by the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ However, some historians would agree with Mavis Campbell’s claim that Jamaican mixed-race free people inevitably strove for the impossible dream of being “white”, and “by the nature of their birth [and] their phenotypic imprecision” lacked “identity focus” and “any self-conception or self-confidence they might have had.”¹⁸ Richard Burton recently supported a similar claim that “brown man hab no country... only de neger and de buckra [white man] hab country”, because mixed-race Jamaicans lacked a point of ancestral focus in either Europe or Africa, unlike whites or blacks.¹⁹ In either case, scholars assert that mixed-race free people in several slave societies had very antagonistic social and political relationships with free blacks, meaning people of darker colour, and slaves.²⁰

¹⁶ See for example, Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 254.

¹⁷ See for example, John D. Garrigus. “Colour, Class and Identity on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Saint-Domingue’s Free Coloured Elite as *Colons américains*,” in Landers (ed.), *Against the Odds*, pp. 20-43; Gad Heuman, “White and Brown Over Black: The Free Coloureds in Jamaican Society During and After Emancipation,” *JCH*, vol. 14 (1981) pp. 46-69; Lennox Honeychurch, *The Dominica Story: A History of the Island* (London: MacMillan Education, 1995), p. 54;

¹⁸ Mavis Campbell, *Dynamics of Change*, p. 368. Campbell argues that: “The hybrid is more strongly attached to the dominant group as it offers him more advantages than the native group. He strives for the impossible, that is, for complete identity with the white group” (Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change*, p. 49). See also Heuman, “White Over Brown Over Black,” p. 47.

¹⁹ Quotes from Anon., *Martyr, or The Life of a Planter in Jamaica* (Glasgow: Richard Griffin, 1828), p. 94, cited in Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) pp. 35-36 and p. 42.

²⁰ Hilary Beckles, “On the Backs of Blacks: The Barbados Free-Goloureds’ Pursuit of Civil Rights and

However, Stephen Small has argued that claims about the relative significance of phenotypic differences among free people of colour have been made indiscriminately and simplistically, without taking adequate account of differences in local attitudes and practice.²¹ In the case of Barbados, historians differ in their views on the importance of phenotypic distinctions. Of the historians who have published research on free people of colour in Barbados, Beckles is the only one who asserts that mixed-race free people of colour saw themselves as a separate group from free blacks.²²

Interpreting the Terms “Coloured” and “Black”

Part of the reason for the confusion arises from the fact that, in primary sources, the terms “coloured” and “black” have inconsistent meanings, sometimes referring to an individual’s legal status, and sometimes to phenotype. How one interprets these expressions determines who one thinks is being discussed. For example, an 1824 advertisement for a domestic in the newspaper the *Barbadian* requested a “steady, middle-aged Coloured Woman”.²³ It is difficult to say whether this was a demand for a free domestic of colour or a mixed-race woman of any legal status. The same newspaper also occasionally referred to free non-whites simply by calling them “coloured”, as opposed to “negroes”, a term which the editor reserved for slaves.²⁴

the 1816 Slave Rebellion,” *Immigrants and Minorities*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1984), pp. 167-188; Mavis Campbell, *Dynamics of Change*; Heuman, *Between Black and White*; James, *Black Jacobins*, pp. 163-173; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Inconvenience of Freedom: Free People of Color and the Political Aftermath of Slavery in Dominica and Saint-Domingue/Haiti,” in McGlynn and Drescher (eds.), *The Meaning of Freedom*, pp. 147-182.

²¹ Small, “Racial Group Boundaries,” p. 32.

²² Beckles, “On the Backs of Blacks”. Handler says that the role played by phenotype in the “ranking system” among free people of colour in Barbados is “speculative” at best. [T]he evidence does not suggest that membership in one group or the other [coloured and black] was the basis for social alliances, that these phenotypic differences produced social cleavages, or that phenotype, in and of itself, offered particular advantages for leadership positions in the freedman community” (Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 210). Sio does not distinguish by phenotype (see Sio, “Jamaica and Barbados”).

²³ *Barbadian*, 10 January 1824.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 October 1824, 4 June 1834.

Thus, even when free people of colour were described as “coloured”, it should not be assumed that this denotes phenotype, as opposed to legal status. At other times, newspapers might use the word “coloured” ambiguously, as in a 1817 advertisement for two runaway slaves, one described as “a short, coloured man” and the other as a “tall mulatto man”.²⁵ That same year, the Registrar of Slaves instructed the public to use the words “Black” and “Coloured” to describe their slaves, rather than the words “Negro, Mulatto, Yellow, &c”.²⁶

Historians do not always take account of these subtleties, and have occasionally conflated ‘race’ and legal status. The effects of this inconsistency are evident in the historiography of Barbados. Since Handler and Sio’s 1970s work on free people of colour, recent historiography has by and large not engaged with their argument that phenotypic differences were not important in Barbados. Hilary Beckles claims that “blackness” in Barbadian society was embodied in “the slave community”, which “had nurtured over the years an anti-slavery ideology which threatened to impose a Black world view upon the society, thereby revolutionising the historical process.”²⁷

According to Beckles, the historical importance of “free coloureds” in the anglophone Caribbean lies in their role as intermediaries in the struggle between planters and slaves over freedom and racial equality. In the introduction to his article “On the Backs of Blacks”, Beckles specifies that he is speaking about free people “of mixed racial ancestry”, and argues that, after 1816, they gained increased civil rights “on the backs of blacks”. He argues that a free mixed race population developed: “...[P]artly because the social conscience of some empowered whites could not absorb comfortably the enslavement of their own progeniture, and partly because of the need for rational socioeconomic planning”. He claims that this led to “a general

²⁵ *BMBG*, 11 November 1817.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 March 1817.

²⁷ Beckles, “Black People in the Colonial Historiography of Barbados,” in Marshall (ed.), *Emancipation II*, p. 137.

social tendency... for the early and easy manumission of these coloured people.”²⁸ Throughout the article, however, “blacks” clearly refers to slaves, not free black people, whose role and views are not discussed.²⁹ Furthermore, even though he claims to be discussing mixed-race people, he often makes observations to support his argument about “free coloureds” which apply to all free non-whites. For example, although he notes that colour was not a major factor in the organisation of the Barbadian slave labour force,³⁰ he still argues that:

The white slaveowners needed an intermediate social group to mute and absorb the socio-political effects of the contradictory orbit in which they were held with their slaves. In addition, there was a demand for a middling administrative and artisanal labour elite for the efficient operation of the sugar plantation economy. Consequently, a group of free-coloured people emerged, and was to be found in most West Indian societies during the eighteenth century.³¹

Beckles’ analysis does not raise the possibility that the term “coloured” in primary sources, including petitions from free non-whites for increased political and civil rights, might also be a reference to free blacks.³² Neither does he provide any empirical evidence of the need for a distinction between mixed-race and black free people and slaves. Thus, the basis for his argument that “blacks” were largely anti-slavery and “coloureds” pro-slavery is dubious.

Despite its shortcomings, Beckles’ article “On the Backs of Blacks” remains a unique attempt to examine changes in the political relationships between free people of colour and other socio-legal groups over time, as historians have done for some other Caribbean territories.³³ Although the work by Handler and Sio discusses

²⁸ Beckles, “On the Backs of Blacks,” p. 185.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 185.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 179-180.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 167-168.

³² Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 210.

³³ Beckles, “On the Backs of Blacks,” p. 168; See also, Heuman, *Between Black and White*; Susan Lowes, “They Couldn’t Mash Ants’: The Decline of the White and Non-White Elites in Antigua, 1834-

changes in the legal position of free people of colour, and examines their social and economic relationships with slaves and whites, these studies are not detailed investigations of changing political ideologies among free people of colour.

Both Beckles and Handler recognise the diversity among free and enslaved people of colour but assume that the authors of civil rights petitions were *de facto* the accepted community leaders of free non-whites. While Handler's study is far more subtle than Beckles' in discussing the implications of colour differences among free people of colour, his discussion of political activity among free non-whites, specifically the struggle for more legal and political rights, focusses on the élite. Like Beckles, Handler assumes that the free non-white élite was politically "conservative" and pro-slavery. He asserts that:

Since leaders in the freedman community were members of the 'respectable classes,' the very nature of the civil rights struggle, including its organization, goals, and strategies, reflected the identification with Euro-creole values and norms. Freedmen were neither submissive nor rebellious, and through constitutional reform they sought the conventional rights and privileges associated with the status of 'free subjects' in a colonial society. The sharing of, and identification with, a variety of socio-cultural attributes, values, and norms with whites, as well as an importance attached to differentiation from the slaves, combined with economic mobility and increased property holdings (including slaves), helped to account for the freedmen's essential social and political conservatism.³⁴

A recent book on Barbadian free women of colour by Pedro Welch and Richard Goodridge examines how African cultural traditions survived in Caribbean slave society in the lives of free non-white women and their slave counterparts.³⁵

However, while it takes issue with the absence of a gender dimension in Handler's study, this work is not a study of the political activities of Barbadian free people of colour. Although Ann Benjamin recently took issue with Beckles' concept of a "black

1900," in Fog Olwig (ed.), *Small Islands*.

³⁴ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 216-217.

³⁵ Pedro Welch and Richard Goodridge, *"Red" and Black Over White: Free Coloured Women in Pre-Emancipation Barbados* (Bridgetown: Carib Research and Publications, 2000).

world view” which was inherently synonymous with anti-slavery thinking,³⁶ there have been no empirical examinations of free non-white political activities and thought since Handler and Beckles.

As Sio has noted, the free élite of colour is overrepresented in archival documentation, which, if not recognised, can distort the impression of life as a free person of colour.³⁷ Wealthy non-whites are more likely to surface in documents as property-owners and tax-payers, or to be counted in a census. For example, a recent work by Handler and others lists the names of 888 free men and women of colour whose names appeared in various documents over the entire period of Barbadian slavery. Although half of the free population of colour was female, the book contains the names of 166 women and 722 men.³⁸

Free People of Colour after Emancipation

The combination of historiographical emphases on labour conflict between planters and slaves, and on mixed-race free people has exacerbated the scholarly neglect of pre-1834 free non-whites in the study of emancipation. Although historians of Barbados distinguish between “free coloureds” and “free blacks” during the slavery period, the word “black” tends to be used as a synonym exclusively for the ex-slave population in studies of post-emancipation.³⁹

However, some scholars, notably Mavis Campbell, Philip Curtin, Gad Heuman and Monica Shuler for Jamaica, and Bridget Brereton and Carl Campbell for Trinidad,

³⁶ Ann Benjamin, “Some Reflections on Hilary Beckles’ Article: “Caribbean Anti-Slavery: ‘he Self-Liberation Ethos of Enslaved Blacks,”” *JCH*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1994), pp. 97-108.

³⁷ Arnold Sio, “Marginality and Free Coloured Identity in Caribbean Slave Society,” in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader* (London: James Currey Publishers, 1991), p. 154.

³⁸ Jerome Handler, Ronald Hughes and Ernest M. Wiltshire, *Freedmen of Barbados: Names and Notes for Genealogical and Family History Research* (Charlottesville: Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, 1999).

³⁹ See for example Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Nation-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 103-135; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*.

have examined the role of pre-emancipation free people of colour in the post-emancipation Caribbean. Mavis Campbell and Philip Curtin argue that mixed-race free people continued to side with planters after emancipation. The others put forward a more nuanced view, claiming that, rather than being unequivocally pro-planter, free people of colour often challenged planters' labour policies, and formed the nucleus of the post-emancipation non-white professional middle class.⁴⁰

Studies of pre-emancipation free people of colour in the post-emancipation Caribbean have emphasised those territories where pre-1834 free people of colour were able to challenge successfully the political dominance of the white plantocracy. Such challenges were made possible in large part by the numerical superiority of free people of colour over whites even before emancipation. Other factors influencing political change were the demise of plantations, the "flight" of the labour force from rural estates, and the acquisition of land by former slaves. In Barbados, where none of these features existed,⁴¹ historians have been concerned to explain why not, and what the implications were for ex-slaves.⁴²

Historians of post-emancipation Barbados provide few details on the fate of pre-emancipation free people of colour after 1834. Beckles notes that, after emancipation, a number of "coloureds" became wealthy Bridgetown merchants. Although he seems to use this term to differentiate between mixed-race people and

⁴⁰ See Carl Campbell, *The Young Colonials: A Social History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, 1834-1939* (Barbados: The Press, 1996), p. 65; Mavis Campbell, *Dynamics of Change*, pp. 173-176; Philip Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830-1865* (New York: Atheneum, 1955), p. 60, 174-175; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 103-106; Monica Shuler, "Coloured Civil Servants in Post-emancipation Jamaica: Two Case Studies," *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 30, nos. 3 and 4 (September-December 1984), pp. 85-98; Trouillot, "Inconvenience of Freedom," p. 168. An exception would be Lowes, "They Couldn't Mash Ants".

⁴¹ Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman, "The Transition from Slave to Free Labor: Notes on a Comparative Economic Model," in Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Frank Moya Pons and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *Between Slave and Free Labor: The Spanish-Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 260.

⁴² For a recent overview of the literature on post-emancipation estate decline and the development of peasantries in the British Caribbean see Jean Besson, "Freedom and Community: The British West Indies," in McGlynn and Drescher (eds.), *The Meaning of Freedom*, pp. 183-219.

“blacks”, he notes in the same paragraph that there were 12, 000 “coloureds” in Barbados at emancipation in 1838, an estimate of the entire free non-white population given unofficially by the governor in 1834.⁴³ Although Claude Levy and Karl Watson observe that post-emancipation political and economic developments helped to widen the socioeconomic gap between a small non-white élite and the overwhelming majority of people of colour, neither has examined this in detail.⁴⁴ In the introduction of her recent thesis on ex-slave labourers in post-emancipation Barbados, Alana Johnson states that ex-slaves’ freedom resembled “the marginal liberty experienced by freed persons during slavery” but she does not pursue this point.⁴⁵

Analysis of the role of free people of colour in Barbados after emancipation has tended to focus on one individual, Samuel Jackman Prescod, a talented freeborn man of mixed racial origin who first appears as an outspoken advocate of civil rights for free people of colour in 1831. During the apprenticeship period he was an influential abolitionist and journalist, and became the first man of colour to be elected to the House of Assembly. Beyond references to other members of the Liberal Party, which Prescod founded in 1840, Prescod’s social and political milieu has been neglected. Emphasis has been placed on his abolitionism and progressive views on rural labour issues, even though he was himself a city-dweller, elected to the House of Assembly in 1843 as the representative of Bridgetown, endorsed by the city’s merchants. Furthermore, there has been an unquestioned assumption that, because Prescod was a popular figure among rural labourers, his political battles were synonymous with those of former slaves. For example, in her analysis of ex-slaves’ struggles to define the meaning of freedom, Alana Johnson states that “For the most

⁴³ See chapter 1, p. 55 and Chapter 2, p. 145.

⁴⁴ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 30-31; Karl Watson, *The Civilised Island*, p. 203.

⁴⁵ Alana Johnson, “The Abolition of Chattel Slavery in Barbados, 1833-1876,” unpublished PhD thesis (Cambridge University, 1994), p. 10.

part, the collective aspect of the fight was centred around the person of Samuel Jackman Prescod, Barbados' leading civil rights activist in the post slavery period."⁴⁶

Contribution and Structure of the Thesis

Thus, this thesis is the first in-depth analysis of free people of colour in the era of emancipation, examining their responses to changes as they occurred, their political views, and how class and gender influenced their responses. It is also the first study of pre-1834 free non-whites in the post-emancipation period. Finally, it is one of very few studies investigating the changes in relations among free people of colour, and between them and other groups, over a long period of time.

I have chosen to use the term "free people of colour" for several reasons. "Free people of colour", and occasionally "free coloured and black", became the terms most consistently used in petitions or public statements from free non-whites themselves when describing the entire free non-white population. Although "coloured" was sometimes used, it appears less frequently, and is more often used by whites to describe free non-whites than by free non-whites themselves from the mid-1820s. I have avoided the terms "freedmen" or "freedwomen", which Handler prefers, because not all of the free population of colour had been "freed" — many were born free, and some certainly did not think of themselves as "freed" people.⁴⁷

Although I do occasionally refer to free people of colour as "free coloureds and blacks", I have elected not to rely on this term because I found little evidence that such colour differences were consistently important to either whites, to free people of

⁴⁶ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 116-117, 118-121; Johnson, "Abolition of Chattel Slavery," pp. 11-12; Glenn O. Phillips, "The Beginnings of Samuel Jackman Prescod, 1806-1843: Afro-Barbadian Civil Rights Crusader and Activist," *The Americas*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1982), pp. 363-378, Hilton Vaughn, "Samuel Jackman Prescod: Eulogy delivered on the occasion of the centenary of his death, Sunday, 26th September, 1971" (Barbados: BDA, 1971).

⁴⁷ I am not advocating that terminology needs to be universal for all Caribbean societies. During the slavery period, the terms "free people of colour" and "*hommes de couleur*" denoted mixed-race people in Jamaica and St. Domingue respectively (See Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. xixx; Trouillot, "Inconvenience of Freedom," p. 151).

colour or to slaves in Barbados. Phenotypical differences did play a role in Barbadian society. For example, in 1815 the manager of one plantation wrote to the owner about a “mulatto” slave girl for whom he claimed he could find no appropriate work because “She is as white as either of us”.⁴⁸ Handler’s analysis of 54 wills and deeds clearly identifiable as those of free people of colour shows that, although very few free people of colour were wealthy, mixed-race people were more likely to be among the very wealthiest members of Barbadian society than blacks. However, although Handler’s research unearthed material which suggests that over 50 per cent of the free non-white population between 1825 and 1829 was termed “coloured”,⁴⁹ this was not necessarily a phenotypic description. For example, in his will, the merchant of colour London Bourne is described as “coloured”, yet various contemporary observers noted that he was extremely dark-complexioned.⁵⁰

The scanty evidence on the correlation between manumission and phenotype suggests that, in Barbados, as in other slave societies, manumission favoured lighter-skinned slaves, particularly mixed-race women. Even so, other factors — particularly type of occupation and place of residence were equally important. Most slaves manumitted were non-agricultural workers living in towns.⁵¹ Barry Higman’s statistical research on the rural parish of St. John is inconclusive regarding the role of colour in the slave labour hierarchy. Furthermore, as Higman notes, even if planters thought it inappropriate for mixed-race people to be field labourers, such views were “placed under stress in the period after 1807 [the year the slave trade was abolished]

⁴⁸ Newton Estate Papers, 1815, item 745, cited in Barry Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Kingston: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1995 [1984]), p. 197.

⁴⁹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 21, 142-143.

⁵⁰ Handler, Hughes and Wiltshire list two London Bournes because of these conflicting descriptions, once as “black” and once as “coloured,” noting that the two listings are probably for the same individual (see Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 7); *Liberal*, February 9 1859, cited in Cecilia Karch, “A Man For All Seasons: London Bourne,” *JBMHS*, vol. 45 (1999), p. 19; J.A.S. Thome and J.H. Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months’ Tour of Antigua, Barbados and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), p. 75.

⁵¹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 51. Manumission is discussed in greater detail in chapter 1.

as the source of black field labourers was cut off and the proportion of colored slaves grew in most colonies.”⁵² In Barbados, which had effectively stopped importing slaves well before 1807, the proportion of mixed-race slaves would have been even higher than elsewhere.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, which are in turn subdivided into sections. Chapter 1 discusses how a free population of colour, concentrated in towns and with strong kinship connections to slaves, developed over the course of slavery’s history. The chapter argues that the legal, economic and political marginality of free people of colour in slave society should not necessarily be construed to imply social marginality, nor should questions of economic, political or legal marginality be confused with more abstract issues of group or individual “identity”. By the early nineteenth century the free population of colour was internally class-stratified, although all free people of colour shared a common legal position by 1834. The chapter examines the emergence, by the late eighteenth century, of a free non-white élite which used pro-slavery arguments to make limited demands for the repeal of discriminatory legislation, particularly legislation which prevented free people of colour from testifying in court.

Chapter 2 examines the “amelioration” period between 1816 and 1833, illustrating how, even before emancipation, reforms to the institution of slavery were already transforming the legal, political and social boundaries between free non-whites and slaves, particularly the already permeable socioeconomic boundary between slaves and free people of colour. As the anti-slavery challenge to the Caribbean plantocracy grew stronger, free people of colour in Barbados gradually moved away from their pro-slavery political stance. Excluded from politics as a result of legal segregation, élite free people of colour established autonomous philanthropic societies for free people of colour and slaves, with the assistance and support of missionary societies in Britain and of the British government. Although these societies were officially non-

⁵² Higman, *Slave Populations*, pp. 196-197.

political they represented a new public assertiveness on the part of free people of colour, as well as an expression of a sense of community with slaves.

The chapter re-examines the role of free people of colour in the 1816 rebellion. It illustrates that, despite the role which these community links between free people of colour and slaves played in the outbreak of the rebellion, very few free people of colour were willing to fight against slavery or publicly to express abolitionist views. This changed between 1823 and 1833, as élite free people of colour allied their struggle for increased civil rights with the abolitionist imperial government, and began to demand equal *political* as well as civil rights with whites. This challenge against racial discrimination eventually became an open acknowledgement that slavery was the basis of racial inequality. Throughout this period, the political and civil rights demands of free people of colour, and the methods which they chose to achieve their aims, were strongly influenced by class background, and their activities were marked by internal class antagonism.

Chapter 3 examines the end of slavery and the apprenticeship period between 1833 and 1838, when the economic, social, legal and cultural boundaries between free people of colour and other groups in the society changed. While the end of slavery was a catastrophe for impoverished non-white slaveowners, even free people of colour who were economically well-off or who were not slaveowners were negatively effected by the growing tide of rural-urban movement and migration by ex-slaves. They also had to contend with harsh legislation designed to control the activities of ex-slaves, which damaged the interests of free people of colour who dominated the occupational categories that former field slaves sought to enter. At the same time, emancipation was the key factor in the redefinition of the concept of “respectability”, turning it into a doctrine of Christian and social equality which free people of colour now used to challenge the moral authority of whites.

Chapter 4 argues that, during the apprenticeship period, élite free people of colour sought to articulate a political role for themselves as the leaders of all non-white people, including former slaves, as part of an international ‘brotherhood’ of people of

African descent. This new language of 'race consciousness' emerged as these élites adopted emancipation as the basis for their demands for racial equality. In so doing, many pre-1834 free non-whites reinvented their former role in slave society, ignoring the fact that many free people of colour had also been slaveowners. In this new racial discourse, slavery became a struggle between black victims and white aggressors, yet élite free people of colour sought to reconcile their putative loyalties as simultaneously the "children of Africa" and the loyal subjects of the British empire. They argued that Britain now had a duty to help Africa's descendants to "civilise" Africa, through imperial colonisation schemes to "repatriate" people of colour back to Africa. Many historians have recognised that emancipation reflected and hastened changes in British popular and official ideas regarding 'race'. In Britain, particularly after emancipation, 'race' was increasingly used as a scientific, geographically-determined and justification for an unequal international order.⁵³ However, less attention has been paid to how and why Caribbean people of colour used race as a tool of political liberation. The post-emancipation 'race consciousness' of free people of colour is an important link in the development of African diasporic consciousness.

Finally, chapter 5 examines how pre-1834 free people of colour were affected by imperial and colonial policies implemented to cope with the post-emancipation labour crisis, and ex-slaves' attempts to resist these policies. It argues that the limited coherence achieved among political and civil rights reformists of colour was destroyed by the free labour debate, the gradual withdrawal of imperial support for their cause and the divisions of class among them. Two broad factions developed dividing those who favoured limited change and less confrontational methods, and those who supported the more radical demands of the editors of the island's two non-white newspapers, the *New Times* and the *Liberal*. This division reflected class

⁵³ See for example Thomas Holt, "'An Empire Over the Mind': Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (eds.), *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 284.

differences among free people of colour, with the radicals being the more working class wing of non-white politics. However, while a small élite finally gained the right to vote in 1843, and Samuel Jackman Prescod became the first man of colour elected to the House of Assembly, most of those who had supported his campaign saw their hopes of political participation dashed. In an era of deepening economic depression and crisis, many pre-1834 free people of colour, in common with many whites and former slaves, suffered severe impoverishment. For many non-whites, by the middle of the century, emigration to other islands or to Africa became the only means they could envision which might give them an opportunity of a better life.

Primary Source Material and Interpretation

This thesis draws on a wide range of primary material in order to unearth information about free people of colour. The Colonial Office records in the Public Record Office, especially the correspondence between the colonial governors and the secretary of state for the colonies, and the minutes of the Barbadian legislature, are crucial sources used in this work. Besides the observations of these politicians themselves, this correspondence usually enclosed petitions from groups or individuals to the crown, as well as materials assembled by the governor on issues of major political interest or controversy. Similarly, the Parliamentary Papers, which are largely extracts from Colonial Office correspondence, have been invaluable for their reprints of the detailed reports which magistrates sent to Britain several times a year from 1836. These magistrates' reports, which included statistical information about socioeconomic activity in their districts, have not been used extensively in the study of post-emancipation Barbados.

Newspapers are also an important source. There were several newspapers in Barbados during this period, and it was impossible to consult them all. I have, however, selected newspapers which represent different political interests and views, and sometimes included quotations from other newspapers. For 1810s and early 1820, I consulted the *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, a merchant

newspaper, and the pro-planter *Barbadian* newspaper. The *Barbadian* published consistently from the early 1820s until the end of the period covered by this thesis, and I have read through the entire run. The *Liberal*, which Samuel Prescod and Thomas Harris Jr., both men of colour, edited from 1837, is a crucial source of information on the political activities of free men of colour and the divisions among them. The *Barbadian* and the *Liberal* contain detailed discussions of labour relations during apprenticeship and after emancipation, and of rural-urban migration patterns, emigration and economic activities. Unfortunately, only one copy exists of the *New Times*, the other newspaper edited by a person of colour during this period.

Newspapers also contain detailed court records, often with verbatim testimony.

The thesis also contains a fair amount of legal history, and I have analysed laws in several ways. Laws can reveal a great deal about processes of social change, particularly in a society where people's lives were regulated, in theory, by strict legal definitions of who and what they were. Particularly during the amelioration period, changes in legal precedent helped to undermine the boundary between freedom and slavery. Although most studies of slavery and emancipation include some legal history, analysis has tended to concentrate on a few, particularly well-known and controversial pieces of legislation. I have therefore examined several different legislative acts and the debates surrounding them, seeking information about changing relations between free people of colour, slaves and whites. Laws designed to regulate socioeconomic activity in towns are a useful indicator of changes in the relationship between rural and urban life. In my analysis, I have sought to remain conscious of the fact that laws reveal at least as much about élite fears of change as they do about the activities which they regulate or proscribe.

Records of absentee-owned plantations, which sometimes include extensive correspondence, provide an important perspective on labour relations, and relations between free people and slaves in rural areas. Church records also provide insight into rural life, community relations, and changing attitudes towards religion. A source used in this thesis which, to my knowledge, has only been used sparingly by one

historian to date, ⁵⁴ is the diary which was kept for nearly 30 years by the missionaries at the Mount Tabor Moravian mission station in St. John. This diary, along with other Moravian and Anglican Church records, offers a unique perspective on rural life during this period of change.

Travel accounts and works of fiction based on life in Caribbean slave society during this period are also useful sources. While I have usually sought to corroborate the observations made in these accounts with other sources, several of these travel accounts provide detailed observations on free people of colour in Barbados. Some contemporary travellers provide the only existing accounts of individuals mentioned in this thesis by people who met them socially. Finally, statistical information is also important, with some caveats. Statistics collected for the imperial government via churches and magistrates are wildly unreliable, particularly for the earliest years covered by this thesis, and the statistics amassed reflect the concerns of the imperial government more than those of either the colonial authorities or the subjects themselves. Still, official figures provide a picture of processes of change which other sources do not, at times adding weight to — or contradicting — other contemporary observations.

⁵⁴ A.K.O Lewis, "The Moravian Mission in Barbados 1816-1886: A study of the historical context and theological significance of a minority church among an oppressed people," unpublished PhD thesis (University of Birmingham, 1983).

Chapter 1

Relations Between Free People of Colour and Slaves in Barbadian Slave Society, 1620s-1834

This chapter examines the historical and structural connection between the free and enslaved populations of colour in Barbadian slave society. It argues that, by the last decades of slavery, the relationship between plantation sugar production and African slavery had created an intricate network of social, economic and political relationships between slaves and free people of colour which crossed and subverted legal boundaries. Although plantations were the economic centre of Barbadian slave society, this chapter contributes to a growing body of literature which examines the connections between rural and urban life in slave societies. ¹ Plantations were the permeable centre of a slave society composed of a web of interactions which crossed racial and legal boundaries. This web of interactions was crucial to the functioning of slave society and economy and shaped relations throughout the society. By the early nineteenth century, slavery dominated most areas of life and work, and there was a wide gulf between the legal framework of slavery and the range of possible relationships between individuals and socio-legal groups. ²

A stratum of people of African and African-European descent who were legally free appeared quite early in Barbados, whether by birth or manumission, even as a

¹ Hilary Beckles, "Slaves and the Internal Market Economy of Barbados: A perspective on non-violent resistance," 20th ACH conference, (Virgin Islands, 1988); Barry Higman, *Slave Populations*; Christine Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price of Freedom: Family and Labor Among Lima's Slaves, 1800-1854* (London: University of California Press, 1994); Roderick A McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Sidney Mintz and Douglas Hall, *The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System*, (New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, No. 57, 1960); Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*; Michael Mullin, "Slave Economic Strategies: Food, markets and property," in Mary Turner (ed.), *From Chattel Slaves*, pp. 68-78; Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Pedro Welch, "The Urban Context of the Slave Plantation System: Bridgetown, Barbados, 1680-1834," unpublished PhD thesis (UWI Cave Hill, 1994).

² Mintz and Price, *Anthropological Approach*, p. 18.

legal system designed to entrench firmly the relationship between bondage and race was being refined.³ These apparently contradictory developments were an integral part of the structure of slave society.⁴ This chapter and Chapter 2 examine the marginal position of free people of colour, associated by their skin colour with slaves, yet legally free without equal privileges to whites, and compare Barbadian free non-whites with their counterparts elsewhere in the Americas.⁵

Although free people of colour were politically and legally marginalised within slave society, their presence helped to shape the hierarchies among slaves, possibilities of escape from slavery and the conceptions which many slaves had of freedom. The position of free people of colour within slave society was frequently ambivalent, but they were neither a clearly "separate and distinct entity" nor an easily categorised "social group", as Karl Watson and Hilary Beckles have termed them.⁶ Rather, as Jerome Handler and Arnold Sio argue, all people of African descent in a highly segregated society inhabited a space of social identification. This space contributed to the overall stability of the slave system while also subverting the categories of distinction upon which that stability was based. This shared space was itself internally fragmented, socially, economically and politically.⁷

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a small minority of comparatively well-to-do free people of colour began a campaign for greater civil rights. As this chapter

³ Elsa Goveia, *The West Indian Slave Laws of the 18th Century* (Barbados and London: Caribbean Universities Press, 1970); Neville Hall, "Law and Society in Barbados at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *JCH*, vol. 5 (1972), pp. 20-45; Arnold Sio, "Marginality and Free Coloured Identity in Caribbean Slave Society," in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A student reader* (London: James Currey Publishers), 1991, pp. 150-151; Frederick Bowser, "Colonial Spanish America," in Cohen and Greene, *Neither Slave Nor Free*, pp. 226-230.

⁴ Mintz and Price, *Anthropological Approach*, p. 3.

⁵ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New Press, 1974); Carl Campbell, "Trinidad's Free Coloureds in Comparative Caribbean Perspectives," in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A student reader* (Jamaica: Ian Randler, 2000), pp. 597-612; Mavis Campbell, *Dynamics of Change*; Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of a Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Jerome Handler, *Unappropriated People*; Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White*.

⁶ Karl Watson, *The Civilised Island Barbados A Social History, 1750-1816* (Ann Arbor: University of Florida, 1977), pp. 189-190; Hilary Beckles, "On the Backs of Blacks," p. 185.

⁷ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 205-213; Sio, "Marginality," pp. 150-151.

illustrates, this movement was an attempt by members of the non-white élite to define a role for themselves which was divorced from their slave origins and which would further set them apart from lower order free people of colour. ⁸

Non-Agricultural Labour and Landless Slaveownership in Barbados

The "Sugar Revolution": The Shift from Indentureship to Slavery

From the 1620s, Barbados evolved as a society which combined high population density with a significant minority of slaveowners who owned no land but owned slaves who performed non-agricultural labour. This section explains how these factors reduced the likelihood of slaves buying their freedom, and kept the free population of colour small.

Prior to the 1640s, when it became the first major sugar-producer in the British empire, ⁹ Barbados was a struggling colony of small estates producing a variety of staples for export, principally tobacco and cotton, but also ginger and indigo. ¹⁰ The representative assembly established in 1638-39 gave extensive powers of self-government to a small land-owning planter élite among the male population, out of an estimated population of around 9000, of whom 2000 were European indentured labourers and 200 were African slaves. ¹¹ The majority of colonists were white small farmers who owned too little land to meet the ten-acre franchise qualification, and former indentured labourers who had received their stipulated "freedom due" of

⁸ Jerome Handler, "Barbados," in Cohen and Greene (eds.), *Neither Slave nor Free*, pp. 254-257; Sio, "Marginality," p. 153.

⁹ Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 37.

¹⁰ David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of development, culture and environmental change since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 146. Barbados was not the first colony in the British empire to experiment with sugar, but was the first to become a sugar monoculture (Gary Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo-Barbadian Politics, 1627-1700* [New York and London: New York University Press, 1984], pp. 40-41 and p. 57).

¹¹ Hilary Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 11-12; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 230; Hume Wrong, *Government of the West Indies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 28; Puckrein, *Little England*, p. 31.

either £10 or a piece of land.¹²

African slavery was present from the beginning of colonisation but was initially an institution of minor importance compared with indentured and free white labour. Fewer than ten African slaves arrived with the first ship bearing English settlers in 1627. The first slave law was passed in 1636, proclaiming that, from then on, all blacks and Indians brought to the island, and their offspring, were slaves for life unless contracts had previously been made to the contrary.¹³ The first census estimates for 1655 still showed a preponderance of whites over blacks.¹⁴

The rapid expansion of the sugar economy transformed this picture, both because of the massive imports of Africans and the rapid decline of white indentureship.¹⁵ Sugar production made the working conditions for indentured labourers even more brutal, and estate expansion rapidly consumed the island's arable land leaving none available as a "freedom due". By the late 1600s few would willingly emigrate to Barbados as indentured labourers.¹⁶ Towards the end of the 1640s planters and

¹² Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 3.

¹³ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 12; Robert H. Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans 1848), p. 266.

¹⁴ Most population estimates for this period are wildly variable, although all agree that the European population exceeded the African population until the 1660s. Watson claims that, by 1643, there were 37,000 whites and 6,000 slaves (Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 10) while Beckles and Dunn estimate that the 1655 population contained 23,000 whites and 20,000 slaves (Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, p. 32 and Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 87). By 1748, when white population statistics were more reliable, there were 15,192 whites and 47,025 slaves (see CO 28/89, "A List of the Number of Planters and Inhabitants...", cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 18-19).

¹⁵ Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar*, vol. I (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949), p. 160.

¹⁶ In 1647 the governor of Barbados announced that no land remained for indentured servants (see Otis Starkey, *The Economic Geography of Barbados: A Study of the Relationship Between Environmental Variations and Economic Development* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1939], p. 61). There is some debate about the precise date of the transition to widespread use of slave labour in Barbados. Some historians place the shift in the late 1640s and argue that the shift to slave-labour based economic production occurred on the island's tobacco and cotton plantations before sugar became a regular staple (Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1972], p. 33). Hilary Beckles disputes this, asserting that, as late as 1654, Barbados was still the leading British American importer of European indentured labour. He argues that European indentured labour played a significant role until well after the consolidation the sugar plantation economy (Beckles, *White Servitude*, pp. 37-36 and p. 115); Vincent Harlow, *A History of Barbados, 1625-1685* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), pp. 294-300; Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, p. 26 and 52; Puckrein, *Little England*, p. 26.

British traders seeking a more reliable and largescale supply of labour turned to the Atlantic slave trade, then dominated by the Dutch and the Portuguese.¹⁷ By 1740, the indentured servant population had fallen below 1, 000 and in 1789 a clergyman named William Dickson observed that no white bondservants remained in Barbados, by which time there were at least 62, 115 slaves, 16, 167 whites and 838 free people of colour.¹⁸ Plantation agriculture and the system of land grants favoured already wealthy planters and aristocratic émigrés with access to the capital and credit needed to start sugar plantations. An influx of large numbers of well-connected royalist English émigrés during the English Civil War further consolidated the plantocracy and pushed smaller farmers off their land. These factors helped to ensure that anyone without wealth or connections could never easily enter the ranks of the Barbadian élite.¹⁹

Wherever sugar reigned in the seventeenth century Caribbean, whites quickly became the minority.²⁰ However, Barbados had a lengthy period of predominantly white migration before sugar transformed the society demographically and economically, which was a crucial difference between this island and the other colonies which also became major sugar producers. Barbados was the first port of call for most ships coming to the West Indies, and the island's planters were situated to take full advantage of the slave trade. By the second half of the seventeenth century, it was the most densely populated island in the West Indies, with an estimated 362 people per square mile in 1690.²¹ Barbados had a larger and more

¹⁷ Beckles, *White Servitude*, pp 42-44 and pp. 115-127; Blackburn, *Making of Slavery*, p. 230.

¹⁸ Beckles, *White Servitude*, p. 10; William Dickson, *Letters on Slavery... to which are added, Addresses to the Whites, and the Free Negroes of Barbadoes* (London: J. Philips, 1789), pp. 44-45; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁹ Beckles, *White Servitude*, p. 16; Puckrein, *Little England*, pp. 23-24; Otis Starkey, *Economic Geography*, p. 83.

²⁰ Of the Caribbean's major sugar exporters, only Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Cuba never developed slave:free ratios of at least 10:1 (Watts, *West Indies*, p. 325).

²¹ Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, *No Peace*, p. 29; Jack Greene, "Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a case study," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 216.

numerically stable white population than any other island in the British Caribbean. Although Jamaica surpassed Barbados as the leader in British Caribbean sugar producer in the early eighteenth century, it made the transformation to sugar towards the end of the seventeenth century when white migration from Britain to the West Indies was already declining and the slave trade was rapidly expanding. In 1790 the ratio of whites to non-whites in Barbados was 1:4, compared with 1:10 in Jamaica, 1:18 in Antigua and 1:16 in St. Domingue.²²

Plantation agriculture also transformed the geography of the island more thoroughly than any other West Indian island. Nearly 90 per cent of the land in Barbados was arable, and the island had no mountains. By the nineteenth century Barbados, according to Barry Higman, "was effectively one vast sugar plantation."²³ From very early on there were no areas in which runaway slaves could establish autonomous maroon communities like those of other parts of the Americas, and references to such maroon communities disappear after the 1660s or 1670s. There was also no farm land available for any slave or servant who acquired freedom.²⁴

Although Barbadian sugar profits were impressive in the seventeenth century when there was little competition, they paled in comparison to later returns from Jamaica, the French Caribbean territories, and much later, Cuba.²⁵ Lower profits and the need for more careful management because of soil exhaustion produced a higher rate of planter residency in Barbados than elsewhere in the Caribbean. After Restoration, Barbados enjoyed a degree of socio-political stability which was unusual for the West Indies. By the late seventeenth century the Barbadian plantocracy had developed a well-defined insular identity, and was characterised by stable patriarchal

²² There were only 696 Spaniards in Jamaica when it was captured by the British in 1655, although the Spanish had been there for 150 years. See Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1969), p. 15; Watson, *Civilised Island*, pp. 61-62.

²³ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 27; Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 52; Watts, *West Indies*, p. 186.

²⁴ Hilary Beckles, "From Land to Sea: Runaway Barbados Slaves and Servants, 1630-1700," *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1985), pp. 95-111.

²⁵ Watts, *West Indies*, pp. 286-300.

family structures and inheritance patterns. About 120 planter families could trace their roots back to the settlement of the island before and during the English Civil War, and this planter élite controlled both houses of the island's legislature. ²⁶

The rise of the plantations initially sent Barbados' white population into decline, and it went from an estimated 23,000 to 12,528 between 1655 and 1712. After more than half a century of decline, the white population of the island stabilised at between 17,000 and 18,000 between 1720 and the early 1770s. It then began to decline gradually but steadily during the 1770s, possibly as a result of emigration during the American War of Independence, which cut off most of the food imports to the British Caribbean. Between 1783 and 1816 the population was relatively stable at just over 16,000. ²⁷ This pattern was atypical in the anglophone West Indies, where white population decline was generally precipitous during the eighteenth century. ²⁸ Although many propertyless whites emigrated, analysis of Barbadian emigration to South Carolina during that colony's early settlement in the 1660s shows a mixture of wealthy and middling planters, merchants, artisans, small farmers, sailors, servants, slaves and poor and landless white men and women. However most seem to have been members of the Barbadian planter class who left because, as Richard Dunn states, they "had no expansion room in Barbados." ²⁹

By the mid-eighteenth century, landless people were the majority among the island's white population, rather than wealthy planters. Landless whites were socially and politically marginalised, and by the mid-eighteenth century a distinctive "poor white" group had become a permanent feature of the Barbadian social landscape,

²⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 76; Greene, "Changing Identity," pp. 240-242; Puckrein, *Little England*, p. 24 and 39; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 42-46 and p. 160; Karl Watson, "Salmagundis vs. Pumpkins: White Politics and Creole Consciousness in Barbadian Slave Society, 1800-34," pp. 17-31 in Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (eds.), *The White Minority in the Caribbean* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), pp. 17-19; Watts, *West Indies*, p. 332.

²⁷ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 32; Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 80; Jill Sheppard, *The 'Redlegs' of Barbados: Their Origins and History* (New York: KTO Press, 1977), p. 43.

²⁸ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 237; Watts, *West Indies*, pp. 311-312.

²⁹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 122-116.

absorbing ever more victims of downward social mobility. Jill Sheppard estimates that, by 1834, destitute whites comprised 8,000 out of a population of 12,000 whites, while Beckles asserts that they always accounted for 40 to 60 per cent of the white population.³⁰ By the 1700s the white population in Barbados was highly internally stratified. Unlike white minorities elsewhere in the British Caribbean, it was also numerically stable.³¹

The Expansion of Slavery and the Marginalisation of White Wage Labour

By comparison, the slave population was rising rapidly, and the marginalisation of landless whites was rapidly accelerated by the growth of the slave population and the range of slave occupations. In 1700, the slave population was estimated at just over 50,000, whereas, by 1780, it was over 80,000.³² When prices for British Caribbean sugar in the European market declined between 1670 and 1690, as production increased in Jamaica, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Brazil, Barbadian planters initially responded by purchasing more slaves to increase production, importing at least 3,000 slaves a year after 1650.³³ They also implemented cost-cutting measures in estate management, of which the most significant in the long term were “amelioration” policies, designed to encourage slave population growth through natural increase rather than imports, and the training of slaves in several plantation occupations, including skilled artisans and petty managers.³⁴ According to

³⁰ Beckles, “Black over White: The ‘Poor White’ Problem in Barbados Slave Society,” *Immigrants and Minorities*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1988), p. 4; Sheppard, *Redlegs*, p. 43. According to Karl Watson, a socio-economic group specifically termed “poor white” or “redlegs” dates from the 1780s (Watson, *The Civilised Island*, p. 108).

³¹ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 42 and “Land Distribution and Class Formation in Barbados, 1630-1700: The Rise of a Wage Proletariat.” *JBMHS*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1980), p. 129; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 18-19; J. McCusker and R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991 [1985]), p. 153; Sheppard, *Redlegs*, p. 63.

³² McCusker and Menard, *British America*, p. 153.

³³ Ward, *British West Indian Slavery*, p. 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Watts, *West Indies*, p. 312; Marietta Morrissey, “Women’s Work, Family Formation, and Reproduction among Caribbean Slaves,” in Beckles and Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Slavery*, pp. 674-676.

Richard Sheridan, Barbadian planters engaged in “economic amelioration”, improving the living conditions of their slaves out of self-interest. For example, they pursued pro-natalist policies, giving incentives to mothers to have children, lightening the workload and providing special medical care for pregnant women. Planters also shifted early on to the use of animals for some of the most repulsive labour tasks, such as dung-collecting, which were still done by slaves in other islands; and they encouraged the development of a skilled slave élite.³⁵ Barbados was the first island to employ slaves as head-drivers.³⁶ By 1798, for example, all the skilled positions below the level of bookkeeper on the large Newton plantation in Christ Church parish were held by slaves, not whites. In the late eighteenth century, the management of the Codrington estate in St. John, run by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, turned to slave labour hired from other owners for more specialised and physically taxing estate work. The estate’s “principal nègroes” were given a greater degree of job flexibility. By 1781, just 59 per cent of the estate’s slaves were field labourers.³⁷

Increased imports and amelioration policies resulted in a slave population which, despite a death rate which was still high, displayed the unusual characteristic of beginning to sustain itself by natural increase during the late eighteenth century. In 1817, African-born slaves were a mere 7.1 per cent of the island’s slaves population, and had decreased to 2.9 per cent by 1832, the lowest figures in the entire anglophone Caribbean.³⁸ In 1820 it was the only island whose slave population

³⁵ Richard Sheridan, “Why the Condition of the Slaves Was ‘less intolerable in Barbadoes than in the other sugar colonies’,” in Hilary Beckles (ed.), *Inside Slavery: Process and legacy in the Caribbean experience* (Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago: The Press, 1996), pp. 31-50.

³⁶ Hilary Beckles and Karl Watson, “Social Protest and Labour Bargaining: The changing nature of slaves’ responses to plantation life in eighteenth-century Barbados,” *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1987), p. 284.

³⁷ Mary, Butler, “Mortality and Labour on the Codrington Estate, Barbados” *JCH*, vol. 19 no. 1 (May 1984), pp. 48-67; Watson, *The Civilised Island*, p. 140; J. Harry Bennett, *Bondsmen and Bishops: Slavery and apprenticeship on the Codrington plantations of Barbados, 1710-1838* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), pp. 12-20.

³⁸ Bennett, *Bondsmen and Bishops*, p. 52; Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 130.

increased after the abolition of the slave trade. Between 1807 and 1834 the slave population of the West Indies declined from 775, 000 to 665, 000, a fall of 14 per cent, but the slave population of Barbados rose from 75, 000 to over 80, 000 between 1808 and the 1830s.³⁹

Slave population growth and estate labour policies contributed to “extensive unemployment among white labourers, with the consequences of their increased material impoverishment and loss of technical skills — a process, if anything, that was the obverse of that experienced by a significant section of the slave and free non-white population”.⁴⁰ To be a socially ‘respectable’ white person, one did not necessarily have to own an estate, which was impossible for most whites, but work associated with enslavement and blackness was out of the question. This opinion was enforced from above and below: in 1744 the manager of Codrington estate noted that, even when poor whites were willing to engage in estate labour, plantation managers would refuse them, as they were “irritants” to the slaves.⁴¹

Slavery pushed whites out of the majority of estate jobs which they had performed in the early days of the West Indian sugar industry, reducing the range of areas in which they could find employment. The decision to train slaves in a variety of occupations created a large group of artisan, or “tradesman” and “mechanic” slaves, who came to dominate the market for skilled trades, and, because of their slave status, contributed to the general decline in wages for tradespeople. Few were willing to hire a white artisan when hired slave labour cost less. By the early nineteenth century the only occupations which were still exclusively white in the plantation-dominated countryside were those of manager, overseer and bookkeeper, and competition for this work kept wages low. The situation was particularly acute for

³⁹ PP 1824, vol. 24, “Returns of the... Slave Population in each of His Majesty’s Colonies in the West Indies; distinguishing the Males and Females...,” pp: 79-82; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 55; Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, p. 423.

⁴⁰ Beckles, “Black Over White,” p. 3.

⁴¹ Manager Abel Alleyne to the SPG, 4 April 1744, Codrington Plantation Correspondence, cited in *ibid.*, p. 4.

white women, who were already proscribed by accepted social norms from most areas of labour and business activity. By the time of emancipation, slave women dominated the market for seamstresses, cooks, maid servants and nursemaids, initially the preserve of white women. Certain jobs in the towns, such as clerks in merchant houses, were reserved for white men, and those who prospered opened small merchant enterprises in the towns.⁴²

According to the 1834 compensation records over 44 per cent of Barbadian slaves were employed in areas other than field labour, and around one-quarter did not live on estates. By comparison, more than 70 per cent of Jamaican slaves were field labourers, and around 92 per cent lived on agricultural units.⁴³ No other British sugar producing colony combined a comparable rate of non-plantation slave labour with such a large white population. European travellers in the West Indies frequently commented on Barbados' peculiarly large population of poor whites, stating that many of this "degraded class" lived from begging or on the charity of enslaved neighbours and friends.⁴⁴

However not all landless whites were poor and such descriptions do not adequately explain how they survived. The 1688 "Act for the governing of Negroes," the most important law in the Barbadian slave régime, provides the key to understanding how many whites found a means of a secure livelihood despite the steady marginalisation of white wage labour. Referred to in the island as "No. 82," this act was an attempt to define clearly the boundaries between whites and blacks, enslavement and freedom. Except in instances of capital crime, slaves were permanently placed outside the common law, and No. 82 established special slave courts with juries composed of three freeholders — themselves planters and

⁴² Dickson, *Letters on Slavery*, p. 42. The transition from free to skilled slave labour was complete on the plantations by 1700. By 1680, 49 per cent of the households in Bridgetown had no white maid servants and 92 per cent had domestic slaves (Beckles, *White Servitude*, pp. 138-139).

⁴³ Barry Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (Kingston: The Press, 1995 [1976]), p. 42; Higman, *Slaves Populations*, p. 550.

⁴⁴ See for example H.N. Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies, in 1825* (London: Publisher unknown, 1826), pp. 286-287.

slaveowners — which functioned until the end of slavery in 1834. The act illustrates an obsession with restricting labourers' freedom of movement which characterised plantation slave societies. No. 82 also forced slaveowners to uphold the boundaries which it established, and one clause, which was repealed in 1706, prohibited the island's Jews from keeping large numbers of slaves for the purpose of hiring out their labour.⁴⁵ The specific targeting of Jews indicates that the purpose of this clause was to preserve the practice for white slaveowning Christians, as opposed to outlawing it entirely.

At the same time that slavery marginalised whites socially and economically, it provided a means by which landless whites could sustain themselves. The marginalisation of white labour gave rise to a parallel system of slave ownership besides plantation slavery, with most whites owning small numbers of slaves but no land,⁴⁶ and probably surviving by hiring out their slaves to others, including plantations. In 1832, about 80 percent of Barbadian slaveowners owned between 1-20 slaves, accounting for nearly 28 per cent of the slave population. While this was a common pattern in sugar-producing colonies, where frequently more than 70 per cent of owners had fewer than 20 slaves, no other colony had such a high percentage of slaves concentrated in the small slaveowner category.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in most other colonies, many small scale slaveowners were also small farmers, which was not the case in Barbados. While most slaves were still the property of wealthy landowners, a significant minority had landless owners.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ "An Act for the governing of Negroes" begins with the preamble: "Whereas the Plantations and Estates of this Island, cannot be fully managed and brought into use, without the labour and service of great number of Negroes and other Slaves: And forasmuch as the said Negroes and other Slaves brought unto the People of this Island for that purpose, are of barbarous, wild and savage nature, and such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the Laws, Customs and Practices of our Nation..." This act was passed on August 8 1688 (Richard Hall, *Acts, passed in the island of Barbados...*, [London: R. Hall, 1764], pp. 112-121; Goveia, *Slave Laws*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 151.

⁴⁷ Higman, *Slave Populations*, pp. 102-103.

⁴⁸ In 1824, out of 5206 slaveowners, 3671 had no land, and most of that number had few slaves (*Report of a Committee of the Council of Barbadoes, appointed to inquire into the actual condition of the Slaves in this Island...*, (London: Publisher unknown, 1824), pp. 77-78 and 151. In 1826, a

Hires could be of short duration, involving one specific task which needed to be done for a specified period of time, or long term for an unspecified period. This system was so widespread, that it accelerated both the process from which it had sprung, namely the expansion of slavery beyond the plantations into all areas of the economy, and the progressive marginalisation of white labour. For most whites, the only way to survive, indeed, the only way to be a respected member of white society, was to own either land or slaves. Owning at least one slave became the *sine qua non* of white respectability, and many would starve because they either would not or could not engage in work associated with slavery, but could not afford to buy or hire slaves. In 1822 the *Barbados Mercury*, a Bridgetown merchant newspaper, railed against poor white and “middle class” white pride, saying that these people were too proud even to go to the market to buy their own food, or do other “negro” jobs.⁴⁹ During the Christmas season of 1821, the same newspaper sought donations for “A Case of Peculiar Distress”, namely, the son of a “very respectable Gentleman”, who had not even “a slave in the world to boil a kettle of water, nor has he the means of hiring one.” In response to the campaign, the man and his family received several donations.⁵⁰

The marginalisation of white wage labourers and the stratification of the estate labour force according to skills had several consequences for the lives of slaves, the first of which was the entrenchment of a highly diversified slave labour hierarchy. In 1789 Dickson observed that “some slaves live and are treated so very differently from others, that a superficial observer would take it for granted, they belong to classes of men, who hold distinct ranks in society, so to speak, by tenures essentially different.”⁵¹ He was referring mainly to the labour hierarchy of the estates, where the

representative in the House of Assembly described Barbados as a colony where “there are many Slave Owners in low-circumstances of life” (CO 31/50, 7 March 1826).

⁴⁹ *BMBG*, 23 September 1822.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 December 1821.

⁵¹ Dickson, *Letters on Slavery*, p. 6.

slave élite was composed of drivers (particularly those of the first and second gangs), boilers, watchmen, artisans and other estate “officers,” as such slaves were termed. In accordance with this hierarchy, power and privileges were unevenly distributed among slaves, giving élite slaves a particular interest in protecting their position.⁵² According to Dickson, “a negro driver would no more think of going into the field than a coachman in England would think of setting out on a journey without his whip.”⁵³ Over time slavedrivers on large estates developed a great deal of latitude in exercising their power. In the mid-1820s, the influential attorney of the Codrington estate, John Forster Clarke, ordered drivers to stop carrying whips into the field, but stated in 1829 that:

... [T]he driver and the manager have both informed me lately, that the gang was, not long since, so idle and inattentive, that the driver was compelled to take it up again for a short time. It is now discontinued, and idleness, insolence, and insubordination, (the common offences in the field), are punished by the driver’s sending the offender from the field, to be put into confinement, and reporting it to the manager as soon as he comes home from the field...⁵⁴

Women were excluded from nearly all occupations in the officer and trades categories on Caribbean plantations, and Janet Henshall-Momsen notes that “the slave élite consisted almost entirely of men.”⁵⁵ Although certain élite occupations were female-dominated — particularly domestic work, huckstering and seamstressing — women were disproportionately concentrated in field labour throughout much of the Caribbean by the early nineteenth century.⁵⁶

⁵² Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, p. 62; Edwin Lascelles et al, *Instructions for the Management of a Plantation in Barbadoes and for the Treatment of Negroes, &c.* (London: Publisher unknown, 1786), p. 22 and 26.

⁵³ Dickson, *Letters on Slavery*, p 14 and 53.

⁵⁴ John Forster Clarke, attorney for the Codrington estate, “Progress of Religious Instruction in the West Indies,” *Barbadian*, 9 June 1829.

⁵⁵ Janet Henshall-Momsen, “Gender roles in Caribbean agricultural labour,” in Malcolm Cross and Gad Heuman (eds.), *Labour in the Caribbean: From emancipation to independence* (London: MacMillan Caribbean, 1992), pp. 142-143.

⁵⁶ Unusually, Barbados had a slight majority of female slave drivers. However, this was because of the larger proportionate of children and elderly people on Barbadian estates. The women who supervised

By the 1800s, while the majority of slaves spent much of their lives in the fields, significant numbers were employed in other areas, and, over the course of his/her life, an individual might perform a variety of different jobs. A typical newspaper advertisement from 1813 illustrates this. The notice announced the sale of several slaves: “[T]hree Men, one a carpenter and fisherman, one who has been accustomed to be about a house but originally a field man; the other has been employed about a house and the care of a horse; two young women, good sempstresses and accustomed to wait on a lady; and a girl about nine years of age.” Another advertisement from 1816 offered for sale an 18 year old girl “who has been brought up in a family to be a Needlewoman and washer; she would make a good field negro.”⁵⁷

Urban Slavery and its Impact on Rural Life

The fluidity of labour categories was facilitated by the existence of port cities, particularly in major points of access to the Americas like Barbados, Jamaica and St. Domingue. Although the historiography of slavery, particularly in the sugar-based economies of the British Caribbean, has focussed on rural life, cities and plantations developed together as integral parts of the system of colonisation and social and economic development in the Caribbean. Port cities were the focus of trade and communications in the Atlantic world. They connected colonies to each other and to metropolises; were the focal point of trade between the rural producers of agricultural products and the consumers in towns and other parts of the countryside; and linked the local population with urban merchant houses, ports, and army and naval bases.

their work were called drivers, although their status would have been more akin to that of nurses. First and second gang drivers and rangers were almost always men, and they were the most powerful group among estate slaves. See Higman, *Slave Populations*, pp. 189-192; Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A social history of enslaved black women in Barbados* (London: Zed Books, 1989), pp. 31-38.

⁵⁷ *BMBG*, 16 March 1813 and 12 March 1816.

⁵⁸ As Christine Hünefeldt argues in her discussion of slavery's disintegration in Peru, "we cannot understand the events in the sphere of [the] rural hinterland without examining the connections between the rural and urban realms. And to perceive these connections, we must look at the relationships established by the slaves themselves...". ⁵⁹ Caribbean cities shaped rural existence in several ways. They were crucial to the development of extensive internal marketing systems dominated by slaves and, with usually no need for field labour, provided a space in which the rigid hierarchies of plantation life did not apply. Additionally, landless free people tended to be concentrated in cities, making the slave:free ratio in the countryside even more extreme. Cities also facilitated the expansion of the "hiring out" system. ⁶⁰

By 1829, about 17 per cent of slaves lived in Bridgetown, ⁶¹ the island's capital city and the major port of call for the south-eastern British Caribbean. ⁶² The urban labour hierarchy was completely different from that of the countryside, and the 1817 slave registration returns showed that 58 per cent of Bridgetown's slaves were skilled. ⁶³ Domestics were by far the largest category, accounting for 50 per cent of urban slaves, with tradesmen a distant second at 11.5 per cent. Although the registration returns provide the most comprehensive statistics on slave occupations, the categorisations imposed upon slaveowners by the British government for the purposes of registration neither express the full range nor capture the true nature of

⁵⁸ Welch, "Urban Context," 1994.

⁵⁹ Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ See Higman, *Slave Populations*, pp. 226-259; Welch, "Urban Context," pp. 4-11.

⁶¹ Welch, "Urban Context," p. 115. Higman suggests that the percentage of urban slaves was declining between 1817 and 1834 in most British Caribbean islands, which Welch argues might have been the result of a strategic decision to redistribute slaves into rural areas after the abolition of the slave trade (See Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 87 and Welch, "Urban Context," p. 116).

⁶² Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados*, pp. 165-166. The number of slaves in the island's second most important port city and major fishing port, Speightstown and in the lesser towns, Oistins and Holetown, is unknown. In 1825, Bridgetown was thought to have a population of around 20,000 (PP 1826, vol. 29, p. 154). There were no such estimates for Speightstown during slavery but, in 1837, its population was estimated at 4000 (PP 1837-38, vol. 48, *Report on Negro Education, Windward and Leeward Islands*, p. 262).

⁶³ Welch, "Urban Context," p. 44; Higman, *Slave Populations*, pp. 232-235.

the work which slaves did. “Transport workers” could be porters or boatmen; women working as hucksters or seamstresses might have been classified as either “skilled tradespeople” — along with artisans, who were predominantly male — or “sellers”. The numbers of those listed as “hired” and “absent” should probably include some of the 28 per cent who were listed as having no occupation. Many of the owners of these allegedly ‘unoccupied’ slaves may have hired them out over long periods and genuinely had no idea what their slaves did for a living. ⁶⁴

Port cities were a life-line in the West Indies, particularly because the French, Dutch and British Caribbean slave colonies were export-oriented and depended heavily on imports. ⁶⁵ Barbados, however, was the ultimate example of import-dependency. In most of the older sugar-producing colonies planters gave their slaves allotments of “scrub” land on which to grow their own food. Barbadian slaves had only “garden plots” attached to their homes, which at best supplemented their estate rations, and almost all of their food were imported and dispensed by the estates. ⁶⁶

However, across the Caribbean, including Barbados, slaves’ allotment-based agriculture was crucial for the domestic market. Although the law did not recognise slaves as having any right to property ownership, Roderick McDonald argues that such rights “existed de facto in the slaves’ informally negotiated conditions of life and labor”. ⁶⁷ Slaves took advantage of their allotments and garden plots to feed themselves and earn money to augment their property through a system of internal marketing based on slaves’ arable plots and livestock rearing. By the mid-eighteenth century, the population of Barbados, particularly in urban areas, depended upon slaves’ garden plots for several basic dietary staples, as well as poultry and livestock products. By 1800 Sunday was firmly established as market day in the British Caribbean, and Barbadian slaves travelled around the island to the four principal

⁶⁴ Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 228.

⁶⁵ Watts, *West Indies*, p. 229.

⁶⁶ Mintz and Hall, *Origins*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Roderick McDonald, *Economy and Material Culture*, p. 16.

towns, but particularly to Bridgetown, to sell their produce.⁶⁸ The slave-dominated internal marketing system facilitated the development and spread of one of the most independent slave occupations and one of the few skilled jobs dominated by slave women — huckstering. The most widespread type of huckstering was that of itinerant “petty hucksters”, who traversed town and countryside with little trays of goods, sometimes selling items which were also available in urban merchant shops.⁶⁹

The Contradictions of Slavery: The “Hiring Out” System

Huckstering illustrates one of the fundamental features of plantation slavery, namely, that, despite owners’ efforts to maintain total control over their slaves, the smooth functioning of slavery required that slaves have a certain amount of autonomy. Hired slave labour — from the hire of domestics and artisans by individuals to plantations’ regular use of hired field labourers — was an endemic feature of British Caribbean slavery.⁷⁰ In theory, owners assumed total control over the hiring process, bargaining over wages and making sure that their hired slaves turned over all their earnings.⁷¹ Hiring was supposed to be controlled by a system of passes, without which, according to No. 82, slaves were not supposed to leave their homes or plantations, even to attend social functions.

In reality, slaves regularly traversed the island without passes, particularly to attend weekend dances and to go to market on Sundays, and were sometimes allowed to hire themselves out. Plantations allowed their slaves, particularly artisans, to hire their labour elsewhere.⁷² Newspaper advertisements for hired labour frequently made it clear that those advertising expected to negotiate terms

⁶⁸ Beckles, “Internal Market Economy,” pp. 2-3; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 70 and pp. 125-130.

⁶⁹ Beckles, “Internal Market Economy,” p. 13.

⁷⁰ Bennett Jr., *Bondsmen and Bishops*, 1958, p. 13.

⁷¹ O. Nigel Bolland, “Proto-Proletarians? Slave wages in the Americas,” in Turner (ed.), *Chattel Slaves*, pp. 126-138.

⁷² Higman, *Jamaica*, pp. 41-42.

with the slave, not the owner. In 1816 a notice declared: "Wanted to hire by the Year — a good male cook, who must bring a letter of recommendation from his owner or last employer." ⁷³ While owners hired out labour for pecuniary gain, it was also a convenient means of devolving responsibility for the care of slaves for whom they often had no work, as those who hired slaves were responsible for their food and clothing during the period of hire. ⁷⁴ Owners frequently opted to retain ownership of their slaves, and, in exchange for a fixed monthly rate, sometimes as low as one dollar, ⁷⁵ would issue passes to their slaves and allow them to do more or less as they pleased. ⁷⁶

Although both unskilled field labourers and skilled artisanal workers were offered for hire, hired slave artisans had far more independence than hired gang labourers. While hired field labourers had greater freedom of mobility and probably better conditions than slaves permanently resident on particular estates, monetary agreements between owners and artisans tended to be more flexible, with artisans allowed to keep more of the money which they earned. A Jamaican planter who testified before the House of Commons committee on West Indian slavery in 1831 stated that slave tradesmen were generally better off financially than any other sector of the enslaved population and that, "in going through à negro village [he] could always tell a tradesman's house from its external appearance." ⁷⁷

Particularly after the abolition of the slave trade, most of those who were hired out in Jamaica were probably gang labourers working on a daily basis. ⁷⁸ By contrast, in

⁷³ *BMBG*, 29 June 1816.

⁷⁴ Higman, *Jamaica*, p. 41. See also Paul D. Lack, "An Urban Slave Community: Little Rock, 1831-1862," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1982), cited in Welch, "Urban Context," p. 43.

⁷⁵ CO 28/119 No. 116 MacGregor to Glenelg, 24 May 1837, enclosing case of the classification of an apprentice named Rebecca as a domestic.

⁷⁶ Higman, *Jamaica*, p. 42.

⁷⁷ PP 1831-32, vol. 20, *Report of the select committee appointed to consider and report upon the Measures which it may be expedient to adopt for the purpose of effecting the Extinction of Slavery...*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ Higman, *Jamaica*, pp. 41-42.

Barbados, where there was no shortage of estate labour, the majority of “jobbing” slaves were skilled and élite non-agricultural labourers, such as tradesmen, domestics, hucksters and seamstresses. By the nineteenth century population density and steady natural increase meant that there was not usually enough estate work to keep slaves occupied.⁷⁹ Overpopulation was reflected in the fact that Barbados had one of the lowest levels of sugar productivity per slave in the British West Indies.⁸⁰ At the same time, there was a market for non-plantation work. Most Barbadian planters were resident, and the high rate of white residency kept the number of domestic servants among the highest in the anglophone Caribbean. In 1788 a committee of the House of Assembly found that a quarter of slaves were “employed in menial service” as butlers, doormen, maids, washers, nurses, carriage postilions, and so on.⁸¹ Similarly, there were probably more artisans in Barbados than elsewhere, which was reflected in the fact that wages for artisans and mechanics were considerably lower in Barbados than in other British Caribbean sugar colonies.⁸²

Slaves who hired themselves out chose anything but field labour, and the market for hiring out was competitive. Widespread non-agricultural hiring out in Barbados had a significant impact on the entire society. First, hired slaves, particularly skilled self-hired slaves, were an unwanted source of competition for free workers and small business people, and were perceived to be a threat to public order because of the degree of personal independence which they enjoyed. Yet they were crucial to the island’s economy. Huckstering is a particularly illustrative example of this paradox. In 1708 and 1774 the government passed laws outlawing huckstering, which were ineffective because few could afford to obey them and there was no real political will to enforce them. In 1784 the legislature admitted the centrality of slave marketing to

⁷⁹ Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 141.

⁸⁰ Ward, *British West Indian Slavery*, p. 13.

⁸¹ Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 142.

⁸² Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 81 and p. 140.

the island's internal economy, but also recognised the threat which such marketing posed to urban merchant businesses, and passed an act restricting huckstering to a particular market in Bridgetown, which also failed.⁸³

The 1708 “act to prohibit the Inhabitants of this Island from employing, their Negroes or other Slaves, in selling or bartering” was an attempt by the legislature to stop “abuse” of the hiring system. The law fined owners for “permitting negroes to go at large, and hire out themselves, to any person or persons, or follow any trade, occupation or calling, and receive the profits themselves, or render to the owners, or for their use, a daily, weekly, or monthly sum of money, or any other income or gratuity...”.⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly, few obeyed. Self-hires were so widespread that, in 1825, a case reached the Colonial Office of a slaveowner, some of whose slaves were “hired from themselves” by a widow to cultivate a small piece of land. A rumour spread that the owner had taken the money from them, and, to protect his reputation “as a humane and good Owner of slaves”, he sued the widow to make “a plain demonstration of the equity of his conduct towards his slaves”.⁸⁵ In August 1818 a group of white men from the parish of St. George in the centre of the island, published the following notice:

Whereas many idle Negroes are allowed by their owners to traffic and huckster, to the great injury of the owners of property in general, the undersigned have therefore given this public Notice, as it is their intention to have all such Negroes brought to Justice, should it be continued after this advertisement.⁸⁶

In response to such outcries and frequent petitions from Bridgetown merchants, the legislature passed an act in 1819 outlawing itinerant huckstering, which, like all

⁸³ Watson, *Civilised Island*, pp. 147-148.

⁸⁴ Hall, *Laws of Barbados*, No. 116; Fortunatus Dwarris, *Substance of the Three Reports of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the Administration of Civil and Criminal Justice in the West Indies, extracted from the Parliamentary Papers...* (London: Joseph Butterworth and Son, 1827), pp. 20-21.

⁸⁵ CO 28/95 President of the Council Skeete to Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Bathurst, 6 July 1825.

⁸⁶ *BMBG*, 11 August 1818.

previous attempts, was ineffective.⁸⁷

The labour hierarchy, the system of internal marketing and the hiring system embodied and entrenched a fundamental contradiction of New World slavery. Slavery was a systematised form of dehumanisation and violence, in which slaveowners had the power of life and death over their slaves.⁸⁸ However, as Dickson stated frankly in 1789: "Laws framed by *owners* (especially by owners who are greatly outnumbered by their slaves) must, at best, be easily eluded, partial if not oppressive in their nature, and feeble in their operation."⁸⁹ Owners had to accept their dependence on slaves and allow them a degree of independence without which slaveownership would have been unprofitable and difficult. Owners were unable to maintain total control over the activities and interactions of their slaves. As Mintz and Price have argued, while the legal code of slavery theoretically assigned everyone a place in the social hierarchy based on race and legal status: "The conception of a society divided into two hermetically sealed sectors can be seen for what is [*sic*] really was: the masters' ideal, never achieved." Slaves were a legally distinct group but the economic and social pressures created by the everyday actions of slaves and free people blurred the boundaries between those who were enslaved and those who were free. This blurring affected what it meant, in terms of everyday experience and possibilities, to be a free person or a slave.⁹⁰

While this contradiction between law and reality was a feature of all slave societies, the structure of labour relations in Barbados contributed to an unusually stable system. Richard Sheridan suggests that the lack of rebellions in Barbados between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries resulted from planters'

⁸⁷ See CO 31/47, Minutes of the House of Assembly, 21 January 1818, petition from Bridgetown merchants; CO 30/20 No. 381, "An Act to prohibit Goods from being carried about from House to House or about the Roads or Streets..." passed 25 May 1819.

⁸⁸ Goveia, *Slave Laws*, p. 52.

⁸⁹ Dickson, *Letters on Slavery*, pp. 43-44.

⁹⁰ Mintz and Price, *Anthropological Approach*, pp. 13 and 18.

amelioration policies making “humanitarian amelioration” unnecessary.⁹¹ Beckles and Watson further assert that the insurrectionism which was a feature of Barbadian slavery in the seventeenth century, and which characterised other Caribbean societies during the eighteenth century, “gave way to patterns of collective behaviour characterised by limited protest and the seeking of socio-economic concessions from masters”.⁹² Slaveowners in other islands allegedly laughed at the “lenity” of slave-discipline in Barbados.⁹³

Sheridan, Beckles and Watson focus on plantation slaveownership, which by itself does not explain the reason for the stability of the slave system in Barbados. However, Beckles and Watson do recognise that Barbadian slavery was the product of “unique geographic, demographic and economic forces, which tended towards compromising rather than confrontationalist social attitudes”.⁹⁴ This combination of factors produced a pattern of widely-spread networks of kinship in Barbados. This pattern, although not unique to the island, was more pronounced than elsewhere. By the nineteenth century, the population was large and continued to grow, although few slaves were imported into or exported from Barbados.⁹⁵ Most slaveowners acquired slaves through internal sales, and this factor, along with the prevalence of hiring out which was a particular feature of Barbados, and the mobility of slaves which was a feature of most slave societies, created slave family networks which crisscrossed the island. During the 1820s Barbados was exceptional in the anglophone Caribbean in having over 50 per cent of male and female partners living separately from each other, compared with the usual average of about 30 per cent.⁹⁶ This further encouraged the mobility of slaves, and forced concessions regarding

⁹¹ Sheridan, “Condition of the Slaves,” p. 47.

⁹² Beckles and Watson, “Social Protest,” p. 273.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁹⁵ Higman, *Slave Populations* p. 81.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 396. Estimations based on data from Methodist and Moravian church records.

slaves' mobility on the part of owners. Re-uniting with kin and visiting "Wives and children on other plantations"⁹⁷ and in towns influenced decisions about recreation, self-hire and running away.

The Growth of the Free Population of Colour

Comparative analyses of slavery in Brazil and the southern United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth century suggest that, in plantation-based societies, long-term economic stability led to lower manumission rates and slower growth of a free population of colour. Degler argues that, in contrast to the United States, the "boom and bust" cycles of the Brazilian sugar industry encouraged the rapid growth of a skilled free non-white population, as planters frequently manumitted skilled slaves in order to limit their slave labour force to agricultural labourers.⁹⁸ Legal constraints as well as the stability of the Barbadian slave system seem to have limited the possibility of manumission. Although the price of freedom could be worked out between an individual owner and slave, manumission fees were set by law, and had to be paid to the vestry of the parish in which the slave was manumitted. An annuity was paid out of the fee to the ex-slave for his/her support. In 1801 these fees were raised from £50 (which were waived if the owner was impoverished) to a non-negotiable £300 for women and £200 for men. The change was made in response to several trends: more women were being manumitted than men; slaveowners tended to manumit old or infirm slaves so as not to have to take care of them; and manumission numbers in general were beginning to rise. While there were legal means through which the fees could be evaded, it involved either the owner or the

⁹⁷ CO 31/50 7 March 1826.

⁹⁸ In 1860, the ratio of free people of colour to slaves in the U.S. was 8:1 (Carl Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* [London: Collier-MacMillan, 1971], pp. 39-47), whereas, by the 1870s, free non-whites outnumbered both whites and slaves in Brazil, accounting for 70 per cent of the population (Herbert Klein, "The Colored Freedmen in Brazilian Slave Society," *JSH*, vol. 3 (1969), p. 42). See also Eugene Genovese, "Slave Societies in North America," in Cohen and Greene (eds.), *Neither Slave Nor Free*, p. 261; Marvin Harris, "Patterns of Race in the Americas (New York: Walker, 1964), pp. 79-84.

slave getting to England to effect the manumission under a 1732 act which made it possible to free a slave from the colonies without paying any fees. Many owners did make use of this act, particularly after 1801, but for most it was obviously inconvenient.⁹⁹ Few slaves who were not in the slave labour élite could afford manumission fees.

Manumission through self-purchase, although infrequent in most slave societies, was even less so in Barbados, partly because competition reduced the rate of payment received for skilled or élite slave labour. Thus, although tradesmen, domestics and the children of trusted officer slaves were disproportionately represented among the free population of colour, few slaves, however skilled, could earn enough to free themselves or family members.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, slaveowners' dependence on the hiring out system, particularly owners who had little or no property other than their slaves, made them reluctant to exchange a steady income for one manumission payment, and most could not themselves afford the manumission fees. These factors contributed to low manumission rates, which rose from 157 individuals, or 0.2 per cent of the slave population, in 1817, to 363 individuals, or 0.4 per cent of the slave population, in 1832, a lower rate than in other territory, with the exception of Jamaica.¹⁰¹

Although women were underrepresented in the skilled slave élite, and few therefore independently raised the money to buy their freedom and the freedom of their children, in many slave societies the majority of manumitted slaves were women. Between 1809 and 1811, 168 men and 263 women were freed in Barbados. Many women were manumitted as a "gift" either for loyal domestic service or by their free male partners. The majority of domestics were female, and, since domestic work brought slaves into close personal contact with owners, the chances of being freed

⁹⁹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 44-47

¹⁰⁰ Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 140.

¹⁰¹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 51-52. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, these figures did not vary much until the mid-1820s, when, as part of its "gradual emancipation" policy, the imperial government insisted that barriers to manumission be removed.

as a gift were greater. Domestic work and huckstering were the two élite jobs open to women which offered the greatest opportunities for earning money by renting out one's labour or receiving freedom as a gift. ¹⁰²

The low rate of manumission meant that the free population of colour in Barbados always remained much smaller, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total population, than in most other islands, and free people of colour remained a minority of the free population. In this respect, Barbados resembled the free population of colour in the United States more than other Caribbean islands. ¹⁰³ For example, whites outnumbered free people of colour in Barbados by 2:1 in 1833. By contrast, by 1831, free non-whites outnumbered whites 4:3 in Jamaica, over 3:1 in St. Kitts, and 4:1 in Trinidad. ¹⁰⁴ Information on the free population of Barbados is both scarce and unreliable for the period of slavery, but it was estimated that, in 1748, there were 107 free people of colour, 47, 025 slaves and 15, 192 whites. By 1825 there were 78, 096 slaves, 4, 524 free people of colour and 14, 630 whites. ¹⁰⁵ The rapid growth rate suggests that manumission was the major factor contributing to their growth, although natural increase should not be discounted, and its importance increased as the free population of colour grew.

¹⁰² Berlin, *Slave Without Masters*, p. 151; Manumission figures from Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 49. Jane Landers and Kimberley Hanger both caution against placing too much emphasis on the role of white male manumitters in the growth of free populations of colour in slave societies. They argue that free family members of colour tended to be more significant overall (See Jane Landers, "Introduction" and Hanger, "Patronage, Property and Persistence," in Landers (ed.), *Against the Odds*, p. viii and 50.

¹⁰³ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, p. 136 and 398; Cox, *St. Kitts and Grenada*, p. 12; Heuman, *Between Black and White*; p. 7; Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue revolution from below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 118-134; Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁴ Sio, "Race, Colour and Miscegenation," p. 7; Cox, *St. Kitts and Grenada*, p. 12; Campbell, "Trinidad's Free Coloureds," p. 600.

¹⁰⁵ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 18-19.

Population of Barbados, 1748-1834

Year	Whites	Free people of colour	Slaves	Total population (including slaves)	Total free population	% of colour of total population	% of colour of free population	Manu-missions per year
1748	15 192	107	47 025	62 324	15 299	0.2	0.7	
1768	16 139	448	66 379	82 966	16 587	0.6	2.7	
1773	18 532	534	62 548	81 614	19 066	0.65	2.8	
1786	16 167	838	69 115	86 120	17 005	1.0	4.9	
1801	15 887	2 209	69 196	87 292	18 096	2.5	12.2	
1809	15 566	2 263	69 369	87 198	17 829	3.0	12.7	
1810	15 517	2 526	69 119	87 162	18 043	2.9	13.9	
1811	15 794	2 613	69 132	87 539	18 407	3.0	14.2	
1812	15 120	2 529	68 569	86 218	17 649	2.9	14.3	
1813	15 561	2 412	65 995	83 968	17 973	2.9	13.4	
1814	15 920	2 317	66 663	84 900	18 237	2.7	12.7	
1815	16 145	3 319	69 280	88 744	19 464	3.7	17.1	
1816	16 072	3 007	71 286	90 365	19 079	3.3	15.7	157*
1825	14 630	4 524	78 096	97 251	19 150	5.2	24	
1826	14 584	4 777	80 551	99 912	19 361	4.8	25	107
1827	14 687	4 896	79 383	98 966	19 556	4.9	25	
1828	14 824	5 020	80 050	99 894	19 844	5.0	25.3	
1829	14 959	5 146	81 902	102 007	20 105	5.0	25.6	223
1833-34	14 592	6 584	82 807	103 983	21 176	6.3	31.1	363*

Compiled from Handler, *The Unappropriated People*, pp. 18-19, 49, 51.

* Figures for 1817 and 1832 respectively.

Many free people of colour had either themselves begun life as slaves or were barely a generation removed from slavery. The widespread networks of slaves' families frequently included free people of colour, and there were significant social and working connections between slaves and free non-whites. Most free people of colour lived lives which were very similar to those of the slave élite with whom they competed for jobs, had close relatives who were slaves, and, particularly in towns, shared a social setting with other non-whites who, although slaves, made their lives independently of their owners. The itinerant hucksters, small shopkeepers and artisans in Bridgetown were nearly all free people of colour and slaves.¹⁰⁶ In her description of life as an Englishwoman in early nineteenth century Bridgetown, Eliza Fenwick commented that: "We have in our little establishment two men & two women servants. The women are free, the others are hired of their Owners."¹⁰⁷ A law passed in 1820 to regulate the fares of porters and boatmen in Bridgetown referred to the "notorious fighting, quarrelings, and other evil and pernicious practices of the Porters and Boatmen openly carried on in the public Streets, Wharfs and landing places in Bridge Town to the disturbance of the general quiet of the Inhabitants...". The law prescribed flogging for slaves and imprisonment for free boatmen who were "complained against for... refusing to work when called upon in giving abusive language."¹⁰⁸

At its height in the last decade of slavery the free population of colour was estimated at 6,584, compared with a slave population of over 82,000.¹⁰⁹ However, many of them had a great deal in common with slaves, and free people of colour were socially, culturally and economically integrated in Barbadian slave society.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ F.W.N. Bayley, *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies, during the years 1826, 7, 8 and 9* (London: William Kidd, 1833), pp. 60-61.

¹⁰⁷ Eliza Fenwick (A.F.Wedd [ed.]). *The Fate of the Fenwicks: Letters to Mary Hays, 1798-1828* (London: Methuen, [1927]), p. 75.

¹⁰⁸ CO 30/20 No. 403, "Act passed to regulate the fares to be taken by the porters and boatmen in Bridgetown," passed 9 August 1820.

¹⁰⁹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 19-21.

¹¹⁰ Sio, "Marginality," pp. 151-153.

The next section examines how relationships between free people of colour and slaves blurred the boundaries between freedom and slavery, and how these connections helped to shape and extend the individual possibilities of slaves.

Free People of Colour in the Barbadian Social Order

Labour and Social Relations Among Free People of Colour

Prior to 1636, when the legal status of Africans and people of African descent was clarified, there may have been Africans who gained freedom at the end of terms of indentureship, similarly to white indentured servants, even if, as Handler points out, their numbers would have been small.¹¹¹ It is also possible that, before the principle was firmly established that legal status derived from mothers, the offspring of relationships between white men and slave women were sometimes freed. Once the sugar revolution had overtaken the island, the children of interracial unions were freeborn only if their mother was free at the time of their birth.

By the late eighteenth century several features defined the free population of colour in Barbados. As in other slave societies, women were the majority of those manumitted, consistently accounted for over 60 per cent of Barbadian manumissions during the nineteenth century.¹¹² Female slaves who were manumitted as a reward

¹¹¹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 13.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. For comparison see Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, p. 151; Hanger, "Patronage, Property and Persistence," p. 50. Beckles and Watson, like many historians, argue that sexual relationships between white men and slave women were less frequent in Barbados because the large number of white women reduced "competition among males for scarce females.... In Barbados... the demographic structure would both minimise this form of conflict and promote reproduction among the slaves, which at the same time accounts for the small size of the coloured social group" (Beckles and Watson, "Social Protest and Labour Bargaining," p. 287. For a similar line of argument see, for example, Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 4; Rosemarijn Hoefte, "Free Blacks and Coloureds in Plantation Suriname," p. 104; Laura Foner, "The Free People of Color in Louisiana and St. Domingue," *JSH*, vol. 3 (3), 1970, p. 441). At the core of this argument is the assumption that white men 'resorted' to black women only in situations where white women were scarce.

The argument that white men "resorted" to slave women because of the shortage of white men also has implications for instances of rape during slavery. Many historians warn against seeing the violation of women's bodies in situations of extreme domination such as slavery as a sexual act, as opposed to an act of violence expressing physical and political power (for good analysis and challenge of this notion see Barbara Bush, "White Ladies, Coloured Favourites and Black Wenches," *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1981) pp. 245-262; Burton, *Afro-Creole*, pp. 31-32. Richard Dunn was perhaps the first contemporary historian to recognise this, tentatively stating that the shortage of white women "was

for years of service as domestics and women who were manumitted by their male partners would have made up a considerable part of this number. Some female slaves, like their male counterparts, did sometimes earn enough money to purchase their freedom and that of their family through their own labour. Phoebe Ford, a shopkeeper from Holetown, probably a huckster during her bondage, earned the money to buy her freedom and set up a small retail shop, then purchased and manumitted her three illegitimate children.¹¹³ Natural increase and the unreliability of census information might explain why there was apparent gender parity among the Barbadian free population of colour, although there were more white and slave women than men.¹¹⁴

Like landless whites, free people of colour did not work as field labourers on the plantations. Manumission, whether by gift or purchase, favoured urban slaves, artisans, domestics, the mistresses and children of white men or élite slaves, who were therefore over-represented in the free population of colour.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, by the end of the eighteenth century, field labour was associated with slave status and was considered by free people to be degrading work. Free people of colour were also excluded from jobs of authority on plantations which were reserved for whites. There was little hope for free people of colour to own land, let alone plantations, except via inheritance from a parent or as a bequest in an owner's will.¹¹⁶ As a

perhaps not the key consideration. The master enjoyed commandeering his prettiest slave girl and exacting his presumed rights from her. Many planters whose wives and children lived with them in the islands openly kept black concubines" (Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 252-253). Following Dunn and Bush, Beckles has retreated from his 1987 view (See Beckles, "Property Rights in Pleasure: The marketing of slave women's sexuality in the West Indies," 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* [Kingston: The Press, 1996], pp. 169-183).

It is likely that sexual relations between white men and slave women were just as common in Barbados as elsewhere, but that fewer children of such relationships were freed by their fathers. Thus, at least one part of Beckles and Watson's claim, that the stability of white family arrangements in Barbados as compared with elsewhere affected the growth of the free population of colour, might be correct.

¹¹³ CO 28/92, petition of Sam Gabriel, Catherine Abel Duke and William Collins, 8 March 1823. Also cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 57 and 133.

¹¹⁴ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 24-25; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 52.

¹¹⁵ Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 384.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121 (Handler found clear evidence of only four non-white plantation owners between 1780

result, free people of colour were concentrated in urban areas. Between 1809 and 1829 around 63 per cent of the free population of colour lived in Bridgetown, and Speightstown was composed largely of free people of colour.¹¹⁷ An 1825 description of Speightstown stated that “The population of the place is colored in a very large proportion, and you may walk some time in the street before you will meet a white or black man or woman.”¹¹⁸

Although there was a small and recognisable élite among Barbadian free people of colour by the late eighteenth century, few free people of colour were wealthy, and the island did not have a large non-white élite equal to that of other territories. Mixed-race free people may have been slightly more likely than those of darker complexion to be wealthy, and there were several mixed-race merchants and hoteliers in the towns.¹¹⁹ However, in contrast to other islands, Barbados lacked the finely graded distinctions of colour which led elsewhere to the development of a coherent mixed-race or “coloured” sense of identity. Barbados therefore had no class corresponding to either the large “brown” merchant class of Kingston and the powerful coloured political organisations of late slavery and early emancipation Jamaica, or the wealthy mixed-race landowners and merchants of Trinidad, Dominica or, most notably, the “mulatto” landed-aristocracy of pre-revolutionary Haiti. There were no legal privileges for mixed-race people in Barbados, nor was the enmity which characterised social and political relations between free blacks and free coloureds elsewhere a feature of social relations.¹²⁰

and 1834); Watson, *Civilised Island*, pp. 201-202.

¹¹⁷ Handler, “Barbados” in Cohen and Greene (eds.), *Neither Slave Nor Free*, pp. 216-217; Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 96.

¹¹⁸ Coleridge, *Six Months*, p. 48. The differentiation between “colored” and “black” in this statement is ambivalent, since it is unclear whether the distinction is one of legal status between slaves and free people of colour, or phenotypically between people of lighter and darker skin colour. See also Bayley, *Four Years’ Residence*, p. 58.

¹¹⁹ Neville Connell, “Hotel Keepers and Hotels in Barbados,” *JBMHS*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1970); Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 41-42, 56-59, 130-133; Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 192.

¹²⁰ For information about relations between people of mixed race and those of darker colour, as well as free non-white property-ownership, see Campbell, “Trinidad’s Free Coloureds,” pp. 603-604; Foner, “Louisiana and St. Domingue,” p. 425; Handler, “Barbados,” pp. 247-248; Heuman, *Between Black and*

As in other countries, however, many free people of colour sought to differentiate themselves from slaves in various ways, among the easiest of which was in their style of dress.¹²¹ By the early nineteenth century, there was an increasing number of relatively wealthy urban free people of colour, and the numbers of those who could afford a good education for their children also increased.¹²² Most of these would have probably been male children. Descriptions of the lifestyles of wealthy free non-whites are rare, but in 1837 Thome and Kimball met Joseph Thorne, his wife and two other “coloured gentlemen” — the Methodist minister Joseph Hamilton and Thomas J. Cummins — at Thorne’s home. Thorne, who had been a slave until 20, afterwards became a Bridgetown merchant and shoemaker. Thome and Kimball’s description of his home is valuable as a rare, possibly unique, description of the home of a wealthy free person of colour during this period, and gives the impression that, culturally, Thorne was very much an upper middle class nineteenth century man of education, who had a hobby as an amateur gentleman naturalist. They were struck by the “scientific appearance” of his parlour:

On one side was a large library of religious, historical, and literary works, the selection of which displayed no small taste and judgment. On the opposite side of the room was a fine cabinet of minerals and shells. In one corner stood a number of curious relics of the aboriginal Caribs, such as bows and arrows, etc., together with interesting fossil remains. On the tops of the books-cases and mineral stand, were birds of rare species, procured from the South American Continent. The centre table was ornamented with shells, specimens of petrifications, and elegantly bound books. The remainder of the furniture of the room was costly and elegant.¹²³

This description also illustrates the possibility of upward social mobility which existed among urban free people of colour during the early nineteenth century. Another wealthy Bridgetown merchant of the 1820s and ‘30’s, London Bourne, had also been

White, p. 36 and 46; Harry Hoetink, “Surinam and Curaçao,” in Cohen and Greene, *Neither Slave Nor Free*, pp. 64-84; Honeychurch, *Dominica Story*, pp. 100-102; Levy, *Emancipation*, p. 31; Sio, “Jamaica and Barbados,” p. 12; Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 190.

¹²¹ Honeychurch, *Dominica Story*, p. 80; John Waller, *A Voyage in the West Indies...* (London: Printed for Sir Phillips and Co., 1820), p. 4 and 95, also cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 139.

¹²² Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 213.

¹²³ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 73.

born a slave, son of a free man of colour. ¹²⁴

However, the appearance of growing wealth must be treated with some scepticism. It is likely that the proportion of *freedpeople*, as opposed to *freeborn* people, was higher than the limited statistics indicate, given the unreliability of census information, and the increase in manumission rates towards the end of slavery. Freedpeople would have been more likely to identify culturally and socially with slaves. Before the late 1820s, when the Church of England roused itself into serious missionary activity, most free people of colour also shared the same spiritual views as slaves. Many adhered to the African-derived religious belief in obeah — which was the spiritual belief system in which most slaves participated until the last decade of slavery. Obeah was just as prevalent in towns among slaves and free non-whites as in rural areas. ¹²⁵ Slaves and free people of colour also came together in the Methodist church, which specifically targetted urban slaves and free non-whites, although the membership of this denomination always remained small. ¹²⁶ Free non-whites mingled socially with slaves at Sunday dances, which free people of colour often hosted. After a white man was murdered when he intervened to stop such a dance at the home of a “free coloured person”, a letter writer to the *Mercury* observed that:

These illegal gatherings are becoming every day more frequent; the time was, when they (the negroes and coloured people) considered it a mark of favour if they were permitted to meet occasionally on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon to amuse themselves, provided they dispersed at the close of evening; but in the town I have alluded to (and of which I feel myself more particularly authorised to speak, although I believe the frequency of meeting prevails in every part of the Island, even the metropolis), it appears that the judicial decision in the case I have related, has impressed them with an idea that they cannot be legally prevented from assembling when and where they please. ¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 56-57. Bourne was manumitted in 1818 at age 25 by his father (Karch, “London Bourne,” p. 2).

¹²⁵ J.W. Orderson, *Creoleana: or social and domestic scenes and incidents in Barbados in days of yore* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1842) p. 37. Orderson refers to obeah having its “nucleus” in Bridgetown.

¹²⁶ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 154-161; Noel Titus, *The Development of Methodism in Barbados* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993).

¹²⁷ *BMBG*, 18 June 1821. See also discussion in Jerome Handler and Charlotte Frisbie, “Aspects of

Blurring the Legal Boundaries: Urban Street Culture

Despite efforts made to segregate society legally, the very presence of free people of colour increased the difficulties involved in controlling slaves. The first known reference to free people of colour in Barbados is a law of 1652 which prohibited anyone from "entertain[ing] any man or woman, White or Black, above one night, if he doth not know him to be a Free-man...".¹²⁸ This law indicates that there were already people of colour who were legally free in Barbados, and that authorities were worried slaves would use this fact to pass as free themselves.

During the eighteenth century, the growing similarity of their employment and disregard for pass laws and laws against extended hires helped to obscure further the boundary between being a slave away from one's owner with leave, becoming a runaway, and becoming legally free. It is difficult to know how many runaways there were at any given time in Barbados. By the 1830s, although the free non-white population was officially less than 7, 000, it was secretly suspected that the number was as high as 12,000.¹²⁹ In dismissing the credibility of this estimate, made by the island's governor in 1833, Handler does not take account of the presence of people whose manumissions were unrecorded, the numbers of runaways passing as free, and the number of skilled slaves whom any casual observer might have assumed were free.

Karl Watson has argued that anonymity was not a strong characteristic of Barbadian slave society, because blacks and whites knew each other well on an individual basis.¹³⁰ However, even if individual relations permitted such close knowledge in rural areas, town life was different. The ability of slaves to blend into

Slave Life in Barbados: Music and its cultural context," *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (January 1972), pp. 5-46; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 123 and 172.

¹²⁸ John Jennings, *Acts and Statutes of the Island of Barbados*, 2nd ed. (London: 1656), pp. 20-21, cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 13.

¹²⁹ CO 28/87, Combermere to Bathurst, January 3 1818; Attorney-General Henry Sharpe to Governor Lionel Smith, 12 October 1833.

¹³⁰ Watson, "Salmagundis vs. Pumpkins," p. 19.

the non-white crowd made whites in slave societies uneasy, ¹³¹ especially in the towns, where they dominated the streets and the markets. Anti-huckstering legislation failed in part because rural slaves coming from distant plantations with items to sell to Bridgetown hucksters preferred dealing with itinerant hucksters to those based in the market. Urban market hucksters, many of them free non-whites, unofficially and illegally set prices for the entire market. They prohibited anyone from buying or selling items below certain prices “and the poor negroes are compelled to take that price, because they are not permitted to take the commodities out of the market.” ¹³² In Bridgetown, the strong presence of free people of colour and their close associations with slaves made it difficult to distinguish slave from free. In one of its frequent calls for a strengthened police force in Bridgetown the *Barbadian* newspaper stated:

We frequently receive communications complaining of the blasphemous and obscene language of the slaves, and ‘the degraded part of the free population,’ as a correspondent of to-day calls them, which almost daily is heard in our streets.... It is lamentable that, notwithstanding the exertions made to humanize and Christianize these people, and with all the opportunities now afforded them of hearing the Word of GOD, such a large portion of them remain lawless, hardened, foul-tongued, incorrigible sinners! ¹³³

Whites were aware of loyalties among people of colour, and they knew that the non-white crowd could easily turn on them. In 1827 a white Bridgetown resident named John Staunton, who owned a counting-house, successfully appealed his conviction for refusing to help two white Bridgetown policemen as they were trying to arrest a slave. Scuffles between the police and people of colour in the town were common and the testimony in this case reveals the extent of white fear of non-white crowds in the 1820s. The slave was accused of theft and, when the police confronted him, he refused to say who he was or where he was from. As the police

¹³¹ Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, p. 70.

¹³² CO 31/45, Minutes of the House of Assembly, June 1811, cited in Beckles and Watson, “Social Protest,” p. 282.

¹³³ *Barbadian*, 10 August 1830, emphasis in the original.

tried to drag him away, a large crowd of “colored persons” of unspecified legal status gathered in front of Staunton’s counting house. They followed the action, “shouting and hooting & exciting the Slave to escape if he could, & advising him to lie down & not to go....” The policeman claimed they asked several slaves standing around a cart nearby to bring the cart and help them, and none moved. When they saw Staunton and his assistant, two white men, the constables asked them for help, and they refused. During the inquiry Staunton was adamant that, had he helped “[he and his assistant] should have been exposed to the hootings and vituperations” of the crowd, whom he claimed the constables had not, in fact, asked for any assistance.

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Free People of Colour and Slave Runaways

Slaves frequently had the ready assistance of free people of colour in using extended terms of hire to establish an identity as a free person outside the bounds of the law — becoming a “runaway”. Bridgetown was known to be teeming with runaways, and Bay Street and Nelson Street, in the southwest of Bridgetown, were crowded collections of small wooden houses inhabited by free people, slaves living away from their owners and hiring themselves out, and, it was well known, a sizable runaway population. Like the legally free, runaways gravitated towards urban areas where they could more readily find work, and where they were least likely to have their freedom questioned.¹³⁵ Often owners who hired their slaves for long periods, and depended upon them to return with the money they had earned, only realised that their slaves had actually absconded once the appointed day for payment had passed. Once gone, runaways could simply disappear and blend into the world of

¹³⁴ CO 31/50 2 January 1827 and 30 January 1827. The cage was a public jail for runaway slaves whose owners were unknown or had not yet claimed them.

¹³⁵ Heuman, “Runaway Slaves in Nineteenth Century Barbados,” *Slavery & Abolition - Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World*, vol. 6, no. 3 (December 1985), pp. 95-111; Handler, “Escaping Slavery in a Caribbean Plantation Society: Marronage in Barbados, 1650-1830s,” *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, vol. 71 (1997), pp. 183-225. For comparison see Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, pp. 214-225.

slave and free people of colour, taking advantage of their connections in the towns and around the island. Owners who wanted their slaves back were often forced to tread a fine line between tempting and coercing them into returning. An 1817 advertisement for Mary was a clear example of this:

The subscriber's Mulatto Girl, Mary, who was advertised in the Mercury some weeks past, as being absent, not having returned, he will readily sell her to any person who may be inclined to purchase her. Should she return within ten days from the date of this advertisement, he will grant her free pardon; but if she be absent on the expiration of the above-mentioned time, he will give £25 Reward for her apprehension. ¹³⁶

This danger was particularly acute with artisans and hucksters. Betsy Lemon's owner, seeking her return in 1816, stated "she had for some time past been employed selling dry-goods both in town & country, and has thereby made extensive connections." Several months later the owner was still advertising to get her back. ¹³⁷ An advertisement for Mystella noted that: "As she is a good washer and seamstress, she may find employment, and be induced to remain out; therefore, any person found harbouring or concealing her, will be prosecuted with the utmost extent of the law...". ¹³⁸ Huckstering allowed slaves to live semi-independent lives, and accusations that hucksters often stole were widespread. However, they could be so valuable and difficult to control that their owners would turn a blind eye to such claims, or accept no responsibility for the means through which their hucksters conducted their business. In 1818 the following notice appeared in the *Mercury*: "The subscriber forbids any person delivering goods of any description to her Negro Woman Slave named Nanny, who has been in the vile habit of taking up sundry articles without her knowledge. Those already taken she will not be answerable for, nor any for the future." ¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *BMBG*, 31 May 1817.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 March, 3 and 12 September 1816.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 March 1817 Prosecutions under the Detinue Act, which provided for reimbursement of owners whose slaves were illegally hired or harboured by other free people, were infrequent, but cases may often have been settled informally.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1818.

The proximity of other Windward islands and the frequency of travel between them provided runaways with the possibility of running even further,¹⁴⁰ particularly after the capture of nearly all the Windward Islands by the British during the Napoleonic Wars. In the early nineteenth century, there was a particularly close relationship between Barbados and the more recent British acquisitions of Trinidad and Demerara and Berbice in British Guiana, where many Barbadian planters owned property.¹⁴¹ There were a number of Barbadian free people of colour in Demerara and Berbice,¹⁴² probably working in the trades and huckstering for better wages than were available in Barbados, and skilled Barbadian slaves whose owners hired them out sometimes went to British Guiana to find work.¹⁴³ Barbadian slaves were occasionally sold to Demerara even after the end of the slave trade.¹⁴⁴

The geographical proximity between the Windward territories, and the regularity of communication between them, also helped slaves to abscond from the island. Runaway slaves were sometimes suspected of having gone to other islands, often to reunite with free family members already there, and runaways from elsewhere in the Windwards and British Guiana were sometimes discovered passing for free in Barbados.¹⁴⁵ In 1818 a slave girl named Eliza Rose was suspected of having been taken to St. Vincent by her father or her grandmother, both free people of colour.¹⁴⁶

The Napoleonic Wars also led to the presence of large numbers of British troops, garrisoned at St. Ann's in Bridgetown. A black regiment in the imperial army, formed

¹⁴⁰ Beckles, "From Land to Sea".

¹⁴¹ Deerr, *History of Sugar*, vol. I, pp. 161-162.

¹⁴² Pedro Welch, "'Crimps and Captains': Displays of self expression among freed coloured women, Barbados, 1750-1834," *Journal of Social Sciences IV*, vol. 2 (December 1997), p. 106; St. Michael vestry minutes, 11 November 1847, notice for £16 worth of manumission annuities due to Sarah Lane, living in Demerara.

¹⁴³ Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, CO 28/101 Petition of Richard Walden, native of Bridgetown, Barbadoes, [n.d].

¹⁴⁵ *BMBG*, 19 April 1917 and 27 July 1822; *Barbadian*, 22 July 1825; See also Heuman, "Runaway Slaves," p. 101.

¹⁴⁶ *BMBG*, 31 January 1818.

of Africans liberated from enemy slave ships at the end of the eighteenth century, was garrisoned at Adam's Castle near the capital. As Brathwaite notes, imperial troops posted in Caribbean cities, particularly those of African descent, undermined the segregation of slave and free.¹⁴⁷ In 1813 an advertisement for a black slave named James, a tailor, mentioned that he had once been the property of an army captain in the 3rd West India Regiment and had since his disappearance "repeatedly been seen at St. Ann's, where he has much connection, having formerly been messman to the 6th W.I. [Regiment]."¹⁴⁸ Several notices appeared for slave women suspected of having left the island as the wives of black soldiers. In 1818, when she was questioned by the Bridgetown nightwatch on suspicion of being a runaway, Celia, the property of a Bridgetown slaveowner, showed them a forged pass and they let her go. Her owner suspected that she then proceeded to Dominica as a black soldier's wife.¹⁴⁹ Slave men could escape under the cover of inter-island military manoeuvres. In June of 1816, an advertisement announced the capture of a "Barbadian Negro" in St. Lucia:

... [W]ho absented himself from Barbados when the Expedition sailed from Martinique, in December 1808; and afterwards went with the expedition to Guadeloupe, in 1809; and has ever since passed himself for a free man. When he used to be taken from about the barracks of St. Ann's, he passed by the name Titus, but of late he has added William to it; and now he is confined, he says he belongs to the Parish of St. John, in Barbados, and that his name is [William] Wiggins; although at first he said he belonged to Mr. Hall, in Bridge-Town.¹⁵⁰

Slaves might pass for free for years before being caught. In 1818 a reward was offered for a shoemaker named Sam or Sammy who was thought to be:

... [H]aroured by his mother, named Ruthy, the property of Thos. L. Waith, Esq. in Christ Church, at Bissex-Hill Plantation in the Parish of St. Joseph, and at Locust-Hall Plantation in the Parish of St. George. He has numerous connexions in St. Peter and St. Lucy's Parishes, particularly in Speight's-Town, where, or in its vicinity, he was harboured and concealed by his father, named

¹⁴⁷ Brathwaite, *Creole Society in Jamaica*, p. 106.

¹⁴⁸ *BMBG*, 30 January 1813.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1818.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 June 1816.

Sam, or Joe Leacock, for nearly 16 years, when by accident he was discovered to be a slave; and it was fairly proved that he was stolen by his parents when the mother was leased at Haymond's Plantation, and he a child; and as he long passed for a free boy, it is probable he will attempt to do so now....¹⁵¹

Pretending to be a slave out on a written pass from his/her owner was also an alternative to passing for free. For example, Toney, a slave who had in the past hired himself out in Bridgetown and Christ Church, was "seen with a forged Pass, and no doubt has deceived many, and, as he can read and write, he may renew his pass..."¹⁵²

Many runaways hid in the homes of their family and friends on plantations or the slave "yards" which adjoined the homes of slaveowners who did not own large tracts of land, particularly in towns.¹⁵³ Slaves would frequently run away when they thought they might be separated from friends and family through sale, as was the case with Hester, who, after being advertised for sale, was suspected of being hidden by her husband, a tailor living in Nelson Street.¹⁵⁴ In 1819 one slaveowner responded to an anonymous offer to buy his slave Clarissa, who had absconded when her owner decided to move to the United States, presumably taking her with him. Her mother was a free woman and her father a slave, and the owner demanded £150 for her, making it unlikely that her family could have bought her freedom.¹⁵⁵

While whites also colluded in defying the rules by illegally employing people whom they knew to be slaves, free people of colour frequently participated in hiding their own relatives or those of their friends. An 1822 notice for Penelope stated that "she is supposed to be harboured by her mother, Mary Barrow (passing herself as a free woman), living in Nelson-street; or by Mary Johnson, a free coloured woman also a resident in Nelson Street."¹⁵⁶ The owner of Hamlet, a black slave fisherman, suspected after he had run away that "... he may pass himself off as a free man,

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 24 October 1818.

¹⁵² Ibid., 20 July 1819.

¹⁵³ Heuman, "Runaway Slaves"; Handler, "Escaping Slavery," p. 209.

¹⁵⁴ *BMBG*, 1 January 1814.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 23 February 1819.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 30 July 1822.

having two sisters who are free subjects,” one of whom lived in Bay and the other in Nelson Street.¹⁵⁷ A striking example of the blurred line between slavery and freedom within families was the case of Lydia, whose owner advertised for her after she ran away in 1826:

This woman is universally known; having been a retailer of goods for persons with whom she formerly lived. She has relations and connections at a tenement adjoining Kendal plantation, occupied by a yellow-skin woman named Norah; also in the Old Church Yard, where her sister, a free black woman named Molly, resides; at Mr. Evelyn’s, the owner of her husband, called Niles (otherwise Green) and at [Adam’s] Castle... [I]t is believed she is harboured alternately by her family. — This woman has not absconded from any unkind treatment, as she actually led a life of freedom, and the only reason for her desertion is in consequence of her mistress *requesting* her to seek an owner.
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Gendered family relationships influenced the assistance which hired and runaway slaves received from free and slave kin. There is a well-established historiography on the social acceptability of polygyny and corresponding rejection of polyandry in Caribbean slave society. This gendered family relationship was important in the lives of Barbadian slaves. It had been the custom, since the earliest days of slavery in Barbados, for male slaves to have “two or three wives,”¹⁵⁹ whereas it had never been socially acceptable for women to have more than one husband.¹⁶⁰ “Polygamy” was a “privilege” reserved for men and several advertisements for adult male runaways mentioned that the slave in question was suspected of being harboured by one of his wives. A runaway from 1814, whose owner was from St. Peter, “was formerly the property of Mr. Robert Yearwood, and is supposed to be harboured at Mr. Joseph Yearwood’s estate called Lammey’s, in St. Joseph’s parish, or at Lear’s estate [in Christ Church] where he has a wife, and another at Mr. Moore’s, not far

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 September 1817.

¹⁵⁸ *Barbadian*, 13 October 1826.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados, 1657* (Barbados: Barbados National Trust, 2000 [1661]), p. 69; Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (London: James Currey, 1985), pp. 96-103.

¹⁶⁰ *Report of a Committee of the Council of Barbadoes...*, pp. 51 and 118-119.

off.”¹⁶¹ While women were often thought to be hiding with their husbands not a single advertisement mentioned a slave woman having more than one husband. However, one 1816 advertisement for a runaway slave woman named Mary stated that: “Her husband (William White) has another wife at Mr. Henry Thorpe’s, in the Parish of St. Joseph, where it is likely she is harboured....”¹⁶²

Thus, despite the legal stratifications of slave society, the close connections between slaves and free people of colour constantly challenged and redefined social boundaries, and free people of colour actively collaborated in this process of subversion. The final section examines the diverse and frequently ambivalent positions of free people of colour as both supporters of slavery as an institution and opponents of slavery as it personally affected them and their families. It discusses the rise of a strongly pro-slavery Barbadian élite of colour which sought to dissociate itself from the social, cultural and political environment of the majority of free and enslaved people of colour.

An Ambivalent Relationship: Free People of Colour and Slavery

Slaveownership and the Militia

Despite the close relationships between many slaves and free people of colour, being free and non-white in a society based on black slavery and white freedom was a condition which inherently produced situations of personal insecurity and political ambivalence. Free people of colour were diverse in their economic status and their personal and occupational relationships with slaves. Despite their diversity none, however wealthy and for however long they had been free, enjoyed the legal privileges accorded to even the poorest white or was ever fully safe from the possibility of having their free status challenged. Even the wealthiest free people of colour were excluded from the island’s political institutions. Furthermore, while many

¹⁶¹ *BMBG*, 22 February 1814.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 9 April 1816.

were determined to defend their free status and that of their families, or obtain freedom for slave relatives, such desires could co-exist with support for slavery as an institution, which permeated the society.

Slaveownership was a mark of social status and an economic asset for free people of both races, and even those who did not own slaves were indirectly economically dependent upon the plantations and slavery for their survival. Most of the artisans and domestics who constituted such a large portion of the free non-white population probably survived through their own labour rather than that of slaves, but Handler estimates that around 2000 free people of colour were slaveowners by emancipation in 1834.¹⁶³ During the early nineteenth century, the number of slaveowners of colour increased along with the rate of manumission. This correlation between the growth of the manumitted population and the increase in their slaveownership would have made it increasingly common for an individual to be simultaneously a former slave, have enslaved relatives and be a slaveowner.

While free people of colour bought their own kin in order to free them, they also owned slaves for their services, just like whites, and do not appear to have been more inclined to manumit their slaves than white owners, either in Barbados or other New World slave societies.¹⁶⁴ Upon her death in 1823, Phoebe Ford, the previously mentioned manumitted slave and Hometown shopkeeper, left behind two slaves and a house worth £500.¹⁶⁵ When Coobah Gibbs died in 1830 one of her sons, a daughter and her grand-daughter were free, but she died before she could manumit her brother, and her remaining son and two daughters. She left two slaves for her two free children.¹⁶⁶ William Bourne, the father of the slave-born merchant London Bourne, owned three slaves himself before manumitting his wife and children in

¹⁶³ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, 150-151.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55; Hanger, "Patronage, Property and Persistence," p. 46; Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁵ CO 28/95 President Skeete to Bathurst, 6 July 1825, enclosing papers relating to the petitions of Sam Gabriel Ford and WC Ford.

¹⁶⁶ Jerome Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 21.

England in 1818. His son London owned three slaves in right of his wife, but went to great lengths to manumit slave family members.¹⁶⁷

Although most free people of colour probably owned no slaves, slavery implicated all free people. All free men, regardless of colour, had to serve in the militia, a military institution which existed throughout the British West Indies for protection against both external invasion and slave rebellion. Established in Barbados in the 1630s, militia service was mandatory for all free men, regardless of race, between 15 and 60 years of age. Men of colour were debarred from positions as commissioned officers in the militia, but by the time of the 1816 slave rebellion, there were 1726 white and 473 non-white privates.¹⁶⁸ For many runaway slaves and newly freed slave men, militia service was a means of establishing oneself as a free person. In 1814, \$100 was offered for a Barbadian tailor named Daniel Lewis, who had “absconded” from Fort Royal in Martinique:

He left Barbados with a pass for 6 months only, from Elizabeth Lewis, his owner, of Bridge-Town, lately deceased, 6th Sept. 1810, to work for Mr. Bingley, late of Fort Royal, Taylor, and on Mr. B's return to Barbados about 2 years ago, Daniel, in company with a Free Negro Man named Albert, commenced and carried on the business at Fort Royal, as successors of Mr. Bingley. It is well known that he passed himself off as a free man, and as such, actually served in Mr. Davids' company of militia, Fort Royal, whereby establishing his freedom there, having a paper or certificate in his possession (which was sworn to by a white person) purporting to be the freedom of Barbados, signed John Lucomb, Church Warden; that £300 had been lodged for that purpose, which proves to be a forgery. Daniel is generally well known in and about Fort Royal and St. Pierre, and all the Barbadian people there know him to be the Slave of Mrs. Lewis above-mentioned, although he associated with free people of colour at Martinique, who are now supposed to secrete [*sic*] him...¹⁶⁹

The backbone of the militia system of the British West Indies was the militia tenancy. Each island had legislation which stipulated that every estate was responsible for providing one militia tenant for a certain number of slaves or acres of

¹⁶⁷ Karch, “London Bourne,” pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁸ Handler, “Freedmen and Slaves in the Barbados Militia,” *JCH*, vol. 19 (1984), pp.1-25; Lucas Mss, “General Return of the Militia of Barbados,” 24 April 1816, p. 405, BPL. For comparison see Klein, “Freedmen in Brazil,” pp. 31-33.

¹⁶⁹ *BMBG*, 7 June 1814. Martinique was captured and held by the British from 1803 until the end of the war.

land which the estate owned, and had to provide that man with a small amount of land for the support of himself and his family. The militia tenancy or tenement system was an attempt to stabilise the white male population when it was rapidly falling and the slave population was rising, leaving white slaveowners surrounded, often in isolated rural areas, by hundreds of enslaved Africans.¹⁷⁰ Even in Barbados, however, the militia was not enough to prevent the white population from declining relative to slaves and, although no records were kept of their numbers, many free men of colour held militia tenancies. At the beginning of the post-emancipation period a writer to the *Liberal* newspaper described Barbados as a place “where the ‘white face’ is daily lessening in the scale of numbers — where the ingenuity of our legislators can hardly even *now* preserve the preponderance in our Militia.”¹⁷¹

Families of Free and Slave Members: The Barrier of the Law

Joining the militia was one of the strategies employed by free people of colour to keep their families together, in a context where most could not afford to manumit their enslaved relations and there were few options for free men and women in rural areas. Many militia tenants, both white and of colour, had relationships and families with slave women in their areas. This could lead to the seemingly incongruous situation of runaways being harboured by militia tenants. This may have been the case with Molly, Jesse and Philly, who, in 1816, were “supposed to be harboured along with their mother, and at the house of their father, at his tenement on the property of John Bowen Esq....”¹⁷²

Many free people would also rent their relations from their owners in exchange for the privilege of having them live with them. In response to a question from the 1831-32 House of Commons commission on slavery as to how a free man of colour could

¹⁷⁰ Handler, “Barbados Militia,” p. 7.

¹⁷¹ *Liberal*, 1 August 1838.

¹⁷² *BMBG*, 24 August 1816. During slavery the term ‘tenement’ referred to the holding of militia tenancies (CO 31/47, 21 January 1818).

survive in the West Indies, a Jamaican plantation manager stated that:

In town he might work upon a wharf, he might work on board a ship, he might act as a servant. There is also another way; they form connections with slave women, and establish themselves in villages; and in right of their wives occupy lands belonging to the owners of the estates. I knew one of them... who rented two acres of land, and he paid 30s. for an acre of land; so that his ground rent was £3. He was a married man, but his wife was a slave, and he had to pay a rent for her; he paid £18 a year for her; that was in order to ensure her living with him; and besides that he supported himself, and in a great measure his wife. She was occasionally with her mistress, but when she was with him he supported her, and himself and the children, and did militia duty; and I believe he had nothing but those two acres of land, because he came down to borrow money from me to manumise his wife, and a certain sum was wanted to make up the balance; he could not accomplish the freedom of his wife, and therefore I inferred that he had nothing but this land. ¹⁷³

Such rental arrangements were common during slavery and usually seem to have involved free men of colour renting their slave kin. In late 1832 an advertisement for a runaway named Nanny Flora stated that she was supposed to be harboured by her husband, a free black tailor, who had pretended to hire her, but was now several months' rent in debt to her owner. Her husband then forged the signature of another person, to pretend to the owner that he had hired her out, but had not paid in that money either. ¹⁷⁴

Many families with both free and slave members, who sought to overcome the legal barrier of slavery, found themselves caught up in the complications of slave law. These legal entanglements often made freedom precarious. The most frequent cause of legal complications and loss of freedom was the discovery that manumission fees had not been paid. Upon such a discovery people who had believed they were free might find themselves escheated to the Crown as public property to be sold at auction, or, worse still, confronted by the next-of-kin of a deceased owner, who suddenly materialised with a legal claim to inherit them. Throughout the early nineteenth century several free people of colour appealed to the Governor, as the representative of the Crown, to spare them from re-enslavement. In 1823, although she had been living as a free woman for 27 years,

¹⁷³ PP 1831-32, vol. 20, "Report from the select committee..." p. 18.

¹⁷⁴ *Barbadian*, 24 December 1832.

Harriet Burke appealed to the crown via the secretary of state for the colonies, Lord Bathurst, when she found the freedom of herself and her five children placed in doubt. Four of her children had been born after her manumission, making them legally free, but in 1804 her second child was “when an infant, seized by a relation of her former mistress, and conveyed into the Country”. The Governor at the time gave her permission to reclaim him, which she did, but he was immediately stolen again and sold. Harriet found herself in worse difficulties in 1823 when, in response to her latest petition for her son’s freedom, Governor Henry Warde and the Attorney-General ruled that her deceased owner had committed various legal errors, as a result of which neither Harriet nor her children had ever been free. Although the Crown apparently found in her favour, she was nevertheless removed from the St. Michael vestry almshouse list and lost her manumission annuity. When she appealed again in 1833 for ten years’ retroactive manumission payments, the vestry prosecuted her.¹⁷⁵

Sarah Stewart, a woman who claimed her owner Margaret Stewart had manumitted her in 1794, fought unsuccessfully to her dying day to save her children from being enslaved. When Margaret Stewart died in the 1810s her son-in-law, John Francis Gill, tried to claim Sarah and her children as his slaves. Sarah’s appeals against his claim spanned the administrations of four governors in Barbados, the first not long after her former owner’s death and the last, under Governor Warde, in 1829. In reviewing Sarah’s last appeal before she died, the Acting Protector of Slaves,¹⁷⁶ John Mayers, stated that he suspected her case was invalid, because Margaret only had a life interest in Sarah,¹⁷⁷ and therefore had no legal right to manumit her. Futhermore, Margaret had never paid the required manumission deposit. Mayers

¹⁷⁵ CO 31/4, 10 June 1823; St. Michael vestry minutes, 5 August 1833.

¹⁷⁶ The office of Protector of Slaves was created under the Consolidated Slave Act of 1826 and is discussed in Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ It is not clear from the documents on this case whether “life interest” referred to a leasing agreement between Margaret and Sarah’s real owner, or if someone had bequeathed Sarah to Margaret in a will only for the duration of Margaret’s life.

also believed Sarah's manumission documents were forged. The slave registration records of 1820 to 1829 listed Sarah and two of her sons as the property of John Francis Gill, and Sarah died shortly after the 1829 return was taken. Because she was a woman, Sarah's legal predicament endangered every generation of her family, as Mayers noted that: "[I]t is alleged [Sarah] has left other Children and Grand Children not yet met with by John Francis Gill so as to be taken into possession."¹⁷⁸ Such cases reveal the instability of the boundary between freedom and enslavement and the determination with which people sought to legalise their status, and secure that status for their relatives.

Cases could become particularly complicated, however, when the struggle for freedom was between people of colour themselves, both because of the likelihood of personal connections and because of the fact that few free people of colour left wills. The contradictions involved in non-white slaveownership are strikingly revealed in the case of a slave named Jane Denny, who petitioned first the governor and then the imperial Board of Treasury for herself and her descendants. The Denny family of slaves were owned by a free woman of colour, Agnes Charlotte Denny, who died intestate. Upon her death in 1829, they were escheated to the crown, whereupon Jane petitioned for their freedom on the grounds that, as Agnes' children were illegitimate and there were no debts to be settled on Agnes' estate, there was no reason for them to continue in slavery. The Board decided the case in their favour, however Agnes' children intervened and argued that, if the Board's manumission order were carried out, they "[Agnes' children] will want food & a shelter, as their mother owes more than the house is worth...". In their petition to the Acting Protector of Slaves Agnes' children included an outline of her debts which they said only a sale of the slaves could settle. Upon hearing of the intention of Agnes' daughter, Hannah Maria, to claim her mother's slaves, Jane Denny sent a desperate petition to the Board of Treasury which reveals how enslavement could be used to settle personal

¹⁷⁸ CO 28/105 Governor James Lyon to Sir George Murray, 30 April 1830, enclosing documents relating to the petition of Sarah Stewart.

scores between those who were slaves and those who were free. Jane alleged that:

[T]hrough the influence of the said Hannah Maria Denny, and her Friends, your Memorialist with her Children and Grand Child, may be doomed to a state of perpetual Slavery, and thereby fall into the hands of the said Hannah Maria Denny who is her inveterate Enemy, and whose earnest wish it is to obtain the possession of your Memorialists, Children, and Grand Child, by any Means whatever, to render their future existence wretched and miserable.

Jane also accused Agnes' children of lying to the Acting Protector of Slaves when they said her other property was insufficient to cover her debts. She strengthened her case by claiming a respectable connection with another free person, the children's father, stating that "her [Jane's] children are by one father, a Gentleman descended from one of the first families in this Island, but now reduced by Misfortune to the greatest Adversity, and not in his power to render any service to his Children, much less to emancipate them from the Cruel Yoke of Slavery." ¹⁷⁹

The Free Non-White Elite and the Beginning of the Struggle for Civil Rights

Despite these personal motivations and complications, slaveownership and support for the institution of slavery were usually as much a business decision and issue of status for free people of colour as for whites. Very few free people of colour were as wealthy as the Belgrave family, who between them, by 1816, owned at least three of the largest plantations in the southern parishes of St. Philip and Christ Church, with hundreds of slaves. ¹⁸⁰ Still, many free people of colour in Barbados used slaves to help establish themselves in business, and many of the non-white élite, which consisted mainly of urban tradesmen and shopkeepers, were slaveowners who survived by doing business with sugar estates. In 1823, John Montefiore, a leading Bridgetown merchant and a Jewish man of colour, advertised six slave carpenters for sale or hire. ¹⁸¹ Estate ledgers show that his business, along

¹⁷⁹ CO 28/106 Lord Commissioners of the Treasury to Horace Twiss, 6 January 1830, enclosing documents relating to the petition of Jane Denny in behalf of herself and Children... and her Grand Child... 26 March 1830.

¹⁸⁰ Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸¹ *BMBG*, 29 November 1823.

with that of Thomas J. Cummins, another prominent merchant of colour, did regular business with several estates around the island.¹⁸² Cummins was also the agent for Edgcombe plantation, owned by a white planter.¹⁸³ In 1825 another prominent merchant and philanthropist of colour, John Cutting,¹⁸⁴ offered a reward to whoever caught his runaway carpenters, Anthony and Dickey, and put them into the cage.¹⁸⁵

Throughout the Americas, free women of colour accounted for a significant percentage, perhaps the majority, of non-white slaveowners. Hanger calculates that women bought 77.8 per cent of the slaves purchased by free people of colour in eighteenth century New Orleans.¹⁸⁶ Although similar statistics are unavailable for Barbados, given that most types of work were off-limits to women, many free women of colour, like white women, probably survived by hiring out slave labour.

The wealthiest free women of colour were shopkeepers, hoteliers or the mistresses of wealthy white men. They were a powerful presence in the urban hotel and prostitution industries, both significant economic sectors in Caribbean port cities. One of the most renowned eighteenth century figures in Barbados was the tavern-owner Rachael Pringle Polgreen, the daughter of a white man who had bought her freedom, who became one of the richest businesswomen of the 1780s and 1790s. She died extremely wealthy in 1791, leaving property which included 19 slaves.¹⁸⁷ In the early nineteenth century free women of colour such as Betsy Austin, Sabrina Brade, Hannah Lewis and Susannah Ostrehan ran some of the most popular taverns

¹⁸² Newcastle and Bissex Hill estate journals, n.d. [early 1820s].

¹⁸³ Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁴ Cutting was the Secretary of the Samaritan Charitable Society of the Free People of Colour, which was founded in the 1790s, and was the island's oldest consistently functioning philanthropic society in the early nineteenth century. See Chapter 2, p. 96.

¹⁸⁵ *Barbadian*, 8 July 1825.

¹⁸⁶ Hanger, "Patronage, Property and Persistence," p. 50.

¹⁸⁷ Jerome Handler, "Joseph Rachell and Rachael Pringle-Polgreen: Petty Entrepreneurs," in D. G. Sweet and G.B. Nash (eds.), *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 376-391; Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 43.

in Bridgetown. ¹⁸⁸ On his visit to Barbados in 1837 the ship in which abolitionist William Lloyd was travelling was greeted, in typical fashion, by boats which came from two different hotels “each with a Negro woman as steerer, to deliver their cards of recommendation” and invite them on shore. Local residents particularly recommended a woman of colour named Hannah Lewis to Lloyd and his party as “very respectable.” ¹⁸⁹ Still, despite these examples of successful entrepreneurship on the part of free women of colour, more lucrative and influential occupations like merchant activities were closed to women.

The legislature saw free people of colour as a nuisance and a threat, and sought to exclude them from any positions of political influence. For free men of colour, both their general lack of property and their colour worked against them (women of all races were excluded from the political, judicial and administrative institutions of the state). In 1721, a law was passed limiting the qualification for the vote, holding of elective office and jury duty to 21 year old males who were British subjects, Christians, the owners of at least ten acres of land or a house with an annual taxable value of £10, and, most importantly, *white*. The law also specified that “no person whatsoever... whose original extraction shall be proved to have been from a Negro” could give testimony in a court of law. As Handler states :

The 1721 law had the obvious effect of stripping freedmen ... of a major device that protected against assault, theft, and similar offenses against property and person. In addition... prior to 1721, some of the known cases stemmed from complaints that they were seized and illegally held as slaves; debarment from legal testimony made it more difficult to win cases of this kind and to validate claims to free status. ¹⁹⁰

The situation was further compounded by a 1739 law which permitted slaves to give testimony against free people of colour. Rather than being an act for the amelioration of slavery, this law “made it less cumbersome for whites to recover stolen property or

¹⁸⁸ Bayley, *Four Years' Residence*, pp. 27-28, 149-150; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 33-37.

¹⁸⁹ William Lloyd, *Letter from the West Indies, During a Visit of 1836, and the spring of 1837* (London: Publisher unknown, 1839), p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 67-68.

press charges against freedmen who engaged in illicit trade with slaves". It recognised that, given the close relations between slaves and free people of colour, a slave might be the only witness to crimes allegedly committed by free non-whites. Slaves could give testimony against each other in the slave courts, but as these courts operated outside the common law, free people did not come under their jurisdiction. Slaves could not testify against whites, and free people of colour could not testify at all, thereby ensuring that, without the assistance of white witnesses, slaves and free people of colour had no effective means of defending themselves legally, even in cases of capital offence committed by whites.¹⁹¹

There were some rights which free people of colour shared with whites. Unlike Jamaica, there were no legal restrictions on their ability to own property, which was less a reflection of planter liberality than of the Barbadian plantocracy's sense of security. Free people of colour in Barbados posed less of an economic threat than their counterparts in Jamaica or Haiti.¹⁹² Laws of 1688 and 1649 made it illegal for slaves to strike or use any "insolent language or gesture" to any free person, regardless of colour. Nevertheless most people of colour shared their economic and working lives, residential space and social milieu with slaves, but had no legal means to protect themselves and their property from anyone.¹⁹³

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was a small free élite of colour who, although not as wealthy as the plantocracy, were certainly comfortable by the standards of the day. Had they been white, these men would have been eligible to participate in the political institutions of the country. Prior to the late eighteenth century there is no evidence of a concerted movement by free people of

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁹² In 1831, only 75 free non-whites in Barbados had taxable property worth more £30 a year (see chapter 2, pp. 93 and 133-134). By contrast, in St. Domingue on the eve of the revolution, free people of colour owned one-third of the land and one-fourth of the slaves (Foner, "Louisiana and St. Domingue," p. 425), and in 1826, the Jamaican legislature classified 400 of the island's 28,800 free non-whites as "rich," 5,500 in "fair circumstances" and the remainder as "absolutely poor" (Sio, "Jamaica and Barbados," p. 12).

¹⁹³ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 70-72; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 5-6.

colour against the racial inequality laws. This changed when, in 1796, a free man of colour named Joseph Denny was accused of murdering his white neighbour, John Stroud. Although it was quite obvious that the murder had been an accident, Denny was sentenced to death. As people of colour, neither Denny, nor any of the witnesses to the event, could testify. The case also awakened the deep-seated racial hostilities of whites towards people of colour, with powerful popular pressure exerted, particularly among lower class whites, to have Denny executed. He was eventually transported rather than executed. The case led a group of 58 free men of colour to write to the Governor asking for the civil right to testify in court. In their memorial they stated that they accepted the necessity of their "subordinate state" within Barbadian slave society, but "if a white man may murder a Free Coloured man, and escape the punishment of such laws, then we have no security for our lives, and we are in a much worse condition than our slaves." ¹⁹⁴

This petition, and those which followed it until the 1820s, were phrased in deferential terms, expressing acceptance of the racial hierarchy of the island and enthusiastic support for slavery. Some of the signatories were themselves slaveowners. In 1803 the House of Assembly received a petition, allegedly signed by over 300 free men of colour, asking it to reject a proposed bill which would have limited their rights to acquire and bequeath land and slaves. The petition stated that:

Although we have all our lives been accustomed to the assistance of slaves, we must immediately deprive ourselves of them and perform every menial office with our own hands... Many of our children who are now grown almost to the years of maturity have from their earliest infancy been accustomed to be attended by slaves; if this bill should pass into law, when we are no more, these children cannot possess a single slave. What will then be the meaning of their condition? Surely death would be preferable to such a situation! ¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Lucas Mss, Minutes of the Barbados Council, 15 October 1799, "The Humble Memorial and Remonstrance of the Free Coloured People...", 14 October 1799, cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 76.

¹⁹⁵ "The Humble Petition of the Free Coloured People, Inhabitants of the Island," in Lucas Mss, Minutes of the Barbados Council, 1 November 1803, cited in *ibid.*, p. 147. The legislation was proposed to prevent any repeat of recent events in Grenada in 1795, where a wealthy non-white planter named Julien Fedon led an armed uprising of free people of colour and slaves against the white plantocracy (see Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, pp. 82-83).

This was followed by a petition to the House of Assembly in 1811, signed by 172 free men of colour, and a memorial to the Governor in 1812, again requesting the right to testify.¹⁹⁶

It is instructive that, of all these early petitions, that of 1803, which is the only petition appealing for equal rights of slave ownership, carried the most signatures, indicating that security of property-ownership, including slaves, was a issue to which a number of free people of colour attached great importance. Of the petitions requesting the right to give testimony, that of 1811 was the largest. Even so, it is highly unlikely that the majority of free people of colour had any part in the preparation of these petitions and memorials, and they should not be taken to represent the views of an entire community. Several of the signatories were the wealthiest and most prominent men of colour in the island, among them the planter Jacob Belgrave Jr. and the merchant William Bourne Sr. Despite the fact that 300 people signed the 1803 petition, the issues of property bequests and the threatened limits to acquisition of property which provoked it were irrelevant to the majority of free people of colour. Most free non-whites did not have enough property to be affected by the proposed 1803 law, and almost none of them left wills.

Thus, by the early nineteenth century, an élite had emerged which challenged laws imposing civil discrimination on free people of colour, and the main issue which petitions addressed was the demand for the right to testify in court. These petitions did not take issue with the exclusion of free people of colour from political institutions, or their subordination in public institutions such as the militia. The petitioners asked for increased civil rights, but not rights equal to whites. Additionally, the petitioners stresses their support for slavery, to illustrate to the plantocracy that they were trustworthy and loyal.

¹⁹⁶ Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. v.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the development of the complicated and ambivalent structural interactions between free people of colour, slaves and slavery, and the emergence of a free élite of colour which began a campaign for increased civil rights. Support for slavery played a central role in the efforts of this élite to convince the legislature of its loyalty. Chapter 2 discusses the impact of the international debate over slavery on these relationships, and in the changing legal position of free people of colour in Barbados. It also situates free non-white political and civil rights petitions within the extra-parliamentary world of non-white political activism between the 1816 slave rebellion and the 1830s. During this period the abolitionist climate radicalised both the demands and the methods of free non-white political agitators, and less wealthy free people also began to challenge racial segregation. There has been little examination of the impact of international and imperial political discussions, decisions and events on Barbadian free people of colour. Contrary to representations of free people of colour as pro-slavery throughout the early nineteenth century,¹⁹⁷ by the mid-1820s, a shift was occurring in the views of wealthy free people on the question of slavery, in part as a result of wider debates at the time. The next chapter discusses how, even before the decision to abolish slavery was taken in 1833, the growing power of British abolitionism in the 1820s impacted on the institution of slavery, causing subtle but significant changes which affected the lives of free people of colour in Barbados.

¹⁹⁷ Beckles, "On the Backs of Blacks," p. 185.

Chapter 2

Race and Institutional Reform: Free People of Colour in the Amelioration Period, 1816-1834

This chapter examines the critical period between the 1816 slave rebellion and the passage of the imperial act of emancipation in 1833. It illustrates how the conflict between the imperial and colonial governments over slavery affected free people of colour and their ambivalent social and political relationships with slaves. Particularly after the imperial parliamentary debate on slave emancipation in 1823, the policies for the amelioration of slavery which parliament pressed the colonial legislature to implement, and the politically uncertain climate of abolitionism, transformed the legal and political relationship of free people of colour to slavery. During this amelioration period, the boundary between slavery and freedom became difficult to maintain, even before the 1833 act was passed.

The struggle over amelioration created space for free people of colour to establish social and philanthropic institutions for free people of colour and slaves. On the one hand, charitable work served to further the social aspirations of the wealthiest and most prominent free people of colour. It provided them with a means to express a public role which helped to distinguish them from the non-white majority by affirming their standing as members of the 'respectable' classes, while challenging the racially exclusive policies of the local government. However, this community organising also illustrates Arnold Sio's point that "the continuation of relations with slaves was not a barrier to a free coloured identity."¹ Although élite free people of colour were articulating a sense of themselves as the leaders of a distinct socio-legal group, their philanthropic organising also reflected a nascent sense that they shared common 'racial' ground with slaves.

The conflict between the imperial and colonial governments gave new impetus to struggles for change in the Caribbean, particularly those of slaves and free non-

¹ Sio, "Marginality," p. 153.

whites. The chapter illustrates how abolitionism helped to ignite the 1816 slave rebellion, and discusses how the outbreak and suppression of the rebellion reflected free non-whites' ambivalent social, economic and political relationship with slaves. The chapter challenges Hilary Beckles's claim that the events of 1816 set the tone for political relations between free people of colour and slaves for the remainder of the slavery period.² Jerome Handler examines the crucial period from 1823-24 in Barbados and recognises that, as the Barbadian legislature came under increasing pressure from the imperial government to reform its laws on slavery and racial segregation, civil rights petitioners became more assertive and expanded their demands.³ However he does not recognise 1823 as a turning point in the movement's position on slavery. As this chapter shows, a series of international and local events in 1823 led élite free people of colour to abandon pro-slavery arguments in their demands for increased civil rights, and turned what had previously been simply a *civil* rights struggle into a demand for equal *political* rights.

The imperial government's shift towards abolitionism between 1823 and 1833 made the already difficult political position of free people of colour more uncomfortable. Although civil rights agitators tried to remain neutral on emancipation, the growing influence of parliamentary abolitionism, and the increasingly violent intransigence of local whites, made neutrality an untenable option by the 1830s. Additionally, as the imperial government increased pressure on West Indian assemblies to reform, the confidence of Barbadian free people of colour grew. The struggle for political and civil rights became a more broadly-based and grassroots challenge to racial segregation and political exclusion, involving both free people of colour and slaves. As the radical element became more prominent, ideological and tactical divisions appeared among the élite and between the élite and those who were not part of the non-white élite. In 1833, free people of colour were forced to

² Hilary Beckles, "On the Backs of Blacks," p. 185.

³ Jerome Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 90-97 and 217-218.

choose sides between the colonial and imperial governments, and, in so doing, some of them publicly condemned racial slavery as the basis of their own oppression.

**The Shifting Boundaries of Freedom:
Imperial and Legislative Amelioration Measures, 1815-1833**

Amelioration and Religious Reform

From the late eighteenth century the abolitionist movement in Britain gained political ground, achieving first the 1772 Mansfield ruling that no slaveowner could deport a slave from England to a slave society, and then the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.⁴ However, while the war with France lasted, the ideas of equality and fraternity were cast in British domestic and imperial politics as concepts to be defeated, not incorporated, and emancipation in the British empire seemed unlikely. After the Haitian revolution, West Indian slave owners lived in dread of metropolitan abolitionist movements, which they argued had given “encouragement” to slaves and free non-whites in St. Domingue to massacre the white élite.⁵

However, the cessation of hostilities in 1815 ushered in a new political era in which slavery as an institution, and West Indian slaveholders as a socio-political class, were increasingly marginalised in imperial politics. Two decades of war left the imperial government with a massive debt, and it adopted a policy of retrenchment which included reduction of the military establishment in the Caribbean. Additionally, the powerful West India Interest, composed of merchants and absentee planters resident in Britain, faced mounting demands for electoral reform which threatened its presence in parliament. In the West Indies, demands for inclusion were also being raised by two politically marginalised but numerous and economically powerful sectors of society — urban merchants and wealthy free people of colour. Although by no means democratic, the demand that the political institutions of Britain and the

⁴ For discussion of the 1772 James Somerset case see Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776-1848* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), p. 100.

⁵ *BMBG*, 30 March 1816; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, pp. 118-134; Barry David Gaspar and David Geggus (eds.). *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

British empire should speak for more than just the landed élite reflected the political discourse of the "Age of Revolution".⁶

Even before the war ended, there were signs of planters' declining influence. The colonies seized from France during the revolutionary wars, rather than being modelled on the "old representative system" of the early colonies like Barbados, St. Kitts, Antigua and Jamaica, were ruled as crown colonies without elected legislatures. The governor, as the representative of the Crown, was all-powerful. From then on, the principles of political representation on which West Indian planters, as "free born Englishmen," based their claims to self-government, would never be secure again.⁷

In the 1810s, under pressure from the abolitionist lobby in parliament, the imperial government began to scrutinise the internal affairs of the slave colonies more carefully. The establishment of registers of the slave populations in the 1810s confirmed suspicions regarding the demographic catastrophe wrought by slavery: with the exception of Barbados, the populations of all of the sugar colonies were declining without slave imports.⁸ Between the early 1810s and 1823, the government pressed Caribbean legislatures to carry out limited legal reforms, termed "amelioration", in an attempt to meet some of the demands of abolitionists. It wanted legislatures to extend greater common law protection to slaves in order to decrease the arbitrary power of slaveowners, and support missionary activity with legislative reforms in order to counter the abolitionist argument that slavery was incompatible with Christianity. The aim was to improve and preserve the institution of slavery, not abolish it. In 1818, the new governor of Barbados advised the House of Assembly to reform laws relating "to the free people of Colour and the Slave Population." He saw these ameliorative reforms as necessary in order to build up "a Constitutional Force

⁶ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

⁷ Lowell J. Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*.

⁸ Barry Higman, *Slave Populations*, pp. 72-75.

for the security of the Colony".⁹

Church reform, particularly of the Church of England, was a key abolitionist concern. Most people of colour in Barbados probably believed in obeah, and very few were baptised Christian before emancipation in 1834.¹⁰ The West Indian clergy came mainly from the planter class, and supported the planters' right to determine whether or not their slaves had access to Christian teachings. The majority of Barbadian planters, like West Indian planters in general, refused to allow missionaries to preach to their slaves, viewing Christian teachings and literacy as inherently subversive to slavery. In 1817, the Colonial Office requested a survey of Anglican Church membership, which revealed that, between 1812 and 1817, about 2600 people were baptised in Barbados, very few of them slaves or free people of colour.¹¹

Although a law was passed outlawing obeah in 1806, it was designed to arrest the practice of cursing and poisoning enemies or owners rather than to suppress obeah as a form of religious expression, and it was not enforced. In 1818, under imperial pressure, the legislature passed a new act against obeah, and several people were transported from then until the end of slavery for "practicing obeah". The debate over the act shows that obeah was a belief system which crossed legal boundaries. The original bill agreed to by the House of Assembly specifically referred to "slaves", however the Council changed the wording to "persons", indicating that obeah's adherents were both slave and free.¹²

The absence of free people of colour and slaves from church was not surprising,

⁹ CO 31/47, 6 August 1818.

¹⁰ A. Caldecott, *The Church in the West Indies*. (London: Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, 1898); Jerome Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 154; Handler, Frederick Lange and R.V. Riordan, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archeological and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹¹ CO 28/86 Governor Lord Combermere to Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Bathurst, 20 August 1817, enclosing "General Return of the Clergy of Barbados"

¹² CO 31/47 30 June 1818 and 28 July 1818.

since many had their own religious beliefs, and they were unwelcome in the island's churches, which were racially segregated, with slaves and free people of colour seated in the most distant and uncomfortable sections. Few willingly and regularly entered what was very much the planters' church. The rector of St. Thomas was honest, admitting that the church deliberately excluded slaves and free people of colour. Although there were many applications from them to be baptised, he always refused.¹³ Subsequent baptism and burial returns for the 1820s showed that fewer than 100 slaves were baptised each year and Christian marriage among slaves and free people of colour was rare.¹⁴ Although slaves could have Christian marriage ceremonies there were only two such weddings between 1808 and 1820. In 1811 in St. Joseph, there was one marriage between a slave man and a free woman of colour, the only Anglican marriage across legal boundaries between 1812 and 1820.

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During the 1820s most of the island's parish vestries sought to meet Bathurst's demands that they increase the pew space available for slaves and free people of colour in churches, but they were determined to maintain strict racial segregation and the class hierarchy. Most of the island's churches had been rebuilt since a devastating hurricane in 1780, at which time, to assist with the rebuilding, pews were made available for purchase to members of the planter and merchant classes. Having a pew set aside for oneself and one's family was a sign of high social standing, and planters and wealthy white merchants were the only members of society to whom vestries would sell pews. However, by the 1820s, the system was in disarray, with many people renting out their pews to others. In 1823 the issue of pew rents came to the fore as the vestry of St. Michael parish, which maintained the

¹³ CO 28/86 Combermere to Bathurst, 20 August 1817

¹⁴ CO 28/90 President Skeete to Bathurst, 24 February 1821 and CO 28/91 Governor Henry Warde to Bathurst, 20 March 1822, enclosing baptism and burial returns.

¹⁵ Ibid.

island's largest Anglican church, sought to regulate the practice. According to the vestry, pews had been illegally transferred to others, and "some [were] transferred even to Coloured person's [*sic*], who did not contribute to the rebuilding of the Church...".¹⁶

Two Nonconformist sects had been active in Barbados since the eighteenth century — the Methodists and the Moravians. The Methodist church proselytised specifically among free people of colour and slaves, and built a chapel in Bridgetown in 1819, whose membership was small but growing rapidly. Although legally mixed, the congregation was mainly composed of free people of colour.¹⁷ West Indian planters hated the Methodists, and considered their teachings and methods particularly subversive of slavery and the Established Church. The fact that free men of colour could be ordained did nothing to improve Methodism's image. The Methodists also proselytised among slaves without the permission of owners.¹⁸ The Moravians would conduct missionary activity only with the permission of owners. They were therefore given access to rural plantations, establishing a mission station at Sharon in St. Thomas in the 1790s, and another at Mount Tabor in St. John in 1825. By contrast, the Methodists were confined to Bridgetown and Speightstown, where they had chapels and schools for slaves and free people of colour.¹⁹

Resisting Cultural Engineering: People of Colour, Slaves and Cultural Reform Measures

After the 1816 rebellion²⁰ parliamentary support for amelioration and emancipation temporarily waned. However, in 1823, a number of influential British abolitionists

¹⁶ St. Michael vestry Minutes, 26 May 1823.

¹⁷ Noel Titus, *Methodism in Barbados*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 158.

¹⁹ A.K.O. Lewis, "Moravian Mission in Barbados," pp. 1-28.

²⁰ For discussion of the rebellion see below, pp. 106-119.

established the Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, giving a fresh impetus to the anti-slavery cause. Led by British MP Thomas Fowell Buxton, the group provoked one of the most important parliamentary debates in the history of slavery in May 1823. Buxton introduced a motion for immediate emancipation, and the Tory government was forced to adopt a policy of promoting the “gradual extinction” of slavery in the West Indies. From now on, rather than simply being a means of “mitigating” slavery, the imperial government would support amelioration as a means of getting rid of slavery altogether.²¹

The two most important institutions for carrying out ameliorative policy were to be the Anglican Church and the common law. Voluntary societies sprang up around Britain for promoting education and Christianity in the West Indies, and in 1825 the Anglican Church responded to the potential threat from Nonconformist missionaries, establishing two dioceses in the West Indies, one based in Barbados for the eastern Caribbean and the other in Jamaica.²²

In the face of abolitionism’s growing political power planters changed their public pronouncements regarding the Christianisation of slaves, although most plantations still did not allow missionaries on to their plantations to preach to their slaves or teach them to read the Bible. By the 1820s, there were several lay catechists, one of whom was Joseph Thorne, a free man of colour who had been a slave until age 20.²³ An 1827 letter from an anonymous planter to the *Barbadian* spoke of Thorne in glowing terms, stating: “[T]here is the name of one humble, but meritorious individual, who, for his great and unostentacious [*sic*] services, ought not to be forgotten — I mean Mr. Thorne, a free coloured man, who, for about ten years, has

²¹ Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, pp. 421-422; Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1992) p. 18.

²² See John Gilmore, “Episcopacy, Emancipation and Evangelization: Aspects of the History of the Church of England in the British West Indies,” unpublished PhD. thesis (Cambridge University, 1984).

²³ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 165-166. See previous reference to Thorne in Chapter 1, pp. 53-54.

done much good upon several estates.”²⁴ Codrington plantation took the lead in religious reform, and, in 1825, the Codrington chaplain reported that:

The attendance is now regular and full from the adult estate negroes; those who are present receiving tickets, which, on being delivered to the Manager, secure to them the enjoyment of the Saturday afternoon next following, from one o'clock. Their children, seventy-one in number, in a neat uniform dress, always attend, seats in a particular part of the chapel being provided for them. Many of the neighbouring free-coloured persons and slaves are in the habit of frequenting this Chapel....²⁵

The impact of the Church of England's new activity, particularly the establishment of the new diocese, was immediate. For example, nearly all baptisms recorded in the parish of St. Thomas in 1825 were family members of planters and militia tenants, whereas in 1826, 60 free women of colour baptised illegitimate children.²⁶ In an 1828 address to the jury at the Court of Grand Sessions, the island's Chief Justice stated that, while obeah still prevailed, Christianity was spreading, and he predicted that the next generation of slaves would know of obeah only by name.²⁷

However, slaves and free non-whites responded to these policies in a variety of ways not always foreseen by the authorities, incorporating aspects of Christianity into already existing cultural practices, and, frequently, resisting conversion. The imperial government and the church sought to eliminate Sunday markets to encourage slaves to go to observe Sunday as the Sabbath, and ban the Sunday dances, which were an important part of the social life of slaves and free people of colour. They also attempted to enforce a particular vision of the patriarchal family. The 1824 Consolidated Slave Act implemented in the Crown Colony of Trinidad linked the issue of compulsory manumission to the patriarchal Christian family. The law made it easier for a male slave who had acquired enough money to “have the power of purchasing his own manumission, or that of his wife and child; and thus the

²⁴ *Barbadian*, 17 August 1827.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 July 1825, “Statement of the Plan Observed on the Society and College Estates in Barbados.”

²⁶ Baptisms solemnized in the Parish Church of St. Thomas... in the Years 1825-1829, BDA, RL 1/50A.

²⁷ *Barbadian*, 17 June 1828.

father may become, as it is fit he should, the Instrument of liberty for his offspring.”²⁸

Slaves and free people of colour resisted Christianity’s emphasis on monogamy. This resistance was apparently rooted in a belief that marriage would limit their freedom, and, in 1829, the chaplain at the Codrington estate posed a question which would have been relevant for free people of colour as well as slaves:

Why cannot you induce the slave to marry? We can easily understand that men who have lived in a state of polygamy, or even have seen others live in such a state, may be unwilling to restrict themselves to a single wife, or to take her for better or worse. And we are assured that the women also object to Christian matrimony, thinking that it gives them, as it were, a second master, and ties them for life to a man who may neglect or ill use them.²⁹

The Moravians also found that women’s resistance restricted the effectiveness of their struggle against “polygamy”. In 1830 the Mount Tabor missionary wrote about Mary Coffly, a slave who, when asked why she did not come to church, replied, “because I live with a man who has a wife besides me, and I think you don’t receive such people into your congregation.”³⁰ The Codrington attorney argued that the continuing prevalence of “polygamy” was due in part to the bad example set by free people of colour and élite slaves. On the basis of his conversations with “the better sort [of slaves],” the chaplain noted that, although Christian ceremonies were not performed:

... [T]he Negro, who lives with one or more women, considers them as his wives.... If induced to] submit to the ceremony... [t]he man would call the married one his wife, but still cleave to the other under a different title. When Christian instruction has had longer time to operate; when the free-coloured class universally apply to the minister for ratifying the sacred bond; when the domestics and tradespeople on estates, who form the intermediate link, do the same; the lower ranks of slaves will naturally follow the example....³¹

An 1825 act made Sunday markets illegal, and encouraged slaveowners to make

²⁸ Ibid., 20 April 1824; On gender, family and the amelioration process see Pamela Scully, *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, 1823-1853* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997).

²⁹ *Barbadian*, 9 June 1829, Reverend Anthony Hamilton, Codrington estate chaplain, “Progress of Religious Instruction in the West Indies.”

³⁰ Moravian Diary, 31 October 1830.

³¹ *Barbadian*, 9 June 1829, John Forster Clarke, manager of Codrington, “Progress of Religious Instruction in the West Indies,”

a different day of the week available for slaves to go to market. Sunday originally became a day of recreation and trade for West Indian slaves because it was the only day which estate slaves had free. Despite the act, Sunday dances and markets thrived, and few people of colour used the day for church attendance.³² Sunday continued to be market day until well after emancipation, even after Saturday markets were established in law, both because planters resisted pressure to cut the Saturday working day in half, and because free non-whites and slaves took advantage of any free time which existed for trade. Although the law temporarily affected the markets in Bridgetown, they quickly revived. An 1827 *Barbadian* report stated that: "Shops frequented by blacks and coloureds opened, but kept their windows closed." In 1828, "in certain places at a distance from town, the Sunday trafficking between plantation slaves and town-hucksters still goes on briskly, in daring contempt of the law...." Less than a year before emancipation, a *Barbadian* reporter complained about the continuation of Sunday huckstering in Bridgetown, claiming to have met 81 slaves on one of the roads leading into Bridgetown on their way to the market.³³

Modernising Slavery: Imperial Intercession, Legislative Reform and the Undermining of Legal Boundaries

However, ameliorative measures which focussed on reforming the island's legal system produced far greater disruptions in the legal and cultural boundaries of Barbadian slave society, as the imperial government intervened in relations between the colonial authorities and non-white British subjects. Immediately after the May 1823 debate, Bathurst published a list of recommendations for amendments to laws on the treatment of slaves.³⁴ That year the imperial government sent a royal

³² *Barbadian*, 1 June 1828.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18 December 1827, 13 June 1828 and 27 March 1833.

³⁴ Bathurst's most significant suggestions were that manumission fees be abolished and increased facility be made for slaves to purchase their freedom; that the whip be outlawed as a form of punishment; that slaves be allowed to own property, and that it be made illegal for families to be separated by sale (see Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 86).

commission of enquiry to the British Caribbean to examine the legal and administrative structures of the colonies. News of the visit spread around Barbados, and free people of colour took the opportunity to bring their complaints before the commission. Most of the complaints recorded in the report on Barbados were from people whose free status was threatened because their manumission fees had not been paid, and the commissioners stated that such testimonies were numerous. The case of one man illustrates the tenuousness of freedom for people whose manumissions were technically illegal. The payment of his manumission fees was in doubt because the churchwarden of the parish at the time of his manumission, who would have received the fees, had since died, and no records existed.³⁵

Although the commission had no binding powers, people of colour saw it as a higher authority which might overrule local magistrates, or take cases to the crown. In 1824, a year after the commission visited Barbados, a woman of colour named Molly Cooper petitioned the Colonial Office because she and her children by a white man were illegally being held in slavery and she had been defrauded of her manumission payments and land bequeathed to her. She stated that: "I should have Complained to [the commissioners] when they were at this Island last year, but they had left... [b]efore I was made Acquainted with their Mission, my being sick at that time."³⁶

The 1823 commission was followed in 1824 by the imperial Consolidated Slave Act, implemented in Trinidad, and which the Colonial Office insisted that self-governing colonies pass similar legislation. It was a comprehensive piece of legislation designed to remove some of the most brutal slave laws from the books, amending or repealing all previous acts relating to slavery. The act also sought to carry out the suggestion made by both Bathurst and one of the legal commissioners

³⁵ PP 1825 vol. 15, "First report of the Commissioner of Inquiry into the administration of civil and criminal justice in the West Indies," p. 62.

³⁶ CO 318/60 Commissioners of Legal Inquiry, vol.5: Barbados, Tobago and Grenada," Barbados case of Mary Cooper, December 1823-September 1824.

that manumissions be encouraged as “the best, or certainly the least objectionable mode, of getting rid of slavery, safely and by imperceptible degrees.”³⁷

In response, the Assembly pursued three main lines of defense: outright resistance to change; stalling, and, where non-compliance was no longer possible, counteracting every aspect of the bill with a measure reducing its impact. The debate over the Consolidated Slave Act in Barbados shows how amelioration threatened the boundaries between slaves and free people upon which the system rested. The legislature’s discussion of the first bill was turbulent because of disagreements between the Council and the Assembly, particularly over the bill’s treatment of free people of colour and its attempt to impose controls on slaves’ movements. The Council argued that the bill made it difficult for freed slaves to continue their relationships with their slave partners by specifically including freed slaves who lived with slave wives among those against whom slaves could testify without restrictions. The Council also objected to the bill’s support for the principle that any person of colour was presumed to be a slave unless they could prove otherwise.³⁸

When it was passed, the bill provoked a petition of protest from a group of free people of colour because it racialised laws which had formerly referred only to free people, regardless of colour, and thereby imposed “new and unmerited grievances and disabilities” upon them. One clause made it illegal for slaves to strike white people, whereas the original law had referred to free people. Another clause made it legal for the first time for slaves to cultivate and market aloes and cotton, but stipulated that only whites could inspect aloes and cotton crops. These crops were important for small-scale farmers, and this clause made it impossible for non-white farmers to sell their crops legally, or inspect crops grown on their property using slave labour. The clause was probably intended to prevent slaves and free people of

³⁷ Dwarris, *Substance of the Three Reports*, pp. 20-21.

³⁸ CO 28/93 Warde to Bathurst, September 3 1824, enclosing “Council’s Remarks on Certain Clauses of the Consolidation Slave Bill,” 28 August 1824; CO 31/49, 28 August 1824.

colour from colluding in selling stolen produce, since aloes and cotton sold well in the markets.³⁹

The speaker of the House of Assembly defended the bill against claims that it compromised the rights of free people of colour, stating:

That Act has not, nor can any Act do away with that intercourse, that intimate association which exists between the Slave and the free coloured and free black People: is it not then unjust that the latter should in a moral point of view, be so far elevated above this unfortunate class of our fellow creatures, who are peculiarly entitled to legislative protection? Let the Slave be ever so respectable, his character ever so exemplary, his principles of Religion ever so firmly fixed, yet is he placed in a state of degradation when brought into Court with the lowest and most profligate of his own colour.⁴⁰

The imperial government disallowed the first Barbados Consolidated Slave Act of 1825, but reluctantly assented to the amended 1826 version, which removed the newly stated racial distinctions, as well as a clause granting whites immunity from prosecution for killing slaves during insurrections, to which the Colonial Office had also objected.⁴¹

The legislature also resisted demands that the Consolidated Slave Act make it mandatory for slaveowners to free slaves who had enough money to buy their freedom, and that the cost of buying freedom be set by a committee of appraisal, rather than by private agreement. Even so, between 1824 and 1826, 126 men and 196 women were manumitted, an average figure since the turn of the century, but the figure jumped to at least 212 men and 458 women for the period 1827-29, according to Colonial Office records. As Handler points out, this change could be the result of improved counting rather than increasing numbers of manumissions. In 1831 the legislature finally passed an act eliminating manumission fees, although there is no evidence to suggest that this affected the manumission rate.⁴²

³⁹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 97-100.

⁴⁰ CO 31/49 25 May 1824.

⁴¹ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 87; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 97-98.

⁴² Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 48-49.

The legislature reluctantly agreed to create an Office for the Protection of Slaves, under the direction of a Protector of Slaves, in 1827. The position was never firmly established, being filled only by an Acting Protector of Slaves from 1828. However this office, combined with imperial pressure to lower the barriers to manumission, strained the legal boundary between slavery and freedom. The increase in the number of recorded manumissions reflected changes in the imperial government's attitude towards the question of manumissions, evident from the government's changing response to petitions from slaves requesting their freedom, or from freedpeople whose status was threatened. Between the mid-1820s and the early 1830s, the Crown became more likely to rule in favour of manumission petitions simply on the principle of the right to freedom alone, without considering other factors. For example, in 1825, after the death of Phoebe Ford, whose case was mentioned in Chapter 1, her slave Sukey and her small daughter were given to Ford's sons, who were on bad terms with each other. They took out their frustrations on Sukey to such a degree that the local clergyman wrote to the president of the council telling him of the situation, and expressing his fear that the two men would eventually kill her. The president recommended her manumission to the imperial Board of Treasury which ordered that she and her child be set free if it was proved that she could support herself and her child. If not, then they should be escheated to the Crown and treated as liberated Africans.⁴³ In this case, the decision hinged upon Sukey's ability to support herself financially.

The outcome of two cases between 1829 and 1831 illustrate that manumission requests or requests for the validation of free status were almost guaranteed success by the end of the 1820s. In the 1829-30 case of the Denny family of slaves, also mentioned in Chapter 1, which was supported by the Acting Protector of Slaves, the Board of Treasury made no enquiries into the issue of how the Denny

⁴³ CO 28/95 Skeete to Bathurst, 6 July 1825, enclosing papers relating to the petitions of S.G. Ford and W.C. Ford, free coloured men; CO 28/99 Lord Commissioners of the Treasury to J. Wilmot Horton, 14 March 1826, re: petitions of W.C. Ford and S.G. Ford.

family were treated as slaves. The Board also ignored claims that the slaves were required to settle debts. The Board decided that the Denny slaves should all be freed immediately, including two members of the family who had not signed the petition.⁴⁴ After the devastating hurricane of 1831 a free woman of colour named Susanna Prescod applied for title to the slaves of her deceased sister, who had been killed in the hurricane. Since her sister had died intestate all her property was escheated to the Crown. Whereas the Board of Treasury had found in favour of similar requests in the early 1820s, in this case they ordered instead that the slaves be manumitted immediately, and Susanna be compensated for them if her claim was valid.⁴⁵

In the cases of Sukey, the Dennys and Susanna's sister's slaves, the claimants were all free people of colour, trying to establish titles to the slaves of relatives who had died intestate. Since free people of colour were likely to die intestate, the shift in imperial government policy in favour of slaves in such cases had negative implications for the relatives of slaveowners of colour who had died without wills.

During the mid-1820s, parliamentary abolitionists began to demand the repeal of racially discriminatory legislation as part of amelioration.⁴⁶ In 1828, the secretary of state for the colonies recommended that the Barbadian legislature do more to ameliorate slave conditions and be more "liberal" in its treatment of free people of colour.⁴⁷ Several factors contributed to this decision. Among them was the well organised political and civil rights movement of the mixed-race Jamaican élite, which had its own political party, was allied with the merchant class of Kingston, and had its own political representative in Britain. Additionally, during the mid-1820s, the laws

⁴⁴ CO 28/106 Petition of Jane Denny in behalf of herself and Children... and her Grand Child..., 26 March 1830; CO/106 Lord Commissioners of the Treasury to Horace Twiss, 6 January 1830, relating to memorial of Jane, Sarah Denny et al.

⁴⁵ CO 28/109 Governor James Lyon to Secretary of State Viscount Goderich, 7 February 1832, enclosing petition of Susanna Prescod.

⁴⁶ Mavis Campbell, *Dynamics of Change*, p. 113.

⁴⁷ PP 1829 Vol. 25, pp 168-170, Sir George Murray to [President Skeete], 3 September 1828.

restricting the rights of free people of colour were repealed in the crown colonies, and, by 1831, Barbados, Bermuda and the Bahamas were the only territories where free people of colour were prohibited by law from testifying in court because of their African descent.⁴⁸

Preserving Racial Segregation under Amelioration: The Plantocracy's Reassertion of White Moral Authority

In 1831 the Barbadian legislature passed an act extending the electoral franchise and the right to testify to free people of colour. The act, popularly known as the "Brown Privilege Bill," set an electoral qualification of £30 for free men of colour. Fewer than 75 people had enough property to meet this qualification. Moreover, the legislature passed an act preserving the £10 property qualification for white men,⁴⁹ as well as a bill removing all constraints on slave testimony in order to further counter the effects of the Brown Privilege Bill. The member who introduced the bill admitted that he did not in principle support removing restrictions on slave testimony, but he felt that:

The unqualified concessions just yielded by the legislature to the free coloured and free black population of this island, unavoidably place the slaves in a more dependent state, as to legal protection, than they had previously been in this community, since the freed man may now become the judge of those very acts which his associates have perpetrated against the slaves, and it is impossible to reconcile the presumption that the slave of yesterday has acquired any moral stability by which he should be permitted to exercise a political advantage under the newly created title, this is the practical fact which imposes the necessity for that change which I have now the honor to submit.... I find it impossible to separate the probable as well as possible consequences [of the "Brown Privilege Bill"] to the slave, which are likely to result from the indiscriminate intercourse that exists between them and the unenlightened portion of the free population, as well as the lower class of white persons....⁵⁰

⁴⁸ CO 28/107 Attorney-General of Barbados to Secretary of State for the Colonies Viscount Goderich, 18 March 1831; Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 33-34. Free people of colour in St. Kitts and Grenada also appointed their own agents in England (see Cox, *St. Kitts and Grenada, 1763-1833*, p. 107).

⁴⁹ CO 30/21 No. 538 "An Act to remove certain restraints and disabilities imposed by Law on His Majesty's Free Coloured and Free Black Subjects of this Island," passed 9 May 1831. No. 541, "An Act the better to equalize the value of freehold property within this Island," passed 12 May 1831, maintained the qualification for white men. Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 103.

⁵⁰ CO 31/51 26 April 1831.

Despite claims that the bill was passed to “protect” slaves, it was clearly motivated by distrust of freedpeople in particular and of “lower class” people in general.

This speech illustrated a crucial conceptual difference between the assembly’s approach to amelioration and that of the imperial government. British abolitionists wanted to improve the “moral” and “spiritual” condition of slaves and prepare them for eventual freedom through cultural transformation. Through Christian instruction, slaves would be turned into imperial subjects who could be trusted to fulfil to the duties of being free citizens. The Assembly, by contrast, feared the social implications of amelioration, and sought to counter them by more clearly delineating and separating the public activities of whites from those of free people of colour and slaves.

Despite the planters’ class disdain for “low whites”, the cultural emphasis of the assembly’s policy was to imbue “whiteness” with a renewed sense of moral authority. Around 1820 the white élite began to try to strengthen its sense of a unified white identity in the face of the social and political threat of abolitionism. During the 1820s activities which brought slaves, free people of colour and whites in close social contact on relatively equal terms, and which had long been accepted as “respectable”, were gradually socially proscribed for élite men.

Although previous legislation on slavery in Barbados had criminalised social interactions between whites and blacks, the measures had not been enforced. The 1826 Consolidated Slave Act restated these rules and serious attempts were made to enforce the separation of whites and non-whites in public space. The bill made it illegal for white and black men to drink, gamble and cockfight together. These were the three social activities in which they interacted on terms of equality. After the act was passed, the local authorities, the press and the police also began to treat gambling and cockfighting as pastimes in which no “respectable” white man would participate. As recently as 1818, the *Mercury* could advertise a cockfight at the home of “a very old and respectable Inhabitant of the Parish of St. Joseph... under the direction of a party of Gentlemen.” By 1827, the *Barbadian* triumphantly reported

that, under the terms of the Consolidated Slave Act, the Bridgetown Night Watch was engaging in a campaign of “putting down” gambling houses kept by free people of colour. The newspaper added that a white man was about to be brought up in court for “keeping a house of this infamous description”. The writer demanded that “the nests of cockfighters” be broken up, but emphasised that “if GENTLEMEN *will* go to those places, there will be no end to them.”⁵¹

Amelioration therefore threatened to destabilise the boundaries of race and legality even before emancipation became inevitable in the 1830s. The relationship between the imperial and colonial administrations, and the impact of legislative and religious reforms, also led to initiatives from free people of colour which challenged the legal and racial hierarchies of slave society. The next section examines how, from 1817, élite free non-whites asserted themselves in the public sphere of philanthropy. Their charities confronted racial segregation, even though they operated within the limits of the law. Additionally, their racially-based philanthropy suggested a latent sense of community with slaves which transcended legal boundaries.

Politics by Other Means: Amelioration, Philanthropy and Race in Public Space

Becoming ‘Respectable’: Legal Status, Class and Non-White Philanthropy

The amelioration era witnessed the burgeoning of new philanthropic associations, missionary societies and schools in Barbadians.⁵² Many were established by free people of colour for the purpose of providing education and poor relief and prosyletising among free people of colour and slaves. Despite the officially non-political mandate of these societies, they offered a new public role for free people of colour and a sense of “consciousness as a group”⁵³ which defied the racial hierarchy. Non-white charities challenged the racial exclusivity and inadequacy of

⁵¹ *BMBG*, 14 March 1818; *Barbadian*, 20 February 1827 (emphasis in the original).

⁵² Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 172-189.

⁵³ Sio, “Marginality,” p. 153.

public educational and poor relief provision. Public services in Barbados were largely for whites only, were only rarely extended to free people of colour, and never to slaves. Non-white philanthropy reflected a new sense of racial identity, which was threatening because it crossed the legal boundary of slavery and exposed the emptiness of the plantocracy's paternalistic rhetoric. Finally, these organisations represented politics by other means. For élite free men of colour to whom the regular channels of power were closed, philanthropic work brought public standing and social respectability, and the buildings became meeting places for people of colour when decisions of a political nature were being taken.

Prior to the 1820s, the oldest philanthropic society in the island was the Samaritan Charitable Society of the Free People of Colour.⁵⁴ Whites formed charities during the late eighteenth century to improve the condition of poor whites, but such philanthropic efforts were rare and short-lived. Planters showed little sense of social duty towards poor whites, rather, as Beckles argues:

Though in [the planters'] dominant political ideology, the principle of 'race first' was clearly articulated, it was not dogmatically applied at the lower levels of society, unless the integrity of the entire structure was endangered. That is, planter elitism was not offended, but confirmed, by the existence of a white working-class culture of poverty on the periphery of the plantations.⁵⁵

In 1818, as an amelioration measure, the new governor, Lord Combermere, acted as patron for the Colonial Charity School, which was established to provide education for non-whites, both slave and free, making it the first publicly supported school for children of colour in the British Caribbean.⁵⁶ Whites were outraged by the school's plan to teach mixed classes of free children of colour and slaves and by the possibility that slave children would be taught to write. In December 1818 an anonymous letter in the *Mercury* expressed public fears that educating non-white

⁵⁴ *Barbadian*, 19 September 1849.

⁵⁵ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁶ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 173-176. The school's name was eventually changed to the National School for Coloured Children.

free and slave children together would:

... [T]end to produce between them correspondent feelings and sentiments. The views and expectations of a free subject, though a child, are, and should be, very different from those of the slave. The distance between their ranks is the widest in the scale of society, and the institutions of that community in which slavery exists, should prevent their distance from being too much contracted.... The slave, educated with the freeman, would naturally receive his notions, which, by rendering his condition painful, if not odious to him, would dispose his mind for a change, and most probably prompt him to attempt it. ⁵⁷

Correspondents also argued that such teaching interfered with slaveowners' control of their slaves. ⁵⁸

In 1819 Thomas Harris, a man of colour and the junior secretary of the Colonial Charity School Committee, informed the public that the schools' trustees would eventually separate slave and free children, and that the Committee had recently adopted a new rule that "[t]he instruction of no Slave Child, who may be admitted on the written application of the Owner, shall extend beyond teaching the Bible, and a knowledge of the doctrines of the Church of England". He stated that the current mixture of slave and free children in the classrooms was the result of a lack of funding and would be corrected as soon as there was money for a separate schoolroom. ⁵⁹

Public indignation at the mixing of slave and free children of colour in the school seems to have died out quickly, and it does not seem that the school committee ever built a separate schoolroom. White distrust of the project stemmed more from what the school represented than the specifics of its educational policy. The Colonial Charity School was not the only school where legally-mixed classes of pupils were instructed by teachers of colour. Some men and women of colour made a living teaching mixed classes of free children of colour and the children of skilled and officer slaves, particularly in Bridgetown and Speightstown. An American sailor who

⁵⁷ *BMBG*, 1 December 1818.

⁵⁸ *BMBG*, 1 and 8 December 1818.

⁵⁹ *BMBG*, 6 February 1819.

spent time in Barbados during the War of 1812 noted that “coloured” women “of every shade”, usually the mistresses of white men, taught music and singing, probably to girls of colour.⁶⁰ In 1827, two years after the founding of the Anglican diocese of Barbados, no objections were raised when the bishop and a prominent white planter-clergyman established a “coloured Sunday school” for free people and slaves, which does not appear to have been internally segregated.⁶¹

The Colonial Charity School was controversial because it was the direct result of imperial slave amelioration policies, and had gubernatorial sanction. Additionally, the school’s administrative board was composed entirely of men of colour, the first time that non-whites had held such important positions.⁶² The school was therefore a potent political symbol of collaboration between the imperial government and local free people of colour, lacking the approval of the Barbadian legislature. Neither the governor’s support nor the applications of the school committee was enough to move the legislature to give the Colonial Charity School any financial support in the early 1820s, although, according to the governor some of the “more opulent Inhabitants” made donations.⁶³

The founding of the Colonial Charity School added to a general sense of unease among whites over the amelioration process, prompting anxiety about the stability of legal distinctions and the maintenance of racial hierarchies in public space. In January 1818, shortly after the school was founded, a white teacher published a notice in the newspaper. He informed the public that: “In consequence of some objections having been made to the admission of coloured Children into his School... he has come to a resolution not to take any Scholars of that description.”⁶⁴ Two years later a white music teacher, who had recently resigned his position at a white

⁶⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne (ed.), *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnall’s, 1926) , p. 12.

⁶¹ *Barbadian*, 30 October 1827.

⁶² *BMBG*, 6 February 1819.

⁶³ CO 31/47, 30 May 1820.

⁶⁴ *BMBG*, 3 January 1818.

school, published the following angry disclaimer:

A Friend having been kind enough to inform me a report prevails about town that the reason for my quitting Miss Steeres was in consequence of my having played at a *Mulatto Dance*....

... [I]t is most true, I gave my services at a coloured Concert, for the benefit of the Charity School, which, as a Christian, I could not refuse; and shall do the same whenever requested. ⁶⁵

“Mulatto dance” was the term used to refer to private parties, usually given by mixed-race prostitutes for the entertainment of men, usually élite white planters, merchants and army or navy officers and soldiers. The fact that this phrase was used to describe a fund-raiser for the school indicates the depth of public hostility.

In 1819, the Colonial Charity School was joined by the Barbados Auxiliary Bible Society of the People of Colour, an colonial offshoot of the British Bible Society which distributed bibles to the lower classes in Britain and the empire. The St. Mary’s Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor in the Principles of the Established Church and for other Charitable Relief was formed in the mid-1820s, which also had a parent society in Britain. ⁶⁶ Although they did not have abolitionist mandates, the British Bible Society and the British Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor raised money for the education and Christianisation of slaves. The boards of their Barbados subsidiaries consisted of the Bridgetown merchant élite of colour, many of whom were politically active in petitioning for civil rights for free people of colour. Thomas Harris and Thomas J. Cummins, both secretaries of the Colonial Charity School Committee during the 1810s and 1830s, and Richard Durant, the Secretary of the Samaritans in 1830, were prominent figures in the struggle for increased rights. The first Committee of the Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor in 1827 was a who’s who of the free community of colour in Barbados. Among its 29 members were the wealthy merchants Joseph Kennedy, Thomas J. Cummins, John Montefiore, Benjamin Massiah, Joseph Thorne, Joseph Shurland, Isaac Carvallo and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 May 1820.

⁶⁶ *Barbadian*, 16 May 1826.

London Bourne.⁶⁷

Most of the societies also had female auxiliaries, whose committees were subordinate to the primary boards composed of men, and who were responsible for female pupils or recipients of benefits. These committees consisted of prominent women of colour, most of whose surnames indicate a family relationship to the men on the main committees. In 1827, the president of the Ladies' Branch Association for the Education of Female Children of the Coloured Poor was John Montefiore's wife, and Mrs. (Thomas) Cummins, Mrs. (Joseph) Shurland, Mrs. (Benjamin) Massiah and Mrs. (Charles) Phipps were among the nine members whose husbands were either on the main committee, or were prominent in other non-white charities.⁶⁸

Never before had so many non-white men and women assumed such permanent public roles. What is more, their charities provided services for slaves and free people of colour which the government could not even competently provide for whites. By the early 1820s the Colonial Charity School was the fourth largest school in the country. In the first year of its existence the Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor, which sought to educate, clothe and feed the hungry, and provide Christian burials for the dead, already had 87 free boys, 60 free girls, 112 slave boys and 70 slave girls in its school, making a total of 329.⁶⁹

By the mid-1820s, there were numerous schools for slaves and free children of colour, most of them in Bridgetown, and many of them run by free people of colour. In 1823 there were at least 25 schools in St. Michael operated by free people of colour, teaching a total of 583 pupils, of which the largest by far was the Colonial Charity School with 150. Most of the others had fewer than 20 pupils, and 18 were run by women.⁷⁰ This list is almost certainly incomplete, and does not give

⁶⁷ Ibid., "First annual report of the Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor," 14 September 1827.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 18 September 1827

⁶⁹ Ibid., 14 September 1827.

⁷⁰ CO 28/93, Warde to Bathurst, 6 May 1824, enclosing "Total of Schools in the Parish of St. Michael in the Island of Barbados," 16 December 1823. By 1833, the School had 222 pupils (Handler,

information on schools in other parishes. Henry Coleridge commented on Bridgetown schools in 1825, stating that: "These schools are scattered about the parts of the town principally inhabited by the colored people, who are by these means more readily induced to send their children. These children are chiefly of the lowest order of the free colored and of the domestic and mechanic slaves in Bridge Town and the immediate vicinity." Coleridge also mentioned that, for the most part, the children were not taught to write.⁷¹ In Speightstown there were several schools for slaves and free people of colour, and, by 1830, there were 11 charity schools scattered around the island for free non-white and slave children, although it is not clear how many were run by people of colour.⁷²

Free people of colour also formed social institutions in the 1820s specifically for themselves. They had a Library Association by at least 1824, and in a notice of a meeting in November of that year the Association mentioned that a post-meeting dinner would be held at the hotel of Hannah Lewis, a leading non-white hotelier.⁷³ The Lyceum, a theatre for free people of colour, was established in 1830, as the few theatres in the island either had segregated seating or were for whites only. The Lyceum was funded by a subscription from the free population of colour. The advertisement for the first performance at the theatre listed the names of seven stewards, many of whom were fairly young men, such as Thomas J. Cummins, Samuel Jackman Prescod and Henry Brathwaite, who were or shortly would become major figures in the struggle for political and civil rights.⁷⁴

While this organising illustrated a growing sense of responsibility on the part of the non-white élite towards slaves and free people of lower economic status, it also

Unappropriated People, p. 175).

⁷¹ H. N. Coleridge, *Six Months*, pp. 51-52.

⁷² PP 1831-32, vol. 47, Incorporated Society for the Conversion and Religious Instruction of the Negro Population, Annual Reports for 1828 and 1833, cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 178.

⁷³ *Barbadian*, 11 May, 1824.

⁷⁴ *Barbadian*, 18 February 1830; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 214. For discussion of the political careers of Prescod and Cummins see Chapters 3-5.

served to establish the public respectability and social superiority of the élite, while dividing people of colour into dispensers and recipients of charity. The directorial committees of these societies were entirely composed of free people of colour who were either wealthy or comparatively well-off, and who were, for the most part, baptised Christians.⁷⁵ Similarly, membership in non-white social organisations was only for those who were considered “respectable”. For example, the 1830 performance at the Lyceum Theatre cost subscribers \$1 per ticket, which was beyond the reach of most slaves and free people of colour. No one would be admitted without a ticket, but “[p]ersons of respectability not subscribers, may be admitted to see the performance with the consent of the Stewards on paying 1 1/4 dollar for each ticket...”. Shut out of politics because of their race, the free men of colour who organised such events and societies were consolidating their public role by establishing a parallel social hierarchy to that of whites.⁷⁶

White Paternalism and Reinforced Segregation

The white aristocracy responded to this challenge by immediately founding similar organisations for the elevation of poor whites and strengthening state support for whites-only institutions. In 1819, the Barbados Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was established. In an early speech, the chairman, a planter, made it clear that the society’s purpose was to maintain the social and economic dominance and assert the moral superiority of whites in the face of threats from uppity free people of colour:

Is there a man here who will deny, that the poor white people of this Community do not fill that rank in Society to which they properly belong? and is it not in our interest as much as our duty to aid them in maintaining their footing? While pleading the cause of this unfortunate class, let me not be

⁷⁵ Some élite families, like the Montefiores, Carvallos and Pinheiros, were Jewish.

⁷⁶ There was a similar and contemporaneous phenomenon in Britain, where philanthropic and social institutions were an important means by which middle class and nonconformist men established public roles (see for example Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* [London: Routledge, 1987], pp. 416-449; Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* [Cambridge: Polity, 1992], pp. 255-295).

understood to censure the laudable emulation of our fellow-subjects [free people of colour] — I wish rather to recommend it to imitation, but, Gentlemen, the case of the poor whites in this community is peculiar. ⁷⁷

This speech is fascinating, not least for the bold and patently untrue dismissal of non-white charitable societies as an “emulation” of white philanthropy. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge founded the Bridgetown Central School for indigent white boys in 1819, and a girls’ Central School was established in 1826. The committee of the Society and the Central School was all white, and the subscription fee was a minimum of £1.10s, or up to £5, which automatically excluded even whites who were not merchants or planters. In 1822 the Assembly assumed financial responsibility for the Central School, although it never extended support to similar organisations run by free people of colour while slavery lasted. ⁷⁸ In 1825, the Ladies’ Association for the Relief of the Sick and Indigent Poor of Bridgetown and its Environs was founded, whose members were all wealthy white women, and whose charity was for poor whites only. An 1828 “amateur exhibition of the fine Arts,” directed by a leading member of the Council to raise funds for the Ladies’ Association would only allow people of colour to come to view the exhibit on Sundays. ⁷⁹ In 1829, the Barbados Society for the encouragement of Arts and promoting Mechanical Trades and General Industry was formed, which was also a planter, merchant and clergy initiative to improve the lot of poor whites. ⁸⁰

After the 1823 parliamentary debate planters also sought to take control of the Christianisation of slaves by establishing their own philanthropic societies for slaves. In August of that year, the local clergy and the General Agricultural Society, a planter organisation, held a meeting at the Central School and resolved to pursue a policy of

⁷⁷ *BMBG*, 2 March 1819.

⁷⁸ CO 31/49, 20 March 1821; CO 30/20 “An Act for the better management and support of the Central School established... by the Barbados Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge,” 18 January 1822.

⁷⁹ *Barbadian*, 26 December 1826 and 22 January 1828.

⁸⁰ CO 31/51 17 March 1829, petition from the Barbados Society for the encouragement of Arts and promoting Mechanical Trades and General Industry; *Barbadian*, 29 November and 8 December 1829.

christianising their slaves.⁸¹ For planters, appearing to acquiesce in the demands of the imperial government was a means of forestalling Colonial Office interference by implementing changes on their own terms. From mid-1823 the rhetoric of planter paternalism changed, as planters sought to re-establish themselves as the protectors of slaves' interests. It was the beginning of a shift away from the blatant language of proprietary rights to describing slaves as the dependent vassals, almost members of the planter's extended family. In August 1823 the attorney for Turners Hall plantation in St. Andrew wrote to the estate's absentee owner to inform him of the formation of the association of planters and clergy and reported that most plantations had appointed lay catechists. The manager offered the assurance that: "All mystery has been avoided by the Owners to their Slaves, they have been candidly told what has passed & what we are willing and even desirous to do for the amelioration of their condition...".⁸² An 1824 letter to the *Barbadian* from "A Master of a Family," titled "Family Religion," instructed other planters on the best means of christianising slaves. First he recommended paying special attention to domestic servants, since, having been raised in the master's family, many of them:

... [H]ave acquired better habits—more civilized feelings—and a moral frame of temper: here is the soil, then, most ready for Christianity. Were these persons instructed in christian principles, and practice, by family worship, as they often have parents or brothers, sisters or children, amongst the labouring class, the leaven would be much sooner spread...

Christian! are you a father and a master? Remember, I beseech you, that you do not stand alone in the world — that you have others to take care of, and to answer for, as well as for yourself.⁸³

However, as planters expanded their private educational and missionary activities among slaves, they strengthened the public racial segregation of whites and free people of colour. In the late 1820s the island's parish governments, called vestries, which were responsible for overseeing parochial schools and whose members were

⁸¹ *BMBG*, 8 August 1823.

⁸² D239M/E20579 Fitzherbert Mss, Sir Reynold Alleyne to Messrs. Nelson and Adam, 4 December 1823, BDA.

⁸³ *Barbadian*, 24 September 1824.

all clergymen and landowners, increased funding for parochial schools. These schools were for whites only, and the vestries sought to improve the attendance of poor white children. They restated the racial segregation policy, making it clear that no free children of colour would be admitted. By the early 1830s, St. Philip and Christ Church were the only parishes which funded schools for free children of colour, who were educated separately from whites.⁸⁴

Many white philanthropists probably hoped the Central School would help limit growth in the number of non-white teachers. An 1826 petition from the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge to the Assembly proposed that the Central School should be a means of establishing a “core” of white teachers for the parochial schools and schools for children of colour. In 1825 the Anglican clergy founded the St. Peter’s Benevolent National School in Speightstown for the children of slaves and free people of colour. Planters were the majority on the school committee, and its 1829 report mentioned that a Central School graduate was already installed as teacher at St. Peter’s.⁸⁵

Planters and the clergy also worked together to establish mutual benefit clubs, called friendly societies, in order to encourage slaves to save their money, which had been recommended by Bathurst. A newspaper report of 1832 stated that the Anglican Bishop, with the assistance of two unnamed philanthropic societies in St. John, one white and one “coloured”, organised a meeting to establish a friendly society. Unlike the later friendly societies of the twentieth century anglophone Caribbean or the *cabildos de nación* of Cuba during and after slavery, which were grassroots initiatives, the Barbadian societies of the 1820s and 1830s were created by authorities to enforce the social and behavioural norms prescribed by the Anglican Church. These societies gave planters control over the process of

⁸⁴ St. Philip vestry minutes, 25 March 1830; *Barbadian*, 8 June 1830, Christ Church vestry minutes, 30 August 1832.

⁸⁵ CO 31/51 18 July 1826, petition from the Central School to the House of Assembly; *Barbadian*, 26 October and 6 November 1827, 14 November 1828, 8 December 1829.

amelioration. Friendly societies accepted only baptised Christians, while drunks polygamists and people in common law unions were not admitted.⁸⁶

Amelioration opened up an avenue for free people of colour and slaves to challenge overtly whites for control of public space and moral authority. The international debate over slavery also helped to fuel slave rebellion and increasing radical demands by free people of colour. The last two sections examine how the political relationship between free people of colour and slaves changed as the anti-slavery debate intensified between 1816 and 1833, creating new bases for solidarity and disagreement across and within legal boundaries.

The 1816 rebellion

The Outbreak and Suppression of the Rebellion

Prior to the night of April 14 1816 no slave conspiracies had been uncovered in Barbados for more than a century.⁸⁷ The 1816 rebellion's timing was directly connected to the changing political climate of the post-Napoleonic era. It was the first of three major slave insurrections which broke out in the British Caribbean in the last two decades of slavery, with increasing intensity, the second occurring in Demerara on 1823, and the last and most extensive in Jamaica in 1830-31. Each rebellion illustrated growing instabilities within slave societies provoked by the abolition debate.

Abolitionists had hoped that the end of the slave trade would force slaveowners to encourage natural population increase and improve slaves' living conditions. However, by 1811, there were suspicions that the slave populations of the West

⁸⁶ *Barbadian*, 13 October 1832; A.F. and D. Wells, *Friendly Societies in the West Indies: Report on a Survey by A.F. and D. Wells* (London: HMSO, 1953); Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 151-152; Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 9 and 66.

⁸⁷ John Poyer, *The History of Barbados, from the First Discovery of the Island, in the year 1605, till the Accession of Lord Seaforth, 1801* (London: Printed for J. Mawman, 1808), p. 174; Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, pp. 52-85. Poyer cites the year of this last conspiracy as 1702 while Beckles gives the year as 1701.

Indies were declining without imports. Abolitionists also claimed that slave trading continued illegally within the Caribbean, and would increase after the war. As a result of these concerns, in 1812, the parliamentary abolitionist lobby succeeded in getting the imperial government to pass an act in the crown colonies forcing slave owners to register their slaves, with the intention that the self-governing colonies would pass similar laws. Towards the end of 1815, there was a well-publicised debate between the Barbadian legislature and the imperial government over the registration bill. The legislature claimed that the bill's abolitionist supporters harboured the "ultimate object" of slave emancipation.⁸⁸ Throughout the island planters openly expressed their fear that, particularly after recent events in Haiti, the registration bill would "[excite] ill-defined expectations that cannot be gratified, and encourag[e] an Insubordination necessarily productive (if not of more horrid evils) of that very Severity which they seem most anxious to restrain". In November, the Barbadian legislature rejected the imperial registration bill.⁸⁹

The substance of the debate reached the non-white majority in Barbados in fragmented form. By the end of 1815, slaves and some free people of colour believed the Registry Bill was in fact an imperial emancipation bill, which the local assembly was blocking.⁹⁰ Believing that they had imperial support, slaves followed the example of Saint Domingue and began the island's first and only armed slave uprising in April 1816.⁹¹

The 1816 rebellion is the least documented of the three major uprisings of the late slavery period. Unlike the 1823 and 1831 Demerara and Jamaica rebellions, no

⁸⁸ *BMBG*, 18 November 1815.

⁸⁹ Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, pp. 92-93; CO 28/85 Petition from the Council and Assembly of Barbados to the Prince Regent, 17 January 1816.

⁹⁰ Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts: The late slave rebellions in the British West Indies, 1816-32," in Craton, *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 282-305, p. 284.

⁹¹ See references to Saint Domingue in the *Report of a Select Committee of the House of Assembly appointed to enquire into the origin, causes, and progress, of the late Insurrection*, (Barbados and London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1818 [afterwards "1818 Report"]), pp. 7. 33-34.

parliamentary inquiry was conducted. An 1818 report from the Barbados House of Assembly is the only document containing slave testimony, and the only source providing information on the internal organisation of the rebellion.⁹² However, the report is a problematic document, since, despite its stated aim, uncovering the root of the rebellion was not really its primary purpose. First and foremost, the legislature was refuting an abolitionist publication which asserted that slaves had rebelled because of poor treatment.⁹³ Second, it was designed to convince the British public of the danger of championing abolition.

The report suggested that the organisers of the rebellion were mainly élite male slaves, living in the four neighbouring parishes of Christ Church, St. Philip, St. George and St. John. They planned the rebellion at weekend dances which were held on plantations around the island on Sundays.⁹⁴ A physician who worked for estates in these four parishes described the organisers as “favoured persons” possessing “considerable influence” and “extensive connexions.” He observed that they had “the means of communication, of concert, and of secrecy; and it is certain that they were the first to be deluded themselves, and were afterwards the principal agents to delude others. The frequency of dances, and other meetings of that kind, no doubt, enabled the disaffected to mislead their associates.”⁹⁵ The presumed loyalty of this category of slaves had been seen by slaveowners as a bulwark against insurrection. The almost total absence of clear documentary references to non-officer slaves has led Beckles to term the revolt “the slave drivers’ war”.⁹⁶

There is no way to state conclusively how many slaves took part in the uprising, but many more fled from the violence than actually took part in acts of looting or

⁹² *1818 Report*.

⁹³ The publication was the anonymously-authored “Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbadoes, and the Bill for the Registration of Slaves,” *The Christian Observer*, vol. 15, no. 6 (June 1816), pp. 403-414.

⁹⁴ Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, pp. 90-97

⁹⁵ *1818 Report*, pp. 52-54.

⁹⁶ Hilary Beckles, “The slave-drivers’ war: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados slave rebellion,” *Boletín de estudios latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, vol. 39 (December 1985), pp. 85-110.

outright rebellion. In 1817, the four parishes most severely affected by the rebellion had an estimated combined slave population of 31,621. In St. Michael, where a few rural estates were involved, there were 18,193 slaves — many of whom would have been in Bridgetown, which was not affected. In the northern parish of St. Lucy, where “minor skirmishes” broke out and were quickly suppressed, there was a population of 5,466. The total slave population for 1817 was given as 77,493.⁹⁷ Beckles estimates that 3,900 male slaves (he apparently assumes that only men participated in armed struggle) were involved in military combat, a downward revision of Karl Watson’s estimate of 5,000 slaves, male and female.⁹⁸ The local militia was accused of indiscriminate slaughter of slaves involved against their will in the uprising. This prompted a proclamation from the president for the militia to show mercy “to Women and children” and towards all slaves “who, contrary to their inclinations, shall be found to have been involved in the commission of such depredations through force or terror of the Insurgents.”⁹⁹

The Ambivalent Role of Free People of Colour in the Revolt

Information about the registry bill debate travelled around the island via the extensive network of links among free people of colour and slaves. An estate physician attributed the rebellion to:

... [T]he great and rapid increase of the free coloured population; in so far as the slaves, from their ignorance and habits, being aware of no other distinction of persons but that which arises from colour, might easily be led to conceive themselves to be as much entitled to freedom as the great number of their own colour who were free.¹⁰⁰

According to the 1818 report, “This vague hope (and uncertain prospect) of freedom” was held by slaves around the island by late 1815, but was:

⁹⁷ Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, p. 99.

⁹⁸ Beckles, “Slave-drivers’ war,” p. 95; Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 132.

⁹⁹ CO 28/85, Governor James Leith, Civil No. 5, 30 April 1816, enclosing proclamation of President John Spooner.

¹⁰⁰ *1818 Report*, pp. 52-54.

... [S]trengthened by the information, imparted by some free People of Colour, as well as by some of the most daring of the Slaves (who had gained an ascendancy over their fellows by being enabled to read and write), and stated to have been obtained from the English Newspapers, which were occasionally produced and read, in order, as it should seem, to enforce conviction on the minds of the hearers. ¹⁰¹

Hucksters and slaves who travelled regularly between town and country were a crucial conduit of information. During the registry bill debate, whenever ships carrying official mail from England arrived, non-whites in Bridgetown would crowd around, eager to know the news. ¹⁰² Information and details of newspaper reports were transmitted around the island along the internal trading routes of slaves and free people of colour. ¹⁰³ A letter which appeared in the *Mercury* a month after the rebellion alluded to this fact and called for strict regulation of:

[T]he vast swarms of coloured people who infest our streets and public roads, from one end of the Country to the other — The pernicious bias which was given to the minds of the slaves on the Plantations, by persons of this description, on a late awful and memorable occasion, one would suppose, would never have been forgotten. ¹⁰⁴

Elite slaves resident on rural estates who travelled to Bridgetown also carried information from the town to the countryside. In his deposition King Wiltshire, from Bayley's plantation in St. Philip, mentioned that the butler, Sampson, returned from Bridgetown on Saturday April 13 and said, "Well, this day's Newspaper has done our business,— for the Packet has arrived, and brought our freedom." ¹⁰⁵

Beckles argues that, despite the participation of a few "free coloured allies" in the revolt, free non-whites were more active in the militia, helping to suppress suppressing the outbreak. He sees this as evidence of the immense social and political distance between slaves and free people of colour: "Unlike the free-coloureds in other islands whose ideological expressions in relation to slaves and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

¹⁰² Lucas Mss., 19 June 1816, pp. 447-448.

¹⁰³ See Andrew Lewis, "An Incendiary Press": British West Indian newspapers during the struggle for abolition," *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 16, no. 3 (December 1985), p. 359.

¹⁰⁴ *BMBG*, 15 May 1816.

¹⁰⁵ *1818 Report*, p. 28.

whites show much ambivalence, in Barbados their leadership was firmly pro-planter”.

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Although four free men of colour were executed for their involvement in the rebellion, and the report contains testimony detailing how three of them participated in organising the rebellion, the role of free people of colour, whether as rebels or suppressors, was limited.¹⁰⁷ The evidence of the role of free non-whites in the rebellion suggests a rather more ambivalent political and social relationship between slaves and even élite free people of colour. The legislature typically assumed that slaves were incapable of conceiving and plotting an event of such proportions without assistance from free men of colour and the impetus of the registry bill debate.¹⁰⁸ The report accused four free men of colour — Cain Davis, James Sarjeant, Roach and Joseph Franklyn — of leading the revolt. Davis had slave children and Franklyn was the illegitimate son of a St. Philip planter who had freed him at 15 and tried to leave him property in his will, which was declared illegal on the dubious grounds that it was written under the influence of alcohol.¹⁰⁹ Davis, Sarjeant and Roach seem to have lived in the St. Philip area, and, according to a slave from Bayley’s plantation, they spread rumours that freedom was “to be given to [the slaves] through a black woman who was a Queen, for whom Mr. Wilberforce acted in England.”¹¹⁰ The report also alleged that a free man of colour who lived near to the Thicket and River estates was seen helping to plan the rebellion, although the slave who testified to this could not remember the man’s name.¹¹¹

The evidence of Franklyn’s involvement in the rebellion is particularly dubious. A slave testified that Franklyn held frequent meetings with Jackey, the driver at

¹⁰⁶ Beckles, “On the Backs of Blacks,” p. 182.

¹⁰⁷ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 86. Five other free people of colour were taken prisoner but released without trial (see Lucas Mss., Colonial General Orders, 10, 19 and 22 June 1816).

¹⁰⁸ *1818 Report*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁹ Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, p. 180.

¹¹⁰ *1818 Report*, pp. 33-34.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

Simmons plantation in St. Philip and an organiser of the rebellion, and was to be made governor of the island in the event of success.¹¹² However this is the only evidence produced against him in the report, and hardly supports claims that he was a leader of the rebellion. Franklyn seems to have been singled out for reasons not directly connected to the revolt. Both he and James Sarjeant had signed the 1811 civil rights petition, but Beckles suggests, albeit without evidence, that: "Franklyn's personal life experiences seemed to have driven him away from the 'moderate' politics of the free-coloured community and into the ambit of slave radicalism".¹¹³ Hilton Vaughn argues that the legislature used the revolt as an opportunity to arrest Franklyn, but was unable to build a case against him for insurrection and therefore executed him on the vague charge of inciting others to revolt.¹¹⁴ In his journal Nathaniel Lucas, a magistrate, assemblyman and inspector of prisons during the period of court martial, made special note of Franklyn's execution.¹¹⁵

Information on the political activities of slaves and free people of colour was often ignored or suppressed by the governor, legislature and the local press. It is possible that Franklyn expressed political views which led some slaves to see him as a symbolic leader and earned him the wrath of the legislature. Many years later, in 1838, the *Liberal* newspaper, whose editors Thomas Harris Jr. and Samuel Jackman Prescod were pre-emancipation free men of colour, stated that:

There are some very respectable people who believe, to this day, that Franklyn was no more concerned in the rebellion of 1816 than the man in the moon. He was a man of bold independent spirit and therefore greatly disliked by those who then ruled the country with rods of iron — the opportunity to get rid of him was too good a one to be lost, so he was hung [*sic*].¹¹⁶

Although contemporary reports made much of the devotion and courage of free

¹¹² Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹³ Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, p. 95; Jerome Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 20 and 47.

¹¹⁴ H.A. Vaughn, "Joseph Pitt Washington Francklyn, 1782-1816," *The Democrat* (January 1971), cited in Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, p. 95.

¹¹⁵ Lucas Mss., 29 June 1816, pp. 392-393.

¹¹⁶ *Liberal*, 7 March 1838.

non-white militiamen who helped to suppress the rebellion, most free people of colour in the island, like the majority of slaves, played no part in the events of April 1816 at all, whether as organisers or suppressors. The free men of colour in the Christ Church militia were singled out for special mention. In a private letter one militia colonel stated that the “free colour’d” in his regiment “behaved admirably.... They would dash singly into a house full of rebels without looking behind for support and dig out the fellows. It was this intrepid courage that appalled the Blacks”.¹¹⁷ However, only two militia regiments fought in the rebellion, those of St. Michael and Christ Church.¹¹⁸ Even if St. Michael accounted for 50 per cent of the total number of free militiamen of colour, there were only 463 “coloured” militia privates in 1816 out of an estimated population of 3007 free people of colour. This number is too low to account for the entire non-white adult male population. The rebellion’s organisers probably anticipated that most free people of colour would not participate, and do not seem to have expected assistance from them, despite their role in providing information. However the organisers wrongly assumed that black imperial soldiers would support the rebellion, because they believed that the imperial government would support a slave uprising to obtain freedom which local white authorities were illegally withholding, and because these men were black.¹¹⁹ As was discussed in Chapter 1, there was a history of interaction between slaves in urban areas and the imperial troops, and an unknown number of the black troops had slave wives, mistresses and children.

Elite Free People of Colour and the Aftermath of the Rebellion

The legislature interviewed four free men of colour for the report because: “From the nearer approximation which existed between the Free People of Colour and

¹¹⁷ Colonel John Rycroft Best to Abel Dottin, 27 April 1816, cited in Beckles, “Slave-drivers’ War,” p. 97

¹¹⁸ Beckles, *Black Rebellion*, pp. 97-102.

¹¹⁹ CO 318/52, Windward and Leeward Islands Correspondence, Leith to the Duke of York, 14 May 1816; see also CO 28/85, Colonel Codd to James Leith, 25 April 1816.

Slaves, arising frequently from original connection or previous acquaintance... the conversations of the latter might have been less guarded when mixing with others of their own colour....” They selected only men “of the most respectable of that class whose, conduct, with scarcely any exception, at the period of the Insurrection, had been highly meritorious, very socially respectable free people of colour,”¹²⁰ who were known for their sympathy with the pro-slavery cause.

Despite the élite status of the men interviewed, their testimony provides insight into the relations between slaves and free people of colour. Particularly instructive is the testimony of Jacob Belgrave, possibly the wealthiest man of colour in the island, who owned plantations in St. Philip and Christ Church at the time of the insurrection. In mid-December Belgrave was returning from Bridgetown to his plantation and as he was passing by a neighbouring estate he “heard a great noise amongst the negroes who were at work in the field.” His servant called to him and said “that the negroes were very abusive towards [Belgrave], complaining that they were free, and that he was one who prevented them from having it.” Belgrave had a similar experience on the Good Friday before the insurrection, at an estate on the border between St. Philip and Christ Church. On that occasion “he was attacked by a black woman there, who (to his face) abused him, and said, he was ‘one of those fellows who prevented the slaves from having their freedom — that it had been sent out to them, and they would have it.’”¹²¹ Belgrave was among the planters whose property sustained the worst damages — £6720 worth — possibly indicating that he had been specifically targetted.¹²²

William Yard, Thomas Harris and Thomas Brewster were the other men of colour interviewed. Both Yard and Harris had signed the 1811 petition.¹²³ Brewster, a tailor and shopkeeper, stated that he was returning to Bridgetown from a plantation in

¹²⁰ *1818 Report*, p. 11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 59-63; Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 256.

¹²³ Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 24.

Christ Church, and, as he passed Searle's plantation in Christ Church, "one of the slaves there asked him if he had any good news for them, and he said he did not".

¹²⁴ In his testimony Yard alleged:

That some time previous to the Insurrection on the fourteenth of April, he heard the slaves, as "*commonly as a penny loaf for a penny,*" say that they were to be free.... This Deponent further saith, that, a short time before the Insurrection, he went (being a Taylor by trade) to General William's estate, in the Parish of St. Thomas, on business; that, on his way there, he met a man driving cattle, who asked him if there was any good news for them? and if the Governor was come?... — to which Deponent answered, that he had not. That, on his return from General Williams' to Town, he saw, at *Ayshford's* Plantation, the gang of negroes receiving their allowance: that one of them (a woman) asked him if he had heard any thing of the Governor, and if he had brought news for them, and could tell any thing about their freedom?—upon which Deponent, putting his finger on his mouth, advised her to be quiet: to which she answered, she understood him.... Saith... that one Sunday, on coming from his house, (a little way out of Town) to his shop, he heard that one of his boys, having been questioned by some negroes from the country, whether he knew any thing about their freedom? had pretended to read to them, from a Newspaper, that they were to be free; and he rebuked the boy for attempting to impose on the negroes. ¹²⁵

None of the whites interviewed spoke of having "heard" the slaves say anything, or having been directly asked by them for news or confronted about their views. That even men so well-known for their pro-slavery positions should be approached for news indicates the widespread role of people of colour in providing information in the months leading up to the rebellion. While these particular men were singled out by the commission of inquiry for their known political sympathies with the plantocracy, many other free people of colour moving around the countryside were approached by slaves for news, who thought they could be trusted to provide information. Belgrave's estate holdings, with at least 243 acres and 130 slaves, would have ranked him among the wealthiest men in the parish. Yet the fact that he was a man of colour, and probably the boldness which the apparent possibility of freedom gave them, made slaves feel that they could be honest with him. As far as those who spoke to him were concerned, as a man of colour *and* a member of the plantocracy,

¹²⁴ 1818 Report, pp. 40-41.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 39-40 (emphasis in the original).

he was a traitor. As wealthy as Belgrave was he was not white, and that placed him within the limits of their political world.

In late 1816, as a reward for their loyalty, the House of Assembly considered a bill to allow certain free people of colour to give evidence in court. The legislature specified that the measure should apply only “to the most enlightened class of the free people of colour” and not “to the vulgar class, many of whom have no idea of the nature or Solemnity of an Oath.”¹²⁶ In March 1817, a group of wealthy and prominent free men of colour sent a letter to the House “for ourselves, and in behalf of the free people of Colour in general”, expressing gratitude for the bill. Without it, they stated, “our lives and properties were not secure, and... our condition was little, if anything, better than that of Slaves.” They reaffirmed their support for slavery and for the necessity of “a distinction” between white and non-white free inhabitants, and assured the assembly that they understood “there are privileges which the latter do not expect to enjoy”. The right to give testimony, they stated, was all they wanted, and having obtained that “thro’ the Justice and Wisdom of the Legislature, we are perfectly satisfied.” Finally, they expressed their pleasure that their conduct “upon a late unfortunate occasion, has met with the approbation of the Legislature” and promised the House “that we shall be ready at all times to give proofs of our Loyalty, and sincere attachment to the King and Constitution, and to risk our Lives in the defence and protection of our Country and its Laws.” The letter was signed by Jacob Belgrave, William Yard and Thomas Harris, who were shortly to be interviewed for the 1818 report on the rebellion, and nine other free men of colour of considerable personal wealth. Among the signatories, Thomas Harris was himself an ex-slave, and William Bourne had at least one son who had been born in slavery.¹²⁷

The House was pleased by the letter’s deferential tone, and the testimony bill

¹²⁶ CO 31/47 8 October 1816.

¹²⁷ CO 31/47 4 March 1817, “Letter from Free People of Colour to the Assembly.” The address was signed by Jacob Belgrave, Charles S. Beckles, Samuel F. Collymore, T. Belgrave, Samuel Cowse, William Bourne, T.B. Collymore, T. Jordan, J. Collymore and J. Montefiore. See also Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 86-87.

passed the legislature in May 1817. It applied only to those who had been baptised as Christians — a very small percentage of the free population of colour — and those free before the passage of the act. The new act was clearly a reward for the, in many cases, slaveowning, élite, which had used pro-slavery arguments to defend its claims for increased rights. It was not a reward for free people of colour in general. This was illustrated in 1818, when a new militia bill was passed. The House decided that current militiamen of colour could keep their tenements, but in future no man of colour would be allowed a militia tenantry.¹²⁸

Immediately after the rebellion, the House also repealed the 1801 act setting manumission fees at £300 for women and £200 for men, which might appear to be a sign of the House of Assembly's gratitude to free people of colour for support during the rebellion. However, like a similar act passed in Grenada the following year, it was passed under pressure from the imperial government in order to reduce the restrictions on manumission, and was more a recognition of reality than an act of generosity. Since 1801 manumission fees had been evaded by having manumission deeds effected in England, which was legal, or by simply never paying the fees. Also, the lowering of the fees did not result in an increase in the number of recorded manumissions, indicating that high fees were not the main factor limiting manumissions, of which the legislature was probably aware when it passed the bill.¹²⁹ The act should therefore not be seen as a reward to free people of colour, which was precisely how the planter Assembly hoped it would be. It was a recognition that, while high fees encouraged law-breaking and would not control the growth of the free population of colour, lower fees would do no harm.

Despite displays of planter confidence in the non-white élite, the rebellion heightened already intense fears that other free people of colour might plot revolution in connivance with slaves. In 1819 a British soldier, born a free person of

¹²⁸ CO 31/47 21 January, 8 February and 31 March 1818.

¹²⁹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 49; Cox, *St. Kitts and Grenada*, p. 53.

colour in Barbados, was imprisoned by magistrates who accused him of being an "Emissary from St. Domingo". He had returned to Barbados after years in the army, wearing a uniform, and challenged a slaveowner whom he had seen beating his slave in the street. According to the soldier the news of his case spread throughout the island and "caused a great sensation among the Slaves... who now seemed to think the Magistrates had reason for what they did, & I was repeatedly warned by People of Colour, that my life was in danger.... From the time that I was apprehended as an Emissary from St. Domingo, an opinion seem'd to prevail among the Slaves that my arrival was in some measure connected with them." ¹³⁰

In the same year the legislature began to debate "an act for establishing an Alien Office with certain Rules and Regulations respecting Aliens...", specifically aimed at preventing the immigration of free people of colour from elsewhere in the Caribbean, especially Haiti. According to the Act, "much Danger had arisen to the Colony from the admission of Aliens and disaffected Negroes and Persons of Colour who were not Natives of [Barbados]...". The Alien and Census Bill forced ships docking in the island's harbour to report the presence of any free people of colour on board and gave magistrates the power to jail any foreigners or natives "of a Suspicious Character," clauses aimed at controlling the entry of people of colour. ¹³¹ During the debate the gallery was packed with "Coloured People" displeased by the measure. A member of the House addressed them, saying that they were "falsely impressed respecting it". He argued that those who were "rational" would realise that the bill would neither "degrade nor oppress them, but, on the contrary, will give to their body a more fixed character, and tend to place it on a more respectable footing." ¹³²

In response to the bill a public meeting of free people of colour was held, at which

¹³⁰ CO 28/86 Captain Elton, King's Dragoon Guards to Lt. Col. Teesdale, Commander of the King's Guards, Manchester Barracks, 22 July 1817; Teesdale to the Prince Regent, 26 July 1817; Loveless Overton to Teesdale, 30 June 1817 Overton was freed after Teesdale wrote to the Prince Regent about his case.

¹³¹ CO 30/20 "An Act for establishing an Alien Office...", passed 29 June 1819.

¹³² CO 31/49 10 April 1821.

400 people were present, and a committee of prominent free men of colour was formed to petition against the bill. Among them were the individuals singled out by the 1818 rebellion commission to be interviewed, and the chairman was Jacob Belgrave Jr. This affirmed his position as the “spokesman” for free people of colour, but marked the last occasion on which his leadership, and the role of the old pro-slavery petitioners as the self-appointed voice of the interests of free people of colour, would go unchallenged.¹³³

Abolitionism, Class Conflict and Political Radicalisation, 1819-1834

The Challenge to the Old Elite: The Counter-address Controversy of 1823-24

Between 1819 and 1833, Barbadian free people of colour underwent a process of political radicalisation as abolitionism in Britain became more powerful. By 1833, élite free people of colour had made a fundamental shift in principle in their attitude towards their legal position in Barbados. Rather than using pro-slavery arguments to gain limited expansion of their civil rights, they gradually moved towards challenging the principle of racial segregation itself, and demanded full political and civil equality with whites. In so doing, they ultimately acknowledged publicly that the institution of slavery was the source of racial discrimination against them, and that their political interests lay with abolitionism.

The pivotal moment occurred in 1823, as a result of the imperial parliament’s adoption of a “gradual emancipation”, and the outbreak of the Demerara rebellion. After 1823, élite political and civil rights agitators found themselves in an increasingly difficult position. They sought to ally their interests with the abolitionist imperial government, while maintaining a strategically neutral stance on the question of slavery in order to avoid antagonising the plantocracy. However, demands for an end to racial segregation were coming from below, as people of colour of various

¹³³ The members of the 1819 Alien Bill Committee were Jacob Belgrave, Samuel and Renn Jordan, Thomas Harris Junior, John Montefiore, Thomas J. Cummins, Nathaniel Alsop, Thomas Jordan, William Roach, Joseph Kennedy, John Durant, Benjamin Partridge, John Wilson, Christopher Serjeant, Joseph Collymore and Thomas Harris (whether Thomas Harris Jr. or Sr. is unclear), see CO 31/49, 4 February 1824.

social backgrounds began to protest against racial inequality. As the class base of the struggle for equal rights broadened, less well-to-do people of colour contested the élite's leadership of non-white opposition politics, exposing deep divisions of class and political ideology among free people of colour.

When the news of the May 1823 parliamentary vote in favour of gradual emancipation reached Barbados in June, many slaves believed, once again, that freedom would shortly be at hand. Rumours of insurrection were so prevalent that Governor Henry Warde made a tour of the island speaking to slaves to deny claims that slavery was ending.¹³⁴ In August 1823, a massive slave rebellion swept Demerara, rumoured to have been aroused by the teachings of a nonconformist missionary named John Smith, whose chapel included among its membership many of the slaves who led the revolt.¹³⁵

In the aftermath of the parliamentary debate and the condemnation of John Smith in Demerara, racial tensions ran high in Barbados. In September the first signs of a more confrontational language regarding race appeared in the *Mercury*. Under the pseudonym "Y" the author of a letter compared two recent murder cases, in one of which two white men were accused of the murder of a slave, and the other in which two slaves were accused of murdering a white man. The white men were not even brought to trial, whereas the slaves were sentenced to death. The author trenchantly argued that the only difference between the two cases was the race of the defendants and the victim.¹³⁶

Then, in October 1823, in response to the revelations about the Demerara revolt, the Methodist chapel in Bridgetown was demolished by a white mob, and the missionary and his pregnant wife had to flee for their safety. The destruction of the chapel followed several weeks of sporadically violent tension between whites and

¹³⁴ CO 28/92 Governor Henry Warde to Lord Bathurst, 14 June 1823; Claude Levy, "Barbados: The Last Years of Slavery, 1823-1833," *Journal of Negro History*, vol. 44, no. 4 (October 1959), p. 311.

¹³⁵ Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹³⁶ *BMBG*, 30 September 1823.

the congregation. White mobs stoned the church during services, and beat up the son of Jacob Belgrave and the slave of a Methodist army officer who was looking after his master's horse while the officer was inside. According to the Governor a deputation of free people of colour from the Methodist Bible Society told him that they feared for their lives.¹³⁷ In a letter to Warde the members of the Society stated that, immediately prior to the chapel's demolition, a "large body" of armed free people of colour had gathered to protect it. On that occasion Belgrave's son was beaten, which, as he was "a Son of the most respectable Coloured Person in the Island... caused a very unpleasant sensation...."¹³⁸ Governor Warde wrote to the Colonial Office stating that "...[G]reat Apprehension is entertained here that a Conflict may take place between the white Inhabitants and Free People of Colour, the horrible consequences of which, would be beyond all Power of calculation...."¹³⁹

Immediately after the chapel was torn down a group of free men of colour, the same men who had been elected to the 1819 Alien Bill Committee, sent a petition to the House of Assembly, professing to speak for themselves and "in behalf of the free colored community at large". Jacob Belgrave's name headed the list of signatures. It was the last pro-slavery address ever sent by a committee of free people of colour to the House. The authors expressed their support for the island's institutions and stated their "willingness to resist, to the best of our ability, any innovations in the present form of the society, which may appear likely to be productive of consequences injurious to the well-being of the Colony". They denounced the "ill-directed, but too successfully conceived efforts" of the abolitionists in the British parliament, "who, in their exuberant zeal to effect a theoretical reform, in institutions and customs of which they have but a very superficial knowledge, could run the risk of involving in practical and lamentable ruin, the property, even the lives of

¹³⁷ CO 28/92 Warde to Bathurst, 23 October 1823, enclosing Warde to Attorney-General Hinds, 20 October 1823.

¹³⁸ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 160.

¹³⁹ CO 28/92 Warde to Bathurst, 25 October 1823.

thousands of their fellow-subjects." They expressed their "pleasure" regarding the "the efforts which are now making in every part of the Country, to impart religious instruction to the Slaves... by teaching them to be contented and happy in their present highly improved condition." They assured the House that they had no intention of taking advantage of the unsettled political climate to press the legislature for increased rights, and stated that "such report, by whomsoever circulated, is entirely void of foundation."¹⁴⁰

The Belgrave address provoked a mass meeting of free non-whites, who decided to formulate a counter-address, which was published in the press in January 1824, signed by 373 names of free men of colour. Like the first address, this one also promised that political and civil rights would be deferred until the colony was in a less agitated state.¹⁴¹ However, it was addressed to the Governor, and not, as had hitherto been the norm, to the legislature. In other words, the petitioners were going over the heads of the colonial assembly straight to the crown. The challengers' message to the British government, the local legislature and the Belgrave group was that most free non-whites would no longer use support for slavery to curry favour with local whites:

Politically situated as we are, it is our ardent wish to pursue that peaceable demeanour and strict neutrality which has ever been the characteristic of the Free Coloured Inhabitants... nor do we conceive an exposition of our sentiments on any political question by any means necessary. But should it be requisite to remove any unfavourable impression which might arise... from our neutrality... we will endeavour to prove... our unshaken attachment to his Majesty's Government and the interests of our Country, and that we are worthy of that kind consideration which we shall solicit at a future period.¹⁴²

The term "political question" is a reference, at least in part, to the debate over slavery. The claim that political "neutrality" had always characterised the political involvement of free people of colour was patently untrue. Many of the men who

¹⁴⁰ CO 31/49 21 October 1823, "The Humble Address of the free coloured Inhabitants..." 20 October 1823.

¹⁴¹ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 90-97.

¹⁴² The *Globe*, 22 January 1824, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

signed the 1824 counter-address had signed previous petitions in which they expressed their support for slavery. However, by claiming that they had always been neutral on slavery, the authors of the address were distancing themselves from the local legislature and illustrating their loyalty to the imperial government, without openly defying the legislature.

The House of Assembly conducted an inquiry in February 1824 into the counter-address. The testimony indicates that the 1823 parliamentary debate had brought about a division among the non-white élite over the strategic role which the issue of slavery should play in their struggle against discriminatory legislation. Several élite men of colour opposed the anti-abolitionist tone of the Belgrave address, not necessarily because they were abolitionists, but because, in the wake of the 1823 parliamentary debate, they recognised that their interests might be best served by allying themselves with the British government. During the inquiry it emerged that Samuel Collymore, a prominent man of colour who had himself signed the 1799, 1811, 1812 and 1817 memorials and petitions, and had been elected to the Alien Bill Committee in 1819, was one of the main instigators of the counter-address. Thomas J. Cummins, who also sat on the 1819 Committee and had signed the Belgrave address, testified that Collymore had denounced the October address for its obsequiousness to the local legislature and its open disagreement with the abolitionist language emanating from the British Parliament. Cummins stated that: “[Collymore] had said they [the free people of colour] should not look to the legislature but to the ‘Mother Country’ for their rights.” Cummins also alleged that, with regards to the reference in the Belgrave address about the improved condition of the slaves, “Mr Collymore asked what was the improved condition of the Slaves, and then added that there was no improvement in their condition.” He claimed Collymore had also expressed the view that people of colour should be allowed to sit in the House, the first time such a demand for political enfranchisement is

documented.¹⁴³

William Yard, whom the legislature had interviewed for the 1818 rebellion report because of his loyalty to the local white élite, who was a member of the 1819 Alien Bill Committee and had signed the October address, confessed under questioning that he “wished his arm had dropped off before [he] signed that address”. Collymore had told him that “the Governor with tears in his eyes had objected to the Address because it contained expressions about Earl Bathurst and the People at home [in Britain]...”¹⁴⁴

John Callaird, a black man originally born in St. Vincent, was symptomatic of the growing impatience among free people of colour with the lack of legal reform in Barbados, particularly since the reform campaigns of free non-whites in neighbouring islands had met with some success. Although Callaird did not sign the counter-address, the House tried to have him transported for saying that men of colour should be allowed to sit in the legislature, which they were now allowed to do in the neighbouring island of Grenada. He argued that they should “fight” for their right to do so.¹⁴⁵ The testimony also illustrates the existence of informal political networks between free people of colour in various islands, and shows that the shift towards more openly confrontational tactics was not limited to Barbados. During questioning a certain Renn Collymore mentioned that, when news of the address reached other islands, his uncle received letters from people of colour in Tobago, St. Vincent and Antigua “requesting to do something to show that it was not the general feeling...”¹⁴⁶

The minutes of the inquiry also reveal growing frustration among non-élite free people of colour with the leaders of the petitioning movement. There was widespread and increasingly impatient opposition among free people of colour to

¹⁴³ CO 31/49, 4 February 1824.

¹⁴⁴ CO 28/93 Warde to Bathurst, 4 February 1824.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ CO 28/93 Warde to Bathurst, 4 February 1824.

racial discrimination, which the organisers of the October address were seeking to keep under control. Thomas Jordan, one of the prime movers behind the original address, stated that he decided to call a meeting of the Alien Bill Committee to draw up the address:

... [I]n consequence of the disturbed State of the Country and the Mobs assembling about the Town and particularly at the Free Coloured School, where there was a large collection of coloured persons, not wishing to let there be any improper Construction to be put upon our Silence; — I suggested to Mr. [Thomas] Cummins not to let there be any assembling, but to prepare a Draft of an address and bring it to me and that if I approved of it I would sign it — He asked who should prepare it I told him to call together a few of the most discreet....¹⁴⁷

Although the Alien Bill Committee had been elected to address a specific issue in 1819, it seems to have been the first body elected by free people of colour to give them political representation, but no elections had been held since 1819. In early 1823, another group of free people of colour had complained to the royal commission on West Indian legal reform about the Barbadian legislature's discrimination against free non-whites, without the Committee's permission.¹⁴⁸

According to Thomas Harris Jr., one of the signatories of the original address and a member of the Alien Bill Committee, when they drew up the address:

[H]e was fully impressed, as were those who acted with him, that they were justified in doing so from the opinion that they entertained of the feelings generally of all the enlightened, respectable and wealthy part of their Body... There was not a general communication but we communicated it partially with the most respectable.¹⁴⁹

There was a clear division between the class backgrounds of those who signed the two addresses. Aside from one man for whom no other records have been found, all who signed the October address were influential men. Most were members of the 1819 Committee and had signed previous petitions. By contrast, there are no other records on most of the men who signed the counter-address, indicating that many may not even have been taxpayers and were therefore quite

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. For discussion of the legal reform commission of 1823-24 see above, pp. 88, 115, 119.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

poor.¹⁵⁰ Most of the men who signed the counter-address were probably of the so-called “vulgar class”, deliberately excluded by the legislature from the 1817 extension of civil rights.

Less affluent and younger free people of colour seem to have harboured resentment against the élite which benefitted from the 1817 testimony bill. One man stated that, on the night of November 5, when rumours that the island’s free people of colour were intending to revolt were rife, “I then talked to Philip [the son of Renn Jordan, who signed the Belgrave address], and begged that he would be quiet and not suffer any dissension to take place amongst the Coloured People as it would have a very bad effect — He said that the few who had signed the Address to the Legislature had something and therefore looked down upon the others, and that Mr. Belgrave had come down from the Country and taken a very active part in it which was very strange....”¹⁵¹ The same man referred to the dissenters as “the young Men”, indicating that there was also a generational rift between the two sides. His statements reveal the resentment which had developed towards the older, relatively well-off élite and its assumed role as the voice of the community.¹⁵²

Ex-slaves were on both sides of the political fence during the address controversy. Thomas Harris,¹⁵³ who signed the Belgrave address, was a former slave, as was William Hutson Sen., who had signed earlier addresses. When questioned, Hutson categorically denied any knowledge of how his name came to be attached to the counter-address.¹⁵⁴

In February a public apology for the counter-address was published in the *Barbadian*, carrying 20 signatures, including those of some men who signed the counter-address. Among the names were many leading free men of colour,

¹⁵⁰ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 97.

¹⁵¹ CO 31/49, 4 February 1824.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 97.

¹⁵³ This was Thomas Harris Jr., who later became co-editor of the abolitionist *Liberal*.

¹⁵⁴ CO 31/49, 4 February 1824.

distinguished either by wealth or involvement in public philanthropy. The apology expressed support for the original address, claiming that “we should have felt most happy and willing to have signed the same, had the short time allowed for its preparations admitted of us being called upon.”¹⁵⁵ That same month the House passed a resolution denying the entitlement of free people of colour to any rights and privileges not granted to them by the legislature for good conduct, and expressing approval of the original address.¹⁵⁶ The Assembly’s unequivocal statement, coming at a time when the political climate was changing, made it clear that it would not change its attitude towards free people of colour unless it was forced to do so.

Class Divisions and Urban Protests Against Racial Segregation

Particularly after the events of 1823, non-white charities took on a new political significance, because their buildings, especially the Colonial Charity School, became places for community assembly and political organising among people of colour. In 1823, during the tension which preceded the destruction of the Methodist chapel, they frequently gathered to discuss the issue at the School. The destruction of the Methodist chapel in October 1823 was provoked by white fears about the effects of Christian teaching on slaves, as well as concern that mixing between people of colour might lead to racial solidarity and political conspiracy. In March 1824, shortly after the legislative inquiry into the counter-address, the St. Michael vestry issued the following statement to the rector of the parish:

...[A]ware from the disclosures which have recently taken place before the [Honourable] House of Assembly that a certain class of free coloured people have formed Societies and lest under the Mark of Religion they should project Schemes dangerous to the legal Establishment of the Colony conceive it to be a duty they owe to the public at large very respectfully to request their Rector not to Suffer the parish Church to be again open for the Reception of any

¹⁵⁵ *Barbadian*, 25 February 1824.

¹⁵⁶ CO 31/49 18 February 1824.

Societies constituted by this description of person's [sic].¹⁵⁷

In 1827, free people of colour met at the School to compose a petition against the discriminatory clauses of the Consolidated Slave Act.¹⁵⁸

The February apology did not express the opinions of the majority of free people of colour. After the counter-address controversy, any free man who continued to espouse publicly pro-slavery views was *de facto* siding with the local legislature over the imperial government, and found himself politically isolated from other people of colour. This was precisely what happened to the figure who most epitomised the pre-1824 movement, Jacob Belgrave. In 1825 Belgrave went to London, and, during his visit, he contacted the agent for Barbados. The agent sent a letter presenting him to Lord Bathurst as "Jacob Belgrave, [free coloured man], of the highest respectability of Character possessing considerable landed property in the island of Barbados", and announcing that Belgrave would answer any questions from Bathurst "in Reference to his Class of the Community."¹⁵⁹ Belgrave's intention to present himself to the Colonial Office on behalf of the Barbadian free community of colour must have been known in Barbados, and was opposed by some non-whites. The *Barbadian* reported an incident which occurred as he was leaving for Britain, which reveals the extent of hostility which free people of colour, and probably slaves as well, felt towards Belgrave and his élite political allies of colour:

We feel it our duty to notice the shamefully riotous conduct of a number of free black and coloured persons, who assembled in immense numbers on the public wharf on Wednesday afternoon, for the express purpose, as it would appear, of hissing Mr. Jacob Belgrave, and a few other coloured men, of the most respectable class, who accompanied him when he took boat to embark aboard the ship *Lancaster*, bound for Liverpool. And to give the greater degree of atrocity to the conduct of these rioters, they waited on the wharf until the boat returned with the party of Mr. Belgrave's friends, who, we understand, were pelted and hissed, and annoyed in every disagreeable way — For the greater part of the evening the Town was in an uproar with the noise of these riotous men, followed by mobs of slaves, who are at all times ready to join in any such disturbance, and who, it appears, the owners — tyrants, as we are

¹⁵⁷ St. Michael vestry minutes, 25 March 1824.

¹⁵⁸ *Barbadian*, 25 December 1827.

¹⁵⁹ CO 28/92, agent for Barbados George Carrington to Bathurst, 10 July 1825. It does not seem that Bathurst ever met with him.

represented to be — cannot keep in doors.¹⁶⁰

Like the slaves who accosted Belgrave before the 1816 rebellion, the 1825 protesters could more safely express their hostility against the island's landed élite towards Belgrave, because he was a man of colour. Moreover, other people of colour felt that Belgrave and the legislature's other non-white supporters had betrayed their own kind. Although the *Barbadian* dismissed the slaves who participated in this protest as a "mob" which would take part in any disturbance of the peace, their presence is significant. First, this was a case in which the social mixing of free non-whites and slaves in Bridgetown turned into a collective expression of racial and political solidarity. Second, the hatred expressed by the crowd was against men who were seen to be traitors against their own colour, and the class enemy of free people of colour excluded from civil rights which some élites enjoyed.

Renn Collymore, one of the leaders of the 1824 counter-address, left the island later that year for Trinidad and Tobago and returned one year later, only to be detained by the police, after the *Barbadian* reported his return. The *Barbadian* stated that Collymore had bribed a slave to assassinate Jacob Belgrave in 1814, and that the slave had subsequently been executed for the attempt. Although the accusation against Collymore was probably untrue, an attempt to kill Belgrave would suggest that opposition towards his political views as a free man of colour predated the rebellion, and crossed legal boundaries. The same report also referred to the counter-address "party" as the "*Radicals*," although this is the only instance when this name is documented, and it is not clear if opposition to the élite was coherent enough to be grouped as a political faction.¹⁶¹

After the events of 1823-1824 non-élite free people of colour mounted their own challenges to the state's racial discrimination policies. In early 1825, a group of people of colour staged a demonstration against racial segregation during a public

¹⁶⁰ *Barbadian*, 8 October 1824.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 29 July, 1825 and 2 August 1825. I found no further information on this case.

service at the St. Michael Church in honour of the whites-only Central School. The protesters came downstairs to the area reserved for whites and blocked the aisles.

¹⁶² After the *Barbadian* rebuked all free people of colour for the conduct of those in the church, it received an angry letter from a member of the “coloured gentry”, who signed it “Justice and Order”. The letter was the first public statement to be so openly defiant of white authority in the island:

... I must confess I felt indignant at the unkind and vindictive remarks which emanated from your editorial department wherein you speak of certain free people of colour who assembled at church on sunday... I anticipated a hope sir that time and the benevolent spirit of the age might have made some impression on you I however feel some regret on being disappointed with respect to those feelings for rich and poor bond and free which you wish to insenuate that you possess... in regard to those previliges which you have trumpeted to the World that the free Cold people injoy not from the philonthropic feeling of the legeslature towards them but from the tolerateing & benevolent spirit of the age... the enlightened part of the free people of Colour do most sincerely feel the degraded state under which they labour nor do they require to be reminded of it by you as they rest fully satisfied that it is their situation alone which gives full scope not only to the [Editor of the *Barbadian*] but to all such reptiles of the tipe to animadvert on thier conduct with impunity...

The writer expressed the hope, in rather sarcastic terms, that “the period may not be far remote when the legislature in their wisdom will see the utility of granting them an extension of previliges and by a spontaneous & benevolent act worthy of their great and dignified minds grant them relief”. As a parting shot, he assured the *Barbadian*'s editor that “I shall keep a watchful eye on you and whenever you attempt to vilify without provocation you shall asuredly hear from a friend to Justice and Order.” ¹⁶³

The events in the church and “Justice and Order's” letter illustrate the defiant attitude and tactics of public protest which free non-whites were adopting against their subordination in public life. The references to “rich and poor, bond and free” and “the liberal spirit of the age” suggest that the writer was incensed by the *Barbadian*'s insensitivity towards both free people of colour and slaves. He also attributed any improvements in the position of free people of colour to the “liberal” imperial political

¹⁶² *Barbadian*, 18 February 1825 (original spelling).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1825.

climate, rather than “philanthropic feeling” on the part of the legislature.

However, the incident also re-awakened political and class divisions among people of colour, as a week later there was a response from “a *real* lover of Justice and Order”, also a free man of colour. The letter reveals the indignation of free people of colour caused by the entrenchment of racial segregation during the amelioration period, of which the most potent symbol was the Central School. This letter writer was among the few beneficiaries of the 1817 testimony act, whereas the first was probably among the majority who were not. The letter sheds further light on the resentment caused by the 1817 bill, which did not apply to anyone who became free after the act was passed. The second letter stated:

I was at Church the day that the Rev. Mr. Payne preached the charity sermon for the Central School, (that source of discontent to so many of my colour) where I saw two black men, well dressed, in a front pew in the south gallery... I do not know whether they were free or slaves, but they endeavoured, and did succeed, in annoying a white lady in that pew, and rendered her time very uncomfortable during service; and I am sorry to say that there are a great many (*there are exceptions*) who would do the same the next Sunday, if they could with impunity.

...

I have often heard my father speak of the late Jacob Belgrave, and have admired his sentiments, “That he wanted no oath [the right to testify in court], so long as his *word* would pass with every white Gentleman in the Island...”.

I must confess I am pleased and happy that I have my oath—but I hope and trust that I shall ever place a greater value on it than many have done since its establishment. I find it is “*wisdom* of the Legislature” in the newspaper, but ask them what it is in their private meetings.... I am a free-born coloured man, and as long as I live I hope to see every department occupied as they now are, and by the same means and mode. If they continue to abuse you, I shall take the liberty to throw a little more light on the subject, in the mean time I remain, not a *feigned*, but a *real* lover of Justice and Good Order. ¹⁶⁴

“A *real* lover of Justice and Good Order’s” description of himself as a “free-born coloured man” was a strong ideological statement, given that a significant number of free people of colour had been born slaves. This might indicate that, although some relatively wealthy ex-slaves were part of the pro-legislature faction, many more were opposed to the conservative non-white élite, a disproportionate number of whom

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 8 March 1825.

would have been freeborn.

By the late 1820s the imperial government was taking an increased interest in the issue of civil rights for free people of colour. Apart from the political influence of Jamaican free people of colour and Parliament's desire for legal reform in the slave colonies, stories were reaching Britain, via the abolitionist press and lobby in Parliament, about the treatment of free people of colour in the Caribbean. First came news in 1825 of the ongoing persecution of Barbadian Methodists by whites.¹⁶⁵ After the missionary had been run out of the island in 1823, a free woman of colour named Ann Gill, described in the documents as a "respectable coloured Woman", continued to hold Methodist services at her Bridgetown home, which slaves and free people of colour attended. Whites threatened to destroy her house because her congregation included slaves, and the governor and the Bridgetown magistrates allegedly tried to force her to stop the meetings. Many people of colour who did not attend the services, "considered the threats and demonstrations of the Riotous Whites against Mrs. Gill's House as marks of hostility to them, the People of Colour, as a body". When the magistrates had told Gill not to invite slaves she replied, "rather than exclude the poor Slaves I will have no Meetings at all..."¹⁶⁶

Race, Class and the Limits of Reform: The White Elite and the Free Elite of Colour

The growing movement for reform of the imperial parliament was a threat to the West India Interest in the House of Commons, since abolitionism and parliamentary reformism were closely allied.¹⁶⁷ As the political climate became more favourable to emancipation between 1823 and 1833, élite free people of colour took up the

¹⁶⁵ *An Authentic Report of the Debate in the House of Commons, June 23, 1825, on Mr. Buxton's Motion Relative to the Demolition of the Methodist Chapel and Mission House in Barbadoes* (London: Parliament Commons, 1825).

¹⁶⁶ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 157; CO 28/96 Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society Richard Watson to Bathurst, 15 January 1825; CO 28/95 Minutes of Council, 10 March 1825, Warde to Bathurst, 26 March 1825 and Warde to Bathurst, 5 May 1825, "Report of a Committee of the Privy Council on an Investigation of the Conduct of the Acting Magistrates of Bridge-Town..."; CO 31/49 5 April 1825.

¹⁶⁷ See Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, pp. 29-30; Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, pp. 444-459.

demand, first uttered publicly by the authors of the 1824 counter-address, for political enfranchisement. In 1829 fifteen merchants of colour sent a petition requesting that the electoral franchise be extended to free people of colour. It was the first petition demanding the right to vote and hold public office, as well as the civil right for all non-whites to give testimony. The new franchise demand was by no means democratic — the men who signed the address were all wealthy, and they requested the franchise for those who could meet the £10 property qualification. However its language indicates the distance which had been travelled since the 1823 address:

Your petitioners are not disposed to question the expediency of the discriminative system, which was adopted on the early establishment of the colony, when their numbers were comparatively few and in a rude and uncultivated state. They beg leave, however, most respectfully to submit to your honourable House, their humble opinion, that their intellectual improvement, and the respectable station attained by them in the community — their respectful and implicit obedience to the laws, and their faithful discharge of the obligations of good citizens, call for a removal of those degrading exceptions and impolitic restraints, whereby they are consigned to a state of political destitution.

The signatories included men who had been on opposite sides during the 1823-24 counter-address controversy, indicating the degree of solidarity which had been achieved among élites since then.¹⁶⁸ The petition is also notable for the absence of any reference to the question of slavery, although some of those who signed were slaveowners. A similar petition was sent to the new governor, Sir James Lyon, when he took office in 1830, signed by Samuel Collymore and John Durant, both leading figures in the community who had signed the counter-address of 1824, and William Jordan, Thomas J. Cummins and John Montefiore, who had signed the Belgrave address.¹⁶⁹

In 1831, the legislature passed the “Brown Privilege Bill”, which caused great excitement among free men of colour.¹⁷⁰ However, a young man named Samuel

¹⁶⁸ CO 31/51 14 July 1829.

¹⁶⁹ CO 31/50 27 July 1830.

¹⁷⁰ Handler, *Unappropriated People*, pp. 102-104. See previous reference above, p. 93.

Jackman Prescod campaigned against the bill as discriminatory because of the higher qualification of £30 for non-whites, and allegedly “incurred the displeasure of the credulous people of color by refusing to participate in their premature rejoicings.”

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The qualified acceptance of élite free men of colour by whites in 1831 reflected a growing community of interests among the wealthy élite of both colours. Despite their participation in philanthropic endeavours designed to benefit poorer free people and slaves, most of the organisers of political and civil rights petitions were merchants and property owners, who, like whites of similar economic standing, feared competition from slave hucksters. For example, after the 1831 hurricane destroyed the Bridgetown market, the House received a petition from the householders of Roebuck Street, a thoroughfare leading into the city. The petition complained that, since the hurricane, hucksters had been selling provisions in their street. While most of the signatories were white, three were free men of colour who were prominent in both the petitioning and philanthropic movements — Henry Wilkins, Benjamin Massiah and Thomas Harris Jr.¹⁷²

The participation of free men of colour in such petitions, which a decade earlier would have been exclusively white initiatives, was related to the greater public acceptance and respectability which non-white philanthropic activities now enjoyed among whites. By the later 1820s, the initial suspicion towards these societies was giving way to a paternalistic tolerance. An 1827 editorial in the *Barbadian* stated that:

The very great anxiety manifested by the Free Coloured people to create and diffuse generally among their fellow-creatures a religious and moral sense, and to relieve distress of every description, is well worthy of our particular notice.... [N]othing, therefore, affords us greater pleasure than to do justice to the general deportment for some time past — to their peaceable, inoffensive, and respectful demeanour — to their liberality in aiding *our* charitable institutions — and to their exertions to spread the knowledge of the Gospel amongst their own class, as well as amongst Slaves.¹⁷³

171 Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation*, p. 74, cited in *ibid.*, p. 104.

172 CO 31/51 27 November 1832.

173 *Barbadian*, 2 January 1827.

In 1829 the Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor received a £50 grant from the St. Michael parish vestry to help build a new poorhouse for black and coloured poor, the elderly and invalids. The society's petition displayed a social élitism of which the vestry must surely have approved, stating that the erection of a poor house would allow for greater relief of the "unfortunate objects of their bounty" and ensure that "many unseemly exhibitions of human suffering [would be] removed from the public eye". In 1832, the society petitioned successfully for £100 from the vestry.¹⁷⁴ By 1830, the Ladies Association for poor white relief and the Ladies Branch Association for the Education of the Coloured Poor were working together, and, in 1833, the Ladies Association's 8th annual report showed that it was now providing relief to people of colour as well as whites.¹⁷⁵ There was even talk of a possible merger between the Barbados Auxiliary Bible Society of the People of Colour and the whites-only Barbados Auxiliary Bible Society.¹⁷⁶

These organisations were benefitting from the perception among élite whites that their membership — composed as it was of the wealthiest among the free population of colour — was "respectable" compared with the majority of non-whites. Although most committee members of non-white charities faced racial discrimination, they shared economic interests with élite whites which they did not share with free people of colour of lower class status. For example, in 1833, while the imperial act of emancipation was being debated in parliament, a group of Bridgetown merchants petitioned the House of Assembly. They stated that, if emancipation came, the terms of compensation to planters should give precedence to the estates' debts to local merchants over mortgages or encumbrances. John Montefiore & Co. and William B. Nunes, two merchant houses owned by men of colour, were among the firms listed on the petition.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ St. Michael vestry minutes, 25 March 1829 and 25 March 1832.

¹⁷⁵ *Barbadian*, 11 September 1833.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18 September 1833.

¹⁷⁷ CO 31/51 27 Aug 1833, "Petition from Merchants and others..."

The political importance of class divisions among free people of colour was illustrated in December 1831, when a group of non-whites who were not part of the élite attempted to desegregate the St. Michael church. Two men, apprentice tailors, took seats in the section of the church reserved for whites and refused to move. When church officials tried to remove them, “a mass” of people of colour left the galleries which were reserved for slaves and people of colour “and made a stand under the Organ loft” in the whites-only area. After the incident it emerged that the protest had been planned, and the protesters intended to do the same again the following Sunday. In response, the St. Michael vestry prosecuted the two tailors, launched an investigation into the matter, and called in a selected committee of wealthy Bridgetown merchants of colour to discuss the issue with the vestry. The merchants summoned were John Montefiore, Thomas Harris, Joseph Kennedy, Thomas J. Cummins, William B. Massiah and Henry Brathwaite. The committee, none of whom had been part of the protest, claimed that it had not been planned, but occurred because free people of colour were often forced to sit with slaves during the service. It recommended that the vestry make “limited” provision for free people of colour to sit in the reserved white area. The vestry gave the suggestion its “fullest consideration”, but resolved that the pews in the white area were “set apart for the accommodation of, and belong to, the white Inhabitants”. The names of the two tailors were not recorded, nor is there is evidence that the proceedings against them were stopped. None of those who had participated in the protest was called before the vestry to give their views.¹⁷⁸ Still, the controversy shows that, while élite merchants of colour were now “respectable” enough in the eyes of the vestry to be considered the legitimate voice of free non-whites, their class status did not cancel out the fact that they were not white.

Rebellion, Reform and Race: The Turn to ‘Race Consciousness’

¹⁷⁸ St. Michael vestry minutes, 7, 13 and 19 December 1831, 2 January 1832; *Barbadian*, 17 December 1831.

However, there were other challenges to the social, political and legal hierarchy coming from below. Particularly after 1823, there was a constant fear of slave rebellions in Barbados, and the precedent of slave rebellions elsewhere in the British Caribbean made the situation more acute.¹⁷⁹ In March 1826, slaves were heard all over the island saying, that, on Good Friday, they would give the whites “bloody cravats”. One slave was arrested after he walked into a grocery shop and calmly announced that on Good Friday he would “shoot off the legs of many white Pigeons”. During an inquiry into the insurrection rumours, two police constables informed on an individual who allegedly had been reading newspapers to slaves and free people of colour and telling them that they were entitled to their freedom and that they should fight for it. Although no plot was uncovered, April 1826 was the tenth anniversary of the 1816 rebellion, illustrating the lingering resonance of the events for people in the island, slave and free.¹⁸⁰

Between April and July 1827, the white inhabitants of St. Lucy parish held public meetings at which they resolved not to allow their reverend, William Harte, access to their slaves because he was attempting to “destroy the distinctions, which the white inhabitants deem so necessary to their safety”. According to the parishioners, Harte had held the white population up to “derision” in public by preaching “seditious” and pro-abolitionist sermons to a mixed congregation of slaves, free people of colour and slaveowners, and performed slave marriages in the parish church. He was also accused of administering the sacrament to people of colour before whites one day, both of which charges he denied. In June, slaves at one of the parish’s estates complained to Harte about their working hours, and he told them that “they would undo all the good being done for them with bad behaviour,” which was interpreted by whites in the parish as a reference to abolitionism. After their meeting with Harte, 21 of the estate’s men took matters into their own hands and went on strike, going

¹⁷⁹ Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, p. 431.

¹⁸⁰ CO 31/50 21 March 1826.

themselves to the home of the estate attorney to complain. ¹⁸¹

In 1830-1831, the disagreement between parliament and the colonial legislatures deepened over the assemblies' refusal to pass amelioration measures implemented in the Crown Colony of Trinidad. Across the British Caribbean, slaves again believed that parliament's proposed measures, which stemmed from the 1823 debate, were an emancipation order which was being withheld by local whites. There were insurrection rumours in several West Indian territories, including Barbados, with a conspiracy uncovered in Tortola. ¹⁸² Revolt erupted in Jamaica during Christmas 1831. In 1832, parliament established a royal commission to discuss immediate slave emancipation. Many parliamentary abolitionists were convinced that the role of religion in the devastating Jamaican "Baptist War" showed that the cultural transformations being wrought by amelioration had made slavery unsustainable. ¹⁸³

It was difficult for free people of colour to make expressions of community pride which whites did not interpret as statements on the wider political situation. Among those who testified before the commission in favour of emancipation was a free man of colour from Antigua, named Henry Loving, the editor of the *Antigua Weekly Register*. Loving was a well known advocate of rights for free people of colour, and a contributor to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, a British abolitionist publication. ¹⁸⁴ On his return to the Caribbean Loving stopped in Barbados in 1832, and 36 "coloured and

¹⁸¹ CO 28/100 Rev. William Harte to Lord Bishop of the Diocese, 22 February 1827 in Warde to Under Secretary of State William Horton, 26 February 1827; CO 28/102 Proceedings of the trial against William Harte, 13-14 December 1827, in President Skeete to Secretary of State for the Colonies Huskisson, 7 March 1828; *Barbadian*, 24 and 31 July 1827. Harte was found guilty of a misdemeanour, but was pardoned by the King (Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 90).

¹⁸² Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, p. 432; Mount Tabor Moravian Diary, 17 March 1831; CO 28/107 Governor James Lyon to Viscount Goderich, 2 April 1832; *Barbadian*, October-November 1831. The Governor of Barbados once again made a speaking tour of the island to dispell the rumours.

¹⁸³ Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, pp. 13-21; PP 1831-32 vol. 20, *Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider and report upon the Measures which it may be expedient to adopt for the purpose of effecting the Extinction of Slavery...*, p. 3. As Mary Turner notes, the Baptist War initially damaged and divided the anti-slavery movement. Only after a long series of negotiations between abolitionists and the West India Interest was the structure of an emancipation bill agreed upon (see Turner, "The Baptist War and Abolition," *Jamaica Historical Review*, vol. 13 (1982), pp. 31-41).

¹⁸⁴ *Barbadian*, 14 November 1832; PP 1831-32, vol. 20, *Report of the Select Committee [on] Slavery*, pp. 156-167.

black” gentlemen threw a party for him. The *Barbadian* refused to publish a letter which he sent to them, in which the editor claimed Loving had described whites in the West Indies as ready to rebel against the imperial government, whereas people of colour would support imperial policy.¹⁸⁵

In 1832, the first elections under the Great Reform Act swept most of the West India Interest out of the House of Commons, bringing an abolitionist government to power. Coinciding with this period of political crisis and reform in Britain, a landmark legal case came to court in Barbados. The case was mentioned in a petition from a group of men of colour, who should have been enfranchised under the 1831 Brown Privilege Bill. They petitioned the Crown, complaining that they were still unable to exercise their right to vote and testify because the legislature had passed the 1831 Brown Privilege Bill with a suspending clause.¹⁸⁶ In their petition the men referred to an 1831 case of a white man who had shot a free black man in full view of free people of colour, slaves and his (the white man’s) wife. However, none of the free people of colour could testify; the slaves could not testify because the case involved the life of a white person; and the man’s wife could not testify because a married woman could not testify against her husband.¹⁸⁷

This was one of three important legal cases in the island which finally led non-white political and civil rights agitators to acknowledge publicly the impossibility of obtaining justice for any non-white person, whether slave or free, so long as slavery existed. Two cases in 1829 and 1833 in particular revealed the legal vulnerability of free people of colour under slavery and the erosion of legal boundaries being caused by amelioration. The first involved three slaves condemned to death for plotting the murder of their owner in 1829. The case against the three men, George Smith, Italy and Will Thomas, aroused significant public interest, because it rested on evidence

¹⁸⁵ *Barbadian*, 10 October 1832.

¹⁸⁶ The 1831 Bill came into effect on November 22 1832 (Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 103).

¹⁸⁷ CO 28/109 Lyon to Goderich, 4 July 1832, enclosing address from a deputation of free colored persons.

from another slave whose testimony was declared invalid once it emerged that he was not baptised. The Governor's Privy Council pardoned them, to the outrage of many whites, and they were again jailed immediately by local magistrates. However the evidence against them was so meagre that the Acting Protector of Slaves intervened and bailed them out of jail.

Legal complications arose because it was unclear whether or not slaves pardoned by the Crown were automatically free as a result of the Consolidated Slave Act. According to the Privy Council, they were, whereas according to the legislature, they were not. Joseph Thorne, who acted as the men's catechist while they were imprisoned and agreed to act as security once they were freed by the Acting Protector of Slaves, said he came forward "under the belief of their being free — for he had had conversations with Mr. Mayers the Acting Protector of Slaves on the subject, who told him that they were free...". The House urged the imperial government to transport the men but they were finally pardoned on the orders of the Colonial Office. The legislature also petitioned the governor to overrule his Privy Council and issue a warrant to arrest the men, because members were worried about the example which the case would set to other slaves, but to no avail.¹⁸⁸

Then, in January of 1833, just months before the imperial act of emancipation was presented in parliament, a slave boatman named Robert James was accused of raping a poor white widow named Margaret Higginbotham.¹⁸⁹ The President of the Council, who was then the acting representative of the Crown, took the surprising decision to pardon James because of inconsistencies in Higginbotham's testimony, resulting in James gaining free status. The case would have been politically charged anyway, but it occurred at a point when everyone knew that the British government would soon abolish slavery. The James case came to stand for the entire future of

¹⁸⁸ CO 28/103 Lyon to Sir George Murray, 22 July 1829 enclosing documents relating to case of John Hurley et al for attempted murder; CO 31/51 2 February 1830; CO 28/104 Herbert Jenner et al to Murray, 13 November 1829; CO 28/105 Lyon to Murray, 12 January and 16 February 1830.

¹⁸⁹ CO 31/51 22 January 1833.

the island's social and racial hierarchy. A letter from "A Widow Woman" addressed to two of the island's magistrates summed up the feeling of whites: "... as fathers, as sons, as husbands, as brothers, as men [you have a duty to] defend the wrong done weak, helpless womam [sic], as well as to stand forth in the sacred cause of your country...".¹⁹⁰

Whites convened public meetings around the island condemning President Skeete, demanding his resignation and lamenting the effect of his decision "on our mixed population".¹⁹¹ The House of Assembly, in defiance of Skeete as the representative of the Crown, passed a resolution in which they argued that, as a result of the 1829 and 1833 cases, slaves could now expect "pardon and reward as the price of the most atrocious crime". They also alleged that there were several "felons" who, "after having been convicted of capital offences have obtained their pardon, and are now at large living in this island as free subjects".¹⁹²

The legislature was now acting in open defiance of the Crown. In January, a group of free people of colour tried to organise a public meeting to prepare an address to the Colonial Office in support of Skeete and distance themselves from the legislature's position. In their address they stated that the president's opponents had made "invidious exertions to put down our public meeting". They admitted that some men of colour were convinced or scared over to the opposite Camp" and that "If none were convinced, many were deterred from showing their opposition to the dominant class...". The authors said they were threatened by whites, but had assembled anyway to prepare the address, but the meeting was "unfairly put down".

¹⁹³

The situation finally forced some free people of colour to choose publicly sides on

¹⁹⁰ CO 28/111 Extracts from the *Globe* newspaper, 12 January 1833.

¹⁹¹ CO 28/111 Skeete to Goderich, 4 January 1833; *Barbadian* 16, 19 and 30 January 1833.

¹⁹² *Barbadian*, 26 January 1833.

¹⁹³ CO 28/111 Skeete to Goderich, 19 March 1833, enclosing "Address of the Free Coloured and Black deputation to President Skeete," 19 March 1833.

the question of slavery. On March 24, a deputation of free men of colour delivered a petition to the Governor which stated that.

... [T]he Free Coloured and Free Black Inhabitants of this Island, as a body and in common with their brethren in other Islands, [have] been at all times remarked for their loyalty and patriotism...

... We detest, as much as any other portion of this community, the crime with which the said felon stands charged, but whilst white criminals, of every denomination, are let loose upon the community without producing any feeling of resentment, we must necessarily attribute the present ferment, in the particular case, to but one cause.

...
As British Subjects, we conceive it to be our duty to assure your Honor, that we shall always stand forth — as we have hitherto done, in defence of the laws, in support of the British government, by whomsoever administered, and in cooperation with the Government in the furtherance of any measure having for its object the impartial distribution of justice to all classes of the community and the permanent welfare of the Island. ¹⁹⁴

The “one cause” of injustice, which this petition was identifying, was race. This petition was the first time free people of colour publicly acknowledged that they shared concerns of racial persecution with slaves, or attributed the oppression of free non-whites and slaves to this common racial background. This embryonic ‘race consciousness’, based on a shared history of racial oppression, was to become a central feature of the post-1834 political and civil rights activities of free people of colour. ¹⁹⁵ Additionally, the assertion of their willingness to support the British government, “in the furtherance of any measure” for “the impartial distribution of justice to all classes... and the permanent welfare of the Island” was an oblique reference to slavery. The petition thereby expressed tacit support for an imperial emancipation measure.

¹⁹⁴ CO 28/111 Skeete to Goderich, 24 March 1833, enclosing free coloured and black address. Although there were no signatures on either the March 19 or 24 1833 petitions, they both resemble the writing style of Samuel Jackman Prescod, who was about 26 years old at this point, and who would become one of the most influential political figures of the post-slavery era through journalism. See Chapters 3-5.

¹⁹⁵ See Chapter 4.

The Idea of 'Race' in Imperial West Indian Policy

These expressions of imperial fervour and references to 'race' by free people of colour would have found willing listeners in imperial government circles during the 1830s. While the Barbadian government was doing all in its power to block the political advancement of free people of colour, imperial officials were developing a racialised vision of how to organise the empire. This vision led to major shifts in imperial policy which increased official interest in Caribbean free people of colour. First, imperial commitment to suppressing the trans-Atlantic slave trade led to the growing involvement of British troops in Africa. Massive death tolls among soldiers fed the belief that race was synonymous with climate, and that people of African descent should be used as imperial officials in Africa.

In 1827 Bathurst sent a request to the governors of Jamaica and Barbados asking for men of colour who had military experience, education and "character" to fill low-level officer positions in the British army in Sierra Leone, and thereby "to preserve the Lives of British Officers". According to Bathurst, people of colour had "Constitutions more congenial with that Climate" than whites. Although no people of colour from either island were ever sent, the request deepened white unease in Barbados over the possibilities of advancement which were opening for non-white British subjects. The legislature opposed it, saying that no local free people of colour would want to "relinquish the advantages of their present Situation to go to Sierra Leone...".¹⁹⁶

Additionally, after the 1832 Reform gave abolitionists control of the Colonial Office, they conceived a pivotal role for free people of colour in the implementation of emancipation policy. Officials considered ex-slaves unfit to assume a direct political role because their slave status had left them unprepared for the "duties" of freedom. Additionally, officials felt that, once emancipation occurred, the stability of the colonies would depend upon ex-slaves continuing to work for the estates,

¹⁹⁶ CO 28/100 Warde to Horton, 20 January and 27 April 1827, enclosing Governor's PS to the Council, January 30 1827.

particularly since, as far as informed British opinion was concerned, white skin was incompatible with long hours of outdoor labour in the tropics.¹⁹⁷ Finally, white slaveowners had shown that they could not be relied upon to implement the necessary liberal measures which Colonial Office officials saw as necessary to maintain the peace after emancipation.

Under these circumstances, the existence of a free population of colour in Barbados, which had consistently displayed its loyalty to the crown since 1823, assumed a new political significance. As people of the same colour as the slaves and as loyal British subjects, they were seen as the natural political representatives of the interests of ex-slaves and a check on the excesses of whites. In 1833, a new governor was sent to Barbados with the mandate to oversee the transition to emancipation, and bring the recalcitrant legislature to heel.¹⁹⁸ Sir Lionel Smith was the embodiment of the evangelical spirit which drove imperial policy during the 1830s. Smith was of the view that “the balance of refinements, morals, education and energy is chiefly in favor of the brown and black — and the Whites have nothing but old Rights and prejudices to maintain their illiberal Position against their own original kindred”. He was determined to follow a policy of “bringing these Castes forward,” by placing them in positions of civil and military administration, particularly as magistrates and militia officers, posts which he saw as crucial for both protecting and maintaining control over ex-slaves.¹⁹⁹

In April 1833, the imperial parliament passed an emancipation bill. Parliament was determined that colonial legislatures in the West Indies should pass identical or similar laws. The Barbadian legislature resisted, and was one of the last to pass a version of the bill in April 1834. In 1833, Smith supported demands from free people

¹⁹⁷ Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, p. xviii; PP 1840, vol. 35, Part II, Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord John Russell to Governor Evan McGregor, 25 November 1838.

¹⁹⁸ Sir Lionel-Smith was the first Governor-General of a federation of Barbados and the Windwards. The islands retained their separate legislative structures, and each had Lieutenant-Governors, but the Governor of Barbados was the Governor-in-Chief from 1833-1876.

¹⁹⁹ CO 28/111 Smith to Stanley, 23 May 1833.

of colour that the franchise requirements for whites and non-whites be equalised, because “emergency” might require the election of a new House of Assembly which would pass an emancipation act. Whereas few free coloured and black people could meet the £30 qualification, more could meet the £10 one. With a reformed electorate there might be “a chance of success, and the election of liberal Members from among Merchants and others, less addicted to old Colonial prejudices”.²⁰⁰

Given that whites greatly outnumbered free people of colour even at the end of the slavery period, the political relevance of the franchise for free people of colour might appear quite small. However it was perception, not numbers, which made the challenge of free people of colour as potential voters a central political issue. The Assembly was well aware that the real size of the free population of colour was unknown, and despite the fact that there were known to be 6,534 of them in 1834, Smith believed that there were in reality 12,000.²⁰¹ The £10 franchise would have enfranchised about 125 free people of colour, whereas only 75 were enfranchised under the £30 franchise, according to Smith’s estimate. All or most of these new voters were in Bridgetown, where white and non-white merchants were also demanding franchise reform to give Bridgetown its own seat in the House of Assembly, rather than sending representatives for the entire parish of St. Michael. The total electorate in 1833 was 1016, of whom 446 were in St. Michael, mostly in Bridgetown.²⁰² Although, as Handler argues, the bill would have enfranchised a small number of people, it was hoped by Smith, and feared by the Assembly, that it would be enough to tip the scales in St. Michael in favour of the urban merchant interest, which, although wealthy, was excluded from political power by the voting strength of rural landowners, and was systematically excluded from the Council. In 1833, Smith wrote to Stanley that:

²⁰⁰ CO 28/111 Smith to Stanley, 27 September 1833.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 29 October 1833. Smith correctly estimated the white and slave populations as 15,000 and 83,000 respectively.

²⁰² Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 103.

I do promise myself from... the absolute necessity that will come of providing some means of representation to the Class expecting freedom, that the subject will be recommended to the local Legislature, by the King, and in the mean time I beg to assure you, I have most perfect confidence in the Loyalty, patience and attachment of the free colored and free Black Classes. ²⁰³

Conclusion

Even before the imperial act of emancipation was passed in late 1833, amelioration and the changed political atmosphere of the post-war era were already transforming relations between slaves and free people of colour, free and slave, and white and non-white in Barbados. Amelioration and imperial abolitionism provoked more assertive challenges from free people of colour and slaves against racial segregation and slavery. By the 1830s, however, even élite civil rights agitators of colour had adopted the demand for political rights which had been made earlier by less affluent free people of colour. The circumstances of 1833 elicited expressions of racial awareness among free people of colour, expressions of which had previously only emerged publicly in the urban street protests of free people of colour and slaves. However, after the 1817 testimony bill, divisions of class assumed a new political importance among free people of colour, as resentment grew among those excluded from the bill. After 1823, these class divisions deeply influenced how free people of colour chose to struggle against racial segregation.

‘Race consciousness’ and bitter divisions of class and tactics would characterise non-white politics in Barbados in the post-emancipation era. This argument is developed further in Chapters 4 and 5. The next chapter examines how the “semi-freedom” of apprenticeship further unsettled relations between free people of colour and slaves. It also discusses how various factors, particularly, class and gender, shaped the responses of pre-emancipation free people of colour to emancipation, and its impact on their lives.

²⁰³ CO 28/111 Smith to Stanley, 27 September 1833.

Chapter 3

Unequal Freedoms: Apprenticeship and Free People of Colour, 1833-1838

In August 1833, an imperial emancipation bill was passed, scheduled to take effect on 1 August 1834.¹ There was no legal precedent for parliament to impose an act of emancipation upon self-legislating colonial assemblies. However, the Colonial Office insisted that any colony failing to pass similar legislation before August 1834 would have it forced upon them, a legal precedent which the colonial governments were desperate to avoid.

The emancipation acts passed in Britain and the West Indies between 1833 and 1834, with the exception of Antigua, established a period of “apprenticeship”, during which former slaveowners and former slaves could “adjust” to freedom. The second phase of emancipation began with the early end of the apprenticeship period in 1838, two years before the originally stipulated time.

This chapter is a study of the period between May 1833 and August 1 1838. Unlike previous examinations of apprenticeship by historians W.L. Burn, William Green, Woodville Marshall and William Mathieson, it focuses on the relationship between and within socio-legal groups in Barbados, rather than on the struggle between the colonial and imperial governments.² While it discusses the labour conflicts between former slaveowners and former slaves (now apprentices), it examines apprenticeship as more than a process in which labour relationships

¹ The full title of the emancipation act of 1834 was the “Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the Manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves.” It passed its third parliamentary reading on 7 August 1833 and received royal assent on 28 August (see *The Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 & 4 William IV, London: Parliament Commons, 1833).

² W.L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937); William Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Woodville Marshall, “The Termination of the Apprenticeship in Barbados and the Windward Islands: An Essay in Colonial Administration and Politics,” *JCH*, vol. 2 (May 1971), pp. 1-45; William Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926).

previously based on legal distinctions between slave and free were reshaped. Apprenticeship also helped to transform the meaning of freedom for both ex-slaves and people who had been free before emancipation.

Section one examines how the legal structure of apprenticeship, with its complicated system for categorising former slaves and provisions for their manumission, created new and marginal groups of free people of colour between 1834 and 1838. Ex-slaves in general sought alternatives to field labour for themselves and their children if they could, and these alternatives were usually the occupations which had been held by free people of colour and élite slaves. Former slaveowners manipulated the apprenticeship system to prevent apprentices from gaining their freedom, and to force former non-agricultural slaves to work as agricultural labourers, policies which disrupted relations between slaves and their free non-white kin.

Section two discusses the economic effects of emancipation on pre-emancipation free people of colour. Free people of colour were divided along class and gender lines in their responses to the state's attempts to regulate both the social and business activities of ex-slaves. Many landless slaveowners, including a number of female and non-white slaveowners, had survived by hiring out their slaves' labour. For them, emancipation represented a loss of livelihood as well as social status, since they lost their position of legal superiority over slaves. The majority of free people of colour who were not slaveowners were, like whites, affected by increased job competition from ex-slaves, particularly in towns, and by repressive government legislation to control ex-slaves' business activities. Ex-slaves' increased migration to Bridgetown created a sense of panic among many whites and élite non-whites about the social, economic and moral order.

Section three takes up the question of moral panic, discussing the debate about public morality, Christian "respectability", class and race relations which emancipation unleashed in Barbados. Emancipation, like amelioration, challenged

the race and class hierarchies of former slave societies, as élite whites sought to reinforce racial segregation to preserve the social order which they perceived to be threatened. Free people of colour and slaves were affected by the cultural policies which accompanied emancipation, and both adapted to and resisted them. Emancipation also brought about cultural transformations in Barbados among free people of colour and slaves. Elite free people of colour played a particularly ambivalent role in this moral and social debate. While they used their own interpretations of “respectability” as a new tool to challenge the racial hierarchy of the island, they helped to disseminate an élitist concept of “respectable” behaviour against which ex-slaves’ cultural practices were dismissed as inferior. Even some very progressive free people of colour assumed that ex-slaves’ proper “station” was that of agricultural labourers.

Becoming Freed People of Colour: Manumission and the Meaning of Freedom During Apprenticeship

The Institutional Framework of Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship system was based on three principal institutional structures: the system of classifications for ex-slaves, the stipendiary magistracy and the committees of appraisal. The 1834 act divided former slaves into three main categories with different dates at which full emancipation would be granted. Children under six years old on August 1 1834 were declared completely free on that date, and could only be apprenticed with their mothers’ consent.³ Slaves over that age were divided into two categories. One was “non-*praedial*” apprentices — who had not performed work directly related to agricultural production, such as domestic servants, seamstresses, fisherman, and some tradesmen — who were scheduled to be freed on August 1 1838. The largest category was “*praedial*” apprentices — agricultural labourers, including some tradesmen whose work was deemed by the Barbadian legislature to have been directly related to agricultural production — who were to be

³ Imperial emancipation policy rested on the assumption that fathers played little role in raising ex-slave children.

freed on August 1 1840. Praedials were further divided into “praedials attached to the soil,” consisting of estate labourers who had lived and worked on one estate and were not hired out to others as a matter of course; and “praedials not attached to the soil”, that is, agricultural labourers who had been hired out.⁴ In total, there were 66,637 Barbadian apprentices as of August 1 1834, of whom more than 80 per cent were classified as praedial.⁵ This figure included everyone from headpeople to “inferior” field labourers, presumably children and elderly labourers, as well as 2,992 tradesmen. There were also 14,732 children who were automatically free, and 1,780 elderly, ill or otherwise ineffective ex-slaves not classified for apprenticeship because they could not work, making a total ex-slave population of 83,149, the second largest in the West Indies after Jamaica.⁶ All apprentices were to continue to work for their former owners without pay, but retained the right, while apprenticeship lasted, to receive rations of food and clothing, to occupy the houses and use the estate land which they had access to as slaves, and to receive medical attention.

The act also created the position of “stipendiary” or “special” magistrates, one-man labour tribunals who took over the judicial role of slaveowners and the slave courts. Both apprentices and employers had to bring complaints relating to labour issues which they could not resolve to their mutual satisfaction to the special magistrates. Across the Caribbean, these magistrates were predominantly British ex-army officers. They answered to the imperial government, were paid by the imperial government and could only be removed from office by the Governor. It was hoped

⁴ Mathieson, *British Slavery*, pp. 299-300.

⁵ The working hours of praedials were regulated by law, whereas no limits were placed on the working hours of non-praedials, on the grounds that, since most of them were domestics, their owners would require their services all the time. The Colonial Office reasoned that, because of this difference, it was more equitable to free non-praedial apprentices before praedials (See *Barbadian*, 22 January 1834).

⁶ Barry Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 550. These figures are from the 1834 census of the slave population, taken so that the imperial government could reimburse planters for the loss of their slaves. “Field labourers” were 56.7 per cent of the slaves enumerated for compensation. For discussion of compensation see Kathleen Mary Butler, *The Economics of Emancipation: Jamaica and Barbados, 1823-1843* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 7-73.

that their presence would ensure a fair hearing for apprentices.⁷ Each territory was divided into districts over which the magistrate had jurisdiction. Barbados was divided into first six and later seven districts, each presided over by a stipendiary magistrate during the emancipation period, but maintained afterwards, with minor alterations, as districts of police jurisdiction.⁸

As a means to encourage “industriousness” among apprentices and prevent their abuse by their former owners, the imperial and colonial emancipation acts instituted measures for mandatory manumission. These regulations were designed to enable apprentices to buy the remainder of their apprenticeship from their owners, or to be awarded it as a gift or compensation for ill-treatment. Therefore, another crucial duty of the stipendiary magistrates was to chair the committees of appraisal, also established under the act, which determined the monetary value of an individual’s apprenticeship. Three local magistrates also sat on these committees of appraisal. Apart from the committees of appraisal, apprentices could also be freed by private arrangement between themselves or their family members and the apprentice’s employer, or as compensation for harsh treatment at the hands of an employer in violation of the terms of apprenticeship.⁹

Between 1834 and 1838, these institutions regulated relations between former slaves and free people, whites and non-whites, and former slaveowners and their apprentices. However, while the Colonial Office had hoped apprenticeship would ease the transition to freedom, the system produced chaos in the legal, social and

⁷ Woodville Marshall (ed.), *The Colthurst Journal* (New York: KTO Press, 1977), pp. 8-10. The stipendiary magistrates had to be non-West Indian “respectable persons wholly unconnected with the colonies” and “men uninfluenced by the local assemblies, free from local passions” (statement made by Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Stanley, [1833 n.d], quoted in W.L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship*, p. 197).

⁸ In 1836, District E, which encompassed the four parishes of St. Peter, St. Lucy, St. Andrew and St. Joseph, was divided into two, creating District F District A, which encompassed the parish of St. Michael and part of north-western Christ Church, was administered as one district, but had a sub-division for Bridgetown, District A (Town Division).

⁹ “An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies...”; CO 30/21 No. 555, “An Act for the abolition of Slavery... and for ascertaining and enforcing the reciprocal duties between them and their employees,” passed 5 April 1834.

economic boundaries of anglophone Caribbean societies. The complicated system of classifications, manumission procedures and staggered dates for full emancipation, produced an unequally distributed freedom whose benefits were often nullified by other legal provisions or loopholes in the emancipation act. Finally, apprenticeship's differentiation of ex-slaves according to legal categories deriving specifically from their occupations introduced a degree of legal restrictiveness and created lines of division among apprentices which had not been features of slavery. The system ultimately created new bases for tension among ex-slaves and between ex-slaves and free members of Barbadian society.

The Marginal Freedom of Ex-slave Children

The most problematic aspect of apprenticeship's manumission laws was the freeing of children under 6 years of age. Planters hoped that the clause of the 1834 act which made mothers responsible for freed children would force parents to apprentice their children as praedials, thus ensuring that children received the basic necessities. However, planters were disappointed in this hope. Throughout the Caribbean, parents were reluctant to apprentice children, and in Barbados, only one child was ever apprenticed.¹⁰ Planters blamed Governor Smith for allegedly instructing parents "that they should work their fingers to the bone rather than ever put their children apprentices...."¹¹ Parents universally resisted the apprenticeship of freed children. Ex-slaves associated field labour with the worst aspects of slavery, and were determined that their children should be trained in non-agricultural work. They preferred alternatives were the jobs which had characterised the slave élite and free people of colour. In 1837 the irate editor of the *Barbadian* complained that:

In every Colony complaints are made of the idleness and profligacy of the

¹⁰ Thomas Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, p. 66; CO 31/52 1837 [n.d]; "Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the condition of the Free Children of Apprenticed Labourers."

¹¹ PP 1842 vol. 13, "Report from the Select Committee on West India Colonies," Question 1828; Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 63; CO 31/52 Report of the Committee [on] Free Children.

young negroes (in a fatal moment set free by the British Government), and of the shameful conduct of the greater part of the parents of these children, in resisting every advance by their employers to bring them up in honest and industrious pursuits... we have heard from various quarters that the *mothers* of these free children decidedly refuse to let them be employed in even the slightest work, either for their former owners, or for any one else.... [T]he deluded parents... declare their preference to *trades* for their children. But if the *boys* are to be all tradesmen, what do they design for their girls? These, we presume, are all to be hucksters....¹²

This statement illustrates how the gendered division of labour which had characterised slavery played a critical role in structuring apprentices' visions of free life. Notions of gender informed emancipation policy towards slave families, and the 1834 act placed legal responsibility for children with mothers, on the presumption that slave fathers played little role in the care of children. As a result, local authorities and the colonial press blamed apprenticed mothers for the withdrawal of children from agriculture. In 1837, during his annual address to the court of grand sessions, the chief justice stated that the prejudice of ex-slave mothers against field labour was "so strong... that they will not allow their children to assist them even in their own gardens, their desire being manifest, where they permit them to be employed, to make them Domestic or Mechanics."¹³ According to the editor of the *Barbadian*, domestics were of the view that "their male children cannot be respectable unless they are taught to be tradesmen, &c," and railed against "the obstinate determination of the mothers of the children already free not to apprentice them as agricultural labourers.... [I]t has been found difficult, nay impossible to persuade these deluded parents that *all* cannot be tradesmen, butlers, grooms, &c. &c".¹⁴

However, slaves also had negative perceptions of the apprenticeship system, which influenced their decisions about their children. The *Barbadian* claimed that mothers were refusing even to ask their former owners for medical attention for sick

¹² *Barbadian*, 8 February 1837 (emphasis in the original). In Jamaica many parents sent their children to live in towns with friends or relatives (see Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, p. 66).

¹³ *Barbadian*, 13 December 1837, speech of the Chief Justice at the opening of the Court of Grand Sessions.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20 September 1834 and 24 February 1836.

children, for fear that the children would be bound into praedial apprenticeship.¹⁵ The 16th provision of Drax Hall estate's rules for conduct illustrates that mothers had reason to fear being forced to perform extra labour if they approached estate authorities for medical attention for free children. The manager of this large St. John estate ordered that the "Woman [is] to be called on to pay the Doctor for their free children or to work 4 Saturdays for each Child & to be told that if the Child falls ill without a Doctor, it shall be bound out [evicted] on its Recovering."¹⁶

This divergence in opinion between planters and their apprentices was fertile ground for conflict during the apprenticeship period. Planters sought, by various means, to manipulate the classification regulations in order to assign as many of their slaves to field labour as possible, even slaves who had never worked in agriculture in their lives. At Drax Hall, for example, the manager stated that he was determined "by every means in my power to lessen the number of Domestics and nonagriculturalists."¹⁷ It was in planters' interests to carry out such a policy, because the compensation payment which a slaveowner received for a field labourer was higher than for a domestic, and the apprenticeship period longer.¹⁸ Additionally, planters across the anglophone Caribbean wanted to increase agricultural production to cope with falling prices and anticipated increases in production costs after 1838.¹⁹

The fact that there was, potentially, an entire generation of ex-slave children growing up with no experience of field labour represented, in the words of the Chief Justice, "The chief draw-back to our future prospects,"²⁰ and planters responded with particular harshness. During the course of the apprenticeship period, estate nurseries, which had previously existed on most large plantations, where children too

¹⁵ Ibid., 20 September 1834.

¹⁶ Drax Hall Estate Records, C. Barrow, "Rules for the uniformity of conduct, c1834-1838," BDA.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Claude Levy, *Emancipation*, p. 43.

¹⁹ See Chapter 5, p. 267.

²⁰ *Barbadian*, 13 December 1837.

young to work were looked after during the day by a slave woman while their parents worked, were closed.²¹ Although the stipendiary magistrates denied it, British MP and anti-apprenticeship campaigner Joseph Sturge claimed, after his 1837 tour of the West Indies, that in Barbados at the start of the apprenticeship period, planters had taken children whose parents refused to apprentice them and “put them out in the road.”²²

While apprenticed parents universally objected to having their children engaged in field labour, the fate of children, both those freed in 1834 and those too old to be freed under the 1834 act, was influenced by the financial position and status of their parents. Only the comparatively privileged apprenticed élite or free parents of apprenticed children could buy their children’s freedom or send them to school. Most agricultural labourers probably lacked the skills and the connections to get their children into a trade. The official number of free and apprentice children in school was 13, 869 in 1837, of whom 2, 430 were the free children of apprentices.²³ Many apprentices could not afford to pay school fees, and a disproportionate number of ex-slave children who were in school probably had a parent or family member who was either free, an apprenticed non-*praedial* or a *praedial* tradesman. In 1836 one stipendiary magistrate reported that: “Many of the first-class apprentices send their free children to school, but the ordinary field people have neither time nor means, and they [the children] are generally wandering about the Negro huts, shunning their parents’ employers....”²⁴ The following year another magistrate estimated that as many as 25,000 children in the island were neither working nor being educated.²⁵

²¹ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 63.

²² CO 28/119 No. 133, MacGregor to Glenelg, 12 June 1837, enclosing extracts from the *Antigua Herald*, 13 and 29 May 1837

²³ PP 1837-38, vol. 48, *Negro Education*, pp. 228-229.

²⁴ CO 28/117 No. 613 President Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, enclosure 4, Monthly report of the stipendiary magistrates for August 1836, District F, George Kennedy.

²⁵ CO 28/119 No. 15, MacGregor to Glenelg, 26 January 1837, enclosing monthly reports of the stipendiary magistrates, December 1836, No. 2 District A, Rural Division.

Manumission Under the Apprenticeship System

A similar bias in favour of non-*praedial* apprentices was also reflected in the pattern of manumission during apprenticeship. Even before the advent of full legal freedom in 1838, apprenticeship further entrenched the association between certain types of labour and free status. While the decreased cost of buying freedom and the abolition of manumission fees made it easier for the *ex-slave élite* to buy themselves out of apprenticeship, freedom was still too costly for most agricultural labourers. The average appraisal by stipendiary magistrates of *praedial* male apprentices in late 1837 was £30 and, for a female, £24, while the average for non-*praedial*s was £12.3 for a man and £10.7 for a woman. Local magistrates generally appraised male and female *praedial* apprentices at £32.6 and £33 respectively, and male and female non-*praedial*s at £12.7 and £10.9.²⁶ Even the stipendiary magistrates' average appraisal rate was beyond the means of most agricultural workers, and stipendiary magistrates were frequently accused of deferring to the judgement of local magistrates in cases of appraisal.

Manumission, whether by appraisal or private agreement, favoured apprentices who were skilled labourers or domestics, who resided in a town, and who were non-*praedial*. For example, of 808 manumissions recorded by stipendiary magistrates in the first year of apprenticeship, 531 were non-*praedial*s, and 277 were *praedial*s.²⁷ Because of their greater financial means, it is likely that tradesmen who had been classified as *praedial*s accounted for a disproportionate number of manumitted *praedial*s. The imbalance between urban and rural patterns of manumission was stark: 661 of those freed in the first year of apprenticeship were from District A, the

²⁶ Governor's circular to special magistrates, 25 November 1837, BPL. Foreign stipendiary magistrates, like officials in the Colonial Office, considered male *praedial* apprentices more valuable because they assumed that women were less productive physical labourers. Local magistrates, themselves planters, were aware that most female slaves were field labourers.

²⁷ CO 31/52 Sessional Papers 1834-38, 18 August 1835.

parish of St. Michael, where Bridgetown was located.²⁸ In his diary the stipendiary magistrate for rural St. Michael, John Colthurst, noted that most apprentices in rural areas were classified as praedial and the cost of buying their remaining apprenticeship was so high that few could afford it.²⁹ His claims are corroborated by monthly reports from stipendiary magistrates from other rural areas. In August 1836, 24 men and 24 women were manumitted in Bridgetown, and between December 1836 and January 1837, the number was 17 men and 18 women, the majority of them tradesmen and domestics.³⁰ By contrast, the stipendiary magistrate for St. Joseph and St. Andrew, two of the island's poorest rural parishes, where most slaveowners were also quite poor, stated that there had been no manumissions in August 1836 because the apprentices were too poor.³¹

Apprentices tried to manipulate the laws in order to elicit lower appraisals. It was a common tactic to appear at an appraisal hearing dressed in rags and trying to look infirm.³² However, former slaveowners had the advantage of legal knowledge and the collusion of local magistrates when it came to manipulating the rules of appraisal. In his diary Colthurst complained that: "[T]he owners of the services of the apprentices... extol the qualifications of the apprentice wishing to purchase his discharge to the skies..., and by so doing appear determined, if possible, to inflict a penalty upon him for so being a good man..."³³ He related the story of the appraisal of a non-praedial cook which illustrates how local magistrates connived at manipulating the ignorance of apprentices to put freedom beyond their reach:

Upon this occasion, the two police magistrates of Bridge Town were my associates. A woman, a non-praedial apprentice, about 40 years old, who had the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, pp. 115-116.

³⁰ CO 28/117 No. 613 Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, enclosing monthly reports of the stipendiary magistrates for August 1836, District A, Town Division; CO 28/119 No. 15 MacGregor to Glenelg, 26 January 1837, monthly reports for December 1836, District A, Town Division.

³¹ CO 28/117 No. 613 Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, monthly reports, District F.

³² *Barbadian*, 7 September 1836.

³³ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, p. 114.

greater part of her life been a cook, claimed an appraisement, wishing to purchase her remaining time from her master. She appeared before me, and, as usual, her master said she was everything but an angel, and "could cook collops for a king." The usual questions were asked as to age, health, employment, and ability. All went smoothly, and there appeared every probability that the old lady would get off for a reasonable sum, till she herself, in the pride of her heart, said "I can cook everyting, massa. I can cook de turtle, I can cook de fish, I can cook de flesh, I can do more den dat, for I can make Bristol tripes, can you?" "Ho, Ho," said my brethren, "so you can make Bristol tripes, can you?" "Oh, yes, massa, better den come from Bristol." "Do you hear that, Major?" said these gentlemen. "I do," said I, "confound folly! Only she is a simpleton. Indeed, she would volunteer to establish her tripeability just now, and she will be likely, I think, to pay dearly for it." "This knowledge," said they, "we certainly think is worth five pounds of itself. So, if you please, we will add that sum to our first calculation." "Then," said I, "if you do, I must, on the part of the silly old woman, declare it no appraisement," and was about to quit the bench when they said, "Don't go, Major, will you not allow something on the score of the tripes?" "Not a penny," said I, "more than our first calculation, £9.5." This, after much argument, they agreed to; so I saved the old woman's bacon, despite her tripes.³⁴

As a result of owners' vested interest in misclassifying their apprentices, and the unequal access of non-*praedials* and skilled *praedials* to manumission, the difficulties of appraisal were, as Colthurst asserted, predominantly with non-*praedials*. Colthurst noted that the highest concentration of cases were "in Bridgetown and its neighbourhood, where also the whole of the apprentice population are of that description."³⁵ Despite the Colonial Office's insistence that the different dates for full freedom based on the classification system was not intended to be a means of "advantaging one class of apprentices over another,"³⁶ this was precisely how the difference functioned and was interpreted by apprentices and former owners alike. Misclassifications were a constant source of legal difficulty for stipendiary magistrates, and unknown numbers of non-agricultural labourers, particularly tradesmen, were suspected of having been misclassified as *praedials* by their owners.³⁷ There was a general suspicion among imperial authorities that many *praedial* tradesmen should not have been classified as such, and had been illegally

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

³⁶ CO 28/119 No. 116 24 May 1837, MacGregor to Glenelg, with enclosures relating to the classification of an apprentice named Rebecca.

³⁷ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, pp. 111-113.

transferred into agricultural labour by their owners.³⁸ Between July 1837 and June 1838 the imperial compensation commission changed the classifications of 1,166 Barbadian apprentices from praedial to non-praedial, due to deliberate misclassification by their owners.³⁹

Misclassification cases were frequently complicated and time-consuming. For example, in May of 1837, the Colonial Office and one of the stipendiary magistrates had to overturn the rulings of both local magistrates and the Solicitor-General of Barbados in the case of a domestic named Rebecca, apprenticed to Colleton estate in St. George. Rebecca had challenged her classification as a field labourer. The proprietor of Colleton admitted that Rebecca had the right to be classed as a non-praedial, because, as a slave, she had hired her labour from the estate for a dollar a month and worked on her own account as a domestic, effectively living as a free person. In his deposition a former manager of the estate admitted that there had been a number of other slaves at Colleton, who lived under similar arrangements. However, the proprietor argued that “her employment in a different manner was an act of kindness, and that it would be unjust if she should be now permitted to found upon it a title injurious to his interests”. The Secretary of State for the Colonies overturned the original decision, stating that: “Instead of exacting her services [the proprietor] accepted from [Rebecca] a monthly payment of a dollar, and it is not shewn that she would have earned more for him by working in the Field Gang.”⁴⁰

Family Strategies: Mixed Families of Free Non-whites and Apprentices

Rebecca’s case highlights the fact that apprenticeship gave many former slaveowners an incentive to end private arrangements which had permitted some slaves to live an independent existence in many respects indistinguishable from free

³⁸ PP 1836, vol. 49, Smith to Glenelg, 8 December 1835, enclosing Governor’s Circular to the Special Justices, 14 October 1835, pp. 16-18.

³⁹ Butler, *Economics of Emancipation*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ CO 28/119 No. 116 MacGregor to Glenelg with enclosures, 24 May 1837.

non-whites. During apprenticeship, the formerly commonplace policy of allowing apprentices to work on their own account in exchange for a monthly fee paid to their owners became a contentious feature of apprentice-employer relations. While many large planters, like the owner of Colleton, permitted such arrangements, many of the owners who adopted this strategy before 1834 were landless. For many such people, emancipation presented the prospect of losing their sole means of economic support, and, during apprenticeship, relations between such employers and their skilled apprentices deteriorated. In February 1837 the Bridgetown stipendiary magistrate attributed most instances of conflict “to the apprentices in this district being almost all non-*praedial*s, and belonging, generally speaking, to people in needy circumstances, who, not having employment for them within themselves [*sic*], hire them out, and try to extort from the apprentice more than he is able to pay.” Without the legal obligation of slavery or apprenticeship, skilled ex-slaves not employed full-time by plantations would have no use for their former owners, a fact of which landless employers and their skilled apprentices were both well aware.⁴¹

The abrupt end of hiring-out arrangements which had permitted slaves to be employed by their free kin produced upheavals within families. In 1836 Robert Cox, “a poor Labouring Black Man”, began a lengthy legal battle against the planter who owned his four children and their mother. After several years of an agreement whereby Cox paid rent to the owner so that the children could live with him in Bridgetown, the planter decided that it was in his interest to use three of the children, who were over six years old, as field labourers. The owner classified the three children as *praedial* apprentices, and took them back to his St. Thomas estate in January 1836. In his petition to the Governor, Cox said that he had regularly paid for the children’s hire and brought them to live with him in Bridgetown as soon as they became “serviceable” to the estate, probably as a means of saving them from field labour. According to Cox “his Children Were Born and Raised in Bridge Town and

⁴¹ CO 28/119 No. 32 MacGregor to Glenelg, 13 February 1837, enclosing monthly reports from the stipendiary magistrates for January 1837, No. 1, District A, Town Division.

[he] Assures Your Excellency they are not Attached to the Estate of the [owner] Mr. Armstrong and your petitioner began paying the Wages of his said Children [to the owner] previous to the Passing of the Emancipation Bill....” The oldest of the children had been trained as a seamstress during her years living with her father, while the two youngest, too young to work before emancipation, were “given voluntarily up to their father, on condition of his feeding and clothing them.” Cox was convicted of harbouring runaways and jailed by the Bridgetown magistrates. A friend eventually helped Cox, and bought the unexpired apprenticeship term of one of the children. However, the other children remained apprentices because Cox could not afford to buy them.⁴²

The tendency of former owners to renege on hiring-out agreements made during slavery also frustrated ex-slaves' and their free relatives' expectations of freedom in other ways which produced conflict during apprenticeship. During slavery, despite laws to the contrary, estate owners and managers had frequently turned a blind eye when relatives of slaves joined their relations as residents. Apprenticeship witnessed an increase in the numbers of slaves, frequently couples, one of whom was free and the other an apprentice, choosing to live together on the estate where the slave/apprentice worked. The free partner may have purchased or been granted freedom after 1834, or may have been free before that date. Planters responded to this trend with evictions, as they did when parents refused to apprentice their free children. In February 1838, the *Liberal* newspaper uncovered an extreme case in which nine free family members — five women and four children — were evicted simultaneously from Walker's estate in St. George. According to the *Liberal*, one of the women, named Margaret Rose, had lived with her husband for 17 years, and bought her freedom in 1834. When the women refused to take their children and leave, the manager filed a complaint with the local magistrate, who fined them and

⁴² CO 28/123 No. 264, Governor Evan MacGregor to Lord Glenelg, 22 September 1838, enclosing petitions of Robert Cox of St. Michael, 21 January and 23 February 1837, 9 January 1838. Case also mentioned in Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, pp. 68-69.

imprisoned them when they could not pay.⁴³

Women were apparently more likely to be the victims of eviction than men, probably because, after emancipation, in most British Caribbean slave societies, women tended to withdraw from field labour.⁴⁴ As Bridget Brereton argues, ex-slave families employed gendered family strategies in order to ensure the economic survival of families after emancipation.⁴⁵ Women moving to the homes of their male partners was, not only a reflection of a desire by partners to co-habitate, but one of the strategies adopted by parents to cope with the need to look after children during the day once estates began to close their nurseries. A planter told American abolitionists Thome and Kimball in 1837 that, since he closed his nursery, “the mothers spend half of their time ‘*in taking care of their brats.*’”⁴⁶ Finding enough time during apprenticeship to take care of free children was only possible on most estates if the mother or another female kin relation was free. In August 1837, the Moravian missionary at Mount Tabor recorded his involvement in a family dispute which indicates how apprentices sought to take advantage of the freedom of friends of relatives to provide care for their children:

Visited at Greens, found in one house an old woman who said that her master had given her free but she was without a house and took her lodging in the Gully under a rock. When I was wondering at the unwillingness of the people to give her a night lodging, the Mrs. of the House I met her in, said, that she had lodged her for some time, with the condition to mind her children, while she was working in the field, but she having been careless about them, the father of the children would allow her no more to stop there. I endeavoured to reconcile them to one another, in wh. as it appeared to me, I did succeed.⁴⁷

Such an arrangement was made possible by the fact that the elderly woman had been freed by her former owner, and was now in need of shelter. Former owners

⁴³ *Liberal*, 28 February 1838 and 7 March 1838. Since they were free people the case was under the jurisdiction of local rather than special magistrates.

⁴⁴ Bridget Brereton, “Family Strategies: Gender and the Shift to Wage Labour in the British Caribbean,” in Brereton and Kevin Yelvington (eds.), *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition*, p. 77.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 63 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁷ Moravian Diary, 2 August 1837

frequently manumitted apprentices who were no longer of any value to them by private agreement. Once free, elderly or ill ex-slaves could find it difficult to look after themselves, and came to depend upon family or community.

In 1836 a stipendiary magistrate reported that: "Those discharged in general follow their former occupations, except some of the women, who take to domestic work in their own families, and generally quit the occupation of field labour."⁴⁸ Many praedials who managed to acquire their freedom were probably women manumitted through the financial assistance of male kin who were officers, tradesmen or free people, and who had earned enough to buy freedom for their wives and/or their children. In the case of the evictions from Walker's estate, for example, Margaret Rose's husband, King Green, was a carpenter.⁴⁹ Again, this was probably a gendered family strategy, because, although buying the freedom of a praedial woman could be more expensive, a manumitted praedial woman could leave field labour and either look after children or take up a more lucrative occupation, like huckstering. The potential impact of the withdrawal of women from field labour posed a particularly serious economic threat to planters. Thus the trend of targetting women for eviction was also rooted in planters' economic self-interests.

Michael Craton's assertion that ex-slaves in the British Caribbean measured freedom in terms of access to land, and that "most ex-slaves wanted to be peasant proprietors",⁵⁰ appears too sweeping in light of evidence from post-1834 Barbados. Although slaves' garden plots were important to their survival and to the island's domestic market, these plots were usually less than an acre in size, and, compared to Jamaica, were rarely enough to provide the basis for an independent livelihood. Furthermore, even in Jamaica, as Thomas Holt argues, "not all slaves were willing or

⁴⁸ CO 28/117 Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, enclosing monthly reports for August 1836, District B.

⁴⁹ *Liberal*, 28 February 1838.

⁵⁰ Michael Craton, "Continuity not change: Late slavery and post-emancipation resistance in the British West Indies," pp. 324-347 in *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom*, p. 324. See also Jean Besson, "Freedom and Community: The British West Indies," pp. 183-219.

able to participate in the provisioning and marketing system, nor did all benefit equally from them. Indeed some worked as the hired labor of other slaves....”⁵¹ For many apprentices and their free relations in Barbados, the easiest freedom to exercise was that of personal mobility. Access to estate land for small farming, which consisted almost entirely of little garden plots on sugar estates, was one of a multiplicity of strategies pursued by Barbadian ex-slaves for making the most of freedom. Before and after 1834, jobs such as huckstering, domestic and artisanal work and seamstressing offered both the possibility of upward social mobility and the freedom to move around the countryside, from rural to urban areas, whether in search of work and better financial opportunities or to be with family. Such mobility was impossible under the terms on which planters expected former slaves to labour exclusively on their estates.

An assumption that land ownership played a central role in Barbadian slaves’ conceptions of freedom fails to take account of several crucial factors which might have influenced ex-slaves’ views of freedom in Barbados. By the mid-1840s, the little land available for purchase in Barbados cost between £60 and £200 an acre, compared with £4-£20 in Jamaica, and £40-£80 in Antigua.⁵² Additionally slaves’ kinship networks extended around the island and no place, however remote, was beyond walking distance of a town. Thus ex-slaves had few opportunities to establish themselves as independent agriculturalists, and had many incentives to adopt a mobile lifestyle.

During apprenticeship, stipendiary magistrates reported that many manumitted apprentices “betake themselves to the calling of petty hawkers and hucksters; few or none can be got to engage in agricultural pursuits,”⁵³ and the number of itinerant

⁵¹ Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, p. 67.

⁵² Bolland, “Systems of Domination,” p. 111.

⁵³ CO 28/117 Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, enclosing monthly reports for August 1836, District D.

hucksters and small shops increased.⁵⁴ Although no comprehensive records were kept on the numbers of ex-slaves who opened shops, taxation records give some indication. In Christ Church parish, for example, the number of shopkeepers paying taxes increased from 26 in 1835 to 78 in 1839.⁵⁵ The number also grew slightly in St. Philip, the only other parish for which statistical information on hucksters shops is available during apprenticeship, from 20 in 1834 to 27 in 1837.⁵⁶ These lists did not include itinerant hucksters, who would have been more numerous and difficult to enumerate. Most of the shopkeepers listed were men, probably because skilled men in particular were better able than most women to raise the capital required to establish a shop. This pattern was similar to that during slavery, when skilled male tradesmen who acquired their freedom often plied their trade and kept small shops.

“Intense Longing for Freedom”: Runaways and Rural-urban Migration

Under apprenticeship, field apprentices’ had Saturday afternoons off by law, and the weekend movement of apprentices back and forth between countryside and towns increased. The *Barbadian* complained that: “Every Saturday since the 1st August, 1834, agricultural labourers, stout, able fellows, have been in the habit of coming into town to get portering jobs, rather than hire themselves out to field labour. Pains should be taken to impress these people with a just idea of the importance and respectability which attach to the labours of agriculture.”⁵⁷

Even before apprenticeship began, Barbadian authorities worried that ex-slaves, like free people of colour and many runaways, would migrate permanently away from the countryside. In 1833, Governor Smith warned the Secretary of State for the Colonies that apprenticeship would bring largescale relocation of labourers’ to

⁵⁴ CO 28/120 No. 215 MacGregor to Glenelg, 24 September 1837, enclosing montly reports for August 1837, District C.

⁵⁵ Christ Church vestry minutes, 23 November 1835; 18 January 1836; 16 January 1837; 18 January 1838 and 17 January 1839.

⁵⁶ St. Philip vestry minutes, 25 March 1834, 25 March 1835, 16 January and 25 March 1837

⁵⁷ *Barbadian*, 21 November 1835.

Bridgetown.⁵⁸ There were early signs that the apprenticeship system would itself encourage such migration. In July 1833, slaves learned that emancipation would entail an apprenticeship period before they were declared fully free, and an unprecedented number of them immediately ran away. In that month, the number of runaway slaves caught and confined in the Bridgetown cage rose from the usual average of around 12 a day to 48, reaching a peak of 59 in October 1833. Although the total number of runaways overall is impossible to know, those actually caught were thought to be a fraction of the number at large. In November Governor Smith had to issue a proclamation demanding that runaways return to their owners. Numbers dipped briefly between March and early June 1834, during the period when the Barbados emancipation bill was being debated, passed and publicised. However, as August 1 1834 approached, the number of runaways in the cage increased from 25 on June 7 to 42 on June 28, reaching 57 by July 26. The increase provoked another proclamation issued by the governor in July, threatening runaways who did not return before August 1 1834 to extra apprenticeship after the official apprenticeship period had expired.⁵⁹

Despite the patterns during slavery, Barbadian officials were not prepared for the numbers of rural people who began to move to the towns after 1834. While the population of Bridgetown was generally estimated at around 20,000 up to the 1830s, and was, apparently, declining slightly on the eve of emancipation, by 1837, the estimate rose to 30,000.⁶⁰ The only possible source of this increase was rural ex-slaves, many of them runaways. By early 1838, stipendiary magistrates and the governor had recognised that the freeing of non-*praedial*s on August 1 1838, while the majority remained apprentices, could occasion a total breakdown in public order,

⁵⁸ PP 1835, vol. 50, Smith to Stanley, 13 July 1833.

⁵⁹ *Barbadian*, 20 July, 10 and 17 August, 25 September, 12, 19 and 26 October, 16, 23 and 30 November, 14 December 1833; 18 January, 8 February, 1 March, 12 April, 3 May, 7 and 28 June and 9, 23 and 26 July 1834. The cage was, literally, a cage where captured runaways were displayed to the public until their owners claimed them.

⁶⁰ Lloyd, *Letters from the West Indies*, p. 11.

if the runaway problem escaped the control of the state. Although no official statistics on runaways were maintained, the stipendiary magistrate for rural St. Michael reported that, during the first two years of apprenticeship, an average of ten runaways who had fled rural estates for Bridgetown, and had been caught by the authorities, were sent into his office each morning.⁶¹ In January, based on the collective reports of the stipendiary magistrates for December 1837, Governor MacGregor wrote to the Colonial Office recommending that apprenticeship end completely on August 1 1838:

In my opinion the manumission of the non-*praedial* apprentices in the ensuing year will cause great discontent among those of the *praedial* class termed tradesmen; many expressed their dissatisfaction at the distinction made between themselves and a certain portion of their brethren in trade, not belonging to lands and classed non-*praedial*... Desertion will, in my opinion, be occasioned by the great facilities which will be afforded the *praedials* among their numerous liberated relations and friends for that purpose.⁶²

As August 1838 approached, the entire system of differentiating free people from apprentices appeared to be on the verge of disintegration, as the problem of coping with alleged misclassifications became overwhelming. In March 1838, the new stipendiary magistrate for Bridgetown, the Antiguan journalist and abolitionist of colour Henry Loving, reported that he already had 105 cases, of which he had so far managed to settle 57 — 56 of them in the apprentices' favour. "Intense longing [for freedom]" he added, "is the only motive by which the Slave of 1833 is guided at this moment". He expected the number of cases to rise, because many apprentices were afraid they would not be able to appeal their classifications after August 1 1838. He spoke of a "feverish something [*sic*] pervading them to be changed into 'four year people'", which would make it impossible for apprenticeship to endure another 12 months.⁶³ As soon as the local act ending apprenticeship was passed in May 1838, Loving reported that all requests for re-appraisal ceased.⁶⁴

⁶¹ CO 28/119 No. 143, MacGregor to Glenelg, 20 June 1837, enclosing monthly reports for June 1837, District A, Rural Division.

⁶² PP 1837-38. vol. 48, MacGregor to Glenelg, 1 January 1838. •

⁶³ CO 28/122 No. 108 MacGregor to Glenelg, 12 May 1838, enclosing monthly reports for March 1838, District A, Town Division.

⁶⁴ CO 28/123 No. 140 MacGregor to Glenelg, 12 June 1838, enclosing reports for May 1838, District A,

In their recommendations, none of the stipendiary magistrates referred to the political situation in Britain, concentrating on the impossibilities of administering the apprenticeship system in Barbados after August.⁶⁵ Even so, In June 1838, pressure from the anti-slavery movement coupled with widely publicised reports of the abuse of the system, forced the British government to pass legislation, binding on all of the West Indian colonies, to terminate apprenticeship in August of that year.⁶⁶

Apprenticeship illustrated how ex-slaves' expectations of freedom were influenced by the examples of free people of colour and élite slaves during the era of slavery. However, while the lives of free people of colour during slavery may have foreshadowed the trends of apprenticeship, most free people of colour were deeply ambivalent about emancipation. The next section will examine how apprenticeship transformed the social and economic boundaries between free people of colour and former slaves. These changes, and the repressive response of the legislature to attempts by apprentices and ex-slaves to exercise their freedom, created common ground for resistance between former slaves and free people of colour. Yet they also highlighted the potential crisis which emancipation represented for free people of colour, whether because of the loss of their slaves or because of the threat posed by competition from the emerging ex-slave population.

Changing Socioeconomic Relations

Gender, Occupation and the Impact of Emancipation on Free People of Colour

In 1837, two American abolitionists, John Thome and Horace Kimball, visited the West Indies to observe the controversial apprenticeship system. They met with a number of government officials, stipendiary magistrates and several leading free men

Town Division.

⁶⁵ Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship*, pp. 333-356.

⁶⁶ The Barbados act ending apprenticeship was an attempt to prevent the imperial government from imposing an act on the colony. However the imperial act for the termination of apprenticeship was still binding, making all colonial legislation on the question void (see Marshall, "The Termination of the Apprenticeship," p. 39).

of colour and their families. The abolitionists commented that, until recently, free people of colour in Barbados had not taken part in the debate about slavery and apprenticeship, but were generally “indifferent” or even “hostile” towards emancipation.⁶⁷ This section examines how free people of colour responded to and were materially affected by emancipation during the apprenticeship period. While many may indeed have been indifferent or hostile, there were few whose lives were not touched by it. For free people of colour, apprenticeship had far-reaching and conflictual economic, social and political implications.

Throughout the West Indies most slaveowners of colour were landless and fairly poor people, and were therefore among the large number of slaveowners for whom emancipation meant almost certain impoverishment. Just before the start of apprenticeship, the *Barbadian* mentioned a pamphlet, recently published in Jamaica, which argued that “a large class of coloured people” would lose their means of support as a result of emancipation.⁶⁸ The London agent for Barbados, J.P. Mayers, claimed that most landless slaveowners in Barbados were free people of colour, but provided no evidence.⁶⁹ Many landless slaveowners, particularly white and non-white women, were entirely reliant upon the labour of their apprentices for survival. The majority of landless slaveowners in Barbados lived in urban areas, particularly Bridgetown, where, as mentioned earlier, many skilled apprentices were most likely to abandon their previous owners as soon as they were free, and where employer-apprentice relations were frequently tense.

Few female slaveowners of colour were wealthy, and many owned small shops. However most of their income came from hiring out their slaves, and having domestic slaves was a mark of high social status. Furthermore, shopkeepers who had used

⁶⁷ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 76.

⁶⁸ *Barbadian*, 30 July 1834. I was unable to find this pamphlet, whose author, according to the *Barbadian* reporter, was someone named Nielsen.

⁶⁹ Butler, *Economics of Emancipation*, p. 30.

slave labour would have to pay wages after 1838, which many could not afford to do. There was probably an even greater number of white women who faced a similar economic catastrophe. However, whiteness usually guaranteed a certain social position, as well as making these women eligible to receive parochial poor relief, which most parishes did not provide for free people of colour. For female slaveowners of colour in a marginal economic position, legal status was the only distinction separating them from slaves, and slave labour the only barrier between them and abject poverty.

The loss of income and social status which emancipation implied for some landless non-white slaveowners was illustrated in the case of a "coloured Lady" brought before stipendiary magistrate Colthurst by one of her female domestics for brutality. Her male partner, a colonel in the militia, had died and left her "besides other property, the services of eight or ten slaves, now apprentices". She kept a small liquor store near to St. Ann's military garrison. When she grew annoyed that Colthurst was laughing at her and sarcastically referring to her as "the queen of Sheba", the following exchange took place:

"Sir," said she, "I tell you I am neither a princess nor a queen." "Then," said I, "what are you?" "What am I, why I am Mrs. Colonel _____, by the by." "Good," said I, "now Mrs. Colonel _____, by the by, are you guilty of the charge your apprentice has made against you?... "I am, your Worship, but I am a hasty person, and was bred in slavery, and so was the poor dear Colonel, who always left the punishment of his slaves to me for seventeen years." "Well, madam," said I, "that will do. I should be sorry to detain you longer. I must, as the law directs, liberate your maid forthwith." "Sir," said madam, by the by, rising with a manner that really alarmed me, "you mean to free the hussy?" "Yes," said I, "I most certainly will, and that without delay." The maid cried out: "I am no more hussy than you." It was then high time to put an end to the scene by ordering madam by the by instantly to leave the court, at the same time directing her maid to come to me the following morning for her discharge.⁷⁰

The case reveals the difference between the pre-emancipation life and self-image of women in her position, and their economic and social decline after emancipation.

"Mrs. Colonel", long accustomed to brutalising her slaves with impunity as a mark of

⁷⁰ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, pp. 122-123, cited in Melanie Newton, "'New Ideas of Correctness': Gender, Amelioration and Emancipation in Barbados, 1810s-1850s," *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 21 (3), 2000, pp. 94-124.

her legal status and power, was now just another non-white shopkeeper, and her maid could challenge and insult her publicly and still walk away with her freedom. Although “Mrs. Colonel” used a married name, it is highly unlikely that she was ever actually married to the colonel, since a white Barbadian man legally married to a woman of colour would never have been accepted as a militia officer. She did not, therefore, even have the social status of widowhood.

In 1837 Thome and Kimball witnessed another case in Bridgetown, also brought by a “colored lady” against her domestic. The former slaveowner presented a list of charges of “insubordination” against her apprentice:

That the girl [the apprentice] brought a candle to her one evening, and wiped her greasy fingers on the (the girl’s) gown; second, That one morning she delayed coming into her chamber as usual to dress her, and when she did come, she sung, and on being told to shut her mouth, she replied that her mouth was her own, and that she would sing when she pleased; and fourth, That she had said in her mistress’ hearing that she would be glad when she was freed.

The magistrate sentenced the domestic to four days’ solitary confinement, but she was released back into her mistress’ service at the mistress’ request.⁷¹ Such acts of insubordination were a common means used by slaves to encourage owners to hire them out or allow them to find a new owner, or, during apprenticeship, so that employers would manumit them just to be rid of them.⁷² However this mistress probably could not face the social degradation of surviving without a domestic, and possibly could not afford to pay for one either.

By contrast, the approach of emancipation opened doors for many free men of colour in estate management jobs previously reserved for white men, which was a source of outrage to some whites. In December of 1833, a passerby found an anonymous letter lying by a road, addressed to Robert Jordan, the black sub-manager of the Codrington estates, in which the author pretended to be a slave

⁷¹ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 67.

⁷² Stipendiary magistrate Loving reported that apprentices would frequently “exhibit such restiveness and bad conduct, as to oblige their Proprietors to dispense with the remaining term of Service rather than be tormented by such disaffected persons” (CO 28/122 No. 60 MacGregor to Glenelg, 20 March 1838, enclosing monthly reports for February 1838, District A, Town Division).

accomplice with whom Jordan was plotting rebellion. The letter stated that, on January 1 1834, the “rebels” would “take the White fellows and give them all the fatal blow with Read [sic] Throats” and that “[W]e must not be afraid as our time is given us from the King and there is no one to do any thing but the King of Greats Britton [sic] all the free people will join us our way and by what you told me the last time I saw you, they all will your way to St. George’s, St. Phillipses [sic], St. Andrews and St. Josephs.” The Governor suspected that a white person, angered at the appointment of a man of colour to a position of plantation authority, had written the letter in order to implicate Jordan. However, the letter’s reference to other free people of colour joining the rebellion illustrates the social threat which the author perceived a man in Jordan’s position to represent.⁷³

During apprenticeship, references to free men of colour holding positions of estate authority as managers, overseers and bookkeepers increased, joined by former slave officers. These reports do not suggest that such situations were out of the ordinary. For example, the Moravian missionary at Mount Tabor made passing references to a “coloured” man named Joe Redland, who was either manager or bookkeeper at Redland estate. The fact that Joe’s surname is given as Redland indicates that he had no surname, and had been a slave on the very estate where he was now in a management position.⁷⁴ One rural stipendiary magistrate told Thome and Kimball of an apprentice “overseer” who, having made himself look elderly and ill at his appraisal hearing, had bought his freedom for £10, and was now employed by a planter as a manager at a salary of £30 a year.⁷⁵ Overall, however, the social and economic effects of losing slave labour were less dire for landless free people of colour than for landless whites. Thome and Kimball observed that:

⁷³ CO 28/113 Smith to Stanley, 8 January 1834. The correspondence of which the letter formed a part was reprinted for parliament, but the references to the letter were omitted, indicating that the subject was considered to be too politically sensitive for public discussion.

⁷⁴ Moravian Diary, 16 September and 18 December 1836.

⁷⁵ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 67. The authors’ use of the term “overseer” was probably a misunderstanding of the term ‘black overseer,’ which was another word for slave driver, and different from the “overseer,” who was the driver’s superior and a free person.

A large proportion, if not the majority, of the merchants of Bridgetown are colored. Some of the most popular instructors are colored men and ladies, and one of these ranks as high as a teacher of the ancient and modern languages. The most efficient and enterprising mechanics of the city are colored and black men. There is scarcely any line of business which is not either shared or engrossed by colored persons....⁷⁶

Urban Migration and Competition for Non-Agricultural Labour

Free artisans, domestics, hucksters and shopkeepers, whether slaveowners or not, now faced competition from ex-slaves desperate to enter the ranks of these occupations now that they were free. The *Barbadian* reported that Bridgetown was being "deluged with tradesmen of every description, who are starving each other".⁷⁷ The encroachment of ex-slaves on the skilled trades and on areas such as huckstering, shopkeeping, domestic work and seamstressing threatened to depress wages in these occupations. This was a particularly serious problem in Barbados, where wages for tradesmen and domestics were already low in comparison with other territories.⁷⁸

Merchants and tradesmen of colour, just like white merchants, saw the increasing presence of ex-slave in towns as a threat to public order and public 'morality' in general. Ex-slave hucksters, shopkeepers and tradesmen were also unwanted competition for white and free non-white merchants and artisans. Hence, free urban residents supported the establishment of an urban police force to control ex-slaves. In January 1834 Joseph Thorne, John Montefiore and Joseph Kennedy, all merchants of colour, signed a petition, along with other Bridgetown merchants, stating their willingness to pay taxes to support an improved police force.⁷⁹ The following month their names appeared on another merchants' petition requesting an

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

⁷⁷ *Barbadian*, 20 September 1834. There was a similar pattern of post-emancipation ex-slave migration to towns elsewhere in the Caribbean (See Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 88-89.

⁷⁸ See chapter 1, pp. 32 and 41.

⁷⁹ *Barbadian*, 8 January 1834.

improved police force and expressing concern about the possibility of increased rural-urban ex-slave migration to Bridgetown. William B. Nunes, Benjamin W. Massiah and William S. Wilkey, who were all influential merchants of colour campaigning for increased political and civil rights for free non-whites, also signed the petition.⁸⁰

At the same time, free people of colour were caught by the tide of repressive legislation intended to stop the flow of people from the countryside. In 1834 the legislature passed an act establishing the Bridgetown police force. Similar acts were passed during apprenticeship to establish police forces in the rural districts, as well as Speightstown and Holetown.⁸¹ The Bridgetown police act is particularly illustrative of the atmosphere of moral panic which surrounded issues of ex-slave control. Very little of the act discussed the structure of the police force. Most of it was dedicated to a detailed description of ex-slaves' business and social activities in the town, which the act gave the St. Michael vestry increased power to control.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 26 February 1834.

⁸¹ CO 30/21 No. 558, "An Act for the Establishment of Rules and Regulations for... the Rural Police of this Island...", passed 1 July 1834; No. 560, "An Act to establish a Police in Bridge-Town, in the Parish of Saint Michael," passed 29 July, 1834; CO 30/22, No. 622, "An Act for the establishment of a police force in Speights Town and in the Hole Town," passed 28 March 1837

⁸² The vestry was to have full power to pass ordinances:

relative to... all offences, evils, and inconveniences whatsoever in the said Town, or in the Streets, Squares, or place therein, or within the Carenage or Mole-Head, relative to the exercising, using, and carrying on of dangerous, noisome, or offensive Trades of every kind in particular Streets, or places, in the said Town; relative to Markets in the said Town (but not to extend to regulating or ascertaining the price of any commodity or article of provision which may be brought to sale within the said Town)... relative to all suspicious persons loitering about the Town in the day or night, and who can give no good account of themselves; relative to Taverns, Grog-shops, Punch or Tippling-houses, Retailers of Liquors of every description, Hawkers, Pedlers, Hucksters, Porters, and Boatmen, and to the fixing and regulating the rates at which Licenses may be granted to them respectively, by the Justices of the Peace regulating and appointed to carry this Act into effect; relative to forestalling and regrating; relative to the assize of Bread; relative to putrid, damaged, or decayed Provisions and commodities of every kind; relative to the building of Houses within the limits of Bridge-Town, materials of which such Houses shall be constructed, so as to render the same less liable to take fire; relative to decayed Buildings, and vacant spots of Land; and to all other nuisances; relative to Hogs, Dogs, and Goats, going at large, or otherwise, being in the said Town... relative to the dispersing of all Mobs, and for the punishment of all indecorous Swearing, Quarrelling, or improper behaviour in the Streets of the said Town; relative to the enforcing due observance of the Sabbath; relative to trafficking in the Streets; and relative to any matter or thing whatsoever, which may concern the good government and Police of the said Town (*An Act to establish a Police in Bridge-Town, in the Parish of Saint Michael, 29 July 1834, The Public Acts in Force, passed by the legislature of Barbados, from the First of William IV... Bridgetown, Barbados.*

In November 1835 the legislature passed an act authorising the enclosure of the Bridgetown market place, which included a lengthy appendix of by-laws for the “good government” of the capital. These included “An Ordinance Relative to idle, disorderly, and suspicious Persons,” “An Ordinance relative to Porters, Carters, Boatmen and Labourers”; “An Ordinance regulating the time for bringing Provisions, Poultry, Guinea-Grass, and other articles from the country-side into Bridge-Town”; “An Ordinance relative to hogs, goats and sheep going at large in the streets” and “An Ordinance relative to the dispersing of all Mobs, and the punishment of all indecorous behaviour within the limits of the Town.”⁸³ The most controversial of them was the “Ordinance Regulating the building of Houses.” This by-law outlined new building codes designed to reduce the number of wooden structures in the city, and empowered the Bridgetown magistrates to inspect any house and determine any repairs which were necessary to decrease the risk of fire. The purpose of this ordinance was ostensibly to prevent fires, but it was really a means of preventing new migrants from establishing themselves in the slum areas of the town. In his report on this ordinance Attorney-General Henry Sharpe described it as “salutary”. He noted that, although there was an eighteenth century building regulations act:

... [T]he provisions of this Act have been for many years totally disregarded and Buildings of a frail character and of very unsightly appearance have spread themselves in all parts of the Town thereby causing great insecurity in case of fire, affording numerous receptacles for abandoned and profligate characters, and converting many parts of the Town into little else than negro settlements.... [The end of apprenticeship will] lead to an insecure and unlimited establishment of a large portion of the emancipated population in the principal Town.⁸⁴

In March 1838, the vestry of St. Peter, which was responsible for the island’s second largest town, Speightstown, passed similar by-laws.⁸⁵

The legislature was also worried enough about the increase in huckstering to pass

House of Assembly, 1836, p. 39).

⁸³ *Barbadian*, November 21 1835; CO 30/22 No. 579, passed 10 November 1835.

⁸⁴ CO 28/117 No. 4 13 January 1836 Smith to Glenelg enclosing Attorney-General Henry Sharpe, “Observations upon certain Bye Laws ordinances and Regulations for the good Government of Bridge Town,” 29 December 1835.

⁸⁵ *Liberal*, 21 March 1838.

the “Act the better to regulate the sale of Goods, Wares and Merchandize by itinerant vendors” in 1836.⁸⁶ The *Liberal’s* comments on the law applied to both free people and slaves: “Some three or four years ago a poor woman, the wife of a poor mechanic, might assist her husband to maintain them, by a little petty traffic requiring a floating capital of one or two dollars. She must now obtain an annual licence for four or eight dollars, probably the whole of her profits!” According to the *Liberal*, prior to the “license mania”, it was not uncommon to see “girls of twelve or fourteen selling nuts, gingerbread, sugar cakes etc., her mother probably at home washing husband’s shirts or cooking his dinner, while he worked to support the family”. The *Liberal* went further to argue that the anti-huckstering act was, in fact, a danger to public morality, because state repression of women’s legitimate economic activities would force females to turn to “some less honorable profession, to which Legislative patronage [*sic*] has not yet been extended.”⁸⁷ This was a thinly veiled reference to the rise in urban prostitution.

In mid-1838 the plantocracy also took action to control the increase in estate wages which might result from uncertain control over the rural labour force after the end of apprenticeship. Planters’ committees in various parishes met to set limits on the wages of both agricultural and skilled plantation labourers,⁸⁸ a measure which would affect the wages for all skilled workers, whether they worked for plantations or not. In July 1838, shortly after a meeting of the committee of planters from the northern parish of St. Lucy on the wages question, a free shoemaker of colour was fined by a St. Lucy magistrate for saying that “it was foolish to think of establishing a fixed rate of wages, for no man could make him take less for a pair of shoes than he chose to ask for them.”⁸⁹

The legislature’s fire prevention by-law provoked protests from ex-slaves, free

⁸⁶ CO 30/22, No. 583, passed 16 August 1836.

⁸⁷ *Liberal*, 10 March 1838, cited in Newton, “New Ideas of Correctness,” p. 109.

⁸⁸ *Barbadian and Liberal*, 19 May 1838.

⁸⁹ *Liberal*, 4 July 1838. It is unclear under which law the man was fined.

people of colour and whites. Bridgetown property owners and landlords were concerned that the ordinances building regulations in particular would lower their property values. In January 1836, whites and free people of colour called separate mass meetings in Bridgetown to formulate protest petitions, but the organisers combined them in order to compose a single petition to Governor Smith. He refused to send the petition to the Colonial Office, justifying his decision in a letter to the Secretary of State on the grounds that the petition did not show the professions or trades of the signatories, adding that ignoring the petition was:

... [A] precaution which you will consider necessary when I inform your Lordship, that we have had no less than 1000 Apprentices discharged [manumitted from their apprenticeships] last Year from infamous Character; and we shall have about 2000 more this year — and my private information went, that many Apprentices have been called upon to sign the Petition and also many Children.⁹⁰

The petitioners also objected to the powers granted to the police under the ordinance to enter homes for the alleged purpose of inspecting chimneys and opposed another ordinance requiring that boatmen and porters have licenses.⁹¹ The licensing measure, like the fire prevention ordinance, was designed to discourage manumitted apprentices from coming to town. The fact that the issue of licenses was raised at the meeting might reflect the fact that the measure negatively affected employers whose apprentices worked in these occupations. It could also indicate the presence of men at the meeting who did such work, both free people and apprentices.

The meeting was held at the Bible Depository of the Auxiliary Bible Society of the Free People of Colour. The Depository, like the Charity School, was often used by free people of colour for political meetings. Smith tried to downplay the “respectability” of the gathering:

... [A]lthough it was pretended this was a general Meeting, comprized [sic] of White, Black and Coloured, it was well known to be got up at the instigation of two or three violent young colored Men and that there was not of any Color, one Person of considerable Property present, the Whites being low dissolute

⁹⁰ CO 28/117 No. 4 13 January 1836 Smith to Glenelg, with enclosures (emphasis in the original).

⁹¹ Ibid.

Persons, and every opulent Individual of the Black or Colored Class either declining to attend, or withdrawing when they witnessed the violence of the Meeting's Procedures.

Samuel Jackman Prescod wrote a letter to the *West Indian* newspaper rejecting Smith's claim that the meeting was composed only of people of colour. Prescod, who was at the time editor of the abolitionist *New Times*, owned by John Callaird, had been elected chairman of the meeting. In his letter Prescod declared that nearly 300 whites had been present, and that of the eleven whites who were elected to the committee, three had combined property values of well over £10,000. "The operation of the Bye-Laws," Prescod continued, "will depreciate this property over 30 per cent! No one therefore will wonder at these gentlemen coming forward to assist in every constitutional endeavour that may be made, to prevent this general depreciation of property."⁹² However, of the 21 names listed in Smith's letter to the Colonial Office 16 were men of colour and five were white.⁹³ With a few exceptions, few of the men of colour mentioned at the meeting were prominent philanthropists or campaigners for civil and political rights for non-whites, and none of them seems to have been particularly wealthy. One exception was Benjamin Eversley, who was a member of the Samaritans and had signed the 1823 counter-address.⁹⁴ Other prominent figures at the meeting — such as Prescod, Thomas Harris and John Collaird — were quite young men, who were in the process of consolidating their political reputations as editors of the island's first newspapers owned and edited by free people of colour.

Even if they opposed the details of the fire prevention ordinance, many élite men of colour probably supported the underlying aim of the vestry's 1835 ordinances, which was to prevent urban migration of apprentices that would have affected the business interests of urban free people. For example, none of the free men of colour who had signed the January and February 1834 petitions in support of a Bridgetown police tax seems to have attended the meeting. Thomas J. Cummins, who was a

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jerome Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 19.

member of the St. Michael vestry and one of only two vestrymen to vote against adopting the fire prevention ordinance, did not attend the meeting,⁹⁵ nor did other prominent non-white political and civil rights agitators. Neither does Cummins appear to have voted against the other ordinances, which affected the business activities of apprentices and lower class free people of colour.

Christianising Slaves: Free Teachers of Colour

Despite the challenges which apprenticeship posed; it created new possibilities for financial and social advancement for both free men and women of colour. A significant expansion in the role of free people of colour occurred in education. Between 1835 and 1841, the British government gave an annual subsidy of £30, 000 to a non-denominational trust called the Mico Charity and to various missionary societies operating in the British Caribbean for West Indian schools.⁹⁶ Although a parliamentary report on the state of education in the West Indies suggested that apprentices were “reluctant” to pay school fees and did not send their children to school regularly,⁹⁷ other reports stated that apprentices were eager for the chance to educate their children. In 1836 stipendiary magistrate Colthurst stated that, in Barbados:

... [A] vast many of the apprentices send their children to school and pay a bit a week for them, a quarter-dollar entrance, and the same at each vacation; those schools are well attended, but very few in number. Many of the apprentices hire their apprenticed children from their masters at a quarter-dollar a week, for the express purpose of sending them to school.⁹⁸

Studies of the development of education in post-emancipation Barbados have

⁹⁵ For the discussion of the circumstances of Cummins' election to the vestry see Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ CO 31/51 26 January 1836; Carl Campbell, “Social and Economic Obstacles to the Development of Popular Education in Post-emancipation Jamaica, 1834-1865,” in Beckles and Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom*, pp. 262-268. The Barbados legislature was supposed to match the grant, but, as one American observer noted in 1838, planters would support schools “only if some plan of labor could be combined with them. At present, they fear the children will not be taught to work...” (Sylvester Hovey, *Letters from the West Indies* [New York: Gould and Newman, 1838], p. 118.

⁹⁷ PP 1837-38, vol. 48, *Negro Education*, p. 175.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169 and 203; CO 28/119 No. 143 MacGregor to Glenelg, 20 June 1837, enclosing monthly reports of the stipendiary magistrates, No. 2 District A, Rural Division.

largely overlooked the role of local free people of colour as educators. Post-emancipation education has generally been studied as a means through which “English culture” was “transferred” to ex-slaves and free people of colour by whites.⁹⁹ However, according to the imperial education report, a larger pool of “respectable” white and non-white masters and mistresses was available to teach in school in Barbados than in any other island, and 12 male and 15 female teachers of colour were employed by the Church of England schools in the island. British abolitionists Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, who visited Barbados during apprenticeship, referred to the existence of a number of schools for apprentices where the teachers were all men of colour.¹⁰⁰ However the report enumerated 13,869 children attending school, and its author admitted that the schools surveyed were not “one-fourths” of the number which actually existed in the island because it was impossible to get accurate figures. The freeing of children under six years old, and parents’ determination to have their children learn skills which could save them from a life of field labour, created something of a primary education boom in Barbados. Numerous poor whites, free people of colour and even slaves made a living in private education. According to the report, there were “innumerable irregular channels through which desultory instruction is received by even the children and youth of the poorer classes, such as lessons given in the dwelling-houses of itinerant teachers....”¹⁰¹

These schools were frequently impermanent, and people of colour of various socioeconomic backgrounds ran such schools for apprentices and free children of

⁹⁹ Olwyn Blouet, “Education and Emancipation in Barbados, 1833-1846: A Study in Cultural Transference,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April 1981), p. 231; see also Joyce Cole, “Official Ideology and the Education of Women in the English-speaking Caribbean, 1835-1945 with Special Reference to Barbados,” in *Women in the Caribbean Project: Women in education*, vol. 5 (Barbados: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1982).

¹⁰⁰ PP 1837-38, vol. 48, *Negro Education*, pp. 228-229; Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1838 [reprinted 1968]), p. 130, 135 and 144-145.

¹⁰¹ PP 1837-38, vol. 48, *Negro Education*, pp. 228-229 and pp. 256-257; Newton, “New Ideas of Correctness,” p. 104.

colour. For some free people of colour, teaching combined economic return with support for emancipation or the “improvement” of children of colour, apprentice and free. For example, in 1837, between his editorship of the *New Times* and the *Liberal* newspapers, Samuel Jackman Prescod announced the opening of his school for “young coloured boys”, where “respectable” boys from rural areas would receive board on reasonable terms.¹⁰² This was the only advertisement for Prescod’s school which appeared in the press, and it is unlikely that he continued the school after he took over the editorship of the *Liberal* later that year. While Prescod was an advocate of the rights of ex-slaves and people of colour, he probably also opened the school in order to raise money for his newspaper. Shortly after becoming editor of the *Liberal*, he also sold his home and its attached retail shop and bakery in Lower Broad Street, the main thoroughfare of the town.¹⁰³ One man of colour, a Methodist, began a school in 1833 in Nelson Street to teach the children whom he saw playing in the road outside his house how to read. The school was run solely on charitable donations until 1837, when it was officially taken over by the Methodist Church.¹⁰⁴

The apprenticeship period therefore emphasised the ambivalent position of free people of colour as simultaneously victims and beneficiaries of the process of emancipation. The reshaping of economic, class and legal boundaries between whites, free people of colour and ex-slaves reflected deeper processes of social transformation during apprenticeship. The 1832 parliamentary reform and the act of emancipation reflected popular challenges to the aristocracy’s assumption of its right to “untrammelled rule”. However neither parliamentary reform nor anti-slavery fundamentally challenged the principle that property conferred the right of political participation. Rather, as Robin Blackburn argues, mainstream abolitionists saw

¹⁰² *Barbadian*, 29 March 1837.

¹⁰³ *Liberal*, 3 March 1838.

¹⁰⁴ PP 1837-38, vol. 48, *Negro Education*, p. 256; Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 71; Sturge and Hurvey, *West Indies in 1837*, p. 148.

emancipation as “integral to a reformed and moralised version of the established order” in both Britain and the Caribbean.¹⁰⁵ The next section examines how, in the aftermath of the reform movement and emancipation, new standards of both public and private behaviour, took their place beside élitist perceptions of property ownership in the organisation of the island’s socio-political hierarchy.

Making a New Moral Order: Christianity, Respectability and Race Relations¹⁰⁶

Race, Respectability and Socioeconomic Inequality

Prior to emancipation, West Indian planters did not see their own widespread habits of drunkenness, sexual promiscuity and arbitrary cruelty towards subordinates as a danger to their assumed right of political, economic and social superiority. The right of white men to behave as they pleased was, rather, an affirmation of their power. It was enough, as the electoral franchise law of Barbados stated, that they were white, Christian, propertied and adult males, for them to be guaranteed of their place among the landed interest of the British empire. However, abolitionism was a struggle over public morality as well as a question of legal reform and a debate over the relative merits of slave or wage labour. As Pamela Scully asserts:

Far more than simply abolishing bonded labor, British slave emancipation reconfigured the relations between men and women, individual and society. It was precisely because emancipation implied, at least in theory, that slaves would be free to live as they pleased that claims regarding the legitimacy of specific family, labor, gender and sexual relations became central to the struggle by various groups to shape postemancipation society.¹⁰⁷

By eliminating legal boundaries, emancipation called into question the racial hierarchy of West Indian societies, and, as the previous section illustrates, unsettled socioeconomic boundaries as well. Amelioration and emancipation gave some whites the sense that the social order was crumbling around them. In 1833, during the debate in Parliament over emancipation, the *Mercury* commented on an

¹⁰⁵ Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, p. 466.

¹⁰⁶ Parts of this section appear in Newton, “New Ideas of Correctness,” pp. 105-106.

¹⁰⁷ Scully, *Liberating the Family*, p. 2.

apparent decline in white attendance at church. The writer complained that “there is so much irregularity between Church and State, that we should not be surprised if all our civil and religious institutions were, in a short time, to cease, to be buried by the mass of amalgamation and confusion which every where pervades the land.” The *Barbadian* replied with disdain that:

The drift of the writer of the above article, to his remark about amalgamation, is obvious enough. It seems to annoy him that coloured and black people, free and bond, gladly embrace the opportunity of the night service to join in public prayer, and, praise to God, to hear instruction in His word; Ought not every Christian to rejoice in such an “amalgamation”? ¹⁰⁸

The *Barbadian*, unlike the *Mercury*, recognised that equality before God did not necessarily have to translate into social equality. However, emancipation’s threat to the social and cultural boundaries upon which assumptions of white supremacy rested was symbolised by the fact that slaves and free people of colour now had access to the same religious facilities and teachings as whites.

Christian proselytisation among former slaves and free people of colour was central to imperial policy on emancipation, and the British government provided financial assistance to missionary education projects in the West Indies, both Anglican and Nonconformist. Emancipation, literacy and the bible marched hand in hand, as amelioration and then emancipation provided missionaries and abolitionists with the opportunity for the mass education of slaves and free children of colour. ¹⁰⁹ The bible was the principle instrument of instruction, and in 1826, the Moravian missionary at Mount Tabor recorded that 49 children at Haynesfield plantation were learning to read and 15 could read “the gospels and acts”. ¹¹⁰ During apprenticeship, a teacher at an Anglican school in Barbados told Thome and Kimball that “the instructions of the school-room were carried to the homes of the children, and caught

¹⁰⁸ *Barbadian*, 6 July 1833.

¹⁰⁹ Blouet, “Education and Emancipation,” p. 222; Shirley Gordon, “Schools of the Free,” in Brian Moore and Swithin Wilmot (eds.), *Before and after 1865: Education, Politics and Regionalism in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998), pp. 1-12.

¹¹⁰ Moravian Diary, 21 October 1826.

up by their parents".¹¹¹

Planters had long resisted demands that they "christianise" their slaves because they recognised that concepts of Christian morality could be a force for social levelling.¹¹² In theory, Christianity opened the possibilities of social equality and public respectability to all, regardless of social or economic standing, and membership in a church became a defining mark of being free. While baptism rates had been increasing since the early nineteenth century, particularly since the 1820s, after 1834, the rates of baptism went into the thousands. In the parish baptism records of the Anglican Church the names of people who would have been slaves, distinguished by the absence of surnames, begin to appear in 1834, but rapidly became the majority, most of them mothers having their children baptised.¹¹³ Almost immediately after emancipation, burial was transformed into a "Christian rite", as plantation slave burial grounds fell into disuse, and burials in churchyards and chapels became the norm.¹¹⁴ In 1837 members of the congregation at the Moravian mission in St. Thomas proposed a subscription for the building of a hearse for the funerals of members.¹¹⁵

The willingness of slaves and free people of colour to learn to read the bible and adopt some of the cultural practices associated with Christianity, such as baptism and a church burial, did not imply wholesale acceptance of what state and church authorities considered "respectable" Christian behaviour. The colonial state had to

¹¹¹ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 71.

¹¹² Ligon, *True and Exact History*, p. 72.

¹¹³ RL 1/50A, BPL Parochial Register — Baptisms Solemnized in the Parish of St. Thomas; The St. Thomas Sharon Moravian Church Book shows that the majority of baptisms at Sharon between 1767 and 1839 were in the period between 1800 and 1839. Only 122 out of 1292 baptisms of women and 97 of men occurred before 1800. The rapid increase in numbers began during the amelioration period (baptism no. 250 was in 1824). The most rapid increase was in the early to mid-1830s and during the apprenticeship period. Between 1831 and 1833, there were 238 baptisms, or more than one-fifth of the total. The remainder occurred between 1834 and 1839.

¹¹⁴ A. Caldecott, *Church in the West Indies*, p. 109.

¹¹⁵ Sharon Church Book, 1 January-30 July 1837. Whoever paid 1/8 dollar would have the hearse at his/her funeral. Those who did not subscribe would have to hire it.

impose some standards of “respectable” conduct among free people of colour and apprentices. The new police force was used to enforce observance of the Sabbath, and, by the mid-nineteenth century, Saturday was the principle market day throughout the West Indies. However the most important strategy used by state and church authorities to encourage what they deemed to be proper “Christian living”, was the promotion of patriarchal family structures and Christian marriage, and the suppression of illegitimacy and “polygamy”.

Church, state and press all used public display of what they considered to be respectable private conduct among former slaves as an incentive to others to marry. In 1833, in preparation for emancipation, the management of the SPG estates offered special allotments to married couples, gave them a day and a half off every week, and wives were allowed not to come to work in the fields until 9am. In August of that year, a visit by the bishop of the see occasioned a “public display” of the married couples. This was followed by a “contract” between the estate attorney and the male slaves, in which the men promised to “provide for ourselves, our wives, and children, food, clothing, and all the other necessaries of life except in case of sickness....”¹¹⁶

Friendly societies, formed after 1828 throughout the West Indies, were the most widespread example of the public display of private morality.¹¹⁷ These mutual benefit organisations were directed by clergymen and based on a members' subscription to provide assistance in time of illness or great need, and help with important expenses, particularly funerals. In 1835 the St. Mary's Male and Female Friendly Societies had 300 members, most of them apprentices “but a considerable number also of very respectable free persons”. In June of that year, the St. Mary's societies held a procession through Bridgetown, joined by the children of the

¹¹⁶ CO 28/112 Secretary of the SPG to George Lefevre, 28 December 1833, “Report Respecting the Negroes on the Codrington Estates,” 1834; Extract of a letter from the Bishop, 30 August 1833; “Agreement between the Attorney and Negroes at Codrington, 16 August 1833.

¹¹⁷ Wells, *Friendly Societies*.

Colonial Charity School, to St. Michael cathedral, where the bishop addressed them.

¹¹⁸ 105 of the societies' members were married men, and any man or woman found to be having a relationship out of wedlock was automatically expelled. ¹¹⁹

In 1838, the *Barbadian* published a series of “conversations” between a married apprenticed couple, John and Jane, and their local Anglican minister, for the instruction of ex-slaves in correct moral behaviour. The articles were really for the instruction of whites, since ex-slaves and free people of colour were not the *Barbadian's* intended audience. The “conversations” give an indication of how élite whites were reconciling themselves to legal and social changes during the apprenticeship period. In the eyes of the editor of the *Barbadian*, a “respectable” Christian family life provided a means by which even a common labourer could be distinguished from others ex-slaves, but only if they did not aim beyond “their station” in life. These articles reassured whites that the social respectability of their former legal subordinates could be compatible with a state of political and economic inequality:

John: ... What difference is there between one labourer and another? Are they not all much alike?

Minister: ... [I]t will make a great difference whether your children are brought up to be idle, or industrious; to be drunken and disorderly, or sober and well-behaved; to be half-naked, like savages, or all in rags, like paupers, or else like the children of respectable Christian parents, to be always decently clothed in proper and whole garments.

Jane: Oh! sir, as to that, I am sure our children have as good clothes as any children on the Estate, and they very often wear them at a funeral or so, or sometimes to go to Church.

Minister: Yes, *sometimes* to go to Church:— for I fear, Jane, your children have not been quite as regular at Church as I could wish them to have been, and as I hope they *will* be now. But do not mistake what I said about dress. I do not wish to see your children *fine*, but decent and respectable.... Nobody will respect you the more, but much less, for wearing *fine* clothes: but to see you and your children coming to Church plainly yet neatly dressed, will give everyone a good opinion of your industry, and motherly care of them; particularly if they find that, through the week also, they are never naked or ragged, but always respectable. Besides clothing, the state of your house should receive your attention...

Nothing makes a difference to any man, and particularly to a labouring man, than a comfortable, happy home. It is the want of this that causes many a man,

¹¹⁸ *Barbadian*, 6 and 10 June 1835.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 June 1836.

and many a child too, to become vicious and good for nothing... There are few sights, John, equal to that of a Christian family, united in love and kindness to each other, and striving who shall do most to make the others happy. ¹²⁰

As far as some whites were concerned, while respectable behaviour was demanded of everyone, the respectability now available for ex-slaves did not translate into political and economic equality with whites. In the eyes of whites, the doctrine of respectability was a means for maintaining, rather than challenging, the economic and political hierarchy, while acknowledging the moral and social equality of all people regardless of race.

Condemning "Licentiousness": The Policing of White Male Behaviour and Interracial Sex

Elite whites were also expected to act according to their "station", and, after emancipation, racial distinctions which were no longer sanctioned by law were re-asserted via other means. Public association of "concubinage" and "polygamy" with ex-slaves and free people of colour, together with the perceived need to find new ways of enforcing racial segregation, led to white condemnation of interracial relations. After emancipation new standards of respectable white behaviour involved a cessation of illegitimate private intercourse with non-whites. In his fourth rule for the conduct of employees and apprentices at Drax Hall estate, the manager stated that he would turn "any white woman who cohabits with a color'd Man, now so common" off of the estate. ¹²¹ While this seems to be the only evidence that such relations between white women and men of colour were commonplace, there is ample material regarding the acceptability of "concubinage" relationships between non-white women and white men. ¹²² As the legal system which had justified the

¹²⁰ *Barbadian*, 24 January 1838 (emphasis in the original).

¹²¹ Drax Hall estate records, "Rules"

¹²² Barbara Bush, "White Ladies". See also Verene Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual values in a Slave Society* (London: Cambridge University Press), pp. 63-64 and 126-130; M.G. Smith, *West Indian Family Structure* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).

racial hierarchy was removed, interracial relationships, particularly between white men and non-white women, which had been a prevalent feature of life in slave society, now became a danger to the social hierarchy.

Whatever one's behaviour might be behind closed doors, "licentiousness" in white men was now a threat to the status quo, and could no longer be publicly tolerated. In 1835, a group of clergymen and planters formed the Barbados Temperance Society, which, following the international temperance movement, aimed to address the problem of alcohol abuse. Its membership was all white.¹²³ In September 1841 the *West Indian* newspaper was outraged when Lieutenant-Governor Henry Darling held a "Dignity Ball", which was attended by white men, in the governor's residence:

If we could bring our minds to believe that NO WHITE persons, who are recognised in society as gentlemen have danced at Pilgrim [the governor's residence] with women of impure character (which we are sorry to say we cannot do) still the well known truth that disreputable females have been there at any dance, cannot be considered in any other light than as a disgrace and indignity to the country.¹²⁴

The *Barbadian* described the party as an "assembly of dissipated men — white, black and coloured — and coloured women of ill fame." Two years later the *Barbadian* vilified a white police officer after his arrest for being involved in a brawl at a "mulatto dance" which he was attending.¹²⁵

In 1854, John Davy indicated that the public distaste for drunkenness and interracial relationships between white men and non-white women which developed after 1834 was lasting, and stated that:

What the hurricane [of 1831] did for the physical atmosphere of Barbados,

¹²³ *Barbadian*, 3 January 1835.

¹²⁴ From the *West Indian*, quoted in a letter to *The Liberal*, 6 October 1841 (emphasis in the original). In June 1841, Governor-General Sir Evan MacGregor died, and was replaced until 1842 by the Lieutenant-Governor of Tobago, Major-General Henry Darling (Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados*, pp. 490-492).

¹²⁵ The *Barbadian*, 25 September 1841 and 15 November 1843. The terms "dignity ball" and "mulatto dance" probably referred to the same thing as "quality ball," mentioned by a traveller earlier in the century as parties held by free coloured women for the entertainment of white men. Although it is not explicitly stated, this quote indicates that such parties could also be a means for white men to meet coloured prostitutes (see Hawthorne (ed.), *Yarn of a Yankee Privateer*, p. 104).

emancipation effected for its moral and domestic atmosphere, it purified that in a remarkable manner, and to the matron ladies and their daughters, always exemplarily correct, was an incalculable comfort. Licentiousness, whatever it might have been before, was almost entirely banished from society: young men no longer exposed to the same temptations as before, acquired new ideas of correctness and purer tastes and habits, all of an elevating kind favoring the development of the higher energies. ¹²⁶

Both the *Liberal* and abolitionists Thome and Kimball commented on the shift in racial boundaries which was occurring during apprenticeship, and saw the declining respectability of concubinage relationships between white men and women of colour as a positive development for the morality of the island. Thome and Kimball claimed that, rather than settling for “disreputable” concubinage relationships:

The colored females are growing in self-respect, and are beginning to seek regular connections with white men. They begin to feel (to use the language of one of them) that *the light is come*, and that they can no longer have the apology of ignorance to plead for their sin. It is the prevailing impression among whites, colored and blacks, that open licentiousness cannot long survive slavery. ¹²⁷

It is questionable whether apprenticeship and emancipation really reduced the numbers of such relationships, or whether it just made them *publicly* unacceptable yet *privately* tolerated. ¹²⁸ However, studies of other Caribbean territories have shown that emancipation was accompanied by the widespread destitution of the former non-white mistresses of white men, as they were abandoned by the men

¹²⁶ John Davy, *The West Indies Before and Since Emancipation, Comprising the Windward and Leeward Islands' Military Command* (London: publisher unknown, 1854), p. 74.

¹²⁷ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 79 (emphasis in the original). See also p. 58.

¹²⁸ An American named William Sewell, who visited the West Indies in the 1850s, argued that what may no longer have been openly sanctioned was now covertly tolerated:

The amalgamation of the two races is nevertheless very general, and illicit intercourse is sanctioned, or at least winked at, by a society which utterly condemns and abhors a marriage between two people of different color. There are cases, it is true, where white people have intermarried with mulattoes, but they are rare, and I know of none where the white is a born Barbadian. A white man who marries a half-caste is nearly always an Englishman, who comes to the West Indies with little or no prejudice against the race, and is ignorant of the unanimous feeling that, on this subject, secretly pervades the whole of Barbadian society.

See William G. Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour in the British West India*, (London: Frank Cass, 1861), pp. 67-68.

who had supported them.¹²⁹ A likely example of this change in Barbados involved a woman of colour from St. Peter named Molly Ann, described by a *Liberal* reporter in June of 1838 as reduced to a state of desperate poverty during apprenticeship. Abandoned by her white partner, she was too poor to support her child of this relationship, who died. The rector of St. Peter refused to bury the child because he had told her to break off the relationship and she had no money to pay for the burial.¹³⁰ While the *Liberal* was appalled at the rector's callousness, and successfully demanded a public inquiry into the affair, Prescod observed that:

This woman belonged for some time to the class formerly so numerous, but, to the credit of the colony, now gradually disappearing, whose chief support was derived from the persons with whom they lived in a state of concubinage.

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Missionaries and Rebels: Elite Free Men of Colour in the New Discourse of Public Morality

As the *Liberal's* views on Molly Ann's situation suggest, free people of colour participated in the development of this new discourse of public morality. Their participation reflected their various socioeconomic backgrounds, however it illustrated that respectability was an inherently paradoxical concept which could be used both to support and to undermine the racial and class hierarchy. The end of slavery enabled élite pre-emancipation free people of colour to challenge the plantocracy openly on the basis of the allegedly superior moral conduct of free non-whites, and to dispute how whites used the language of respectability in order to reinforce the racial hierarchy. Elite men of colour argued that their private behaviour entitled them to political rights, public prominence and social equality. In March 1835 Samuel Jackman Prescod criticised the commissioner of police's conduct in a case involving Prescod's son. This provoked a reply from the commissioner, in which he referred to Prescod's illegitimate birth, calling him "an individual who having no claim

¹²⁹ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 75; Lowes, "They Couldn't Mash Ants", p. 42.

¹³⁰ *Liberal*, 27 June 1838.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

to the name he assumes, in his ardent desire to become a conspicuous character has rendered himself an object at which the finger of scorn may justly be pointed....”

¹³² In his response, Prescod dismissed the commissioner’s references to his origins, and was scornful of the entire concept of “respectability” as employed by the commissioner and élite whites in general:

If Mr. Agard’s statement were the correct one, *bearing on my boy’s case... I should indeed have done something to be ashamed of! — I should indeed have forfeited — for only I can forfeit — my claim to the title of gentleman! A claim which, bye the bye, I have, despite my base birth, dared to assume — which I have hitherto maintained and, God willing, will maintain during life — not by frothy declamations, not by mere drivellings about “respectability” — but by moral conduct, “by being true and just in ALL my dealings — by keeping my hands from picking and stealing; and my tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering — by keeping (or at any rate endeavouring to keep) my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity — by not coveting, nor desiring OTHER MEN’S GOODS,” in short, by the general tenour [sic] of a life not disgracefully run through!* ¹³³

At the same time, after 1834, pre-emancipation free non-whites, as teachers, journalists and missionaries, helped to disseminate notions of Christian morality. Prescod himself believed in the need to reform the behaviour of the élite in order to promote proper relations among labouring people. His tone on the matter of ex-slaves’ morality was so condescending that even the pro-planter *Barbadian* was pleased with Prescod’s first article as editor of the *New Times* in 1836. Commenting on a proposal for a public lottery, Prescod expressed the view that gambling by the social élite was a bad example to the “lower orders”. In his denunciation of gambling, he exhorted the upper classes to smooth the transition from slavery to freedom by encouraging hard work and thrift among the poor:

In these colonies especially — and at this moment above all others — it is the duty as it certainly is the interest of all, especially of the wealthy and great amongst us, to set a good example before the lower orders — To endeavour, by every means in their power, to raise the tone of religion and morals, and to promote honest and persevering industry amongst them, as the *only proper* means of bettering their condition in this life, and of purchasing eternal happiness in the next!! We should justly consider that man a pest to society — we should hold him in abhorrence — and ransack the statute book to find a

¹³² *Barbadian*, 11 March 1835.

¹³³ *Barbadian*, 14 March 1835 (emphasis in the original).

punishment equal to his crime — who should go about the country preaching idleness to the people — denouncing industry and frugality — ridiculing the claims of children and of aged and diseased relatives on their support — and admonishing to thoughtless extravagance reckless of the future!... In short, and to come to the point, how can we expect the lower classes amongst us to be proof against the vicious examples of those whom they have, from their infancy, been accustomed to look up to as their superiors in morals and intellect? With what justice can we make laws to punish them those vices, which, if not sown by us, have, at least, been cherished and brought to maturity by the influences of our example? ¹³⁴

Two years later, in an early edition of the *Liberal*, Prescod and Harris announced the launch of the journal *The Labouring Man's Companion*, which they had established as an educational tool for “rendering a peasantry virtuous, industrious and happy”. The editors expressed the view that:

Legislation, it is generally admitted by sensible men, can do little in the way of prevention of crime, unless preceded by that better state of mind which questions not what should be done, but is only too weak of itself to resist those evil propensities that would deter us from the doing of it. It is to the effect, then, of this state of mind that our attention and endeavours must chiefly be directed.

The journal focussed on “Agricultural pursuits, Mechanics, Domestic Economy, with occasional notices of useful Inventions connected with these and other Arts of Life, Historical and Biographical Sketches, Moral tales, &c...,” with the object of turning “The Labouring Man” into “an honest, industrious, and useful member of the Christian community...” ¹³⁵ The journal’s mission demonstrates the editors’ élitism, as well as their unstated assumption that ex-slaves’ proper socioeconomic position was that of peasants or agricultural labourers.

Stipendiary magistrate Colthurst described the missionary methods used by Joseph Thorne, an ex-slave who worked as an Anglican catechist on five plantations during the apprenticeship period:

All the negroes on the plantation were speedily collected in a spacious boiling house with their children. A table and chair were placed at the upper end, where sat Mr. Thorn, the manager, and myself; the male apprentices ranged at one side, and the females at the other, and a host of children in front. The lecture was opened by a short prayer and hymn. Mr. Thorn then proceeded with

¹³⁴ *Barbadian*, 4 May 1836, extract from the *New Times* (emphasis in the original).

¹³⁵ *Liberal*, 28 February 1838.

his lecture, every word of which was suited to his hearers. He dwelt upon their religious and moral duties; their present situation and condition as contrasted with their former as slaves; their duties when they became positively free and entirely dependent on their own good conduct for support; the gratitude they owed to the Almighty who moved the hearts of the British people to release them from the chains and bonds of slavery; and so impressive was he at its close that, during the last prayer, eight or ten of the grown-up male apprentices, who were kneeling near me, blubbered and sobbed like children. ¹³⁶

After witnessing this performance, Colthurst prevailed upon the authorities on 18 of the 65 estates in the rural St. Michael district to allow Thorne to preach to their apprentices. The first stipendiary magistrate's report for 1836 revealed that, in rural St. Michael, where Thorne was a catechist, the total number of marriages among estate apprentices was 64, of which 59 had taken place on the five estates where Thorne acted as catechist. ¹³⁷ Colthurst credited Thorne with having "put a final stop to the practice of oboe [obeah]":

Coloured as he is, he has a double advantage, and from what has come to my knowledge, has done more real good in the colony than any other person in it, not even excepting the [Anglican] Bishop... when persuasion failed, he used the stick freely. His last performance was of this description, on which occasion he dispersed a crowd of negroes collected together to perform the barbarous ceremony of strewing the grave of a friend with provisions to help the dear defunct on his journey to his native land. On this occasion, Thorn (who is, by the by, a very able man) laid about him manfully, and scattered the assemblage in every direction, and served the provisions in the same way he did the commissaries. ¹³⁸

Class, Gender and Non-White Attitudes Towards "Christian" Morality

Most former slaves and free people of colour were influenced by the religious policy of the Christian churches, but were selective in their adoption of the "Christian" lifestyle being peddled as the proper way to live. Membership in a church, usually the Church of England, became an important mark of free status and respectability during the apprenticeship period, a development facilitated by the relaxed admission

¹³⁶ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, p. 83.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 79-80; CO 28/117 No. 613, Beckles to Glenelg, 21 September 1836, enclosing monthly reports, District A, Rural Division.

¹³⁸ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, p. 84. As Marshall points out, this was not an obeah ceremony. Slaves believed that the dead went on a journey. Marshall quotes Orlando Patterson's observation that this was likely the "retention and slight re-interpretation of the common African belief that on death one rejoins one's ancestors" (Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, p. 168).

policies of the Anglican Church. Unlike the Methodists and the Moravians, who screened potential members according to very strict standards of conduct, the Anglican clergy was, on the whole, more concerned with numbers than individual behaviour. In 1833, the Anglican rector of St. John's parish church invited the slaves of the surrounding area to be baptised. The Mount Tabor Moravian missionary complained in his diary that "many of them went and were baptized without having received any instruction previous to it; also some of our candidates who had not Patience to wait any longer were induced to go with the rest".¹³⁹ In 1837, Fanny, an apprentice, asked to be baptised by the Moravian missionary at Mount Tabor and he refused, on the grounds that she led a "vicious life", and "used to come to her speaking desiring to be baptised without being willing to alter her conduct". Fanny immediately went to Bridgetown and was baptised at the Anglican church.¹⁴⁰

The ease with which people could be baptised into the Anglican Church facilitated a process whereby new converts could become nominally Christian while comfortably continuing to engage in practices which, in theory at least, were incompatible with Christianity. Thus, while Christian baptisms and burials became the norm, "polygamy" and common law unions continued. In 1838, the Mount Tabor missionary station recorded 17 as the highest annual number of marriages which it had performed during apprenticeship. In 1835 there were no marriages at all in the church, although there were hundreds of slaves who signed up as candidates for baptism. That same year the missionary recorded a visit to the home of a free man of colour whose apprentice was also his mistress. When he arrived at the house he found the mistress reading the Bible to the family.¹⁴¹ Even among ex-slaves and free people of colour who were respected members of Christian congregations, "polygamy" stubbornly refused to disappear. In 1839, the missionary at Mount Tabor

¹³⁹ Moravian Diary, 1 January 1833.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1837.

¹⁴¹ Mount Tabor Moravian Church, List of Marriages in the Congregation, 1829-1839; Moravian Diary, 14 February 1835.

wrote wearily of a pre-emancipation free man of colour in the neighbourhood named Harding, who had married but “still keeps the woman whom he had befor [*sic*]”.¹⁴²

Although abolitionists and missionaries saw themselves as “freeing” women by tying them to one husband, the resistance of slave and ex-slave men and women to marriage was rooted in a belief that marriage would limit their freedom. The

Barbadian complained that:

In the present race of adults, the demoralizing practice of polygamy is far from being removed from the negro character, notwithstanding the severe denunciations from the pulpit, the censure of the press, the admonitions of employers, and the vast increase in the *form* of Christianity among them. They are, indeed, entering by numbers into the Christian fold, receiving, at least, the *form* of Baptism.... They still think the having of two or three wives (married to neither, or if married to one, still cherishing the concubine partners) — a venial offence; and the very women themselves in many instances, still “like to have it so;” although the *mates*, as these women *affectionately* call each other, occasionally show a disposition to tear each other to pieces in their jealous quarrels.¹⁴³

Differences in social status among former slaves and free people of colour influenced the adoption of patriarchal Christian family structures. Among the non-white elite Christian marriage was a symbol of good moral conduct, and prominent political and civil rights agitators were married either before emancipation or during the apprenticeship period. However, it is possible that there were even some very distinguished men of colour who were not baptised until their adulthood. The *Barbadian* claimed that, just before Prescod took over the *New Times* in 1836, he had “been lately united in marriage to an accomplished and pious lady of his own class, and... had become a Christian, converted from his wretched system of infidelity...”.¹⁴⁴ Although wealthy non-white merchant London Bourne was married in an Anglican church in 1822, he was not baptised until he was about 31 years old in 1824, six years after his manumission.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Moravian Diary, 3 January 1839.

¹⁴³ *Barbadian*, 30 August 1837 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 September 1840.

¹⁴⁵ Karch, “London Bourne,” p. 3.

Reports from the middle of the apprenticeship period also indicate that, although friendly societies were popular, they attracted mainly élite and relatively well-off apprentices and free people of colour. After a severe yellow fever epidemic in 1836 and 1837 it emerged that few members of the St. Mary's Friendly Society applied for aid, with the majority saying that they "did not absolutely require it". This revelation angered the Anglican bishop, who saw it as an indication that the society's members were "not of the poorest class".¹⁴⁶ Friendly societies' failure to attract a more diverse membership probably stemmed from their strict regulations on marriage and general deportment. In early 1836 the bishop stated in a sermon that, while the Bridgetown friendly societies were gaining increasing membership and "becoming more respectable", 29 men had been expelled for continuing to live with women to whom they were not married.¹⁴⁷

The continued prevalence of "illegitimacy" symbolises the struggle to define "respectability" in post-emancipation Barbados. Christianity and its stress on the importance of legitimacy and marriage reinforced opinions that women who had children from more than one father or out of wedlock were "common" and lacking in respectability.¹⁴⁸ However, it remained the norm for non-white mothers not to marry, even if they were in long-term relationships.¹⁴⁹ Thus, while Christian marriage and a legitimate birth for one's children were the pinnacle of respectability, an individual man or woman of colour was unlikely to experience social ostracism for being in a relationship and for having children without be married. Female-headed families probably accounted for a significant number of non-white households throughout the

¹⁴⁶ *Barbadian*, 13 May 1837.

¹⁴⁷ *Barbadian*, 25 May 1836.

¹⁴⁸ *Liberal*, 14 March 1840, report on the case of John Watts v. Frances Partridge, accused of using ill language in the street. Partridge allegedly called his wife an "unmannerly woman," and compared her unfavourably to Partridge's mother who "had children all for one man; others had them by all men, and were common women".

¹⁴⁹ Davy, *Before and Since Emancipation*, pp. 92-93.

post-emancipation period.¹⁵⁰ Decisions about marriage and families by and large reflected a practical position and a negotiation between Christian and African-Barbadian conceptions of respectability, rather than a passive acceptance of British and élite Barbadian values.¹⁵¹

Conclusion

As a system of incomplete and unevenly distributed freedom, apprenticeship shifted the legal, economic, social and cultural boundaries between free people of colour and other legally and racially defined groups in Barbadian society. The response of free people of colour to the changes wrought by apprenticeship reflected their ambivalent position in Barbadian society, since many non-white slaveowners were in fact people of precarious socioeconomic status. Even people of colour who did not own slaves were negatively affected by state attempts to regulate the behaviour of apprentices. The response of pre-1834 free non-whites was also significantly determined by their gender and socioeconomic background. Apprenticeship illustrated the diversity of pre-emancipation free people of colour, and the shifting bases for alliance and divergence between their perceived interests and those of ex-slaves. However, emancipation was accompanied by a shift in the meaning of social importance of "respectability". Elite free people of colour interpreted respectability as a concept which implied the possibility of social equality, and used it to challenge white claims of moral authority.

¹⁵⁰ Henshall-Momsen, "Gender Roles," p. 147.

¹⁵¹ Jean Besson, "Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women," in Janet Momsen (ed.), *Women and Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean Perspective* (London: James Currey, 1993), p. 19; Diane Austin-Broos, "Redefining the Moral Order: Interpretations of Christianity in Postemancipation Jamaica," in McGlynn and Drescher (eds.), *The Meaning of Freedom*.

Chapter 4

“The Children of Africa in the Colonies”: ‘Race’ Consciousness and the Politics of Emancipation, 1833- 1842

This chapter examines how and why slave emancipation transformed the political role of pre-emancipation free people of colour in Barbados. It argues that, particularly after 1838, the concept of ‘race’, as a political ideology implying a necessary solidarity between ex-slaves and pre-emancipation free people of colour based on skin colour, became a central feature of the struggle by free people of colour for equal political and civil rights and racial desegregation.¹

Between the beginning of apprenticeship and the early 1840s, élite pre-1834 free people of colour, besides expressing support for emancipation, began to base their claims for political equality with whites on emancipation itself. Once emancipation had removed the legal distinction between slave and free, élite people of colour claimed the abolition of slavery as the moral and legal basis of their own ‘liberation’ from political subordination. They recast their struggle for political inclusion in light of their presumed right to be the legitimate representatives of all people of African descent on the basis of shared racial origins.

The decision by élite men of colour to champion the cause of ex-slaves was, in part, a continuation of the élitist assumption that property and education gave them the right to speak on behalf of all free people of colour. After emancipation, when all people of colour were free, why should they not now claim to speak for ex-slaves? Despite this élitism, a wider cross-section of free people of colour became involved in demanding racial equality during the 1820s and early ‘30’s. After the intervention of less prominent people of colour who opposed the old élite, the struggle became a

¹ See Kevin Yelvington’s definition of race and ethnicity as ideologies: “... [A] people’s conception of ‘peoplehood’ based on a sense of their putative links to some ancestral group or community.” Yelvington goes on to argue that the kind of “consciousness” to which the ideology of race gives rise is “a culturally constructed phenomenon precisely when people act as though it is not constructed at all” (Yelvington, “The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad,” p. 190).

more disparate social protest for racial desegregation and equal political rights, and formerly pro-slavery agitators changed their public stance on slavery to one of neutrality.² In the early 1830s, the old élite was joined by a new generation of individuals like Samuel Jackman Prescod, who sought to harness this broad base of support as the justification for their claim to represent a large constituency of people. After 1834, these men had a great deal to gain by making a decision to support emancipation, presenting themselves to the imperial government as the legitimate 'protectors' of ex-slaves, and maintaining popular support in Barbados.

Despite these clear signs of continuity and opportunism, the élite's shift towards political solidarity with ex-slaves was neither simply the outgrowth of the pre-emancipation activities of free people of colour nor purely a matter of strategic political manoeuvring. The success of abolitionism reflected a major shift in ideas about 'race' and its role in the Atlantic world. British slave emancipation was a triumph over the belief, which had long sustained slavery, that Africans and their descendants were, by nature, deserving of slavery. Emancipation was an example of what Benedict Anderson describes as "profound changes in consciousness". Such changes: "... [B]y their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity... engenders the need for a narrative of 'identity'." ³

Emancipation, particularly full emancipation in 1838, produced such a transformation in consciousness, changing how pre-emancipation free people of colour saw themselves in relation to ex-slaves and to the idea of 'blackness'. Between 1834 and 1838, even men who had previously exhibited no sense of solidarity with ex-slaves, and had once even been hostile to emancipation, began to speak of their rights in terms of *race*. Many free men of colour redefined their political

² See Chapter 2.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 204-205.

role as the challengers of the plantocracy on behalf of all people of African descent.

However the concept of 'race' was subject to competing interpretations.

Emancipation may have rested on the idea that differences of racial origin did not give one 'race' the right to own another, but it did not, in the eyes of British officials, necessarily imply political equality.⁴ The idea of race which free people of colour adopted as the basis of their demand for equality with whites was at variance with an evolving imperial discourse which ordered the world in terms of cultural and political hierarchies based on racial difference.

Section one examines the process by which, between 1833 and the middle of apprenticeship, élite pre-emancipation free people of colour began to articulate their demands for equal rights on the basis of a need to provide political representation for ex-slaves. Class differences among pre-emancipation free people Barbadian society influenced this shift, which was also connected to an urban movement for electoral reform, as white and non-white Bridgetown residents, particularly merchants, joined forces to challenge the political hegemony of the plantocracy.

Section two illustrates how this alliance for franchise reform increased the public respectability of élite free people of colour and of their philanthropic and social activities, even making it conceivable for some of them to be elected to office. Between 1834 and 1842, several men of colour, now accepted by whites as 'respectable' members of the community, were appointed to positions of influence which gave them a direct say in emancipation policy. However, the issue of emancipation increased the potential for divisions among people of colour, as popular support began to divide between those who supported the more radical abolitionism and anti-segregationism of the *Liberal* and *New Times*, and those who were more apprehensive about the effects of emancipation.

Yet, despite their disagreements, élite free people of colour shared a paternalistic attitude towards ex-slaves. As Joanne Melish Pope illustrates in her study of race

⁴ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Basingstoke: MacMillan and St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1982), pp. xii-xiii.

and emancipation in New England, “the discourse of ‘race’ shaped and fatally compromised [the] efforts” of white and non-white abolitionists to improve the “condition” of lower class free people of colour and ex-slaves. In Barbados, as in New England, as a result of this racialised discourse, élite free people of colour “often described the problem of the degraded “condition” of free people of color in... essentialist language.”⁵ While Barbadian political and civil rights advocates ‘disowned’ slavery by constructing their discourse of race consciousness, they also “whitened” the memory of slaveownership by overlooking the fact that many people of colour had themselves been slaveowners.

Section three situates this shift towards abolitionism and race consciousness in Barbados within a changing trans-Atlantic discourse on the relationship between race, slavery and British imperialism. It examines how this new racial discourse manifested itself among free people of colour as they began to argue that people of African descent were one people, equally entitled to the rights of full participation in the political system. After the end of slavery, people of colour combined a sense of political loyalty to the British empire with racial identification with Africa as an ideology of political liberation. However, in the minds of imperial and local government officials, the concept of ‘race’ combined with class paternalism to determine the boundaries of “equality”, and to limit political access for people of colour.

In addition, the ideology of racial solidarity was frequently contradicted by the role which both pre-emancipation free people of colour and former élite slaves played in state and planter repression of ex-slave field labourers. Many people of colour themselves propagated racist notions of their own colour.

⁵ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 3.

**The Franchise Extension Movement and the Emancipation Question,
1833-c1837**

Between Popular Pressure and Imperial Support: The Non-white Elite vs. the Colonial Legislature, 1833-1834

Before the 1823-24 address controversy, élite free people of colour sought to downplay the fact that they were of the same racial background as slaves by emphasising that freedom allied their interests with whites. After 1824, these men pursued their demands for civil and, eventually, political equality through an alliance with an increasingly abolitionist imperial government. Although this represented a breaking of ranks with the local plantocracy, non-white equal rights agitators made no explicit public statements drawing connections between their own marginal position in Barbadian society and the existence of racial slavery. Yet, in their seemingly apolitical philanthropic activities, they provided charitable relief and education for both free people of colour *and* slaves, illustrating that, despite the legal boundary between themselves and slaves, the connection between race and slavery created a basis for identification between free people of colour and slaves.

Thus, ambivalence on the issue of slavery had characterised the political and philanthropic activities of free people of colour before 1834, but unity among the élite was preserved in part by a strategic neutrality with regards to slavery. However, by 1833, this position of neutrality became more difficult to maintain. The heightened political tension surrounding emancipation increased the legislature's determination to block the desegregation of politics and public institutions at precisely the time when free people of colour saw possibilities for political advancement beginning to open up.

During apprenticeship a profound change occurred in the political relationship between free people of colour and ex-slaves. This change occurred in the context of widespread demands by both landless white and non-white Barbadians, particularly merchants and artisans, for political change during and immediately after the

apprenticeship period. This section examines the course of this transformation in the politics of the island between 1833 and the end of apprenticeship, illustrating how rapidly, during apprenticeship, pre-emancipation political and civil rights campaigners adopted slave emancipation as the basis of their struggle.

As emancipation approached, élite free people of colour struggled to maintain unity in the face of the legislature's intransigence over the issue of racial equality. Yet, despite the support of the abolitionist imperial government for their demands, the January 1833 petition supporting the President's decision in the Robert James rape case was the only reference which élite equal rights agitators made to emancipation before the summer of 1834.⁶

Governor Lionel Smith's arrival in early 1833, and his public support for the removal of barriers against the political advancement of free people of colour, both raised the hopes of these people and antagonised the legislature. Smith considered free people of colour to be a reliable intermediary between the plantocracy and ex-slaves, since they had shown themselves loyal to the imperial government throughout the final decade of abolitionist struggle. Furthermore, Smith wished to protect the interests of ex-slaves without giving them direct access to the political process. He assumed that this intermediate political role should be filled by pre-emancipation free non-whites.

Thus, Smith saw extension of the franchise to free people of colour who possessed enough property to meet an equalised qualification as part of his political strategy for coping with emancipation.⁷ In May 1833, he addressed Barbadian free people of colour:

You are, in my opinion, not only fully entitled and qualified to be raised also to confidential civil employment, but I consider it very desirable, at this moment, that you should be appointed Magistrates in particular.... [B]ut much as I wish to see this wise and just measure adopted, I have not the power to do it,

⁶ See chapter 2, pp. 141-142.

⁷ The 1831 Brown Privilege Bill had set the qualification for the right to vote and to give evidence in court at £30 worth of annual taxable property for free men of colour, but retained the £10 qualification for white men.

without the concurrence of his Majesty's [legislative] Council. Should I fail in gaining their support for you, I will seek for these powers from home.⁸

A few months later, in a private list of suggestions to the Colonial Office regarding how best to implement imperial emancipation policy, Smith made it clear that he considered free people of colour as valuable intermediaries between the empire and ex-slaves because of their race. He suggested that, rather than remain with their former owners as apprentices, all ex-slaves should be made the apprentices of the Crown and turned into "military labourers" under the supervision of the army. They should be moved into military barracks and supervised by "European conductors and sub-conductors", with free men of colour, "selected for intelligence", as corporals.⁹

However, the legislature blocked Smith's attempts to appoint men of colour to high office. In May 1833, he tried to appoint Thomas J. Cummins to an officership in the St. Michael militia. In 1834 Smith described the St. Michael militia as being "a good deal composed of Free people of color and Free Blacks who have long been in a state of dissatisfaction, at not being allowed to be Commissioned Officers, no qualification whatever, being required for white Officers, up to the Rank of Captain."¹⁰ However, he backed down in the face of opposition from the legislature.

The legislature's rejection of Cummins's appointment provoked a mass meeting of free people of colour. The proceedings of this meeting illustrate the division between those who favoured a deferential approach towards the legislature, and those who were both impatient with the legislature and emboldened by Smith's public pronouncements. Hundreds attended, and Samuel Jackman Prescod proposed several resolutions for presentation to the Governor. Prescod stated that the continued exclusion of free men of colour from positions of public trust was "disgraceful to the community." He added that the 1831 franchise reform was "a dead letter", and that the legislature had made that reform more out of "*necessity* than

⁸ *Barbadian*, 15 May 1833.

⁹ CO 28/111 Smith to Stanley, 8 July 1833. These suggestions were not publicised.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; CO 28/114 Smith to Spring Rice, 26 September 1834, Papers relating to the "Memorial of Freeholders of St. Philip on the appointment of Mr. Gaskin as Colonel of Militia."

from a conviction of the *justice* of our claims.” The meeting voted to present an address to the governor, the contents of which illustrate how the legislature’s rejection of Cummins symbolised, for free men of colour, the dismissal of all their claims to political equality:

We verily believe — indeed, we have indubitable proof — that there are some individuals of the opposite class, who never contemplated that [the 1831 Brown Privilege Bill] which acknowledged our rights, was to be more than nominally beneficial; and who will, therefore, view with displeasure, any attempt of the Executive to raise the most worthy individual of our body.... We beg to assure your Excellency, that only the certainty that no individual of our body will ever be officially recommended to your Excellency for public situations, could have induced us to bring our claims to your Excellency. ¹¹

As Jerome Handler points out, “some freedmen felt that the resolutions were too strongly worded” ¹² and proposed amendments, but the overwhelming majority at the meeting were in favour of Prescod’s resolutions and the collective address, which were passed “amidst loud cheering”. Among those who objected were prominent free men of colour such as Joseph Kennedy and Thomas Harris Jr. However, they bowed to majority opinion, and Kennedy, Harris, Prescod, Cummins, and Anthony Barclay Jr. signed the address. ¹³

Although this address was more forceful than previous ones, demanding full equal rights and accusing the legislature of dishonesty, it was couched in élitist language which reveals that free people of colour accepted the principle that class should determine political enfranchisement:

We beg your Excellency that none in this community can be more convinced than we ourselves are, of our inability, as a body, to cope with our white fellow subjects in talent, wealth, and consequent respectability. We are aware that, owing in part to the political disadvantages under which we have hitherto laboured, there are, comparatively, but few of our body who can reasonably expect to participate, with the other free class, in the fruition of those social and political advantages which should result from an acknowledged equality of rights.

All, therefore, that we ask — all that we expect — and we hope reasonably —

¹¹ *Barbadian*, 15 May 1833.

¹² Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 106.

¹³ *Barbadian*, 15 May 1833. The meeting in the first documented reference to Anthony Barclay Jr.

is; that the few who are qualified, will be admitted to participate with their equals on the other side. The exaltation of them must indirectly tend to the exaltation of our whole body; and... your Excellency will have ensured the heartfelt gratitude, not only of those who may be immediately benefited by it, but of the whole free coloured and black body. ¹⁴

Thus, while they recognised that the relative impoverishment of free people of colour in comparison to whites was rooted in history, they still did not question the fundamental assumption that “talent” and “wealth” defined the “respectability” necessary for full political participation. In addition, this address, like previous addresses since 1823, made no reference to the issue of emancipation, focussing solely on the right of élite free non-whites to the same privileges as “the other free class”. The fact that positions of authority in the militia, one of the institutions most associated with slavery, were so important to free people of colour, also suggests that, whatever individuals might think, as a group they placed racial equality among free subjects above slave emancipation. Even in August 1833, when the imperial act of emancipation was actually passed, making the freedom of West Indian slaves the following year inevitable, there were no recorded statements issued by Barbadian political and civil rights campaigners of colour on the imperial act. There is no indication that they saw emancipation as in any way connected with their struggle for equality.

The approach of emancipation brought no sign that the legislature had any intentions of repealing discriminatory political and civil rights legislation. Wealthy free men of colour became more willing to embrace methods which, prior to 1834, had led to internal division and debate. In December 1833, four free men of colour from St. Philip and Christ Church — Thomas and Edward Weekes, Benjamin G. Nurse and James E. Williams — “invaded” the white section of Christ Church parish church. They announced to the vestry board that that “nothing could compel them to leave... that they did not intend to come again to molest us, but on that day they had come and were determined to sit there in defiance of all opposition.” The Christ Church

¹⁴ Ibid.

vestry prosecuted the four men.¹⁵ Whereas a similar protest in the St. Michael parish church had provoked acrimonious debate in 1825 among people of colour,¹⁶ the Christ Church incident became a rallying point for electoral reformers. In February 1834, during a public meeting held at the St. Mary's Boys' School to demand franchise equalisation, the Christ Church protest was invoked to point out the bad faith of the local authorities. The meeting concluded that the 1831 Brown Privilege Bill "had the effect of disqualifying a large portion of that class, for whose benefit that Bill was said to be passed." The attendants issued the following statement, which, even at this late stage, makes no reference to emancipation, although its demands were issued in strong language:

This meeting regret [*sic*] that they should have to complain of the want of good faith on the part of many of the functionaries and authorities of this island (with a few honourable exceptions), in attempting to render nugatory the provisions of the Act which was said to be passed for the purpose of abolishing all legal distinctions between freemen, by their *lending the aid of their influence and authority* to cause those distinctions to be continued as matter of custom which have been abolished as matter of law. They refer most especially to the... case of Messrs. Weekes and others in Christ Church.¹⁷

The last petition sent by free people of colour to the governor or the legislature before the beginning of apprenticeship also made no reference to emancipation. This address was sent to the legislature in April by propertied "free black and coloured" Bridgetown inhabitants who requested political rights as free British subjects. They argued that free people of colour "comprise a large a rapidly increasing portion of the general body of freemen, having among them individuals fitted by education and gentlemanly habits, if not equal wealth", who deserved to be "elevated to posts of honor and emolument". It accused the legislature of "violating the principle and spirit of the measure passed for the relief of the free colored population, and exposing themselves to a charge of bad faith, in attempting to withdraw with one hand, that

¹⁵ Christ Church vestry minutes, 31 December 1833 and 8 December 1834.

¹⁶ See Chapter 2, pp. 13-132.

¹⁷ *Barbadian*, 12 February 1834 (emphasis in the original).

which they had offered as a boon with the other.”¹⁸ The continuing silence on emancipation in this petition is particularly striking, given that the “general body of freemen” was about to expand to include over 80,000 people of colour, who, as apprentices, would in reality still be bonded labourers but legally free.

Towards Abolitionism: The Bridgetown Reform Movement and the 1834 Election

Not until the last House of Assembly elections of the slavery period did free people of colour refer to emancipation in connection with their demands for greater political representation. This election was particularly important because one of the issues at stake was the creation of a separate constituency for Bridgetown, which was still part of the constituency of St. Michael parish, a change advocated by Bridgetown merchants. The election pitted the Attorney-General, Henry Sharpe, against two incumbent planter candidates, George Taylor and the Solicitor-General, Robert Bowcher Clarke. Although all three candidates were white, they represented opposing political camps among the white élite. Clarke had become the most outspoken representative of the plantocracy against imperial emancipation policies, and Governor Smith considered him the greatest obstacle to imperial interests in the assembly.¹⁹ Sharpe, by contrast, was Smith’s consistent ally, a Bridgetown lawyer who was considered a social and political outsider by the planters.²⁰

While race prejudice ran deep among the plantocracy, they were also hostile to urban merchants, regardless of race. Most of the principal figures demanding franchise reform, both white and non-white, were Bridgetown merchants and tradesmen. White Bridgetown residents were no less racist than planters — for example, the Bridgetown Commercial Hall, a merchants’ club, did not admit men of

¹⁸ CO 28/113, “Address of the Free Coloured and Free Black Inhabitants of Bridgetown” to the Council and Assembly, 2 April 1834, cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 109.

¹⁹ CO 28/113 Smith to Spring Rice, 26 August 1834.

²⁰ CO 28/111 Smith to Stanley, 12 October 1833 and CO 28/116 No. 31 8 August 1835 Smith to Glenelg.

colour, even though it rented its rooms from the wealthy merchant of colour London Bourne.²¹ However, white merchants and tradesmen shared the views of free men of colour on the issue of electoral reform, and resented the fact that colonial fiscal policy had for so long favoured the rural landed interest at their expense. They were also excluded from the highest levels of politics and the colonial civil service because they were not landowners. For white merchants and free men of colour, separate representation for Bridgetown was a means of gaining political influence.

Sharpe's popularity among free people of colour and slaves derived from the fact that he was the governor's candidate and a reformer who dared to challenge two staunch conservatives. Considering the opposition he faced, it was in Sharpe's interests to present himself as the voice of reconciliation with the imperial government. Thus, at a meeting of his supporters in May 1834, Sharpe announced his support for the education of the labouring classes, and for equalisation of the franchise qualification for white and non-white voters. Furthermore, although he had himself been a slaveowner, he declared himself in favour of emancipation.²² Civil rights agitators of colour rallied behind Sharpe's platform, endorsing both his candidacy and his abolitionist views. At this meeting, Cummins, a leading participant in the movement for civil rights during its pre-1823 pro-slavery days, referred explicitly to franchise extension as an emancipation measure. He stated that it was particularly necessary now that "a long constituted state of one class of our island society [will be dissolved], advancing it into a higher order", and laws of "centuries' duration" were about to be made obsolete.²³

The June 1834 St. Michael election became a *de facto* referendum on the future of the political hierarchy in post-emancipation Barbados. Sharpe's candidacy brought together disparate elements of Barbadian society marginalised by the plantocracy:

²¹ Cecilia Karch, "London Bourne," p. 5.

²² In June 1826 Sharpe imported a slave from Grenada (see PP 1831-32 vol. 46, *Papers... Relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies...*, p. 21).

²³ *Barbadian*, 31 May 1834.

merchants, both white and of colour, lower class free people of colour and ex-slaves from rural and urban St. Michael rallied behind his campaign. The *Barbadian* described the unprecedented scene at the June hustings in the St. Michael Cathedral, noting that the:

... [!]reverent behaviour of many, of *all* colours, of political partisans, exceeded all former profanations of the House of God.... It is our duty to animadvert more especially on the shameful, indecent, and insulting behaviour of the crowd of negroes and coloured persons — of the lowest degree we are aware — who filled up the pews, and made the walls of that sacred place re-echo with their profane “hurrahs,” several times. The uproar and tumult in the street, and in the churchyard, where the graves of the dead were indecently trampled upon.... [!]t was reserved for Monday last to furnish a specimen of the insolence, and utter contempt of all decency, and all respect for their superiors, and all reverence for the House of God, which the negroes and coloured people, some of them probably free persons, displayed within the very walls of the church. Could any thing be more disgusting than to see negro women, dirty trollops, swaggering up and down the aisles of the cathedral, with their bows of blue ribbon on their arms, the distinguishing badge of those, respectable as well as vulgar, who professed to be the supporters of Mr. Sharpe. In, or out of, the church, we know not which, we have been informed that some of Mr. S’s coloured and black friends were extremely insulting to the other candidates, Messrs. [Robert Bowcher] Clarke and [George N.] Taylor, even *hissing* them several times. We are quite sure that the respectable individuals of the coloured class who were, as it might be reasonably expected, anxious for the success of their avowed friend, Mr. Sharpe, are as much disgusted as we are at the intemperate conduct of their brethren. There has been much censure cast on the honorable gentleman for having been the cause of all this excitement, and all this vulgar, impertinent, and tumultuous bearing of the slaves and lower orders of free people.

In the end, Sharpe lost by a landslide to Clarke and Taylor.²⁴ However, the populist nature of Sharpe’s campaign had transformed the atmosphere of elite politics in the island. To the horror of the *Barbadian* and the plantocracy, slaves and lower class free people of colour, including women, were participating in electoral politics, even though they could not vote. In his victory speech, Clarke referred angrily to the “use of ribbons and party distinctions” by Sharpe’s supporters during the election.²⁵ In August, when Governor Smith tried to appoint Sharpe to the Council where he could act more effectively as an imperial ally, several councillors

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1834. For a discussion of ex-slave women and post-emancipation politics see Mimi Sheller, “Quasheba, Mother, Queen: Black Women’s Public Leadership and Political Protest in Post-Emancipation Jamaica, 1834-65,” *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 19, no. 3 (December 1998), pp. 90-117

²⁵ *Barbadian*, 7 June 1834.

threatened to resign. Smith said he would have been glad to see them go, but they were influential planters, and “their retirement would be likely to create a violent Party Spirit in the Island, and occasion much trouble and an excitement among the colored and Black Population ill suited to the Times”.²⁶

The issue of slavery became central to the franchise question. Although apprenticeship gave the house time to prevaricate, its only options were either to lower the franchise requirement for all to £10, or to raise it for everyone, thereby eliminating many white voters. In March 1835, the House of Assembly tried to stall by drafting and voting down an electoral reform bill which increased the requirement. However, despite his earlier claims,²⁷ by 1835 Smith supported raising the qualification to £30, fearful of the potential political power of ex-slaves: “if [the £10 franchise were] granted to all, there would be a mass of black Voters, when perfectly free, that would swamp all other Classes.”²⁸ Smith was concerned that many apprentices would establish their own hucksters’ and artisans’ shops, and buy land or erect houses which would give them enough taxable property to meet the £10 qualification. By 1835, apprentices’ tendency to leave field labour and go huckstering, and, in some cases, to set up shops or to migrate to Bridgetown, was already clear. Smith considered that it was more important to prevent too many ex-slaves from voting than it was to extend the vote to more people of colour.

Smith’s willingness to dismiss the demands of free people of colour for greater representation seems somewhat at variance with his public pronouncements in their favour. However, Smith’s public statements were quite different from his private opinions of free people of colour. In July 1836, Smith opposed a Colonial Office proposal to accept West Indian people of colour into the imperial army in the Caribbean, in which Africans liberated from foreign slave ships already served, and

²⁶ CO 28/113 Smith to Spring Rice, 23 August 1834.

²⁷ See Chapter 2, pp.144-145.

²⁸ CO 28/115 Smith to Aberdeen, 29 March 1835.

gave his real views of their claims to equal rights: “[T]here is not in the whole Globe a more dissolute or indolent race of Men than the free Blacks of the West India Colonies... I am positive they could never be depended on, if employed against their own Countrymen, whereas original Africans have the greatest contempt for them.” Furthermore, although Smith thought that creoles were “more intelligent” than Africans, he saw in them “a dangerous intelligence, a rankling of hearts at inequality of condition, & unfounded notions of common rights”.²⁹ The only man of colour whom Smith appointed to office in Barbados before he left the island in 1836 was Joseph Garraway, a wealthy Grenadian free man of colour, who became a stipendiary magistrate in Barbados in 1834. Garraway had previously held a low level royal appointment in the Grenadian Customs Office between 1832 and 1834, making him one of a small number of men of colour throughout the West Indies who received royal appointments during the last years of slavery.³⁰ Despite his publicly expressed desire to see some wealthy and educated men of colour in high positions, Smith did not appoint a single Barbadian of colour to a high office during his term. Indeed, the only individual whom he seemed to think worthy of such a position was Thomas J. Cummins. Although Smith was initially welcomed by free people of colour and slaves in Barbados, his vacillations made him unpopular, and, according to the abolitionists Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, he “embarked for Jamaica [in 1836] amidst the execrations of the crowds of free blacks and apprentices assembled on the beach.”³¹

Smith claimed that free people of colour would accept a higher franchise qualification for everyone, so long as the principle of equality was respected: “... [T]hey would be satisfied, even if it was raised to £40 or £50 — all they maintain is, if

²⁹ CO 28/117 No. 54, Smith to Glenelg, 31 July 1836 enclosing Smith to the Adjutant General of the Forces Horse Guards.

³⁰ Cox, *St Kitts and Grenada*, pp. 108-109. For background information on Garraway and details of his 1834 appointment in Barbados see the *Barbadian*, 2 November 1836.

³¹ Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837*. p. xxxiv, quoted in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 108.

we are British subjects, give us equal Rights; dont [sic] restrict us if we have Qualifications of property, Character, and Education, by Laws of complexion.”

Raising the franchise qualification to £30 for everyone would have reduced the white electorate of St. Michael from 446 to 230, along with the 78 men of colour enfranchise by the electoral reform of 1831, whereas lowering it to £10 would have immediately enfranchised 121 people of colour.³²

Men of colour themselves initially seem to have had ambivalent feelings on the matter. At a meeting of non-white political rights campaigners in February 1834, those present passed a resolution stating that the 1831 Brown Privilege Bill had disqualified “a large portion of that class, for whose benefit that Bill was said to have been passed”. A speaker tentatively suggested that an appropriate franchise requirement would be “say 5 acres and a house value of £10”.³³ This hypothetical qualification, like any significant lowering of the franchise requirement, would have increased the voting potential of ex-slaves. This was an important consideration because the white electorate was so small that, for example, the legislature had to pass a special act allowing the vestry board of St. Andrew in 1838 to be composed of ten men instead of sixteen, because there were not enough voters and willing candidates.³⁴

However, Smith’s claim that the demands of free people of colour had more to do with the principle of racial equality than electoral reform struck at the heart of longstanding divisions of class and ideology among free people of colour. The next section illustrates how, as apprenticeship progressed, these divisions began to assume greater political importance.

³² CO 28/115 Smith to Aberdeen, 29 March 1835.

³³ *Barbadian*, 12 February 1834.

³⁴ No. 107 Glenelg to MacGregor, 31 August 1838, enclosing “An act to authorize for the future the Election of ten Vestry Men, instead of Sixteen, for the Parish of Saint Andrew in this Island,” 29 June 1838.

Political Factionalism and Abolitionist Politics, 1833-1842

Class and the Emergence of Political Factions

The May 6 1833 meeting in support of Cummins' nomination to the militia was a turning point in non-white politics. It was the first time that the opinions of lower class free men of colour defeated the opinion of élites who, although they pressed the government for increased representation, had previously been unwilling to come out in open opposition to the legislature. Cummins' rejection, and the overwhelming sentiment of the free men of colour who attended the meeting, either convinced or forced cautious individuals like Joseph Kennedy and Thomas Harris Jr., who opposed the strong language of the petition, to give it their support. The meeting was also significant because, in providing leadership for this more populist faction of the free community of colour, Prescod established himself as a powerful figure in non-white politics. As a merchant-tradesman, he was a new and more radical voice from within the élite itself, but with a popular base of support.

Elite and lower class free men of colour clashed over the kinds of measures necessary to meet the challenge of emancipation. Some merchants of colour, like their white counterparts, viewed ex-slaves as competition and a threat to public order and morality, and supported policies which were adverse to the interests of poorer free non-whites. In March 1834 over 100 non-white and white merchants united to demand separate representation for Bridgetown in order to protect their political and economic interests from ex-slaves. They wanted political control over the city in order to be able to pass regulations to police the urban population after emancipation. All the non-white signatories were men of property who met the £30 franchise requirement. They argued that, considering the collective wealth of its inhabitants, Bridgetown was under-represented in the House of Assembly:

... [M]ore especially when urged by the anticipation of a vast accession of freeholders, so soon as the present slave population of the parish, which are as 33 to 80 of the whole island, shall become free.

Unprotected therefore as your Petitioners are, they cannot suffer the present crisis in the political state of the Country, to pass without endeavouring to secure themselves from those evils inseparable from a neglected state of

things such as Bridge Town now presents, without any efficient Police Establishment, and municipal regulations for the good Government of so dense a body of people as it contains.

The first signature on the petition was that of Attorney-General Henry Sharpe. Among the merchants who signed were the men of colour Edmund Haynes, Henry Wilkins, William B. Nunes, Benjamin Massiah, the brothers London and Edward W. Bourne and Thomas Harris Jr.³⁵ Although the legislature dismissed their petition as “disrespectful”, the petitioners’ allusion to the need to establish a police force and pass regulations to “protect” Bridgetown from emancipation, anticipated the by-laws passed by the legislature in November 1835 to prevent ex-slaves from migrating to Bridgetown.

Thus, few élite merchants and tradesmen objected to the 1835 ordinances, with the exception of the fire prevention ordinance. By contrast, many working class free people of colour and whites, like ex-slaves, would suffer as a result of repressive measures designed to control the activities of ex-slaves. Therefore, at the January 1836 public meeting, organised by Prescod, speakers condemned all the vestry’s anti-apprentice ordinances, particularly the new house-building regulations and the ordinance imposing more rigid licensing regulations for porters and boatmen. According to Smith’s report, the meeting attracted numerous apprentices.³⁶ On one hand, the meeting is reminiscent of Bridgetown’s labouring class culture during slavery, when the close interactions of lower class free people of colour and slaves created an environment within which opposition to the authorities was frequently expressed. However, the meeting was boycotted by the merchant élite, which illustrates the political importance of class divisions among free non-whites. Smith claimed that “every opulent Individual of the Black or Colored Class either declin[ed] to attend [the meeting], or with[drew] when they witnessed the violence of the

³⁵ CO 31/51 24 March 1834, Petition from inhabitants of St. Michael’s Parish, praying for an augmentation of their representation. A man named Joseph Belgrave also signed the petition. It is not clear if this signatory was white or whether he was Thomas Joseph Belgrave, a member of the wealthy plantation-owning Belgrave family, who were people of colour. On 27 March 1834 the House of Assembly dismissed the petition as “disrespectful.”

³⁶ CO 28/117 No. 4, 13 January 1836, Smith to Glenelg, with enclosures.

Meeting's Procedures." ³⁷ As the *Barbadian* had suggested in its description of the June 1834 hustings, more "respectable" free people of colour would not associate themselves too closely with either working class free non-whites or slaves.

Those who spoke out against the ordinances do not appear to have been extremely wealthy or previously prominent men of colour. In some cases, it was the first time that their names appeared in any surviving political document since the 1824 counter-address. For example, this meeting provided the first mention of John Clark, a man of colour, since he had signed the counter-address. ³⁸ Henry Pinheiro, who had signed the 1824 counter-address and may have been one of the two tailor's apprentices prosecuted by the St. Michael vestry for breaching the peace in 1831, also spoke at this meeting. ³⁹ The first documented evidence of a man of colour named William F. Thomas before he spoke at the January 1836 meeting was on May 6 1833, when he supported Prescod's resolutions. ⁴⁰ Others, such as N. Brathwaite and Samuel Arthur, appear for the first time at this meeting. ⁴¹ Of the men of colour mentioned in Smith's report, Thomas Harris was the only clear example of an individual whose political history differed from this pattern. He had found Prescod's 1833 resolutions too strongly worded, and he was one of the signatories to the March 1834 merchants' petition demanding the restrictive legislation against which this meeting now protested. ⁴²

Socioeconomic background had always influenced the protests of free people of colour against racial discrimination. However, as emancipation removed the crucial

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ CO 28/117 No. 4; Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 11.

³⁹ CO 28/117 No. 4; Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 42 and private communication with the author.

⁴⁰ CO 28/117 No. 4; Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 52.

⁴¹ CO 28/117 No. 4.

⁴² Another possible exception is William McCasky, one of the two vestryman who voted against the fire ordinance, and who attended this meeting (*Barbadian*, 9 December 1835). Smith described the William McCaskey who attended the January meeting as white (CO 28/117 No. 4), but there was also a man of colour named William McCasky who signed the 1823 Belgrave address (Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 34).

distinction between free and slave, erasing the privilege of legal status which even a poor free person of colour had enjoyed, class distinctions seem to have assumed an even greater significance for wealthy people of colour. It is possible that, as the numbers of successful ex-slave hucksters and tradespeople increased, wealthy non-white merchants began to distance themselves socially and politically from less affluent pre-emancipation shopkeepers and tradesmen with whom they might have associated before 1834. For example, in 1833 and early 1834, when he was still struggling to be elected or appointed to office, Cummins was willing to sign petitions along with men such as Anthony Barclay Jr. and William Nunes. In 1841, however, having become a police magistrate, Cummins would refer derisively, in a communication with the Colonial Office, to Prescod's supporters as being from among "the lower orders of Tradesmen... whose names, but not their rank or occupation, frequently appear in his paper either as Memorialists or Orators...." Among the 14 shopkeepers and tradesmen whom he listed under this dismissive title were Anthony Barclay Jr., and William Nunes, as well as John W. Reid and William F. Thomas, both of whom had attended Prescod's 1836 ordinance protest.⁴³

Thus, in 1834, Sharpe's candidacy united free people of colour who, despite agreeing on the need for political reform, had very different class perspectives about how this should be done and how far it should go. The *Barbadian's* editor recognised that, despite Sharpe's popular appeal, many working class people of colour, both slave and free, had misunderstood him to be, essentially, a democrat. The editor pointed out that it was unfair to "throw the blame of all the blackguardism which distinguished the day of the election, on Mr. Sharpe" just because "an unthinking and ignorant mob of negroes have misunderstood Mr. S's professions, and have fancied that he had proclaimed liberty and equality among all ranks."⁴⁴

⁴³ CO 28/139 No. 26 MacGregor to Russell, 18 March 1841, enclosure no. 5 Police Magistrates Tinling, Sealy and Cummins, Commission of Inquiry into the case of Frederick Watts v. Samuel Jackman Prescod, 13 March 1841.

⁴⁴ *Barbadian*, 4 June 1834.

The Role of the Non-White Press

The founding of the *New Times* and the *Liberal* in 1836 and 1837 respectively secured the places of Prescod, Harris and Nathaniel Roach as the voices of a more progressive wing in non-white politics. They supported abolition and demanded a wider extension of the franchise to include many working class people of colour. Neither Harris nor Prescod supported universal suffrage;⁴⁵ however, they supported the lowering of the franchise to £10, because raising it would exclude many whites. Prescod argued that this change was also indispensable as an emancipation measure, stating that: "... [U]nless such a number of the poor and middle classes of every complexion be admitted to a share in legislation, as will make their voice to be respected — in vain shall we expect justice for the free laborer — in vain shall we expect him to be peaceful, or orderly, or contented: free men will never be contented with the treatment of slaves."⁴⁶

The *Liberal's* letters page became a forum for people who supported radical franchise reform. In 1839, a letter from a correspondent, whose race was not specified, argued that society's "middle orders", rather than the "excessively rich", should govern society. The writer attributed the following characteristics to the wealthy: "[H]abits of gratification, of adulation, producing mental incapacity, and moral deadness, distinguish the intellectual or cerebral part of their organization.... Does not all history abound with the regulations which these men have made... to preserve in the hand of the rich all the high and lucrative posts of legislation and administration?"⁴⁷ In its editorials the newspaper challenged the unequal application of the island's laws, arguing that, in the eyes of the courts: "That which is '*proper*

⁴⁵ See speeches by Harris and Prescod at a franchise extension meeting reported in the *Liberal*, 23 January 1839.

⁴⁶ *Liberal*, 10 March 1838.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 May 1839.

spiritedness' in one class (the wealthy whites), would be sedition in another, (the poorwhites) and downright rebellion in a third, (the colored and black)."⁴⁸

The *Liberal* was popular among rural field labourers, many of whom saw the editors as their advocates. As had been the case during slavery, although most of the island's population could not read, information from newspapers travelled around the island via word of mouth.⁴⁹ The *Liberal's* editors were particularly active opponents of apprenticeship and early post-emancipation labour policies. Harris sometimes went to court to speak on behalf of labourers unfairly prosecuted by employers,⁵⁰ and, as labour unrest and evictions increased during the early months of the post-apprenticeship period, labourers would frequently come to the *Liberal's* office in Bridgetown for help. In October 1838, the *Mercury* newspaper accused a group of labourers — who had told the *Mercury's* reporter that they had come to town to "get advice" — of "loitering" in Bridgetown. The *Liberal* retorted that the people in question were estate labourers from a rural St. Michael plantation, who had come to the *Liberal* for advice in a wage dispute with their manager: "... [T]hey came to us; and at our office, not 'patrolling the streets,' the wordy Editor of the *Mercury* saw them." The *Liberal* had told them of another estate where they could get work on better terms, and advised them to go back to their manager and use their knowledge of this better opportunity as a bargaining tool.⁵¹ In 1839, the newspaper declared that it usually advised labourers who came for advice to receive their wages only in money and to save that money for illness and old age, but "DO NOT WASTE IT ON LAND from which you may at any time be ejected."⁵²

Such was the influence of the *Liberal* and the *New Times* that, in his speech during the debate about the colonial bill to end apprenticeship in April 1838, Solicitor-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 28 March 1838.

⁴⁹ Lewis, "Incendiary Press," p. 359.

⁵⁰ See for example, *Liberal*, 18 September 1838.

⁵¹ Ibid., 10 October 1838.

⁵² Ibid., 26 January 1839 (emphasis in original).

General Clarke referred to them when he advised the House of Assembly: “[L]et not the House suppose that the apprenticed labourers are allowed to remain ignorant of what is passing on this subject. If they had not the English papers to inform them, there is a press in this island which is devoted to their cause, which advocates all their rights — I wish I could say with a little more prudence.”⁵³

Prescod was the author of most, if not all, of the *Liberal's* editorials. It is not clear whether or not Harris actually wrote anything. Therefore, the *Liberal* did much to consolidate Prescod's public position as a 'man of the people' and the enemy of the legislature. He became a member of the British Anti-Slavery society, attending anti-slavery conferences in Britain,⁵⁴ and the newspaper gave him a platform to publicise both his and Harris' anti-slavery and anti-segregationist campaigns, such as their annual anti-slavery dinners commemorating the end of apprenticeship.⁵⁵ Thus, in November 1838, Prescod and Harris hosted British abolitionist John Scoble's visit to the island, accompanying him when he visited various plantations, and they organised an anti-slavery dinner in Scoble's honour at the St. Mary's Boys' School. Besides a small number of whites and pre-emancipation free people of colour, many ex-slaves also attended. When Prescod rose to speak, he was met (according to the newspaper of which he was himself the principal editor) with “wild cheering” and cries of “we'll never desert him”, “We'd sooner turn our backs on our fathers” and “but for him, we'd be worse than slaves.”⁵⁶

⁵³ CO 31/52 24 April 1838.

⁵⁴ Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, p. 85; Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 105.

⁵⁵ See reports of annual anti-slavery dinners in the *Liberal*, August 3 1839, 5 August 1840, 3 August 1842 and 2 August 1843. Historians have associated such activities commemorating emancipation in the Caribbean with a much later period, particularly between the 1880s and the early twentieth century (see Barry Higman, “Remembering Slavery: The rise, decline and revival of emancipation day in the English-speaking Caribbean,” *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 19, no. 1 (April 1998), pp. 90-105).

⁵⁶ CO 28/ 124 No. 340 MacGregor to Glenelg, 13 December 1838, enclosing correspondence between MacGregor, the Board of Gaol Commissioners and John Scoble, and extracts from the *Liberal*, 21 and 24 November 1838; *Liberal*, 1 December 1838.

“A Blessed Change For All”: Changing Attitudes Towards Emancipation and Segregation

During apprenticeship free people of colour gained increased support among whites for racial desegregation of public institutions. Some whites became more tolerant of the philanthropic and religious activities of people of colour of high social standing. For example, Sharpe’s wife agreed to be patroness of the annual Methodist Christmas bazaar in Bridgetown.⁵⁷ The Methodist minister, Joseph Hamilton, was a man of colour, and his wife, Susanna, was the sister of London Bourne.⁵⁸ Prior to 1834, although a governor’s wife might have served as the patroness for the Methodists, no local white politician’s wife would have agreed to do so. Mrs. Sharpe’s participation illustrates the growing willingness of white professionals and merchants to accept the Methodists as socially respectable, whereas whites had previously vilified the church for its religious nonconformism, racially mixed congregation, and its acceptance of men of colour as clergy.

The colonial government also gave more recognition to the social and philanthropic activities of people of colour. In March 1834 the St. Michael vestry increased its grant of £100 to the St. Mary’s Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor and for Other Charitable Relief to £150, and gave the society £50 more to help build a school for children of colour. However, the vestry went even further, bestowing semi-official status on St. Mary’s as a poor relief organisation. The vestry board voted unanimously that it should appoint overseers from among the board of St. Mary’s, with powers similar to those of Poor Law overseers, but only with

⁵⁷ *Barbadian*, 24 December 1834.

⁵⁸ Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 25.

regard to the activities of the society.⁵⁹ Some of the philanthropic societies previously reserved for whites were desegregated. In 1836 the Ladies' Association for the Relief of the Sick and Indigent Poor of Bridgetown and its Environs, made the entirely false claim that "the aid of this Institution has *ever been* administered to indigent sick individuals of every description, without any distinction whatever of sex, age, complexion, or nation and although they have not, hitherto, recorded the following regulation, they hope, from the nature of the Association, it has already been inferred."⁶⁰ The Ladies' Association was the largest white charitable society in the island, originally established to provide charity to white paupers.

There was also a rapid shift in attitudes among whites on the issue of emancipation similar to that of free people of colour. Although planters and the white press had fought emancipation it rapidly became taboo after 1834 to express pro-slavery views publicly. For example, less than a month after the start of apprenticeship, the *Barbadian*, a former bastion of anti-abolitionism, referred to emancipation as "a blessed change for all":

... [W]e are not only satisfied, but thankful that the heart-burning question is finally settled, and that we are no longer slave owners, nor slave dealers, and that absolute uncontrollable power is taken out of the hands of too many who abused it. To a right-thinking man, it is the greatest comfort and consolation to know that the door is now more effectually opened for the admission of his brethren to all the glorious and inestimable blessings of religion, and the benefits of civilization.⁶¹

By the middle of apprenticeship, planters were claiming that, deep down, they had never *really* supported slavery. In 1837 Thome and Kimball spoke to a planter named in their book as 'Mr. C', who told them:

Emancipation is as great a blessing to the master as to the slave. "Why," exclaimed Mr. C, "it was emancipation to me.... I felt myself, for the first time, a freeman on [August 1]...."

Mr. C said he had often wished for emancipation. There were several other planters among his acquaintance who had the same feelings, but did not dare

⁵⁹ St. Michael vestry minutes, 25 March 1834.

⁶⁰ *Barbadian*, 19 November 1836 (emphasis added).

⁶¹ *Barbadian*, 23 August 1834.

express them. Most of the planters, however, were violently opposed. Many of them declared that emancipation would not and should not take place. So obstinate were they that they would have sworn on the 31st of July, 1834, that emancipation could not happen. *These very men now see and acknowledge the benefits which have resulted from the new system.* ⁶²

The vestries, the legislature and the Anglican church were under pressure from the imperial government to end racial segregation in churches and schools, demands which they resisted. Vestries sought to maintain separate seating in churches by expanding the area available to people of colour, including ex-slaves, but continued to use the pew rent system in order to exclude people of colour from white areas. ⁶³ People of colour were important in education during the post-1834 period partly because both the vestries and the church maintained strict racial segregation among students, and there was an enormous demand for teachers of colour. This demand was increased by the fact that parochial schools continued to be for white children only, and few parishes opened schools for children of colour during and immediately after apprenticeship. ⁶⁴

The legislature was eventually forced to admit people of colour to certain state institutions. In 1834 and 1835 it tried to keep local people of colour out of the police force which was being established to control the ex-slave population. In its first draft of the Bridgetown police bill the House of Assembly inserted a clause preventing people of colour from joining the new police force by making eligibility contingent upon franchise qualifications, and excluding those enfranchised under the 1831 franchise act. A committee of people of colour sent the governor a petition of protest, and, on Smith's recommendation, the Colonial Office disallowed the first police bill. In his message to the House of Assembly informing them of his recommendation to the

⁶² Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 55 (emphasis in the original). Mr. C was James Chrichlow of Lears plantation (see *Liberal*, 29 August 1838).

⁶³ Christ Church vestry minutes, 15 August 1833, 4 August 1834, 16 March 1837; St. George vestry minutes, 3 August 1835, 1 February, 18 April and 1 August 1836. In 1840 the churchwarden of St. James forced a man of colour to leave a pew leased to him by a white man who was temporarily away (*Liberal*, 4 April 1840).

⁶⁴ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 71; Sturge and Harvey, *West Indies in 1837*, p. 144; St. Philip vestry minutes, 16 January 1837.

Colonial Office, Smith stated that the petition from "His Majesty's coloured and black subjects":

... [A]ffords sufficient proof that the distinctions which the Bridge-Town Police Bill established, between voters upon the old, and on the new qualification, is regarded by the King's subjects of African descent, as an injurious attempt to perpetuate indirectly, one of those distinctions referable to African and European descent, which by the language of the general Law, might seem to be abolished. ⁶⁵

The house was forced to amend the bill, opening the door for the participation of people of colour in the police force. As early as 1835, one-third of the police constables in Bridgetown were men of colour. A note attached to the table in which these figures were reported stated that the proportion of "coloured men" in the police force overall had never been less than one-third, and now exceeded that figure. ⁶⁶ American abolitionists Thome and Kimball visited District B police station, which covered the south-western parish of Christ Church, and noted that all but "two or three" of the policemen there were black or coloured. ⁶⁷ By 1839, a report on the racial and phenotypical composition of the national police force showed that, of 162 constables in the island, 58 were "white", 56 were "coloured" and 58 were "black". ⁶⁸ A planter testified to the 1842 imperial commission on the West Indies that the rural police force was composed almost entirely of black and coloured people. ⁶⁹ With the disbandment of the militia tenantry in 1839, a potent symbol of race prejudice and slavery, the militia ceased to have any symbolic or actual relevance, and the police

⁶⁵ PP 1835, vol. 50, Glenelg to Smith, 20 June 1835, referring to 27 April 1835 address of free people of colour on the Bridgetown Police Bill, pp. 228-231; CO 31/52 6 August 1835.

⁶⁶ PP 1835, Vol. 50, *Papers... in Explanation of the Measures Adopted... for the Abolition of Slavery...*, Aberdeen to Smith, 10 January 1835, Glenelg to Smith, 20 June 1835 and Appendix A, "Return of the respective Numbers of White and Coloured Men, at present serving in the Bridge Town Police Establishment," pp. 195-198.

⁶⁷ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 67.

⁶⁸ CO 28/129 MacGregor to Russell, 8 November 1839, enclosure no. 1, "Return exhibiting the degrees of complexion of the Police Force," Barbados 30th October 1839."

⁶⁹ PP 1842, vol. 13, *Report of the Select Committee*, 12 May 1842, questions 1880-1884. This remained the case throughout the post-emancipation period, see the *Report of the Commission on Poor Relief*, 1875-77, p. 11.

force effectively replaced it.⁷⁰

Elite Men of Colour in Politics

Between 1837 and 1839, under Governor MacGregor, the demands of élite men of colour for political appointments were satisfied to a limited degree. In 1837, several wealthy men of colour — Michael .T Corbin, George Barclay, Robert Reece Sr. and Jr., Thomas Ellis and Thomas J. Cummins —were appointed to a commission of the peace, which toured the island explaining to apprentices their rights and duties under apprenticeship.⁷¹ Immediately after emancipation, in August and December 1838, MacGregor established two more commissions of the peace which also toured the island placating labourers. The Grenadian Joseph Garraway was the only man of colour selected for the first commission. However, he was joined in December by Cummins and the merchant of colour Valentine Wilkins, along with a number of leading white planter-magistrates and clergymen.⁷² Surprisingly, the legislature raised no objections when, in late 1837, MacGregor appointed Henry Loving, the abolitionist journalist of colour from Antigua who had testified in favour of emancipation during the 1831 imperial commission, to a stipendiary magistracy in Barbados.⁷³ In 1838, the governor appointed Joseph Garraway to be a judge in the newly created Assistant Court of Appeal, the highest level of the local judiciary, and a

⁷⁰ CO 28/128 No. 78 MacGregor to Normanby, 23 July 1839, laws No. 698, "An act to consolidate and amend the provisional Acts relating to the Militia of this Island and to provide for the better organization of the same," and No. 699, "An act to augment the number and increase the pay of the Police Force, and to consolidate the Laws relating thereto." For a discussion of the militia and the militia tenantry see Chapter 1, pp. 65-66.

⁷¹ CO 28/119 No. 1 MacGregor to Glenelg, 2 January 1837.

⁷² CO 28/123 No. 214 MacGregor to Glenelg, 11 August 1838, enclosure No. 11; *Barbadian*, 5 December 1838.

⁷³ See Chapter 2; CO 28/119 No. 112 MacGregor to Glenelg, 19 May 1837; CO 28/120 No. 248 MacGregor to Glenelg, 30 October 1837; CO 28/123 No. 13, MacGregor to Glenelg, 27 January 1838; Loving was promoted to be the lieutenant-governor's colonial secretary in Montserrat in early 1838 (CO 28/123 No. 24 MacGregor to Glenelg, 3 February 1838), but remained a stipendiary magistrate in Barbados until the end of apprenticeship.

year later made him acting governor's private secretary.⁷⁴

Thomas J. Cummins' career was the most striking among Barbadian men of colour. In 1839, after several other civil service appointments and several years of being re-elected to the St. Michael vestry, he was finally appointed by Governor MacGregor to the Council and the police magistracy for the parish of St. George. This made him the first man of colour to sit in the island's legislature. Between 1840 and 1842, he presided over the Court of Grand Sessions, the highest judicial appointment for a local magistrate. In 1841, he began his first of several terms as churchwarden of the St. Michael vestry, appointing several other leading planters and merchants of colour — Valentine Wilkins, John Montefiore and Thomas Ellis — to positions in the vestry's limited bureaucracy.⁷⁵

MacGregor also appointed Nathaniel Roach, the editor of the *New Times* as police magistrate of St. Lucy, a surprise decision which outraged the editor of the *Barbadian*, and probably many other whites as well.⁷⁶ In May 1839, MacGregor nominated, and the Council approved, Nathaniel Roach and Joseph Thorne as "marriage officers" under the 1839 Marriage Act. MacGregor introduced Thorne to the Secretary of State as "a respectable coloured inhabitant of this island". It is not exactly clear what the position involved, but the new act was specifically designed to encourage Christian marriage among ex-slaves and people of colour generally. It provided the assurance that, if couples now married, children born before the marriage would not be declared illegitimate.⁷⁷

During the 1840s, men of colour contested and were elected to seats in the St.

⁷⁴ CO 28/123 No. 164 MacGregor to Glenelg 7 July 1838. In other Windward islands, the stipendiary magistrates stayed on after emancipation, replacing the police magistrates. However in Barbados, police magistrates retained their judiciary power, and only three stipendiary magistrates were appointed to form the Assistant Court of Appeal; the earliest letter which I have found signed by Garraway as acting private secretary was published in the *Barbadian*, 23 January 1839.

⁷⁵ *Liberal*, 28 July 1842.

⁷⁶ CO 28/127 No. 14 MacGregor to Glenelg, February 7 1839 and No. 67, MacGregor to Normanby, 14 May 1839; *Barbadian*, 8 May 1839.

⁷⁷ *Liberal and Barbadian*, 13 March 1839.

Michael vestry. Besides Cummins, Joseph Thorne also became churchwarden of the vestry several times, beginning in 1844. On several occasions during the 1840s, of an average of 18 candidates for 16 vestry seats, at least four of five merchants of colour ran for the vestry, with Cummins, Thorne, Valentine Wilkins and William S. Wilkey being the most successful at the polls.⁷⁸

All the men appointed or elected to positions of authority were extremely wealthy in comparison with other people of colour. The imperial government's interest in appointing men of colour to positions of authority applied only if they were deemed to be of the right socioeconomic status. Similarly, the well-off merchants, tradesmen and planters who dominated the St. Michael electorate under the pre-emancipation electoral laws were unlikely to vote for working class candidates of either colour. Political leanings also clearly influenced the selection of men of colour for posts. Despite the popularity and influence of the *Liberal*, Prescod was never nominated for a government post, and Harris, although nominated once for a magistracy, was passed over for the job.⁷⁹ Harris also ran for election to the St. Michael vestry in 1842, but came last.⁸⁰ With the exception of Nathaniel Roach, Joseph Thorne and Valentine Wilkins, none of the men appointed or elected to political office was associated with the more radical wing of anti-racist and abolitionist politics in Barbados.

Although many people of colour saw Thomas Cummins as their best hope for appointment in 1833, after his election to the vestry he distanced himself from racial equality struggles. His name all but disappears from civil rights petitions, and he never attended any post-apprenticeship anti-slavery dinners. Men of colour did not mark any of his appointments with public celebrations. By contrast, on the occasion of Roach's appointment to the police magistracy, a group of men of colour presented

⁷⁸ *Liberal*, 15 January 1840; *Barbadian*, 19 January 1842, 12 January 1848, 17 and 20 January 1849.

⁷⁹ *Barbadian*, 9 October 1841.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 January 1842; *Liberal*, 15 January 1845.

him with a letter of thanks, signed by 337 people, for “his unremitting exertions in behalf of the newly emancipated class; and also, his advocacy of the just claims of the oppressed *generally*.”⁸¹ There were similar celebrations when stipendiary magistrate Henry Loving was promoted to be the governor’s colonial secretary in Montserrat. A deputation of “coloured gentlemen” presented Loving with 100 guineas and a vote of thanks for his services as a “faithful uncompromising advocate of the rights of our long oppressed fellow descendants of Africa” and his devotion to the “coloured cause.” Thomas Harris, Valentine Wilkins, Joseph Thorne, London Bourne, Benjamin Massiah and Edmund C. Haynes signed the tribute.⁸²

There was also a marked lack of enthusiasm for Joseph Garraway, the other highly successful political appointee of colour. Although reputedly fair,⁸³ he had no history of anti-racist political activity and his position as a stipendiary magistrate left him open to suspicion by men of colour. Some men of colour denounced the stipendiary magistrates as “greatly controlled by the planters. They associate with the planters, dine with the planters, lounge on the planters’ sofas, and marry the planters’ daughters.”⁸⁴ When Garraway was appointed to the August 1838 Commission of the Peace during the labour unrest of the early post-apprenticeship period, the *Liberal* pointed out that: “... [T]he negroes do not know Mr. Garraway as a coloured man, and they are unlikely to place any confidence in him — although I am of opinion that he would do them every justice.”⁸⁵ The fact that Garraway was the only man of colour on the Assistant Court of Appeal established in 1838 was seen as something of an insult. Thomas Harris argued that a “coloured committee” should have been appointed, and suggested Joseph Thorne, London Bourne,

⁸¹ *Liberal*, 30 January 1839 (emphasis in the original).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 22 August 1838.

⁸³ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, pp. 33-34.

⁸⁴ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, pp. 72-73; see also Sturge and Harvey, *West Indies in 1837*, p. 132. Garraway never married a planter’s daughter.

⁸⁵ *Liberal*, 29 August 1838.

Prescod, and, somewhat predictably, himself as suitable choices.⁸⁶

Temporary Unity and Class Paternalism in the Franchise Reform Struggle

The end of apprenticeship temporarily created political unity on the issue of franchise reform across class boundaries among free people of colour. Elite campaigners displayed a greater willingness to associate themselves with Prescod's more radical and generally lower class supporters. This was partly because apprenticeship ended with no clear sign that the legislature had any intention of extending the franchise. It was also because, although Bridgetown merchants of both colours had found common cause on the issue of the franchise, white merchants were still reluctant to accept merchants of colour as their social equals. In January 1839 the all-white Bridgetown Commercial Hall blackballed the applications of two leading non-white merchants, John Montefiore and Thomas Griffith, for membership. The governor refused to grant official recognition to the Hall as long as "no mercantile gentlemen of the coloured body are members of the institution," and the Hall claimed that it had taken measures making it more difficult for individual members to block applications by men of colour. Nevertheless, the *Liberal* claimed that non-whites continued to be rejected.⁸⁷

Thus, at the August 1839 dinner at the St. Mary's Boys' School commemorating the end of slavery, Joseph Kennedy gave a toast to Prescod. Kennedy admitted that he had once opposed Prescod because he thought his methods "ill-timed, but that was years ago now" and proclaimed that "so long as the colored classes were united and firm, nothing could prevent them from moving forward."⁸⁸ That year, at least 18 non-white businessmen, including wealthy men such as Kennedy, London Bourne, William Wilkey, Joseph Thorne, Andrew Fillan and Edward W. Archer, closed their

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Barbadian*, 19 January 1839 and *Liberal*, 26 January and 2 February 1839.

⁸⁸ *Liberal*, 9 August 1839.

businesses in commemoration of emancipation day, and sold tickets for the dinner at their stores. ⁸⁹

This appearance of unity was evident at the November 1838 dinner in honour of John Scoble. In his address, Scoble asked the audience: "what is the duty that devolves upon the emancipated slave?" He answered the question himself, stating that the ex-slave had a duty to assert his/her rights. He directed these comments "to the emancipated class, many of whom he believed were then before him, and he was happy to see them there, (cries of, 'yes,' 'most of us,' 'the majority.')." Scoble noted that "the more respectable of the colored and black community were there, with few exceptions," along with "one or two liberal whites". He told the "pre-emancipation free people" who were there that:

They had a duty to perform, and he trusted he did not look in vain for its being discharged. They were the natural protectors of an immense class of their brethren. From their station, their characters, their influence, their knowledge, the lately emancipated slave looked up to them to secure him against the oppression of wrong doers.

In response there were cries of, "[W]e will do it" and Scoble "assured them of the cooperation of the British in this holy work." He concluded that, now that everyone in the colony was free, there was a need for "just and equal laws," to which someone replied, "[W]e won't get it [*sic*], till we have an extension of the elective franchise!" ⁹⁰

Although free men of colour saw electoral reform as the ticket to "just and equal laws," their claims of solidarity with ex-slaves were marked strongly by paternalistic élitism. Not even Prescod questioned the fundamentally hierarchical social, economic or political structure of the island, and, although the *Liberal's* editors spoke out against planters' mistreatment of labourers, their tone was paternalistic and condescending. ⁹¹ Elite men of colour saw the survival of the sugar industry and the maintenance of economic stability as crucial to the interests of the country. Thome

⁸⁹ Ibid., 20 and 27 July and 27 1839.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1 December 1838.

⁹¹ See Chapter 3, pp. 191-192.

and Kimball summarised their discussion with Prescod, Harris and Thorne on emancipation as follows:

The gentlemen testified to the industry and subordination of the apprentices. They had improved the general cultivation of the island, and they were reaping for their masters greater crops than they did while slaves. The whole company united in saying that many blessings had already resulted from the abolition of slavery — imperfect as that abolition was. Real estate had advanced in value at least one third. The fear of insurrection had been removed; invasions of property, such as occurred during slavery, the firing of cane-fields... &c., were no longer apprehended. Marriage was spreading among the apprentices, and the general morals of the whole community, high and low, white, colored, and black, were rapidly improving. ⁹²

It is telling that they should have been pleased about the increase in the price of land in the island, which was already among the most expensive in the West Indies.

These men were both pragmatic and élitist in their approach to electoral reform.

While they demanded a limited redistribution of political power by lowering the property qualification for the vote, and argued that emancipation made such reform an even greater necessity, they had no interest in challenging the distribution of property itself. In discussing the post-emancipation political role of pre-1834 free non-whites in Dominica, Michel-Rolph Trouillot emphasises the importance of distinguishing their demands for political and civil equality from a struggle for socioeconomic redistribution. ⁹³

Furthermore, the quote suggests that they did not support the extreme methods to which slaves had resorted during slavery — such as attacks on planters' property. It is doubtful, in fact, whether élite men of colour would even have seen such acts as the oppositional political statements which they frequently were, rather than random acts of violence. During the rash of cane fires which occurred in the island between 1839 and 1840, the *Liberal* expressed pleasure that some labourers were helping to put the fires out, adding that the newspaper "trust[s] they know it is their duty" to help identify the culprits. ⁹⁴

⁹² Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 73.

⁹³ Trouillot, "Inconvenience of Freedom," pp. 162-175.

⁹⁴ *Liberal*, 25 September 1839.

The *Liberal* saw it as the role of the “middle classes”, meaning pre-emancipation free people of colour and landless whites, to mediate in the struggle between planters and labourers, and to direct the political activities of labourers. This was evident in the newspaper’s response to the 1838 planters’ scheme to fix wages in the island at a rate beneficial to employers:

[Do], any of the... talented and candid gentlemen at the [planters’] meeting on Saturday, suppose that the respectable coloured community will quietly suffer them to carry every thing with a high hand as before? — will suffer the laborer to be imposed upon for the want of that knowledge, and talent, and influence which they possess? The coming struggle, mark you, is not to be a struggle between the Springers and Alleyne’s on one side, and the laboring population on the other. ⁹⁵

The newspaper’s opposition to the planters’ plan was rooted in the editors’ commitment to classical economics, and their opinion that the market should be allowed to determine wage rates. They saw these plans as evidence of “combination” among planters, and argued that:

We shall content ourselves in observing, that any attempt to meddle with wages, by establishing a fixed rate, will be injudicious in the extreme... To mention no other evil, it will be highly injudicious to set the labourer the example of combination to regulate what will best be regulated by circumstances, over which neither he nor his employer can have any possible controul [*sic*]... We warn them that combinations on their part to lower wages, will most assuredly produce counter combinations among the labourers to raise wages. ⁹⁶

The Colonial Office, the colonial government and the non-white élite looked favourably upon friendly societies as an alternative to unionization, probably because of the “self-help” philosophy of these societies. However, in contrast to Britain, where unions operated secretly under the guise of friendly societies, ⁹⁷ friendly societies in Barbados were usually established by the clergy and planters, and their membership seems to have included some extremely wealthy and, frequently, politically conservative men of colour. The involvement of élite men of colour in friendly

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1838. Springer and Alleyne were the names of two leading planter families.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 May 1838.

⁹⁷ Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early industrial Britain, 1783-1870* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), p. 158.

societies was evident in 1839. When he retired, a delegation of the members of the St. Mary's Male Friendly Society sent an address to Reverend William Harte (the former rector of St. Lucy parish church prosecuted by the vestry for allegedly spreading "sedition" among slaves and free people of colour in 1827 ⁹⁸). The address thanked Harte for his: "[S]trenuous endeavours in forwarding, by your benevolence and zeal, that portion of the population to which we belong, in the respectability to which we are anxious to attain in this community." It was signed for and on behalf of the society by, among others, Thomas J. Cummins, Joseph Thorne, and a man named Charles Grandison, who had signed the 1811 petition requesting the right to testify to the House of Assembly. Three of the other five signatories were also pre-1834 free men of colour, some of whom had signed the 1823 counter-address. ⁹⁹

Gender, Labour and Public Life

The struggle for equal political and civil rights was entirely dominated by men, despite the fact that there had been a demographic gender balance in the pre-emancipation free non-white population. There was an assumption that the only proper public role for respectable free women of colour was in Christian philanthropy, and women who fulfilled this role were held up as examples to the community. For example, in 1838, when, Sarah Hope, the daughter of a prominent free man of colour, Thomas G. Hope, died, the *Liberal* published the following obituary:

Miss Hope was called at an early hour, to seek her God; her walk and conversation along life's thorny path were in strict accordance with his Divine will, and her days entirely devoted to her service and the good of her fellow creatures. Her zeal was conspicuously displayed by her attention to the Sunday and Evening Schools: she was also a strong supporter of that useful body, the Friendly Society; and one of the most willing and indefatigable labourers in circulating the word of God as a Member of the Bible Society, of which she was the Secretary; to her exertions principally we are indebted for the excellent Choir of Singers of St. Paul's. But, above all we cannot omit to

⁹⁸ See Chapter 2, p.137

⁹⁹ CO 28/129 No. 127 MacGregor to Russell, 17 December 1839, enclosing "An Address from certain Inhabitants of this Colony to the Reverend W.M. Harte"; Handler, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 22.

notice her unceasing labours, as one of the Committee for furnishing ready-made clothes to the poor and indigent. In her the poor have lost an invaluable friend and supporter; her charities being those of the true Christian — secretly and unostentaciously [sic] bestowed. ¹⁰⁰

Although élite free men of colour recognised that economic circumstances would prevent ex-slave women from withdrawing into the home, there was an assumption that this was their proper place, and any economic activity on their part should be limited to ‘assisting’ their husbands. While huckstering might be appropriate work for women, field labour was considered to be unfeminine. In 1839 the *Liberal* supported Scoble’s statement that “negro females” should withdraw from field labour, adding that: “We hope and trust that, whatever the consequences may be to ‘the crops,’ the negro laborers throughout the colonies will, ere long, insist on their wives and daughters keeping out of the field, except in reaping time to assist in the lighter works of harvest.” ¹⁰¹

Elite men of colour also celebrated the fact that emancipation made relationships between unmarried women of colour and white men less publicly acceptable, but expressed little concern about the economic consequences of this change for these women.¹⁰² Part of the reason for this was class interest. Although civil rights agitators demanded the desegregation of state provision of poor relief, the pervasive ideology of self-help prevented many élite civil rights campaigners and philanthropists from supporting poor relief for anyone who was not practically starving. The *Liberal* argued that the exclusion of free people of colour from vestry poor relief was the reason for their industriousness, and advocated that relief should be extended only to the “absolutely destitute.” ¹⁰³ In December 1838 the St. Mary’s Charitable Society announced that it would no longer provide daily meals for poor children because of the “improved condition of the parents,” a reference to

¹⁰⁰ *Liberal*, 12 May 1838.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 30 March 1839, cited in Newton, “New Ideas of Correctness,” p. 98.

¹⁰² See Chapter 3, pp. 189-190.

¹⁰³ *Liberal*, 17 March 1838.

emancipation.¹⁰⁴ A year later the St. Mary's clothing society announced that no one earning domestic servants' wages would be eligible for relief.¹⁰⁵

However there was a more complicated aspect to this apparent class insensitivity. To acknowledge that any people of colour were impoverished due to the loss of their slaves would have involved admitting that many free people of colour had themselves been slaveowners, and, after 1834, élite men of colour were determined to erase that aspect of their past from the collective memory. By 1838, despite tactical differences, the deep class divisions among free people of colour, and their paternalistic attitude towards ex-slaves, élite men of colour were trying to forge a new political discourse, according to which the interests of free people of colour were now united with those of ex-slaves. The preservation of this appearance of unity of interest fundamentally depended on a denial of the fact that many pre-emancipation free people of colour had been slaveowners. According to this new rhetoric, the common enemies of all people of colour were the plantocracy and racial prejudice. The report of Prescod's speech at the August 1839 anti-slavery dinner illustrates how this new politics of racial solidarity was rooted in the negation of a past in which pre-emancipation free people of colour had been slaveowners, although they now embraced ex-slaves as their blood "brethren":

[Prescod] needed not remind them of the indissoluble ties between them and the lately emancipated classes. Those were the stock from which they as branches had sprung, and in the degradation of that stock they had necessarily been degraded. They were now both free; and on the moral and social improvement of those brethren, — to effect which self-interest, properly understood, should now direct all their energies, — their own political advancement entirely depended. (Hear, hear, and applause.) He concluded with proposing 'Our emancipated brethren; may their improvement keep pace with the wishes of their friends.' — Drunk with cheers.¹⁰⁶

Emancipation led to a shift in race consciousness in Barbados, based on the common experience of past and continuing racial prejudice which, despite their many

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 December 1838.

¹⁰⁵ *Barbadian*, 23 October 1839.

¹⁰⁶ *Liberal*, 3 August 1839.

differences, slaves and free people of colour shared. This shift manifested itself in paternalistic abolitionism and collective amnesia among pre-emancipation free people of colour regarding the fact that not all slaveowners had been white. The rise of this discourse of race consciousness was part of the reason why, during apprenticeship, free men of colour came to see their political interests as allied to those of former slaves. The next section will examine the development of this racial ideology in Barbados, and illustrate how it shaped relations between former slaves and pre-emancipation free people.

Imagining Africa: Emancipation and the Reinvention of 'Race'

Slavery, Abolitionism and the Idea of Race

To understand how and why emancipation led to such a change in race consciousness in Barbados, one has to examine the wider historical, imperial and international processes which fostered abolitionism, as well as attitudes towards Africa and the concept of 'race' in pre-emancipation Barbados. Although this section does not attempt to summarise all the nuances of the evolution of 'race' in intellectual and popular thought in the Atlantic world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹⁰⁷ it outlines the main trends which were important for the shift towards anti-slavery race consciousness in post-emancipation Barbados. It then analyses the newly racialised discourse which came to characterise the attitude of pre-emancipation free people of colour towards ex-slaves, slavery and politics in the island, and how ex-slaves themselves responded to this change.

In the slave societies of the West Indies whites had an almost universally negative opinion of Africa. As writers and politicians, both resident and absentee West Indian planters contributed to the racist conceptions which provided the ideological basis for

¹⁰⁷ For an analysis of the role of race in the development of nineteenth century British scientific and ethnographic thought see Stepan, *The idea of Race*. For a discussion of popular ideas about race in Britain see Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978). For a more general international discussion of the development of racial thought see Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

slavery in Britain and the Caribbean. They projected their views of people of African descent in the West Indies on to Africa, as a justification for the slave trade.¹⁰⁸ However, slaveowners were worried by the growing number of creole slaves in the West Indies. Some colonists thought creoles born and raised in slavery were potentially more dangerous because, as the diversity of African origins ceased to be relevant among them, the possibility of collective rebellion increased.¹⁰⁹ Although the assumed connection between creolisation and slave revolts is debatable, the three major rebellions in Barbados, Demerara and Jamaica between 1816 and 1831 were strongly characterised by a sense of solidarity among slaves based on race consciousness and unfree status. However, these rebellions also illustrated that the legal division separating slaves and free people of colour undermined any sense of racial solidarity between them, as well as the likelihood of collective political action.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, despite the importance of race as a motivating factor in the 1816 rebellion, most slaves also did not participate.

Although, as Mintz and Price argued, African cultural practices survived in the Americas in fragmented but recognisable forms,¹¹¹ it is difficult to know whether or not creole slaves and free people of colour made conscious references to Africa as a homeland in their every day practices. In Barbados, by the time of emancipation, only two per cent of the slave population was African-born, and few people had any

¹⁰⁸ Probably the most influential planter-politicians and historians in Britain were Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 4 vols. (London: 3rd. ed., John Stockdale, 1801) and Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vols. (London: Frank Cass, 1970 [1774]).

¹⁰⁹ See correspondence of 9 July 1668, Governor Willoughby to the Lords of the Council, reprinted in Nšel Sainsbury, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, Vol. I (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), p. 278; Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, pp. 323-324.

¹¹⁰ Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, pp. 101-102; Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, p. 16. Michael Craton has argued that, by the late eighteenth century, anti-slavery revolts led by élite creole slaves were supplanting rebellions organised among specific enslaved African groups in the British Caribbean (See Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British slavery* (London: Temple Smith, 1974), pp. 226-237, and Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts," p. 283). For discussions of the historical debate surrounding this assertion see David Geggus, "Slave Resistance Studies and the Saint Domingue Revolt: Some Preliminary Considerations," Florida International University, Latin American and Caribbean Center, Occasional Papers Series, No. 4 (Winter, 1983).

¹¹¹ Mintz and Price, *Anthropological Approach*, pp. 27-31.

personal memories of Africa.¹¹² This figure was probably even lower among free people of colour. There is evidence that Barbadian creole slaves looked down on African-born slaves, derisively referring to them as “salt water negroes.”¹¹³

Furthermore, part of slavery’s dehumanisation of people of African descent was its construction of them as people without history. Slaves and all people of African descent were stigmatised as people without a past, and Africa, by extension, as a place where superstition ruled rather than religion, and myth instead of history.¹¹⁴ According to one pro-slavery line of argument, even if plantation slavery was harsh, Africans enslaved in the New World would have been slaves in Africa anyway.¹¹⁵

Despite their different political positions on slavery, both abolitionists and advocates of slavery accepted the premise of racial and cultural inequality between Europe and Africa. Both saw Africa as ‘uncivilised’ and prone to the depredations of slave trading because it was ‘backward’ and therefore easy prey to the more advanced European powers.¹¹⁶ Schemes for promoting the ‘civilisation’ of Africa were a crucial part of British abolitionism from the late eighteenth century, even though the fight against slavery in Britain’s own colonies took centre stage.¹¹⁷ Ironically, as Robinson and Gallagher observe, “The stopping of the slave traffic involved the British in the affairs of the Coast far more than the trade itself had done”.

¹¹² Handler et al, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados*, p. 29.

¹¹³ Watson, *Civilised Island*, p. 135.

¹¹⁴ See Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, London: Verso, 1990), pp. 14-15, cited in Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Rev. H.E. Holder, *A Short Essay on the Subject of Negro Slavery, with a Particular Reference to the Island of Barbadoes* (London: Couchman and Fry, 1788), p. 13: “Slavery very extensively prevails in Africa: it should seem, then, that the transportation of Negroes, from Africa to the West-Indies, does not put them in a situation, *essentially*, different from that, in which they previously were” (emphasis in the original).

¹¹⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” in Henry Louis Gates Jr. (ed.), *“Race,” Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 185.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187 and 189. For a general discussion of ‘race’ in imperial policy in the West Indies and India from the 1780s-1810s see C.A Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 147-155.

The slave trade's volume was greater after British slave emancipation than ever before, at the precise time when the British humanitarian movement had enough political clout to "conscript their government into the anti-slaving crusade."¹¹⁸

In 1788, the same year that the first anti-slave trade bill was introduced and lost in the British Parliament, several leading British abolitionists established the West African port settlement of Sierra Leone. This was the first project to 'repatriate' people of colour from Europe and the Americas 'back' to Africa, and the first time British subjects acquired land by treaty on the African continent.¹¹⁹ The settlement was taken over by the British government in 1808, which followed its example, on a more limited scale, with the establishment of the Gambia and Gold Coast settlements for Africans liberated from foreign slave ships in 1816 and 1821 respectively. Such colonies were intended to be "bases from which legitimate commerce and civilisation would drive out the slave traffic."¹²⁰ They would illustrate to slave traders that the labour of free people of African descent was a viable alternative to slavery. In the case of Sierra Leone, it was thought that a British colony whose population was itself predominantly of African descent, would be a more effective means of gradually effecting the cultural transformations thought to be necessary to end slavery in Africa. Moreover, as a repudiation of the slave trade, the Sierra Leone project allowed the British to enter Africa for the first time as moral superiors.

Such colonisation projects were controversial because, despite the Sierra Leone project's anti-slavery aims, it was also a convenient means of removing free people of colour from Britain, and from parts of the Americas where people of African descent were welcome only as slaves.¹²¹ The colonisation idea gained support

¹¹⁸ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher (with Alice Denny), *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1981 [first ed., 1961]), pp. 27-28.

¹¹⁹ Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans," p. 186; Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹²⁰ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 28.

¹²¹ Most of the Sierra Leone colonists were loyalist free people of colour and ex-slaves who had

among both white abolitionists and racial exclusionists or segregationists in the United States. In 1816, the predominantly white American Colonisation Society was established in New England, which in 1822 founded Liberia as an American colony for the 'repatriation' of free people of colour.¹²² By contrast, the British Colonisation Society, founded in 1833, fell apart one year later due to lack of interest.¹²³ Although British coastal settlements facilitated encroachment by explorers, missionaries and scientists,¹²⁴ the racial segregationist aspect of colonisation and the immense difficulties of administering Sierra Leone made the British government reluctant to support further expansion into Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁵

British abolitionism was also driven by a strong sense of the need to 'atone' for the sin of slavery in Africa and the West Indies. In the eyes of abolitionists, slavery was the greatest stain on the national conscience, because Britain had risen to world power on the backs of enslaved Africans and at the expense of the African continent.

¹²⁶ In 1807 a group of influential abolitionists formed the African Institution, whose

fought with the British during the American War of Independence, and had been resettled in what remained of British North America after the war. The Sierra Leone Company had also rounded up hundreds of Britain's so-called 'black poor,' some of the thousands of people of African descent living in Britain's cities. Maroons from Jamaica, escaped slaves from the surrounding area, and, after 1807, slaves liberated from slave ships, were also an important part of the population of the colony. For descriptions of the composition of the early Sierra Leone population see Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976), p. 311; Fyfe, *Sierra Leone*. See also Mavis Campbell, *Back to Africa: George Ross & the Maroons, from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1993).

¹²² Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, p. 192-194.

¹²³ Richard Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 47-68.

¹²⁴ Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans," p. 185.

¹²⁵ On opposition to colonisation projects in the international anti-slavery movement see Blackett, *Anti-Slavery Wall*, p. 78; On reluctance of the British government to expand into Africa during the period see Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 27

¹²⁶ As Boyd Hilton has argued: "Religious and financial motives are particularly hard to disentangle with respect to anti-slavery, which was the supreme example of the politics of atonement" (see Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], p. 209). See also Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p. 27:

Since the Evangelical revival and the rise of secular liberalism, the issues presented by tropical Africa to the British nation had been derived from the ethical constructs of these movements. The duty to free the slaves and to convert the heathen had been thrown into high relief by the statute of 1807 which declared the Slave Trade illegal, and throughout the century the

purpose was to raise public support for emancipation. In an early pamphlet published under the Institution's auspices, James Stephen, future legal advisor in the Colonial Office during the 1820s and '30's, ¹²⁷ expressed the evangelical view that Britain was in debt to Africa for its wealth:

It is false, that we promote wars, for the sake of our trade in Europe, but that we thus sin in Africa, is unquestionably true. It is a foul libel, that the European continent owes its present miseries to British avarice; but that the great African continent owes chiefly to that cause, miseries far greater and more durable than those of Europe, cannot fairly be denied.

If therefore we are suffering for such offences as have usually provoked the scourge of the Most High, if it be as the protector of the poor and the destitute, that God has entered into judgment with us, we must I repeat, look to Africa, and to the West Indies, for the causes of his wrath. ¹²⁸

Stephen's tract illustrates that, despite the unpopularity of colonisation schemes, emancipation in the West Indies was intimately connected with Africa in British abolitionist thought. While it would be simplistic to see such tracts as a precursor to later British imperial policy, it contained justifications for emancipation in the West Indies and for greater British intervention in Africa. ¹²⁹

Abolitionism's growing influence in European imperial politics increased the antagonism between metropolitan governments and Caribbean planters. In the eyes of slaves, these distant metropolises became allies against the tyranny of the local white élite. For example, the leaders of the Haitian uprising did not initially seek independence from France, but launched their overthrow of white planters as part of the French revolution so long as it favoured emancipation. ¹³⁰ Similarly, the organisers of the 1816 rebellion believed British troops would support them, and

Churches and anti-slavery societies were to keep up the call of duty.... [T]he chief African questions for the Victorians were ones of atonement and duty.

¹²⁷ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, p. 48.

¹²⁸ James Stephen, *New Reasons for Abolishing the Slave Trade; Being the last section of a larger work, now first published, entitled "The Dangers of the Country"* (London: J. Butterworth, 1807), p. 11 and 26-27.

¹²⁹ See discussion of the connection between anti-slavery and British colonisation of Africa in David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 231-315.

¹³⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 148-151.

some thought that freedom had been granted to them by a “black Queen” in Britain but was being withheld by the planters.¹³¹

Abolitionists After The Fact: Free People of Colour and Emancipation

Free people of colour in West Indian slave societies were in a particularly ambiguous position, being people who had reasons both to support slavery and to repudiate the racist foundations on which slavery and their own marginalisation depended. Free non-whites in Barbados empathised with their counterparts in slave societies elsewhere in the Americas. In 1834, when a ship of black and coloured emigrants from the United States bound for Liberia stopped to provision in the Bridgetown port, the *Barbadian* reported that the “coloured portion of our community” donated \$30 in provisions to the Liberian colonists.¹³² The report listed no names and did not specify the number of people involved in making the donation. However, the amount of money collected suggests that either wealthy élites had put together the money, or there had been a major effort made to collect money from a large number of people of colour. This act by Barbadian free people of colour was not necessarily an expression of abolitionist sentiment. The Liberian scheme was greeted with almost universal condemnation by American abolitionists of colour, who objected to the notion of ‘repatriation’ as a thinly veiled segregationist attempt to ‘whiten’ the United States.¹³³

By the middle of the apprenticeship period, however, some free people of colour advocated expanding this sense of racial solidarity among pre-emancipation free people of colour to include ex-slaves. They may have been influenced by black abolitionist American thought. Some of these individuals had been educated in

¹³¹ 1818 Report, p. 27.

¹³² *Barbadian*, 24 February 1834.

¹³³ Support for African colonisation only grew among black American abolitionists after Liberia began independent in 1847, and the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law (see Blackett, *Anti-Slavery Wall*, p. 68; Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, pp. 261-267).

England during the 1820s, in an atmosphere charged with the influences of abolitionism and other 'liberal' movements for social, political and imperial reform. The most prominent examples are Samuel Prescod and his wife Katherine (née Cruden), Thomas Harris Jr. and Nathaniel Roach, the editors of the *New Times* and the *Liberal*, Barbados' first abolitionist newspapers. Educated in England in the 1820s, these three men returned to Barbados and became important figures in the civil rights struggle during slavery's last years. Thome and Kimball met Harris and the Prescods during their visit, just after Prescod had left the *New Times* and Roach assumed the editorship, and before Harris and Prescod founded *The Liberal*. Harris, who had also gone to France during the 1820s, probably after the scandal over the 1823 Belgrave address, told Thome and Kimball that, while in Europe, he had become involved with abolitionism, and had, since his return to Barbados, "often found himself in court for his views." Thome and Kimball noted that, on returning from England, Prescod "had seen himself and his accomplished wife excluded from the society of whites, though keenly conscious of their capacity to move and shine in the most elevated social circles." Although Prescod spoke "bitterly of the past" he expressed hope that racial prejudice would now diminish.¹³⁴ Roach lived in England for 12 years before returning to Barbados in 1828, where he opened a school in Bridgetown.¹³⁵

Historians have found it difficult to account for the sudden appearance of radical anti-slavery views among free people of colour in Barbados, and have focussed much of their attention on the activities of Prescod and Harris. However, historians have not examined their activities against the background of free non-white politics in Barbados during this period. Beckles states rather vaguely that, sometime around emancipation, Prescod "became associated with anti-slavery opinions emanating from the slave yards." The late Hilton Vaughn argued that Prescod's anti-slavery

¹³⁴ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, pp. 72-75.

¹³⁵ H. A. Vaughn, "Samuel Prescod: The Birth of a Hero," *New World Quarterly* 3 (1966), p. 59, cited in Handler, *Unappropriated People*, p. 181.

views were the result of witnessing his great uncle, who was a slave, being driven to suicide by slavery.¹³⁶ Although Prescod and Harris both participated in the pre-emancipation political and civil rights movement during the 1830s, and Prescod urged other civil rights agitators to be less obsequious in their relations with the local legislature, there is no evidence that either of them espoused abolitionist views before 1834. Harris' claims that he was always an abolitionist are even less convincing, as his political career outlined in previous sections of this chapter illustrates.

In fact, while the *New Times* and *The Liberal* were the most progressive voices in apprenticeship-era politics among free people of colour, they were examples of a rapid and apparently widespread change in the attitude of élite free people of colour. Many in the élite came to see slave emancipation as an issue relevant to their own political and civil rights struggle. How did free people of colour in Barbados come to see ex-slaves as their 'emancipated brethren', as Prescod called them in 1838? Was it simply a response to both changing political circumstances in Barbados? The answer to these questions lies in a combination of hypocrisy and class paternalism on the part of imperial officials towards people of colour in the West Indies, and a mixture of opportunism and growing race consciousness among people of colour in Barbados.

Opportunistic Abolitionists? Colonisation Schemes and Political Appointments

On the one hand, emancipation, representing a triumph of the principle that slavery was not the 'natural' fate of the person of African descent in the Caribbean, changed the socio-political position of pre-emancipation free people of colour in general. Elite free men of colour, as propertied men, had the most to gain politically

¹³⁶ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 116; Hilton Vaughn, "Samuel Jackman Prescod: Eulogy," p. 2. Vaughn is referring to a speech made by Prescod and reported in the *Liberal* on January 23 1839, in which Prescod stated: "He had never directly in his person known Slavery.... He had seen one old man who loved him like a son, and whom he loved as a father; he had seen that old christian man... made to forget his God, and bring upon his grey hairs the odium of suicide; and that man was the brother of his grandmother." See also Johnson, "Abolition of Chattel Slavery," p. 204.

from the principle of racial equality inherent in emancipation. They realised that their struggle for the repeal of laws sanctioning political and civil discrimination benefitted from the emancipation of slaves. By the middle of the apprenticeship period, even élite men of colour who had once been pro-slavery or neutral on slavery now supported emancipation, claiming it as further justification for their demands for increased political and civil rights. In 1837 Thome and Kimball met Joseph Thorne, his wife and two other “coloured gentlemen” — the Methodist minister Joseph Hamilton and Thomas J. Cummins — at Thorne’s home. Thorne, who had been a slave until age 20, had afterwards been a Bridgetown merchant and shoemaker.

According to the two Americans, the conversation was mainly about emancipation:

All spoke with great gratitude of the downfall of slavery. It was not the slaves alone that were interested in that event. Political oppression, prejudice, and licentiousness had combined greatly to degrade the colored community, but these evils were now gradually lessening, and would soon wholly disappear after the final extinction of slavery — the parent of them all. ¹³⁷

For these men to speak “with great gratitude” about emancipation was an important change in the tone of their pronouncements. Thomas J. Cummins had been one of the principal figures in the pre-1824 petitioning movement and, like many merchants of colour, had benefitted financially from slavery, although there is no evidence that he personally owned slaves. A few days before this meeting Thome and Kimball went with Cummins to the plantation for which he acted as agent. ¹³⁸ Thorne’s views before emancipation are less clear, since he seems never to have signed any political and civil rights petitions. Although he clearly believed strongly in the need for missionary activity among slaves, it is likely that he did not want to compromise his role as a catechist by means of political activity, even if he agreed with such views.

After emancipation, the local legislature continued to block the governor’s attempts to appoint local men of colour to high office during and immediately after apprenticeship. Despite the success of some men of colour in achieving office,

¹³⁷ Thome and Kimball., *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 74.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

imperial governors had rigid class criteria for office which made the process difficult even for those who were ultimately successful. Just after the end of apprenticeship in 1838, MacGregor appointed Thomas Cummins to a magistracy and nominated him for the legislative Council. Although, as he said, Cummins was “an opulent gentleman of color... whose manners and education, qualify him for the same rank,” his nomination met with “[C]onsiderable repugnance, on the part of several Members of Council to his nomination, when I made him a Magistrate; on account, not of his complexion, but of his keeping a retail shop — and I have since, in vain, urged him to purchase a landed estate, in order to endeavour to be returned to the Assembly.”¹³⁹

Emancipation and colonisation schemes in Africa offered wealthy men of colour who were frustrated with the situation in Barbados the possibility of appointments elsewhere. However the British government did not go out of its way to find appointments for men of colour in the West Indies, which were limited for any Caribbean-born man, of whatever colour. Sierra Leone seemed to offer the best hope for men of colour from the West Indies to acquire positions of real influence in imperial administration. Here too, however, the British government did not have a coherent West African policy, and was not very interested in colonisation schemes. Therefore, nothing came of the Colonial Office’s sporadic requests for governors in the West Indies to furnish lists of suitable candidates for West African government.

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The case of Charles Phipps, a pre-1834 free man of colour, is a good example of the hopes which some people of colour had of building careers as imperial officials in Africa, and of the difficulties they faced realising these dreams. Phipps was a fairly prominent man in free non-white philanthropy. He had for a long time been a teacher and secretary at the Colonial Charity School, and had also been secretary of the

¹³⁹ CO 28/123 Private, MacGregor to Glenelg, 8 September 1838.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 2, pp. 143 and CO 28/139 No. 21 MacGregor to Russell, 26 February 1841.

Barbados Auxiliary Bible Society.¹⁴¹ In 1842 Governor Sir Charles Grey described him as “a coloured Gentleman of respectable appearance and demeanour...” who had studied in Dublin. Between 1837 and 1842, Phipps sent at least six unsuccessful petitions to the governor and the Colonial Office asking for an imperial appointment in either another Caribbean island or Sierra Leone. After three years of waiting for something to come up, Phipps finally received a low level appointment as Acting First Clerk and Warehouse Keeper at the Bridgetown Port in 1840. In 1842 he sent another petition to the Colonial Office asking for an appointment as a magistrate or provost marshal in either the West Indies or Sierra Leone. Governor Grey wrote to the Secretary of State saying that the only possibilities for Phipps were in the police force or the customs, but he was too old for the former and not trained for the latter. As for his request for a magistracy, Grey felt that Phipps’ “station in Society, though quite respectable, does not adapt him to be added to the existing body of Magistrates in this Island”, and, despite his qualifications, it would be difficult to find a “suitable” appointment for him in Barbados. Grey, the Attorney-General Henry Sharpe and, according to Grey, Phipps himself, thought that perhaps “something on the coast of Africa” or in another Caribbean colony regulating the immigration of labourers from Africa would be most suitable.¹⁴² Had Phipps been white his educational and philanthropic background would probably have inclined the governor and the Colonial Office more favourably to his request, although they might still have thought him insufficiently wealthy for a magistracy. Phipps’ case illustrates the implicit view of the imperial government that the value of free people of colour in the

¹⁴¹ *Barbadian*, 22 August 1826; Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*, p. 42.

¹⁴² CO 28/ 127 No. 39 3 April 1839, MacGregor to Glenelg, enclosing petitions from Charles Phipps, referenced as No. 274, 5 December 1837, No. 205 5 July 1838 and No. 247 1 September 1838. Also enclosing No. 28 Glenelg to Macgregor [n.d], about Phipps. Later correspondence regarding Phipps and enclosing his petitions: CO 28/134 No. 92 MacGregor to Russell, 22 October 1840; CO 28/140 No. 20 Darling to Stanley, 22 October 1841; CO 28/144 No. 43 Grey to Stanley, 26 August 1842. After 1834, the imperial government experimented with a scheme of using Africans liberated from foreign slave ships as indentured labourers in ex-slave colonies which needed estate labour. See Monica Shuler, *“Alas, Alas, Kongo”: A Social History of Indentured African Immigration into Jamaica, 1841-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

civil service was determined largely by their race.

This desire for a role in the imperial civil service was probably an influential factor when, in 1841, élite men of colour, along with a number of prominent white planters, merchants and clergymen, established the Barbados auxiliary to the British Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilization of Africa. The organisation's parent society was founded in 1839 by Thomas Fowell Buxton, the leader of the parliamentary anti-slavery lobby. The Society held its first meeting at Joseph Thorne's home. Charles Phipps was among the founders, along with Thomas Cummins and three other prominent non-white merchants and philanthropists, the Methodist reverend Joseph Hamilton, and Edward Archer, a teacher and shopkeeper, also men of colour. The society was formed to lobby the Colonial Office to recruit West Indian subjects of African descent in order to "civilise" Africa, so that Europeans would not have to set foot on Africa's "pestilential" shores.¹⁴³

Two Motherlands: Emancipation and 'Double Consciousness'

Yet there was more to the shift in the attitude of free people of colour towards Africa and emancipation than just opportunism. Emancipation provided people of colour with a stronger claim to equality than any they had previously possessed. Now they could claim equality *because* emancipation had overthrown the legal association between race and inferior status. After emancipation, British Caribbean free people of colour had a new role in the 'civilising mission' of a racialised British empire, as examples of what the cultural and political benefits of benevolent empire could bring to Africa.

In Barbados, people of colour forged a sense of their identity as simultaneously subjects of two larger transnational communities: the British Empire, which represented the forces of 'civilisation' and 'progress'; and Africa, as the geographical

¹⁴³ *Barbadian*, 3 July 1841; *Liberal*, 10 July 1841; *Liberal* 19 and 26 January 1842. The three merchants of colour involved were Benjamin Massiah, Joseph Kennedy and William Wilkey. This organisation became known as the Barbados Anti-Slavery Society.

focal point of an international fraternity based on ties of skin colour and of 'blood'. Many of them came to see their interests as unified with those of former slaves, as well as other people of African descent elsewhere in the world. Paul Gilroy has termed the sense of 'black identity' which emerged in the Atlantic world in the context of slavery, anti-slavery struggles and racial inequality as the "double consciousness" of striving to be both "European and black". He further argues that "occupying the space between [Europeanness and blackness] or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination." 144

The *Liberal* newspaper and the participation of free people of colour in the anti-slavery activities which its editors organised show how élite non-whites forged a post-emancipation discourse of an international blood brotherhood composed of people of colour, including ex-slaves. On August 2 1838, at least 15 leading merchants of colour attended a meeting to celebrate emancipation. The meeting was chaired by Prescod, and held in the Bible Depository of the Barbados Auxiliary Bible Society of the People of Colour in Bridgetown. Joseph Kennedy and Thomas Harris were the featured speakers. In his speech Harris stated:

I rise with a heart uplifted with gratitude to a merciful Creator, for the inestimable blessing this day vouchsafed me, of meeting to celebrate our Emancipation. I say our Emancipation, gentlemen, because I do assert, and that too, without the fear of contradiction, that this day in which... the legislature of this Island has granted freedom to the slave — also made us *free indeed*... Gentlemen, by one Queen, the stain, that disgraceful stain of slavery and its horrors... has been removed from the escutcheon of Britain. Long may she reign to witness the good effects of the blessing she has conferred upon a grateful though calumniated people.

Gentlemen, this manifestation of our sentiments on this joyful occasion becomes us as men whose every feeling... more or less, are associated with the late emancipated class; for we must admit, to use the language embodied in an admirable resolution of the coloured people of America, "That they are our brethren by the lieu [*sic*] of *consanguinity*, of *suffering*, and of *wrong*..." And I trust the first of August will ever be celebrated by us with praise and thanksgiving, and with the same brotherly love which now actuates the company present.

144 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 1.

The reference to ties of “consanguinity,” “suffering” and “wrong” together demonstrate the selective memory necessary to forge a concept of a political future based on shared racial identity and a common history of racial oppression. The journalist who wrote the report on Harris’ speech argued that it was the duty of pre-emancipation free people of colour to protect and uplift former slaves:

“Our newly emancipated brethren look to us, gentlemen, for countenance and protection from the wrongs they may yet be subjected to; and I trust, gentlemen, that there is no gentleman of our body who will so far forget that his interests and theirs are now one and the same, as to refuse this protection.” They do look to us for countenance and protection; and we feel satisfied that, although an ignorantly selfish individual, here and there among us, may refuse them, the general body will never forget that “our interests and theirs are now *one and the same* — to be affected with common benefit or common injury!”¹⁴⁵

These anti-slavery dinners exemplify the sense of ‘double consciousness’, which élite free men of colour expressed, of being simultaneously the cultural and political progeny of Europe and “descendants of Africa”

Clifford Geertz observes that this tension between “essentialism” and “epochalism” — the uneasy pairing of apparently competing claims to a proud but stagnating “tradition” and a modernity associated with both inequality and “progress” — is strongly associated with racial and nationalist movements in contexts of colonial subjugation.¹⁴⁶ While such a discourse is usually associated with twentieth century anti-imperialism, post-emancipation Barbados is an example of pro-imperial race consciousness. Although they were critical of Europe’s past involvement in the trade of African slaves, Barbadian men of colour saw it as Europe’s duty to “enlighten” Africa. At the 1838 dinner in abolitionist John Scoble’s honour Prescod announced a toast to “the speedy civilization of Africa,” his “motherland” and theirs, and argued that:

[Before] the white man would give up his notions of exclusive humanity... Africa must enjoy all the advantages of civilization. The light of the gospel must spread into her deepest recesses, and the foot of the slave merchant must desert her shores. The European must seek these shores to carry

¹⁴⁵ *Liberal*, 4 August 1838 (emphasis in original). The name of the journalist was not given.

¹⁴⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press), pp. 240-241.

improvements to her children, and not to render her barbarism more barbarous — her mental darkness more impervious, by the damning influences of a traffic in human souls... For until they [people of colour] could point to Africa, with the same feelings of pride, with the same degree of exultation, with which the white man, now pointed to Europe, and say, behold our Mother country — until they could do this, they must be satisfied to be still a degraded people, although revelling in wealth and comforts.

He then made his toast, which was, “drunk with enthusiastic applause” by the audience.¹⁴⁷

Prescod’s speech shows the ambivalence which free people of colour felt towards the idea of European cultural superiority. On one hand, he saw Europe as representing modern “civilization”, but accused Europeans of having prevented Africa, through the slave trade, from progressing to attain similar levels of civilization. Europe, therefore, owed Africa a debt, and, it was the special duty of people of African descent outside Africa to be the protagonists of this project of modernisation. At the same time, however, people of colour had to defend Africa’s indigenous greatness. In an 1841 letter, a regular anonymous contributor to the *Liberal*, who wrote as ‘Africanus,’ expressed his view of the special mission of the “children of Africa in the Colonies”:

There is a rumour afloat of a scheme of the British people, for the civilization of Africa. As this century is marked by a spirit of enterprize [*sic*], and the energies of the British people, pent up for years, now seek an outlet in philanthropic acts to benighted Africa....

How exalted ought to be the emotions of gratitude, in the breast of every descendant of Africa, to the British nation, that so disinterestedly, so humanely, extends the hand of succour to the sons of that despised land, with a view of raising them to a station among the civilised nations of the earth!

It is necessary for the practical success of the scheme, that the children of Africa in the Colonies should lend their zealous co operation in this gigantic undertaking.... [I]t is not unreasonable to infer, from instances afforded by history, that the vast unexplored continent of Africa may contained nations who have arrived at a high degree of civilisation.... Considering the high civilization of Africa in ages long past, and that there was the birth place of Literature and Science, and Art, — there is nothing in the least unreasonable in the idea, in the far regions of that vast continent, another China might be concealed from the vision of the great European nations, who at present consider themselves

¹⁴⁷ *Liberal*, 1 December 1838.

the Monopolisers of learning and science. ¹⁴⁸

Thus, this apparent celebration of European cultural superiority was also a political challenge to the racial hierarchies of European imperialism and colonial West Indian society. In another letter 'Africanus' argued that:

Our mental powers, although shackled by fetters of slavery, have not been extirpated... If political equality is denied us in that land which gave us birth, by those in whom rests the power to bestow it — how are we to obtain it? There are but two courses: either by fighting our way to it, as the braver spirits among us are doing — bringing all our moral energies to the good work, or by seeking it (those who can seek) on other and more auspicious shores, leaving the land of our birth — that land which is dear to our hearts, to be tilled by the tyrants who claim it as their own. We are not borne down by the paltry considerations of locality. No! Wherever our species is found, there we instinctively feel to be our home, because with them we are identified; and if some of us perish through the baleful influence of climate, in our attempts to build for ourselves a temple of liberty, we will die with the consoling reflection that our race will reap the benefits of our martyrdom in their cause. When we raise our voices in that cause, we awaken a responsive chord in the breast of the negro in every part of the world. The differences of language occasioned by particular localities, are not sufficient to obliterate from our minds the identity of our origin.... ¹⁴⁹

'Africanus' therefore saw a decision by Barbadian free people of colour to emigrate in order to set up new political communities as a possible alternative to struggling for racial equality in Barbados. For 'Africanus', this international brotherhood of Africans and people of African descent gave free people of colour the option of either struggling for equality in their own local contexts, or moving en masse to start anew. While the participation of local men of colour in the Barbados Anti-Slavery Society might represent an element of opportunism on the part of élites looking for jobs in the empire, colonisation schemes also offered the possibility of building a new life free from racial oppression. The *Liberal* and its editors lobbied for racial equality in Barbados, but also printed regular articles about Haiti and Sierra Leone. ¹⁵⁰ In 1839, the *Liberal* reprinted, and gave its approval of, a suggestion by the Irish abolitionist MP Daniel O'Connell to the radical Quaker abolitionist Joseph Sturge that the "waste

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 17 February 1841.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 10 February 1841.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, articles entitled "Communication with Hayti" and "Biographical Sketch of the Late Sir John Jeremie, Governor of Sierra Leone," *ibid.*, November 26 1842.

territory of Mexico” be used as a “Free State for British coloured subjects.”¹⁵¹ Toasts to “the infant Haiti” were also a regular feature at the post-emancipation anti-slavery dinners at the St. Mary’s Boys’ School.¹⁵²

Demanding Colour-Blind Justice for the “sons of Afric”

Ultimately, people of colour hoped and believed that the end of racial slavery would usher in a new era of racial equality in Barbados itself. People of colour, both ex-slaves and pre-emancipation free people, hoped that the British government would bring colour-blind justice to the island, and that British judicial officers would rise above the colour prejudice which motivated local white élites. This was evident, for example, in the response of free people of colour to the 1823-24 West Indian legal commission,¹⁵³ and in public participation in the court system after emancipation.

Apprenticeship gave former slaves their first opportunity to prosecute their erstwhile owners for crimes and to obtain redress. One planter complained that his apprentices would “always hold him to the letter of the law, and are ready to arraign him before the special magistrate for every infraction of it on his part, however trifling.”¹⁵⁴ In 1836 stipendiary magistrate Colthurst recorded that: “When the negroes see even-handed justice given to all, they express great astonishment; they stare and exclaim ‘white man upon tread mill too.’”¹⁵⁵ Rather than dismissing the courts as a place where they could not expect justice, people of colour in the West Indies were active participants in the court system. As Diana Paton argues in the case of post-emancipation Jamaica, court cases attracted a large public audience.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 16 October 1839.

¹⁵² See reports of the anti-slavery annual dinners in the *Liberal*, 3 August 1839, 5 August 1840 and 3 August 1842.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 2, pp. 87-88.

¹⁵⁴ Thome and Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, p. 63.

¹⁵⁵ Woodville Marshall (ed.), *The Colthurst Journal*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁶ Descriptions of court room scenes in Barbados after emancipation also indicate that people came to court to insist by their presence that justice be served, and not just to witness the spectacle. ¹⁵⁷

The 1838 court case against Gunning Best also illustrates the popular view that it was the role of the law to be the impartial arbiter between local people of colour and whites. Best, man of colour and reporter for the *Liberal* newspaper, was convicted by the Court of Grand Sessions of assaulting a police officer. It is highly likely that the case was a trumped up charge, an attempt by the legislature to silence Best for his political views, since he was an employee of the *Liberal*. During the proceedings, Best argued that the case had been designed to convict him and that Solicitor-General Clarke and the magistrate had conspired to exclude witnesses. In sentencing him to hard labour and fines of more than £100, the magistrate displayed his bias by describing Best as “a most quarrelsome and violent individual: he had formerly been in the Police; and it was not, as he [Magistrate Gill] believed for good conduct, that he had to leave it.” During the same session of the court, two white men were convicted of the manslaughter of an apprentice but were sentenced without hard labour. The differences in the cases provoked a petition from a group of men of colour to Governor MacGregor, in which they compared Best’s treatment to that of the two white defendants: “These [the white men] were brought to the Bar of Justice, Arraigned for manslaughter, *they shot the sons of Afric, they shed blood — Best, in the discharge of his duty, as a Reporter for the ‘Liberal’ paper, after being struck by a police Officer, merely defended himself.*” They told MacGregor that they

¹⁵⁶ Diana Paton, “No Bond But the Law: Punishment and justice in Jamaica’s age of emancipation, 1780-1870,” Chapter Six, “Justice and the Jamaican People.” Unpublished PhD thesis (Yale University, 1999).

¹⁵⁷ For example, throughout 1839 several labourers took employers to court for pay which they said they were owed. In one particular case involving several male field labourers from Salter’s plantation, St. George, who said the attorney owed them money, there was dissatisfaction when the magistrates found for the defendant: “This decision seemed to create great dissatisfaction, and on the complainant’s [*sic*] quitting the Court and informing their friends (of whom we reckon no less than 30) of the issue of the trial, the commotion was so great, that the Magistrate left his seat, and desired an Officer to disperse them” (*Liberal*, 24 April 1839). See also *Barbadian*, 24 March 1849.

trusted him based on his past fairness in instances where the local courts were suspected of prejudice.¹⁵⁸

During his trial, Best and a group of other men of colour formed the Barbados Political Union Society, whose mission was to “defend and protect the rights of the poor.” The society does not seem to have survived very long, as this is the only reference made to it. However, its aim — the defence of the poor — was expressedly non-racial, even though the membership was entirely men of colour.¹⁵⁹ While men of colour fought for civil rights on the basis of their right to racial equality, many, particularly those associated with the *Liberal*, also recognised that the plantocracy had marginalised both landless whites and free people of colour. Thus, racially-based organising was not seen as inconsistent with a more general political alliance with whites against the plantocracy. In 1840, Prescod formed the Colonial Coloured Union, an abortive political association whose aim was equality for “black and mulatto men” throughout the West Indies.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, he organised the Liberal Party, a loose bi-racial coalition of predominantly merchant and professional candidates who challenged planters for seats in the House of Assembly.¹⁶¹

The editor of the *Barbadian* expressed the fears of many whites who accused Prescod’s Union, and the *New Times* and *Liberal* of being attempts by people of colour to “establish the complete ascendancy of the coloured and black population over the white, — to throw the whites entirely into the shade.”¹⁶² This attack provoked a response from a correspondent of colour named ‘Claudius’, in which he informed the *Barbadian*’s editor that, he hoped “no one of any sense would suppose

¹⁵⁸ CO 28/124 No. 355 MacGregor to Glenelg, 13 December 1838, enclosure B, No. 1. The signatories to the petition were *New Times* editor Nathaniel Roach, John Arthur Chase, who had been considered one of the ringleaders of the 1824 counter-address; Benjamin C. Eversley, who had signed the 1811 petition, James Reed, who had supported Prescod’s 6 May 1833 petition, and Charles R. Arthur (see Handler et al, *Freedmen of Barbados*).

¹⁵⁹ *Liberal*, 3 October 1838.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1840.

¹⁶¹ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 120.

¹⁶² *Barbadian*, 29 July 1840.

for an instant that we are over ambitious to throw open our drawing rooms to them [whites].” ‘Claudius’ saw whites as “one of the families of the human race, and therefore equal to ourselves in capacity, moral and physical.”¹⁶³

However, few free people of colour combined concepts of racial unity and class solidarity with a public acknowledgement that such coalitions were being built on a recent past in which people had been divided into slaves and slaveowners as well as black, coloured and white. One of the few was John Richard Belgrave, a man who wrote a letter to the *Barbadian* in 1841 describing himself as a “poor coloured man:”

“I the undersigned with the warmest feelings of love towards my brothering; more especially my poor class. Now my brothering [*sic*: brethren] you that have tasted of Slavery, were we persecuted by the white Inhabitants alone or was it every one that was capable of owning a Slave. Now my brothering as far as my judgment extends every man had his original faults, and so we are faulty to this day, I know that God suffer’d slavery or it would not have been in existance for what reason I do not know, but I know that it is by the same Lord have delivered us and no one else... [W]e ought not to be revengeful, for vengeance belongeth to God.... Now my brothering, White, or Black, as it had not been your lot to of been Master or Mistress be abiding your call, for if you exercise your duty with a good conscience and to the utmost of your abilities you are as much as the Master, or Mistress... [N]ow my brothering, I speak of those that have tasted of Slavery have you never known a Collard [*sic*: coloured] person possessing wealth and have taken their own Brother, Sister, Neice, Nephew, Cousin, or else, and made merchandize of them as well as any White person would.... [N]ow we are a Jealous race for if a man is placed in any Public Situation he is sanctioned with many evils, when many of you perhaps would not exercise it with a pure conscience, you all have so much to say about a White Man and yet you never feel yourselves any way aggrandized except you are seen in their Company, for I have heard the argument that a Man have used to his Collard Brothering, and then to hear him when he gets before two or three white men if they will be seen with him, his argument is as different, as a Stone to a bit of Cheese, I have heard them.... I am a poor my Brothering, no wealth, no voice... I of myself can praise God for a wonderfull governor for he has been of use to high, and low; more especially the poorest Class... [A]nd my Brothering of the higher Class if any of you are thinking of your forefathers doings I beseech you to with draw your minds from it, and be contented for the great change that God has been pleased to make, now my Brothering for all this argument may contain it does not approach the guiltless: wishing the Island more than tongue can express, and may be... we may enjoy that peace that do not exist among us now, to the satisfaction of our future days, and let God be praised.¹⁶⁴

Belgrave’s letter is remarkable for the author’s careful specifications of his use of the

¹⁶³ *Liberal*, 19 September 1840.

¹⁶⁴ *Barbadian*, 19 December 1840.

term “Brethren” to refer to people of his “race”, to those of his own socioeconomic background, whether “white” or “black”, or to all Barbadians, regardless of race or class status. In one sense, Belgrave’s use of ‘brethren’ is biblical, indicating the existence of a human family, however, in his reference to people of colour as “a Jealous race”, he employs clear concepts of racial difference. The letter is also important as a rare post-emancipation admission of the fact that many people of colour had also been slaveowners, and is at once a call to racial, class and country solidarity, based on a shared past of the experience of living in a slave society.

The double consciousness of being the descendants of Africa and subjects of Britain was not confined to pre-emancipation free people of colour. In July 1839 49 ex-slaves signed an address to the Queen, on behalf of 792 other emancipated people from the parish of St. Thomas. The authors thanked the governor and the British parliament for freedom and expressed the wish that “The Omnipotent will Ever be that Friend to Your Majesty as You have Been to the Unfortunate Sons of Affrica [sic].”¹⁶⁵

The Limits of Brotherhood: State Repression and the Internalisation of Racism

Whatever the similarity of their feelings towards Britain, the appeal for unity among pre-emancipation free people of colour and ex-slaves on the basis of shared racial origins was at odds with the fact that the process of emancipation itself created new bases for competing economic and political interests. Pre-emancipation free people of colour and some ex-slave officers participated in the establishment of post-slavery institutions of state control designed to repress ex-slaves.

The participation of non-whites in the new police force undermined the rhetoric of

¹⁶⁵ CO 28/128 No. 76 MacGregor to Lord Normanby, 16 July 1839, enclosing “An Address of Your Majesty’s dutiful and loyal Subjects the Lately Emancipated of the Parish of St. Thomas...”; see a similar address from ex-slaves in CO 28/127 No. 49, MacGregor to Normanby, 23 April 1839, enclosing address of “the recently enfranchised portion of the black and coloured population of the parish of St. George...”

racial solidarity. The police force was essentially a modernised version of the militia, developed specifically to help the plantocracy maintain control over the post-emancipation labouring population. From its inception, the police force was notorious for its brutality towards ex-slaves. In 1834 members of the Moravian congregation at Mount Tabor told the missionary that they were afraid to come to prayer meetings because of the danger of being arrested by the police “who had treaded [sic] several very roughly.” This harassment occurred even though the local stipendiary magistrate had instructed the police not to prevent people from going to church.¹⁶⁶ Accusations also reached the imperial government that the police were conducting illegal floggings of apprentices.¹⁶⁷ In 1834, the Colonial Office received an anonymous letter from an individual claiming to be a Barbadian apprentice, the only extant letter ever sent to the Colonial Office by either a slave or apprentice from the West Indies. The author begged the secretary of state to curb the excesses of the police:

... [T]here is a Police framed but the men acts in a most in humane manner rushing into mens house beating them and Cutting them a COUNTRY Policemen killed a poor apprentice Struck him to the heart and he dyed and it was said it was all in self defence a poor Black Woman in a Prègnant state was kicked in the Belly and sevearly beaten by him and laid out Dead and [...] Property recovered and recompense all this they blame Mr. Stanley [Edward Stanley, the author of the 1833 imperial emancipation bill], for but God bless him his aim was good.¹⁶⁸

After apprenticeship there were several court cases in which the police were found to have falsified reports and assaulted prisoners, and there were instances of labourers dying under suspicious circumstances in both urban and rural jails.¹⁶⁹

The only brutality case in which the race of a police officer was specifically mentioned was the October 1838 case involving Gunning Best. The officer who

¹⁶⁶ Moravian Diary, 5 October 1834.

¹⁶⁷ See CO 28/115 Smith to Aberdeen, 14 March 1835, on the case of a runaway apprentice named Eliza.

¹⁶⁸ CO 28/114 Anonymous, Barbados, 1 October 1834.

¹⁶⁹ *Liberal* 27 April 1839; letter from ‘Aristides’, 12 June 1839; 16 March 1842.

prosecuted Best, whom Best accused of assaulting him and targetting him for arrest on political grounds, was himself a man of colour.¹⁷⁰ Since the majority of constables in the police force by 1839 were men of colour, it seems unlikely that only white officers abused their power. Ironically, although the inclusion of men of colour was seen as a victory against racism, the police were accused of participating in the maintenance of illegal racial segregation. In March 1839, Benjamin Goodridge, a white political associate of Prescod's from Speightstown, wrote to the *Liberal* saying that the police had turned people of colour away from a concert, and had physically assaulted those who resisted.¹⁷¹

The role of pre-emancipation men of colour as police officers during and immediately after the apprenticeship period was mirrored by male apprentices who had been part of the plantation labour élite during slavery. A Jamaican planter had suggested to the 1831 commission on gradual emancipation that estate headmen might be less welcoming of freedom than other slaves:

The headman upon an estate is indifferent [to freedom]... I could point to a head driver, living on an estate where his privileges were great, and his means of acquiring property greater, and that man considering freedom, to use his own expression, being turned out upon the open savannah, he would say, "I would rather forego those privileges."

...
The head driver of an estate... would take the freedom and like the freedom if he were permitted to remain in his office, if it could possibly consist with freedom.¹⁷²

The rural police force was accompanied after 1834 by a network of 'estate constables', male apprentices selected to assist the police in keeping the peace on a particular estate. In nearly all cases, these 'constables' were former headmen, particularly drivers. Although it was illegal for drivers — now called 'superintendants' — to carry whips into the field, estate constables were issued with batons, like the

¹⁷⁰ CO 28/124 No. 355 MacGregor to Glenelg, 13 December 1838, enclosure B.

¹⁷¹ *Liberal*, 13 March 1839.

¹⁷² PP 1831-32, Vol. 20 *Report of the Select Committee...*, p. 22.

police, and it emerged during apprenticeship that many constable-headmen were carrying their batons into the fields with them to supervise the work of field labourers.

¹⁷³ They also carried out many evictions of estate labourers from their homes during and immediately after apprenticeship. ¹⁷⁴

As a result, relations between headmen and field labourers after emancipation were tense. In 1834, the missionary at Mount Tabor noticed that the labourers at one of the estates in the neighbourhood would not come to hear him when he visited, because he held his meetings in the driver's house. He sent word to them "that I would keep the meeting under the tree before their Master's house, wh. met their approbation very much, tho the driver did not seem to like it, but we had a larger company this time than before." ¹⁷⁵ During a particularly acrimonious field labourers' strike in August 1838 at a St. George estate, police magistrates, policemen and the estate constables threatened to evict the strikers. According to the estate attorney, the labourers told the magistrates they had no right to interfere, and: "... [A]s for the rural constables, if one of them spoke and demanded silence, or in any way attempted to exercise his authority, the clamour was so great that it was impossible for any one to demand silence in the Queen's name so as to be heard." ¹⁷⁶ In March 1839, the Governor instructed police magistrates not to allow drivers to become constables. ¹⁷⁷

Despite attempts to promote racial pride among people of colour, many pre-emancipation free non-whites and ex-slaves had internalised negative attitudes

¹⁷³ CO 28/ 127 [no. missing] MacGregor to Glenelg, 26 March 1839, enclosing no. 6, Governor's Circular to the special magistrates, 18 February 1839 and No. 7, Nathaniel Roach, police magistrate for St. Andrew, to Joseph Garraway, Governor's Private Secretary, 23 February 1839.

¹⁷⁴ Newton, "New Ideas of Correctness," p. 110.

¹⁷⁵ Moravian Diary, 19 October 1834.

¹⁷⁶ CO 28/123 No. 220 MacGregor to Glenelg, 22 August 1838, enclosure No. 2, James Henry Went, Justice of the Peace, to MacGregor, 16 August 1838.

¹⁷⁷ CO 28/ 127 [date missing] MacGregor to Glenelg, 26 March 1839, enclosing No. 8 Joseph Garraway, Acting Private Secretary, to magistrates, 15 March 1839.

about their own colour. In 1835, for example, an estate constable arrested an apprentice accused of stealing canes, and brought him to stipendiary magistrate Colthurst. The constable, whom Colthurst described as an “old negro man”, told him that the apprentice was a disreputable character, and added: “Massa, massa, Major, dat man is not belong to de property — he is bad man, he only dare two, three days ago — de damn black nigger.”¹⁷⁸ This internalisation of racism and distrust of the police made slaves’ wary of people of their own race who held positions of authority over them. White police magistrates frequently alleged that labourers preferred white to non-white employers, and had more confidence in whites in positions of authority than men of colour.¹⁷⁹ While such claims should not be accepted without question, they are supported by an incident from 1841, when a crowd of people of colour supported a black porter or boatman named Cox, when he resisted arrest by a black police officer. A witness testified in court that, as a black policeman dragged Cox through Trafalgar Square, Cox declared that he “would not go to the Station-house with any black villain of a Policeman...,” and that he only stopped resisting when a white officer turned up.¹⁸⁰

Regardless of their wealth and social status, people of colour were expected, frequently by other people of colour, to show deference to those of lighter skin. In August 1842, several hundred people of colour attacked London Bourne’s home after he charged one of his shop assistants, a light-complexioned man of colour named John Piper, with theft. In an editorial on the incident the *Liberal* stated sadly that:

We are grieved to the soul that any considerable number of persons should at this day be found in the community, so utterly destitute of common sense as to entertain and proclaim by open riot the stupid notion, that fair complexion and

¹⁷⁸ Marshall (ed.), *Colthurst Journal*, pp. 104-106.

¹⁷⁹ See for example PP 1842, Vol. 29, *Papers Relative to the West Indies*, “Questions for Quarterly Reply from the Police Magistracy... 1840”: 1 January to 31 March, No. 2 St. James and No. 4 St. John; 1 April to 30 June, No. 11 Rural St. Michael; 1 July to 30 September 1840, No. 8 St. Joseph; *Liberal*, 22 January 1840.

¹⁸⁰ *Liberal*, 22 September 1841.

respectability, real or presumed, are to be a passport to impunity from crime, when the party injured happens to be a black man! And that black men and women, above all others, should be the fools to be led away by this preposterous notion, to commit a breach of the law and expose themselves to its penalties, is evidence of their zealous sincerity. ¹⁸¹

The crowd threw stones at the house and threatened to kill Bourne's son, who had testified against Piper, referring to Bourne as a "Barbadian Congo" and his son as "the congo son". ¹⁸² Caribbean lexicographer Richard Allsopp describes the term "Congo" in the West Indies as a derogatory expression for: "A person who is black, whose standard of living is of the lowest, speech uneducated and language rough, and who is also considered basically stupid and ignorant." Africans from the Congo region of Africa were enslaved and brought to the West Indies much later than West Africans, when the process of creolisation was well underway among West Indian slave populations. According to Allsopp: "The Congoes were strongly despised by the established creolized slave population, and consequently the stigma of stupidity was attached to the type and passed on to present times." ¹⁸³ The use of this term during the 1842 riot indicates how deeply-ingrained negative attitudes towards Africa were among some people of African descent in Barbados, and the prevalence of the view that, as a man of darker colour than Piper, Bourne had no right to prosecute him. In 1859 Bourne was described as "a man of unmixed African blood", which suggests that he had very dark skin. ¹⁸⁴ Some of Bourne's neighbours, themselves people of colour, apparently either participated in the attack or refused to help the police sent to disperse it.

Conclusion

After 1834, pre-emancipation free people of colour supported emancipation, and sought to make the freedom of ex-slaves the basis of their claims for the vote, civil

¹⁸¹ *Liberal*, 20 August 1842.

¹⁸² *Liberal*, 3 September 1842, see also reports in the *Barbadian*, 20 and 27 August 1842.

¹⁸³ Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 167.

¹⁸⁴ Karch, "London Bourne," p. 19.

equality and full citizenship. They formed a political alliance with whites who also wanted electoral reform, and forged an ideology of political equality which rested on the principles of racial solidarity among all people of colour, regardless of past legal status. The imperial government also saw the role of free people of colour as crucial to the success of emancipation, and supported their demands for the desegregation of the island's public institutions.

However, several factors combined to create tensions among non-white political reformers. Many élites were uncomfortable with the populist approach of more radical abolitionists and anti-segregation campaigners like the *Liberal*. Some élite men of colour sought the vote for themselves, but were reluctant to support working class demands for political enfranchisement. The outlook of élite political and civil rights agitators was very paternalistic in class terms, both towards poorer pre-emancipation free non-whites and ex-slaves. Additionally, the struggle to create a new basis for political solidarity between pre-emancipation free people of colour and ex-slaves rested on a denial of the ambivalent role of free non-whites in slave society. Throughout slavery, the state had been used as a tool for oppressing former slaves, and this legacy shaped post-emancipation social relations. The participation of many people of colour, including ex-slaves, in repressive state institutions undermined élite claims of racial solidarity. Additionally, the racist stereotypes which had supported slavery shaped the thinking of many people of colour, and influenced relations among them.

Chapter five discusses how, as Barbados entered a period of labour and economic crisis after 1838, disagreements about how to face the challenges of emancipation, and about the right of ex-slaves to exercise their new freedom, finally destroyed the limited solidarity achieved among campaigners for equal political and civil rights.

Chapter 5

The Ambivalence of Full Freedom: The Question of Free Labour, 1838-c1854

This chapter examines how early post-emancipation political and economic developments helped to establish a small political élite of colour and widened the socioeconomic gap between this élite and the overwhelming majority of people of colour, including ex-slaves. While a small group of urban pre-emancipation free people of colour benefitted socially, politically and economically from emancipation, most other pre-1834 free non-whites found themselves facing the same choices as ex-slaves, of either living with severe hardship and even starvation, or emigrating to another country. Although there was significant movement of ex-slaves into non-agricultural types of work, by the 1850s, not a single ex-slave had entered the ranks of the social and economic élite of colour.

In discussing pre-emancipation free people of colour in Barbados after 1838, historians have focussed their attention on the activities of Samuel Jackman Prescod, who, in 1843, became the first man of colour to be elected to the House of Assembly.¹ Claude Levy emphasises the contrast between the active and influential political role of non-whites in other islands, particularly Jamaica, and the relative absence of such a role in Barbados.² While Prescod is a significant figure, this chapter places him in the wider context of non-white political activity in Barbados. Pre-emancipation free people of colour were more politically active in Barbados after 1838 than has previously been recognised, although their influence was limited and they were deeply factionalised.

This chapter nuances the sweeping claim made by some historians that

¹ Phillips, "Beginnings of Samuel Jackman Prescod." Although Phillips discusses the discrimination faced by free people of colour, and discusses their social and philanthropic activities, the only other political figure of colour whom he mentions is Cummins, a reference to his rejection for a magistracy in 1834 (p. 367).

² Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 85.

emancipation failed to bring about significant changes in Barbados.³ It also seeks to expand the relatively limited references to pre-emancipation free people of colour as a group after 1838.⁴ The chapter supports the assertion made by O. Nigel Bolland and Michael Craton that there was significant continuity between slavery and post-emancipation in terms of the grievances, tactics, aims and expectations of slaves and ex-slaves, and the harsh response of planters.⁵ However, the chapter questions the tendency to measure social change in terms of land redistribution, and resistance in terms of outright rebellions. It argues that this focus places emphasis on the relationship between planters and labourers to the exclusion of other social groups.⁶ Historians have paid scant attention to the significant shifts in socioeconomic relations among landless people, particularly between pre-emancipation free people of colour and ex-slaves, which were wrought by emancipation.

Section one examines how urban free people of colour were affected by the repressive rural post-emancipation labour régime, and ex-slaves' efforts to resist it. Rural labour conflict accelerated rural-urban migration, which in turn increased competition for non-agricultural and urban work. The section discusses the connection between these internal changes, and the participation of pre-emancipation free non-whites in Barbadian emigration to other Windward territories, particularly British Guiana and Trinidad. However in Barbados, in contrast to other parts of the Caribbean, this movement of people posed no threat to the political and economic power of the plantocracy, partly because the legislature moved quickly to

³ Michael Craton, "Continuity not Change"; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*.

⁴ For exceptions see Shirley Aub, "Discovering the Free Coloured People of Barbados," unpublished paper, [BDA, c1973]; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 30-31.

⁵ Bolland, "Systems of Domination," p. 108; Craton, "Continuity not Change," p. 192.

⁶ There has been a tendency to focus attention on the growth of free villages after emancipation as an indicator of change. However, as William Green notes: "The free village movement took hold everywhere except Barbados" (Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, p. 301). Similarly, the absence of largescale armed rebellion between 1816 and 1876 has been taken as a measure of the acquiescence of Barbadian ex-slaves. For example, Levy states: "The cooperation of Barbadian workers, despite occasional signs of discontent, was an important reason why emancipation was not as injurious to planting interests as it was elsewhere" (Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 96).

restrict emigration.

Section two examines why, although emancipation stimulated political mobilisation among pre-1834 free people of colour, and brought political success for a small group of them, it also brought about the rapid disintegration of the struggle for political equality and civil rights. It illustrates how the debate over the right of ex-slaves to control their own labour and emigrate fatally divided political leaders of colour, a breakdown which reflected the declining political influence of pre-emancipation free non-whites in imperial politics in the Caribbean. Despite the destructive emigration debate of 1839-1840, the handful of men of colour who gained access to political office continued to use their positions to challenge racial segregation policies.

Section three examines why, as socioeconomic conditions worsened during the 1840s, the legislature's anti-emigration policy increased poverty levels. Slavery had entrenched high unemployment as a structural feature of the Barbadian economy. As the countryside continued to haemorrhage labourers looking for a better life in the towns, the standard of living in urban areas for the already established population of tradespeople also declined. By the 1850s, the social status and living conditions of most pre-emancipation free people of colour were indistinguishable from the growing non-agricultural segment of the first generation of former slaves. For many pre-emancipation free people of colour, emigration represented the only real possibility of socioeconomic betterment.

Rural Resistance, Migration and Pre-emancipation Free People of Colour

Barbados and the Post-Emancipation Crisis in Caribbean Agriculture

Post-emancipation labour and social relations in Barbados must be seen in their wider imperial and Caribbean context. The abolition of slavery contributed to one of the worst economic crises in the history of British Caribbean plantation agriculture. By the 1820s the price of sugar from the British West Indies had gone into a

seemingly irreversible decline. Haiti, the greatest eighteenth century threat to the British West Indies sugar industry, had now been replaced by even more daunting competition from Cuba and Brazil.⁷ The situation was similar with regards to other important West Indian export crops, such as coffee and cotton, the latter a crop which was particularly important for the survival of small landholders.⁸ West Indian planters survived on credit from merchant houses in the colonies and in Britain. After the long cycle of declining prices and political controversy over slavery, many merchants lost confidence, and demanded loan repayments while refusing to extend further credit.⁹

From 1663 sugar entering Britain from its Caribbean colonies was taxed at a lower rate than sugar from elsewhere in the empire and the wider world. Since the 1790s, there had been pressure from abolitionists and parliamentarians with financial interests in India to equalise the sugar duties.¹⁰ After emancipation, parliamentary abolitionists, many of whom were also supporters of free trade, supported popular demands for the end of protective tariffs on agricultural products, such as sugar and corn which, free traders argued, kept prices for these necessary items artificially high.¹¹

During apprenticeship, planters in the West Indies determined that to survive in the face of these pressures, they had to increase production.¹² However, the costs

⁷ Between 1820 and 1860 Cuba's annual sugar exports rose from 43,119 tons to 447,000, while Brazil's grew from 75,000 to 82,000 between 1820 and 1839, but afterwards tended to fluctuate a great deal from year to year (See Deerr, *History of Sugar*, vol. I, p. 131). See also Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship*, p. 337 and 368-369; Watts, *West Indies*, p. 300.

⁸ Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship*, pp. 23-24; Richard Lobdell, "Patterns of Investment and Sources of Credit in the British West Indian Sugar Industry, 1838-1897," in Beckles and Shepherd (ed.), *Caribbean Freedom*, p. 319.

⁹ Lobdell, "Patterns of Investment", pp. 320-321; Kathleen Mary Butler, *Economics of Emancipation*, pp. 64-68; Richard Pares, *A West India Fortune* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950), p. 261.

¹⁰ Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, pp. 104, 204-212 and 361; Deerr, *History of Sugar*, vol. II (London: Chapman and Hall, 1950), pp. 427-448.

¹¹ Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, pp. 202-213; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 99.

¹² During apprenticeship Barbados had the greatest increase in sugar production in the British Caribbean, with production falling in most territories (Levy, *Sugar, Emancipation and Federalism*, p. 59).

of running an estate with free labour were higher than they had been during slavery, partly because wages now had to be paid.¹³ Although there was some discussion regarding technological modernisation of sugar production in order to reduce the required labour force, few planters had the money to invest in research.¹⁴ Planters were generally hostile to technological innovations, particularly those based on claims that sugar could be produced profitably without a large, captive labour force.¹⁵

Unfortunately for planters, emancipation also presented the likely prospect of a Caribbean-wide labour shortage. In many colonies such as Trinidad, British Guiana and Jamaica, the labour force had declined significantly since 1807, and emancipation made it likely that planters would lose the majority of this already insufficient labour force to peasant farming, artisanal labour and huckstering. In these colonies emancipation rapidly led to the withdrawal of free labourers from the estates, creating an unreliable labour supply and forcing proprietors to increase wages in order to keep and attract workers, which did not stem the flow.¹⁶

Planters in territories facing crippling labour shortages experimented with indentured immigration schemes to obtain labourers from elsewhere. Africans liberated from foreign slave ships were one source of labour, but the numbers were inadequate for the needs of largescale agriculture. After 1835, planters brought in indentured labour from various parts of the world, including Madeira and China. In the long term, contract labour from India was to become the backbone of the post-

¹³ Lodbell, "Patterns of Investment," p. 319; Deerr, *History of Sugar*, vol. II, pp. 367-376.

¹⁴ Lodbell, "Patterns of Investment," p. 320.

¹⁵ Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, pp. 68-76. Butler argues that part of the reason why Barbadian planters fared better than many of their peers after emancipation was because, during slavery, they had been forced to rationalise the management process of their estates and make use of artificial fertilisers to make up for exhausted soil and comparatively small estates (See Butler, *Economics of Emancipation*, p. 58, pp. 68-71). However, as Levy argues, Barbadian planters were also conservative regarding mechanical innovations (Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 95).

¹⁶ Riviere, "Labour Shortage."

emancipation sugar industry in Trinidad and British Guiana.¹⁷ Meanwhile, however, planters from these two colonies set their sights on the large labour force of their neighbour, Barbados, which, with over 82,000 ex-slaves and an estimated population density of 500 slaves per square mile in 1834, had the second largest and most dense slave population in the Caribbean.¹⁸

Imperial officials were initially enthusiastic about the prospect of redistributing some of Barbados' ex-slave population to other parts of the Caribbean where labour was required. In 1833 Governor Smith described the island as "dreadfully overpeopled, we have... as close a population as China — It is most desirable to encourage emigration — Trinidad and Demerara would be the best points...."¹⁹ However, Barbadian planters wanted to maintain a reserve of labour to ensure themselves of an adequate supply of workers and to keep wages down.²⁰ The London agent for Barbados, J.P. Mayers, admitted in 1833 that the island's population had been "gradually ascending for several years, & very possibly might soon become so redundant as to render emigration advantageous to the interest of that Colony.", However, he rapidly retracted that opinion, arguing that an excess labouring population was necessary because of widespread "indolence and indisposition to labour." He further argued that as much as 12 per cent of the island's slave population was elderly or infirm people whose able-bodied relatives had to look

¹⁷ Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, pp. 245-251, 269-270; Levy, *Sugar, Emancipation and Federalism*, p. 80; Brian Moore, *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery, 1838-1891* (New York and London: Gordon and Breach Science, 1987), pp. 31-47; Brinsley Samaroo, "Two Abolitions: African slavery and East Indian indentureship," in David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, *Across the Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian identity in the Caribbean* (London: MacMillan Caribbean, 1996), pp. 25-41; Mahdavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Jamaica had the largest slave population at 311,070, with an estimated 74 slaves per square mile, and Trinidad, with 20,657 emancipated slaves, had an ex-slave population density of 12 per square mile. St. Kitts had the second highest density, with 314 slaves per square mile, and a slave population of 19,780 (Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, p. 193).

¹⁹ CO 28/111 Smith to Secretary of State for War and Colonies Edward Stanley, 8 July 1833.

²⁰ Mary Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile and Return* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan Caribbean, 1997), p. 21.

after them if the colony was to avoid the burden of granting them poor relief.²¹

In response to the threat from British Guiana and Trinidad, the legislature quickly passed the 1836 “Act to regulate the Emigration of Laborers from this Island.” The House claimed that local “crimps”, as emigration agents were called, were buying labourers’ remaining apprenticeship, and then forcing them to sign three-year contracts for work in British Guiana. Besides reflecting planters’ worries about losing labourers, the act was also motivated by racism and parsimony, as the legislature simply did not want to have any non-white pauper children for whom the vestries might have to care. In most parishes, poor relief was exclusively reserved for whites. The legislature defended the anti-emigration legislation on this basis, arguing that it was necessary due to “the inevitable consequences, of having numerous families to provide for by Poor Laws, which will eventually be much heavier in this, than in any other Colony, on account of our numerous Whites.”²²

There was a general belief that ex-slaves were too “attached” to their homes to emigrate from the island,²³ and the legislature was more concerned about losing rural labour to the towns, to artisanal work and to huckstering. To counteract this danger, a new poor law, passed a few months before the 1836 emigration act, gave the vestries power to expel illegitimate children whose parents dwelt in another parish, so that they would not have to assume financial responsibility for them after emancipation.²⁴ This act was designed to discourage labourers from moving from parish to parish, or from the countryside to towns, in search of work. In 1835 the legislature passed acts increasing the tax on huckstering, and instituted a system of licenses for various types of non-agricultural labour.²⁵ As former slaves established

²¹ CO 28/112 J.P. Mayers to Stanley, 22 July 1833.

²² CO 28/117 No. 50 Smith to Glenelg, 26 July 1836.

²³ *Barbadian*, 31 August 1836.

²⁴ CO 28/117 No. 24 Smith to Glenelg, 13 April 1836 enclosing Attorney-General Henry Sharpe to Smith, 26 March 1836, re: “An Act to confer settlement or right of Paupers to dwell immoveably in some one particular parish of this island” (CO 30/22 No. 194, passed 6 March 1836).

²⁵ See chapter 3, p. 176.

rum shops and small retail stores during apprenticeship, the legislature also increased the cost of a license to sell alcohol from £5 to £10.²⁶

The legislature would probably have rejoiced if some of the free people of colour working in non-agricultural sectors had emigrated, particularly those in urban areas, whom it saw as a threat to white businesses and public order. The perception that these groups were dangerous was probably particularly strong in the middle of the apprenticeship period, when non-*praedials* were scheduled to be freed two years before *praedials*. Planters considered tradespeople, hucksters, domestics and urban people of colour to be a potentially destabilising force and a dangerous example for rural field apprentices. Towards the end of apprenticeship, planters sought to decrease the number of male and female domestics employed on plantations,²⁷ in order to discourage the desertion of field labourers who coveted such positions and to cut the cost of estate management. The 1836 anti-*émigration* act was therefore quite specific in its targetting of labourers, and kept the possibility of emigration open for paupers and non-agricultural labourers. The *Barbadian* probably reflected elite opinion when the editor wrote enthusiastically about Liberia and published advertisements requesting skilled tradespeople for British Guiana, but supported legislation restricting the emigration of field labourers.²⁸

Harsh Labour Legislation and Rural Unrest

In the last months of apprenticeship, governments across the West Indies sought to prevent an estate labour shortage by passing legislation designed to force workers to remain in full-time estate labour, or else face criminal charges and eviction from their homes. As Beckles asserts, Barbadian plantations' near total domination of land and political power led to: "... [A] situation whereby after emancipation a workforce

²⁶ CO 30/22 No. 587 "An Act for amending and continuing in Force An Act entitled An Act for laying a Tax on Licenses to be granted for the retailing of Rum, Brandy, Gin and other Liquors...", passed 15 December 1835.

²⁷ See Chapter 3, p. 154.

²⁸ *Barbadian*, 24 February 1834 and 10 August 1836.

which did not own homes, or have access to land, was created with a inbuilt dependency on the plantation.... The system provided planters with an adequate supply of labour, and afforded them considerable control over that labour.”²⁹

The self-governing colonies of Barbados and Jamaica and the crown colonies Trinidad, British Guiana and St. Vincent based their most important post-apprenticeship labour laws on legislation from Antigua. The Antiguan assembly had foregone apprenticeship in 1834 because it was confident of its power to coerce free labourers into remaining in full-time estate labour.³⁰ The centre-piece of post-emancipation labour legislation was the wage-rent system, first established in Barbados by the 1838 “Act to regulate the Hiring of Servants”, also known as the contract act.³¹ Under the act, five days of continuous labour on one estate was deemed to constitute a binding contract for one year. This ‘contract’ could be broken by either side at one month’s notice. However, labourers who broke their contracts had to vacate their houses and garden plots on the estate, or face eviction. In respect of eviction, the act differentiated between those freed before August 1 1838, who were subject to immediate eviction on August 1 if they did not comply with the terms of the act, and those freed after that date, who could remain on their owners’ estates until November 1.³² The local police magistrates replaced the stipendiary magistrates of the apprenticeship period as the arbiters of labour disputes.³³

The vagrancy act buttressed the power of the Contract Act by effectively making it illegal to be unemployed, outlawing any form of employment not licensed by the

²⁹ Hilary Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 110-111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-110; Bolland, “Systems of Domination,” pp. 109-110; Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship*, p. 170.

³¹ CO 28/123 No. 165 MacGregor to Glenelg, 8 July 1838, enclosure no. 2, “An Act to regulate the Hiring of Servants, and for the more expeditious recovery of Wages by them.”

³² CO 28/122 No. 220 MacGregor to Glenelg, 22 August 1838, enclosure No. 7, MacGregor to Commissioners of the Peace (Parry, Maxwell and Garraway), 18 August 1838; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 109.

³³ CO 28/122 No. 220 MacGregor to Glenelg, 22 August 1838, enclosure No. 2, Police Magistrate James Henry Went to MacGregor, 16 August 1838.

colonial state, and increasing the state's control of occupations which conferred too much freedom to "wander". Under the act:

Every person being able, wholly or in part, to maintain himself or herself, or his or her family, by work or by other means, and wilfully neglecting to do so, every petty chapman or pedlar wandering abroad, and trading without being duly licensed, or otherwise by law, every common prostitute wandering in the public streets or highways or in any place of public resort, and behaving in a riotous and indecent manner, and every person wandering abroad or placing himself or herself in any public place, street, highway, court or passage to beg or gather alms, or causing or procuring or encouraging any child or children to do so, shall be deemed an idle and disorderly person...

Furthermore, anyone who did not rent a house on an estate, or who was known to live in a house rented by someone else, who deserted his wife and children, gambled or played cards by a road, or carried a weapon, was deemed a "rogue and a vagabond" and could be imprisoned. Estate constables were empowered to take anyone thought to be breaking the provisions of the act before a magistrate. The "bastardy" act denied poor relief to any person who had not been resident in a parish for one year, another means of forcing labourers to abide by the contract act. Finally, the riot act gave police and magistrates the right to deem any gathering of more than 12 people a riot, and made those who disobeyed orders to disperse subject to transportation or imprisonment, which effectively made all strikes or protests illegal.

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The Colonial Office quickly disallowed both the contract and vagrancy laws, a decision which did little to improve labourers' bargaining power, as they could now be evicted without notice.³⁵ This legislation laid the foundations for labour conflict and apprenticeship came to an end in many British Caribbean territories between June

³⁴ CO 28/123 No. 165 MacGregor to Glenelg, 8 July 1838, enclosure no. 4, "An Act to punish and suppress Vagrancy, and to determine who are Vagrants, Rogues, and Vagabonds, and incorrigible Rogues and Vagabonds"; CO 28/123 No. 165 MacGregor to Glenelg, July 8 1838, enclosure no. 5, "An Act for the government and better ordering of the Poor in this Island, and the prevention of Bastardy" and no. 6, "an act for preventing Tumult and Riotous Assemblies, and for the more speedy and effectual punishing of the Rioters." Although these laws stirred controversy in Britain, they closely resembled metropolitan laws against vagrancy and squatting (Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, p. 461).

³⁵ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 101; Governor's circular to the magistrates, 30 October 1839.

and August 1838 amidst strikes, evictions and violent confrontations between labourers on one side, and estate authorities, estate constables, the police force and magistrates on the other.³⁶ Between July and October 1838 newspapers in Barbados carried reports of strikes and evictions throughout the island. Labourers refused to accept a system which forced all members of a family and residents of a house to work permanently for the estate where they resided. They wanted to combine the minimum amount of labour required to retain their homes on estates with other types of more lucrative economic activity. Labourers wanted access to land on which to grow marketable provisions. Many also wished to send their children to school, or train them in more lucrative and respected types of work.³⁷

Furthermore, they wanted the right to seek work on the open market, and to sell their labour to the highest bidder. Planters thought this most unreasonable, particularly since labourers' homes and land belonged to the estates. Thus, the manager of Turner's Hall and Boarded Hall estates in St. Joseph wrote to the estates' owner in England that: "... [O]n almost every Estate in the Island they [labourers] have [withdrawn] their children from the Estates on most frivolous pretences, and when they can get any other employment such as wandering about the Country as Peddlers and selling bread they walk in two at a loss of home and diminished wages...".³⁸ Planters made an informal agreement to keep wages down to roughly 10d a day or less, or "2 bits" in local currency.³⁹ However, in the unsettled circumstances of the early months of post-apprenticeship, labourers were able to

³⁶ Jean Besson, "Freedom and Community," pp. 184-187; Gad Heuman, "Riots and Resistance in the Caribbean at the Moment of Full Freedom in the Anglophone Caribbean," *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 21, no. 2, (August 2000), pp. 135-149; Woodville Marshall, "'We Be Wise to Many More Tings': Blacks' hopes and expectations of emancipation," in Beckles and Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom*, pp. 12-20; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Labour and Emancipation in Dominica: Contribution to a debate," *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 30, nos. 3-4 (1984), pp. 73-84.

³⁷ See for example, *Barbadian*, 15 August and 26 September 1838.

³⁸ D239M/E20607, Sir Reynold Alleyne to Sir Henry Fitzherbert, 30 October 1838, BDA. The term "walking in two" refers to huckstering, since hucksters sometimes worked in pairs, but this has not been corroborated. The quote might mean that couples often left the estate together.

³⁹ Riviere, "Labour Shortage," p. 29; *Liberal*, 26 May 1838, see previous reference in Chapter 4, pp. 221-222.

take advantage of differences in wages from one estate to another. At Maxwell plantation in Christ Church, where the owner had freed his apprentices in June and started paying them 3 bits a day, he announced in August that he would reduce their pay to 2 bits. He informed them that if they did not agree they could leave, which “most of the young men that had no connection on the estate” promptly did.⁴⁰ Many of the smaller estates lost entire gangs of labourers, and were forced to offer higher wages which owners said they could not afford to pay indefinitely.⁴¹ Before its disallowance, magistrates interpreted the contract law as strictly as possible in order to prevent labourers from leaving their employers to search for work on the open market. For example, in August an estate mason from one estate was fined over £20 for telling two women whom he met on a road, and who had left another plantation, that there was work available on his.⁴²

In 1840, the legislature passed new contract and vagrancy acts. While the vagrancy act was little different from its 1838 predecessor, the 1840 contract act stipulated that contracts could not be for a period of longer than one month. Labourers who refused to sign them were subject to immediate eviction, and anyone found guilty of “enticing” a labourer away from his/her previous employer could be fined £10.⁴³ However, based as it still was on the principle that occupancy of a house was contingent on fulltime labour on an estate, it sparked widespread strikes and acts of sabotage.⁴⁴

The Impact of Rural Resistance on Non-Agricultural Workers

Bolland, Levy and Emmanuel Riviere have noted that, during the mid-1840s, most

⁴⁰ *Liberal*, 19 August 1838.

⁴¹ Letter from “A Justice of the Peace,” *Barbadian*, 15 August 1838.

⁴² *Liberal*, 25 August 1838.

⁴³ CO 28/133 No. 6 MacGregor to Russell, 23 January 1840.

⁴⁴ *Barbadian*, January 18 1840; *Liberal*, 8 February 1840.

Barbadian planters separated the issue of rent from that of labour and wages.⁴⁵ Although planters tried to impose the wage-rent system throughout the island, magistrates reported from the early 1840s that planters were forced to rely on a mixture of resident and itinerant labour, and even resident labourers did not usually work “continuously.”⁴⁶ As early as 1841, the only estate employees who signed monthly contracts were, as the police magistrate for St. Andrew stated: “The higher class of labourers... superintendants, stock-keepers, watchmen, and domestics”, who were paid a monthly wage. Field labourers would only agree to work for one day at a time, and had “an insurmountable objection to specific agreements of any description, and no document for such purpose has ever been lodged in my office.”

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Despite the efforts of the legislature, magistracy and estate authorities to prevent labourers from “wandering”, ex-slaves drew on the experience of slavery to evade the provisions of post-emancipation labour legislation, using family and community relations who were resident on the estates to help them evade contracts. Like runaways during slavery, many people secretly lived with relatives and friends in estate negro yards, and worked illegally as hucksters. Others, unknown to estate authorities, slept in their houses on estates and worked elsewhere during the day.⁴⁸ The contract act seems to have had precisely the opposite effect to that intended. As soon as it was passed in 1840, police magistrates’ reports alluded to the appearance of independent itinerant field labour gangs, composed mainly of young men, who

⁴⁵ Bolland, “Systems of Domination,” p. 109; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 96; Riviere, “Labour Shortage,” p. 7.

⁴⁶ See for example CO 28/156 No. 40 Grey to Stanley, 18 May 1843, enclosing half-yearly reports of the Police Magistrates... and Stipendiary Magistrates... of the Assistant Court of Appeal, see reports for St. Philip, St. John, St. Lucy, St. Andrew and St. Michael; *Report of the Commission on Poor Relief* (Bridgetown: Barbados Government, 1875-1877), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁷ PP 1842 vol. 29, President Brathwaite to Russell, 17 June 1841, enclosing “Quarterly Reply from the Police Magistracy of the Island of Barbadoes...” January -March 1840, pp. 84-98, No. 10 St. Andrew.

⁴⁸ *Barbadian*, August 15 1838; PP 1840, vol. 35, Part II, No. 19 “Second Series of Questions... [and] Answers relative to the working of the Free System in Barbados,” reply from St. Lucy, Question 17, p. 160.

roamed the countryside selling their labour on different estates each day, working on a task-work basis for a higher rate of pay than resident first gang labourers. In 1840 the St. John magistrate argued that “[a] system of independent jobbing is rapidly growing out of the present state of things, and, by these independent gangs, a great portion of the most laborious work is performed.”⁴⁹ In his testimony before the 1842 commission on the West Indies a Barbadian planter attributed the preponderance of men among the “extra and transient” labourers to the prevalence of “polygamy”. According to this planter, men who joined these labour gangs had “no settled employment upon a particular estate”, and Barbadian male labourers generally had “various homes... in as much as they have various wives, leading of course to a disinclination to fix themselves upon one particular spot.”⁵⁰

Repressive labour conditions in rural areas accelerated the trend of rural-urban migration. Like slave runaways, rural estate labourers gravitated towards the towns, swelling the ranks of skilled and domestic work, and once they reached the towns, they disappeared among the masses of other people of colour already there. In a letter to the *Barbadian*, one correspondent claimed that migrants from the countryside were forging testimonials for domestic work, taking advantage of the old system of slavery, when testimonials presented by slaves themselves had served as legitimate passes from owners allowing slaves to hire themselves out.⁵¹ In 1843, the town limits of Speightstown were extended because of “the vastly increased habitations and streets annexed thereto which are not included in the local rates of the said Town...”⁵² Although there were undoubtedly numerous women who left field labour for the towns, most were young men, and in 1838 the *Barbadian* complained that:

⁴⁹ PP1842, vol. 29, “General reports for 1840,” St. John, pp. 127-133.

⁵⁰ PP 1842 vol. 13, testimony of George Carrington, 12 May 1842, Question 1732.

⁵¹ *Barbadian*, 22 December 1838.

⁵² CO 30/23 No. 794, “An Act to extend the limits of the Town called Speights Town, in the Parish of St. Peter,” passed 14 February 1843.

A great number of able-bodied young men from the country are now thronging the town, and foolishly offered themselves, without procuring any characters, as grooms, coachmen, cooks, &c. Grooming horses is the occupation which these chaps chiefly desire. One fellow, we understand, offered himself to a gentleman as a coachman, and on being pressed to tell in what employment he had been heretofore engaged, confessed that he had been a pig-driver. Every day brings a fresh accession of these skulkers from the country to town. Are they not decidedly vagrants, coming under the operation of the Vagrant Act lately passed, but which seems to be already a dead letter.⁵³

While the pattern of post-emancipation urban migration mirrored the experiences of free people of colour, urban slaves and runaways before 1834, the already substantial populations of Bridgetown and Speightstown now faced competition from thousands of newly freed slaves. They also had to cope with increasingly strict regulations designed to restrict former field labourers' access to alternative occupations. In 1840 the magistrate for St. Peter, where Speightstown was located, recommended further legislation regulating occupations connected with the island's ports because: "[A]t this time, those who perform these occupations are frequently found to belong to that class of agricultural labourers who had quitted the country... and their connexion with the country, added to the fact of their being unknown in the town, render their detection and apprehension difficult."⁵⁴

With so much competition it was difficult for urban people of colour, whether ex-slaves or pre-emancipation free people, to earn a living. In 1842, in order to counteract this growing problem, the St. Michael vestry extended the scope of the 1835 ordinances to discourage rural-urban migration. The new ordinances instructed Bridgetown magistrates to provide an annual return of the number of licenses issued to porters, boatmen and carters, and revoke the licenses of any person convicted of theft. They made it illegal for anyone to: "[M]anufacture or fire any cask or Casks in any of the Streets, lanes, or alleys of the said Town", indicating that rural migrants were setting themselves up as artisans in the streets, competing with the businesses of established urban tradesmen. The amendments also authorised magistrates to

⁵³ *Barbadian*, 15 August 1838.

⁵⁴ PP 1840 vol. 35, Part II, No. 19, "Second Series of Questions... [and] Answers relative to the working of the Free System in Barbados," reply of the magistrate for St. Peter, 36th question, p. 154.

confiscate sheep, hogs or butchers' meat brought from the country to the town, until they were certain that the alleged owners had "come by them honestly", suggesting an increase in huckster traffic from the countryside. This provision was aimed at labourers who stole livestock from their plantations and took it to the urban markets.

⁵⁵ The following year the ordinances were extended to Speightstown and Holetown.

⁵⁶

Slaves, Free People of Colour and Emigration

For the increasing number of disaffected labourers, urban paupers, hucksters, domestics and skilled tradespeople, emigrating to Guiana and Trinidad after emancipation created opportunities not available at home. The St. John magistrate described the relationship between rural itinerant labour, rural-urban migration, and trans-Caribbean migration:

Tenancy on estates is almost always made contingent on the performance of five days' labour per week, at a stipulated rate of wages, which is about 2 d. sterling less than the wages obtained by the free workers and jobbers [itinerant labourers], who live amongst their friends without any settled place of residence. Should these householders fail to perform the agreed labour on the estates on which they are located, they are, under a previous arrangement, charged an exorbitant rent, amounting to coercion to labour; it is to escape this restraint that a desultory and disaffected class from among the young and able-bodied peasantry has been formed, on whom, in fact, the planters chiefly depend for working their estates; they form the labour market. They are impatient of all control, and are ready to emigrate when affronted, or on the slightest encouragement held out by the paid agents of the neighbouring colonies. ⁵⁷

While the greatest demand in Trinidad and Guiana was for indentured agricultural labour, both planters and the legislatures in these two territories advertised in Barbados for everyone from agricultural labourers to headmen, policemen and

⁵⁵ St. Michael vestry minutes, 17 October 1842. For a discussion of state regulation of the activities of people of colour in urban areas see Pedro Welch, "Notes From the Underground: Post-emancipation adjustments in Bridgetown, Barbados," Unpublished seminar paper, UWI Cave Hill [n.d., c1994].

⁵⁶ CO 31/53 12 January 1843.

⁵⁷ PP 1846, vol. 28, Sir Charles Grey to Lord Stanley, 4 September 1845, enclosing "Statistical Summary for the Parish of St. John."

tradesmen.⁵⁸ Although many Barbadians went to British Guiana and Trinidad to work on plantations, many also went hoping to find non-agricultural work, particularly in the towns. Thus, while Guianese and Trinidadian planters did obtain estate workers from Barbados, the post-emancipation migration of Barbadians to these two colonies was also an extension of the rural-urban movement within Barbados and a redistribution of some the urban population of one territory to others. In 1840, the St. Peter magistrate commented on this:

The idlers and the petty thieves who exist in the towns and their neighbourhood, constitute a large portion of the emancipated people; and such characters would not be readily induced to undertake the toil of agricultural labour in the colonies of Demerara and Berbice; with such persons, therefore, the emigration crimps have not reaped a harvest for themselves by their artful practices, that have too fatally succeeded with the deluded agricultural population.⁵⁹

Pre-emancipation free people of colour, as well as skilled ex-slaves, were probably among these so-called "idlers and petty thieves". The same magistrate mentioned that many of those who had left the island from St. Peter were fishermen, porters and hucksters. These were occupations in which pre-emancipation free people of colour were concentrated.⁶⁰ In 1841, Prescod, who was acting as the emigration agent for Trinidad, published a notice stating that he had received too many requests to emigrate from tradesmen and domestics. He informed the public that only those accustomed to doing field work on an estate, or those willing do this if other employment failed, should apply.⁶¹ The few records listing the occupations of those whose applications for emigration were granted show that most were artisans or domestics. However it should be noted that this gives no indication of how many actually applied.⁶²

⁵⁸ See advertisements in the *Liberal*, 14 July 1838, 22 August, 22 September, 10 and 31 October 1838.

⁵⁹ PP 1842 vol. 29, "Quarterly reply from the Police Magistracy..." 1 October- 31 December 1840, No. 6 St. Peter.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 April- 30 June 1840, No. 6 St. Peter.

⁶¹ *Liberal*, 3 February 1841.

⁶² St. John vestry minutes, copies of 6 emigration certificates dated 3 May 1838-19 February 1840,

Emigrants often conceived of their journey as a seasonal migration. They frequently did not intend to relocate permanently, planning to use their earnings to improve life at home. Part of the attraction of emigration agents' offers was the promise of a paid return passage in a few months.⁶³ Despite the absence of emigration agents for St. Lucia or Dominica in Barbados, Barbadian domestics and artisans regularly went to work there for short periods and then return to Barbados.⁶⁴ However, it was estimated in 1842 that only about 10 per cent of the 3,000-4,000 who had left since 1838 had returned.⁶⁵

Emigration to British Guiana and Trinidad was both a response to living conditions after 1838, and an example of how slaves and free people of colour drew on their experiences during slavery to find new alternatives after emancipation. Barbadians, including skilled slaves, had a history of emigration to neighbouring colonies, and there was a constant traffic back and forth between the islands of the Windward Caribbean. By the time of emancipation, Barbados was the communications centre and, after 1833, the administrative centre of the Windwards. Before emancipation, there were numerous family and business connections between the islands of the Windward Caribbean, and there was frequent ocean-going traffic between them, with all major trans-Atlantic shipping coming in to and out of the south-western British Caribbean usually stopping either first or last in

four of them "artificiers" and two "labourers," all male; 20 February-29 February 1840, 7 certificates grants to five men and two women. Men listed as "artificiers" and "labourers," but no breakdown of this number, women's occupations not given; CO 28/128 No. 111 MacGregor to Russell, 26 October 1839, enclosure no. 15, "Return of Emigrants from the Island of Barbados for British Guiana, between the 4th of September and 25th of October, 1839," from Francis Sheridan, Colonial Secretary, 25 October 1839: two women, a domestic and a washerwoman, 3 male domestics and artisans, two male field labourers.

⁶³ Governor's circular to magistrates, 24 February 1840.

⁶⁴ PP 1842 vol. 29, "Quarterly Reports," 1 October-31 December 1840, No. 12 Bridgetown; *Poor Relief Report*, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁵ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 81-83 and 102; *Liberal*, April 18 and June 17 1840; PP 1842, vol. 13, *Report from the Select Committee on West India Colonies...*, p. 148; PP 1842, vol. 29, "Questions [and Answers] for Quarterly Reply from the Police Magistrates of the Island of Barbados," 1 April - 30 June 1840, pp. 96-97; Bruce M. Taylor, *Black Labor and White Power in Post-Emancipation Barbados: A Study of Changing Relationships* (New York: Current Bibliography on African Affairs, 1973), pp. 185-187; *Liberal*, 18 April and 17 June 1840.

Barbados.⁶⁶

An unknown number of slaves and free people of colour had relatives in British Guiana and Trinidad.⁶⁷ In 1839 the agent employed by planters in Demerara to recruit Barbadian labourers for that colony observed that "... [A] very large proportion of the Mechanics, Hucksters, and Domestics [in Demerara], are natives of [Barbados]; and their communications with their relatives here by letters, by presents, and by visits, are too frequent to admit of the existence of much doubt as to the real state of British Guiana...."⁶⁸

Levy claims that Barbadian workers showed no "enthusiasm" for emigration, despite their difficult circumstances, being too "attached to their country, proud of their British heritage, and scornful of other places in the West Indies."⁶⁹ Nonetheless, labourers rapidly disabused local authorities of the notion that they were reluctant to work abroad. One rural magistrate reported that labourers were using the threat of emigration as a bargaining tool in labour disputes: "...[I]f the Labourers on the Estates are not allowed to work when they please, where they please, and as little as they please for a full day's pay, they openly threaten those who rebuke them, that they will go to Demerara."⁷⁰ By 1840, a letter writer in the *Liberal* estimated that more than 2,000 labourers had gone to Demerara, listing several plantations which had lost nearly their entire labour force through emigration.

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Magistrates suspected that illegal emigration was continual during the 1840s. For example, although the St. Andrew magistrate reported in 1842 that the number of applications was decreasing and many of those to whom he granted emigration

⁶⁶ Schomburgk, *History of Barbados*, pp. 165-166.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 1, p. 59.

⁶⁸ *Liberal*, 9 October 1839.

⁶⁹ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 101.

⁷⁰ CO 28/134 No. 103 MacGregor to Russell, 11 November 1840, with enclosures from the ACA and the police magistrates, St. Andrew, 30 June 1840.

⁷¹ *Liberal*, 29 July 1840.

certificates had stayed, he suspected “that some others have been clandestinely conveyed away without any reference to me”.⁷² The magistrate for rural St. Michael shared these suspicions. He had signed 115 applications for emigration between April and June 1840, but suspected illegal emigration was continuing “to an alarming extent”. He recommended that all ships carrying migrants be checked for stowaways, because “their [*sic*] is no longer a doubt in my mind that almost every vessell that leaves with ‘emigrants,’ carries away a considerable number without tickets”.⁷³ The harbour master of the Bridgetown port admitted that the ships carrying emigrants were so crowded that it would be easy for people without tickets to slip on board.⁷⁴ Trevor Marshall estimates that, between 1834 and 1850, between 5,000 and 8,000 left the island.⁷⁵ The number of emigrants to the tiny island of Tobago during the 1840s was significant enough to draw attention. At the opening of the court of grand sessions in 1849, the Tobago Chief Justice attributed the increasing number of legal cases against labourers to “the introduction of *barbadian* Immigrants”, claiming that there had been an “influx of worthless people from Barbados, who have completely changed the character of the Tobago peasantry...”.⁷⁶

Many of those who left seeking non-agricultural work were destined to be disappointed. In 1840, the *Liberal* published a letter sent by a woman in Demerara to her Barbadian nephew. The woman told him that Barbadians who went to Guiana did well if they could find work in the towns, but could not adjust to the heavy labour demanded on British Guianese plantations. She claimed that many who could find no work in Georgetown were seen “crying in the streets”.⁷⁷ The following year, the

⁷² PP 1842, vol. 29, “Quarterly Reports,” 1 July-30 September 1840, No. 10 St. Andrew.

⁷³ PP 1842, vol. 29, “Quarterly Reports,” 1 April - 30 June 1840, no. 11 St. Michael rural.

⁷⁴ CO 28/133 No. 26, MacGregor to Russell, 21 March 1840, enclosing JJ Evelyn, Harbour Master, to Joseph Garraway, Governor’s Private Secretary, 16 March 1840.

⁷⁵ Marshall, “Post-emancipation Adjustments,” p. 97.

⁷⁶ *Barbadian*, 20 October 1849 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁷ *Liberal*, 14 March 1840.

Barbadian expressed its surprise that:

... [O]ur negroes still emigrate to British Guiana, though information reaches this island by every opportunity of great numbers of those who have gone before them, wandering about the streets of Georgetown, without employment... [T]he Demerara Editors of papers, out of sheer spite to us, are continually boasting over us that our labourers are pouring into the colony. ⁷⁸

In 1839 the legislature passed two harsh anti-emigration laws designed to strengthen the 1836 legislation. The first act prevented the “clandestine deportation” of people anyone under 16 years of age, or those under 21 who were apprenticed to a trade. This latter provision was intended to prevent young men who claimed to be skilled tradesmen, but were, in fact, former field labourers, from emigrating. It also increased the penalties for those convicted of acting as emigration ‘crimps’. The second act stipulated that anyone seeking to emigrate had to prove that they would leave no elderly, young and infirm family members behind them (the 1836 act had outlawed emigration only for those with dependents under 14 years of age). As with the 1836 act, any applicants for emigration had to obtain permission from the parish churchwarden and a magistrate. ⁷⁹

These acts made it difficult for anyone, including skilled pre-emancipation free people of colour, paupers and skilled ex-slaves, to emigrate legally. ⁸⁰ By the mid-1840s, magistrates received very few applications for emigration, and while illegal emigration was still a concern, the authorities were no longer worried that it would lead to a decrease in the size of the labour force. ⁸¹

The labour conflicts of the late 1830s and early 1840s, particularly the question of the right of labourers to emigrate, had a deep and permanent impact on the struggle by pre-emancipation free people of colour for political and civil rights. It crystallised a

⁷⁸ *Barbadian*, 4 September 1841.

⁷⁹ CO 30/22 No. 597 19 July 1836, “An Act to regulate the emigration of labourers from this Island; CO 30/22 No. 706 19 December 1839”; An Act entitled an Act to amend an Act to regulate the emigration of labourers from this island”; CO 30/22 No. 696 16 April 1839, “An Act to prevent the clandestine deportation of young persons from this island.”

⁸⁰ Welch, “Notes from the Underground,” pp. 19-20.

⁸¹ Anonymous, *The Sugar Question: Being a digest of the evidence taken before the committee on sugar and coffee plantations* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1848), p. 6.

number of political divisions among élite men of colour. Between 1838 and the early 1840s, emancipation finally contributed to the fragmentation of the role of pre-emancipation free people of colour in post-emancipation politics.

The Emigration Debate and Post-emancipation Politics

The Fear of "Race War": The Imperial View of the Non-white Electorate

Between 1839 and 1840, the debate over labour control and the right of labourers to emigrate intensified the divisions of class, political ideology and competing political ambitions among pre-emancipation free people of colour to the fore. By the mid-1840s, although individual men of colour were enjoying political success, the reform struggle which had brought them to political prominence was finished. However, as this section illustrates, men of colour continued to play an important role in the island's politics, particularly in St. Michael, the most populous parish in the island.

During apprenticeship, Governors Smith and MacGregor both considered good relations with the pre-emancipation free population of colour as crucial to the success of their policies. However, full emancipation turned out to be something of a pyrrhic victory for Barbadian pre-1834 free people of colour, because, almost as soon as apprenticeship ended, imperial support for the cause of racial equality in the West Indies began to wane. Despite their determination to end slavery and to repeal all racially discriminatory legislation, colonial officials were unwilling to involve the British government in the complicated task of redressing the deep racial inequalities created by slavery. Once the legislative framework of racial slavery was dismantled, the imperial government saw itself as having no further role to play in regulating race relations in the Caribbean.

Governor MacGregor exemplified the imperial view that the post-emancipation state was *de jure* racially blind. After August 1838, he began to distance himself from demands from non-whites that he should intervene as the representative of the crown to protect the civil rights of people of colour and advance their political claims

to vote and hold high office. He refused to appoint men of colour who were not wealthy to high posts, stating that:

Now, when happily no political privileges are withheld from any portion of the population, the Question is, in fact, rather one of *Station*, than of *Color* — and, while many descendants of Africa, erroneously impute, solely to their hue, an inferiority of condition, arising from other adventitious [*sic*] circumstances, which they altogether overlook, the whites protest against the elevation of persons, merely because they are of colour, to high offices, which would not be conferred on white Candidates of equal merit, and of the same rank in life. ⁸²

MacGregor argued that men of colour were playing victim when they levelled charges of racial discrimination against public institutions, or attributed their under-representation in political posts to skin colour. In December 1838, he responded to the petition from free men of colour during the Gunning Best trial, in which they accused the court of grand sessions, the presiding magistrate and the Solicitor-General of racism. ⁸³ Writing on the governor's behalf, Acting Private Secretary Joseph Garraway informed the petitioners that attitudes like theirs were responsible for any racial tension in the island:

... I am instructed to express His Excellency's regret that you should therein, have alluded to distinctions of Class, fortunately no longer recognized by law — and the unkind remembrance of which, the Governor — with every favorable disposition towards the Color'd Body, finds himself necessitated, on the present occasion, to remark, seems, in this Colony, to be Sedulously perpetuated, — rather by the injudicious measures of certain descendants of Africa, — than by the proceedings of their White Brethren and Fellow Subjects. ⁸⁴

Such views made MacGregor personally unpopular among people of colour, partly because they did not realise that his attitudes reflected how the political climate in Britain was changing to their disadvantage. ⁸⁵ While the British government may have been unwilling to push the political claims of free people of

⁸² CO 28/123, Private, MacGregor to Glenelg, 8 September 1838.

⁸³ See Chapter 4, pp. 254-255.

⁸⁴ CO 28/124 No. 355 MacGregor to Glenelg, 22 December 1838, enclosing Garraway, Governor's Acting Private Secretary, 14 December 1838.

⁸⁵ *Barbadian*, 19 December 1840, letter from John Richard Belgrave. According to Levy, MacGregor's death in 1841 "was regarded as a great loss by the whites but was scarcely noticed by the blacks" (Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 86).

colour, it was ready to step in if the result of leaving race relations to sort themselves out would be ex-slaves' control of the state. In Jamaica and several of the Windward and Leeward islands, such as Dominica, free people of colour had outnumbered whites before emancipation. After apprenticeship there was an increase in the number of people of colour, particularly mixed race or "brown" people, who became rural landowners and wealthy urban merchants, accompanied by the growth of the non-white electorate.⁸⁶ The British government was disturbed by post-emancipation socioeconomic trends in the West Indies, particularly in Jamaica, where, as in Trinidad, British Guiana and several of the smaller Windward islands, ex-slaves left estate labour en masse. The difference between Jamaica and these other colonies, however, was that Jamaica had an elected legislature, based, as elsewhere, on a property qualification. As the Jamaican sugar industry contracted, the peasant electorate and the number of black and coloured politicians grew.⁸⁷ In Jamaica, where an acre of land cost between £4 and £20 (compared with between £60 and £200 in Barbados), the number of freeholders went from around 2,000 in 1838, to 27,379 in 1845, and would climb to around 50,000 by 1861.⁸⁸

The changing nature of the electorate was reflected in the Jamaican House of Assembly, in which, after 1837, the number of coloured representatives steadily increased.⁸⁹ In the first years of emancipation, all the non-white assemblymen in Jamaica were wealthy, educated and a few were even planters.⁹⁰ However, as W. P. Morrell states, the British government feared that "white ascendancy in the West Indies would ultimately lead to a black ascendancy worse than itself." In other words, the British government was afraid that ex-slaves and free people of colour would

⁸⁶ Mavis Campbell, *Dynamics of Change*, 1976; Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, p. 188; Heuman, *Between Black and White*, p. 117, 129; Honeychurch, *Dominica Story*, pp. 127-129.

⁸⁷ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 59-61, pp. 128-133.

⁸⁸ Bolland, "Systems of Domination," p. 111.

⁸⁹ Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp. 100-103.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

gain control of the island's political institutions, a situation which it assumed would lead to race war. The Whig administration therefore took action in 1839 to try to forestall the political consequences which might result from non-whites' dominance of Jamaican politics, and introduced a bill to suspend the island's constitution for five years as a precursor to abolishing the Jamaican legislature. Faced with overwhelming parliamentary opposition to the measure, Lord Melbourne's administration resigned. Although the 'bedchamber crisis' brought the Whig government back to power, the Whigs abandoned their policy of intervention in West Indian affairs in favour of conciliation of, and cooperation with, the plantocracy.⁹¹ The Jamaican constitutional crisis marked the end of the limited influence which pre-emancipation free people of colour had over imperial policy in the Caribbean. The imperial government's view on race and politics was clear: planter oligarchy was acceptable, but an ex-slave democracy was not.

With no likelihood of external intervention in their favour, and without the possibility of a growth in the black electorate to support them at the ballot box, pre-emancipation free people of colour who were struggling for a broader franchise in Barbados had good reason to oppose the repressiveness of the post-apprenticeship labour laws and support ex-slaves' right to undertake contract labour elsewhere. This represented the only chance for political change. From 1838 to the early 1840s, some of them defied the anti-emigration legislation and helped ex-slaves to emigrate. Some probably did so for money not politics: in March 1839, solicitor-general Robert Clarke wrote to MacGregor concerning a Bridgetown man of colour named Belgrave, allegedly the emigration agent for Trinidad, against whom Clarke was trying to gather enough evidence for a prosecution.⁹² Ex-slaves also recruited contract labour for

⁹¹ W.P. Morrell, *British Colonial Policy in the Age of Peel and Russell* (London: Clarendon Press, 1930), pp. 152-153. See also Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, p. 461; Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838-1865: An Economic history* (London: Caribbean Universities Press, 1969), pp. 3-8; Richard Lobdell, "British Officials and the West Indian Peasantry, 1842-1938," in Cross and Heuman (eds.), *Labour in the Caribbean*, pp. 196-199.

⁹² CO 28/127 No. 40. MacGregor to Normanby, 4 April 1839, enclosure no. 3, Bridgetown Police Office, 11 March 1839.

emigration agents.⁹³ However, the support of the *Liberal* and the *New Times* for contract labour emigration grew out of their principled opposition to post-emancipation labour laws. Both objected to the Contract act, described by *New Times* editor Nathaniel Roach as an “EXECRABLE LAW”.⁹⁴ As a committed liberal, Prescod opposed any attempt to regulate the labour market, and, although he had reservations about labour migration schemes, he argued that ex-slaves had the right to migrate if they wished. He blamed employers’ repressive policies for rural unrest and labourers’ growing desire to emigrate,⁹⁵ and promoted emigration as the only way to stop planters’ interference with the free movement of labour. In the first year of emancipation, both newspapers offered advice to potential emigrants in their offices.⁹⁶ The non-white press became the platform for political opponents of the rural labour régime. For example, in March 1839 a correspondent calling himself “A Labouring Man” addressed a letter to rural labourers, advising them that: “Whatever you attempt... let it be *together*. Move in a body, and move in a body out of this country, if you can.”⁹⁷

The Fragmentation of the Radicals

However, in late 1838, Nathaniel Roach of the *New Times* was appointed to a magistracy, and on taking office he immediately reversed his earlier opposition to the contract and emigration laws. The *Barbadian* mocked Roach’s sudden conversion to the planter cause and blamed both Roach’s newspaper and the *Liberal* for the conduct of their rural “brethren of African descent:”

Mr. Nathaniel Roach, elevated by his Excellency the Governor, to the office of Police Magistrate in [St. Lucy], has, we are informed, expressed his utter astonishment, wonder, and what not, at the disgraceful conduct of the negroes

⁹³ PP 1842 vol. 29, “Quarterly reports,” 1 October-31 December 1840, No. 6 St. Peter.

⁹⁴ *Barbadian*, 8 May 1839.

⁹⁵ *Liberal*, 15 July 1840.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 September 1838.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 March 1839 (emphasis in the original).

in that district.... The truth now bursts upon his mind, and he is astonished!

... There cannot be the shadow of a doubt on any man's mind, that the inflammatory Editorial articles, and communications, constantly, week after week, published in the above named paper, and its intemperate and insulting coadjutor, the *Liberal*, upset the minds of the labouring classes, and were mainly instrumental in sowing the seeds of discontent among the labouring population, in alienating their minds from employers to whom a considerable portion of them felt attachment, and in bringing the whole train of evils which have followed the Emancipation Act. ⁹⁸

The *Barbadian's* editor also suggested that the journalists at the *New Times* and the *Liberal* were driven by political ambition because the editors were excluded from public office. In a editorial on Prescod's 1840 Colonial Coloured Union, part of whose programme was to challenge the labour legislation being passed throughout the British Caribbean, ⁹⁹ the editor wrote:

Roach's foul mouth was stopped, and his mischief-making pen arrested by his appointment to the office of Police Magistrate — but Prescod, disappointed in his ambitious views, has taken good care to fan the dying embers of political discontent, and now seems determined to raise a flame which shall burn throughout the whole Western Archipelago. ¹⁰⁰

The few men of colour elected or appointed to office certainly tended to distance themselves from demands for political reform and racial desegregation once they got into office. For example, in October 1838, Thomas J. Cummins, still the only man of colour in the St. Michael vestry, voted in favour of a motion to exclude people of colour from a new public lunatic asylum being built by the vestry. Cummins was the only man of colour in an elected office, and his vote provoked an angry response. A correspondent to the *Liberal* pointed out that Cummins' decision was inconsistent, "especially when he or any relation of his would be debarred from this whited sepulchre...." ¹⁰¹ Shortly afterwards, Cummins admitted that his decisions were influenced by careerist considerations. At a franchise extension meeting organised by Prescod and Harris in January 1839, Cummins was asked to explain to the

⁹⁸ *Barbadian*, 8 May 1839.

⁹⁹ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁰⁰ *Barbadian*, 29 July 1840.

¹⁰¹ *Liberal*, 31 October 1838.

audience why he had adopted the majority position of the St. Michael vestry board during that's year's vestry elections, and supported a conservative white candidate over Thomas Harris. Cummins stated: "I am aware that my tenure is by permission of the Vestry, and that were I to incur their displeasure by opposing any of their views they might prevent my reelection." He added that he supported franchise extension as his best hope of "retaining my seat in the Vestry in opposition to the caprice of the old members."¹⁰² At that meeting, Prescod publicly accused Roach of having been "bought" by the plantocracy with his appointment to the magistracy. The meeting was called to elect a committee to lobby the legislature and the imperial government to lower the franchise qualification, and although Cummins was elected, Roach, who held an equally prestigious political post as magistrate, was not even invited to attend.¹⁰³ In August Prescod wrote a letter to the *British Emancipator* accusing the governor and Roach of having conspired to undermine the coloured press. He repeating his claim that MacGregor had bribed Roach with the magistracy in exchange for Roach agreeing to end his work with the *New Times*, which Roach denied.¹⁰⁴

The split between Prescod, Harris and Roach further factionalised non-white oppositional politics. At the January meeting, speeches by Prescod's supporters were interrupted by supporters of Roach, who saw Roach's exclusion from the committee as an insult. By 1839, Prescod's editorship of the *Liberal*, and his aggressive stand on the issue of rural labour relations, had made him simultaneously the most controversial and popular figure in the island. As MacGregor's hostility towards their cause became increasingly evident, some political activists of colour were worried that Prescod's methods, and his popularity among the urban poor and rural labourers, would damage the credibility of élite franchise reformers. At the meeting, one of his supporters felt compelled to publicly dismiss claims that Prescod

¹⁰² Ibid., 23 January 1839.

¹⁰³ Ibid. and 26 January 1839.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7 and 21 August 1839.

“had not the support of the respectable colored community” and that “it was only the lower orders, the rabble, who viewed his conduct with approbation.”¹⁰⁵

Despite the tensions which surfaced at the meeting, 24 men of colour who attended were elected to an Elective Franchise Committee, with a mandate to petition the legislature and the governor for franchise reform. The Committee represented what was to be a shortlived truce between Prescod’s faction, who wanted an significant lowering of the franchise requirement, and more conservative and wealthier men of colour who would benefit from less radical change. In February, the Committee sent a petition to the legislature and the governor requesting extension of the suffrage, but without specifying what a new requirement should be.

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Divide and Rule: The Colonial Government, People of Colour and the Emigration Debate

However, the different political factions among free people of colour were irreconcilably divided by disagreements over the emigration issue between 1839 and 1840. The catalyst for the crisis came in September 1839, when a new agent for British Guiana, Thomas Day, arrived in Barbados. Day was unlike previous agents, who had conducted their operations discreetly. According to the Governor, upon his arrival Day made it known that he had a “higher motive” for being an agent, namely, “to raise the wages of Labor in Barbados which he considered himself in condition to prove too low....”¹⁰⁷ Whether or not Day’s political claims were genuine, his

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 23 January 1839.

¹⁰⁶ There were 25 men elected in total. B.F.B. Goodridge, who was white, was one of Prescod’s supporters. Of the men elected, Anthony Barclay, John Reed, William F. Lynch, Henry Hawkesworth and William F. Thomas supported Prescod (see CO 28/129 No. 26, MacGregor to Russell, 18 March 1841, enclosure 5, magistrates Tinling, Sealy and Cummins). The others men elected were London Bourne, Valentine Wilkins, Joseph Kennedy, Joseph Hamilton, Andrew Fillan, William Seon, Edmund C. Haynes, William S. Wilkey, Thomas J. Cummins, Samuel J. Collymore, Robert H. Ashby, Benjamin Massiah, Benjamin Norville, William P. Thomas, Joseph Thorne, James F. Reed, George R. Sealy, William H. Austin and Prescod (*Liberator*, 26 January 1839).

¹⁰⁷ Governor’s correspondence with magistrates, 2 September 1839; CO 28/128 No. 95 MacGregor to Normanby, 19 September 1839.

statements endeared him to the editors of the *Liberal*, and his presence immediately became a source of grave concern to the governor, legislature and planters.

Day set to work discrediting the Barbados anti-emigration acts, sending petitions to the Colonial Office outlining their injustice and unconstitutionality.¹⁰⁸ Within a month of his arrival, the governor anxiously requested that the island's magistrates locate Day's "co-adjutors" and "emissaries" who were "seducing" labourers from their districts to go to British Guiana.¹⁰⁹ Claims were made that Day's "agents" were former rural labourers who had moved to Bridgetown and were now working as his crimps.¹¹⁰ In articles, editorials and advertisements, Day and the *Liberal* conducted an emigration campaign, supported by letters from the public. For example, in February 1840 a letter-writer named "Wilberforce" wrote to the *Liberal*, claiming that he had spoken to a crowd of people assembled in front of Day's James Street house. He quoted the prospective emigrants as saying that "*home was nothing to them now; they had been so persecuted by those who ought to have treated them as 'laborers worthy of their hire', that to them any country was a home, where they could work and receive equivalent for their labour.*"¹¹¹ In 1840, Thomas Harris even took a trip to British Guiana, paid for by several British Guianese planters, in order to refute claims that the conditions there were poor.¹¹²

The governor took action to counteract the threat from Day and the *Liberal*, nominating Joseph Thorne, the former slave and Anglican lay catechist, to the newly-created position of assistant harbour master. Thorne's task was to spot agricultural labourers who came to the harbour with emigration certificates, and to convince them to remain. Although there are no recorded statements of Thorne's views on

¹⁰⁸ CO 28/128 No. 102 MacGregor to Normanby, 9 October 1839, enclosure No. 7 Memorial of Thomas Day, 19 September 1839.

¹⁰⁹ Governor's circulars to magistrates, No. 20, 20 September 1839.

¹¹⁰ CO 28/128 No. 111, MacGregor to Russell, 26 October 1839.

¹¹¹ *Liberal*, 19 February 1840 (emphasis in the original).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18 April 1840; *Barbadian*, 2 May 1840.

emigration prior to his appointment, MacGregor was apparently aware of his opposition to indentured emigration. The governor, who disapproved of appointing men purely on the basis of colour, clearly felt that the labour crisis was a special circumstance, describing Thorne to the Colonial Office as “a very worthy Member of the Colored Body, — deservedly possessing the confidence of the Agricultural Laborers.”¹¹³

Thorne, who seems never to have left Barbados in his life, opposed emigration on the grounds that the climate of British Guiana was dangerous for Barbadians, and that the emigration of labourers from Barbados would affect the island’s prosperity.¹¹⁴ When he learned that the imperial government had disallowed a recent British Guiana emigration act, Thorne approved the decision, stating that: “... [I]t would be highly prejudicial to the Laborer, as the Proprietor, had [Day] succeeded in drawing the Laborers away from a healthy to an unhealthy Colony.... I shall not cease to advise all whom I may hear of, to remain in their native Country, as, in my Opinion, we can find ample employment for them all....”¹¹⁵ The *Liberal* and Day accused Thorne and other government officials of coercing would-be emigrants into remaining in the island. Day charged Thorne with lying to labourers who came to the port, telling them, for example, that slavery still existed in British Guiana. Both he and Prescod produced statements from labourers accusing Thorne and the magistrates of colluding against labourers who applied for emigration certificates.¹¹⁶

Thorne, like the *Liberal* editors, believed he was acting in the labourers’ interests. He freely admitted that he advised all potential emigrants not to go to British Guiana as contract workers, and, in the following statement, invoked abolitionism to justify

¹¹³ CO 28/128 No. 95 MacGregor to Normanby, 19 September 1839.

¹¹⁴ CO 28/133 No. 26 MacGregor to Russell, 21 March 1840, enclosure D, Joseph Thorne to Joseph Garraway, 21 March 1840.

¹¹⁵ CO 28/128 No. 95 MacGregor to Normanby, 19 September 1839, enclosure No. 17, Thorne to Garraway, 24 September 1839.

¹¹⁶ *Liberal*, 12 October 1839; CO 28/129 No. 131 MacGregor to Russell, 20 December 1839, enclosure no. 1, Meeting of the Court of Error, 3 December 1839.

his behaviour:

I have advised them not to go, and will continue to do so whether they hear or whether they forbear. And in so doing, I am borne out by one of the best friends that the negro race ever had, namely, Mr. [John] Scoble; and upon the authority of that gentleman, and many others who have resided there, and have seen the labour to be performed in that Colony, and what is to be done here, also from what I have seen written in the *Liberal* from time to time, I feel justified as a man of colour to give them advice which I have done and will continue to do. ¹¹⁷

In March 1840 the legislature moved to close off the loopholes in previous anti-emigration acts in order to make it more difficult for emigration agents to operate, and for labourers passing themselves off as domestics and artisans to leave the island. The more important of the two acts made it illegal to grant emigration certificates to an individual if any member of his/her family was known to object, and anyone who "encouraged" another person to emigrate was liable to prosecution and to a fine of £10 for every person whom he/she encouraged to leave. Furthermore, all emigration agents had to be sanctioned by the Barbadian government, a rather unlikely prospect. The second act more clearly defined and expanded the authority of the assistant harbour master, and increased the governor's power to issue emergency decrees to prevent emigration. ¹¹⁸

The *Liberal* immediately dubbed the first of the two acts the "Gagging Act", because it made it illegal even to voice a positive opinion about emigration. In early April, a non-white Bridgetown shopkeeper was convicted under the act of being an emigration agent, simply for saying to a pauper, whom she passed on the street, that he would be better off in "Demerary". ¹¹⁹ A man of colour from St. Philip was fined

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 16 October 1839. Thorne had misunderstood Scoble's views on indentured labour. Scoble supported labour migration from Barbados and Antigua as a population control measure. He stated two years later that Barbados could spare 5000-8000 labourers for emigration (PP 1842 vol. 13, *Report of the Select Committee...*, 10 June 1842, Question 4299). For previous references to John Scoble see, Chapter 4, pp. 211, 220, 239, fn. 56.

¹¹⁸ CO 28/133 No. 26 MacGregor to Russell, 21 March 1840, enclosing "An Act to amend... an act to prevent the clandestine deportation of young Persons from this Island, and to protect the Laborers in this Island from... Emigration agents," and "An Act to empower the Governor... to make such regulations as he shall deem expedient... and to appoint an Assistant Harbour Master to see such regulations carried into effect..."

¹¹⁹ *Liberal*, 1 April 1840 and CO 28/139 No. 25 MacGregor to Russell, 17 March 1841.

£50 for renting his cart to labourers who used it to travel to Bridgetown in order to board a ship for Demerara.¹²⁰ Day and another Guiana agent who had an office in Speightstown were prosecuted and heavily fined.¹²¹ The second act allowed the government to impose a smallpox quarantine on British Guiana. In 1842, the British Guianese government was still protesting against the quarantine restrictions, saying that, without it, labourers from Barbados would have been flocking to their colony.¹²²

The "Gagging Act" (act no. 720) did nothing to improve relations between the *Liberal* and Thomas Cummins, by now a member of council and the police magistrate for St. George, in which capacity he did his best to discredit the supporters of emigration. Cummins reported that labourers would be less restive if they were "left to themselves, and not interfered with by those interested and self-constituted emigration agents and their emissaries, who now infest our land."¹²³ The *Liberal* argued that, as a man of colour, Cummins should have resigned from the council in protest at the passage of the act.¹²⁴

Public opinion was so divided over No. 720 that in early 1840, a *Liberal* correspondent writing under the pseudonym "Ignatius Sancho", a good indication that he was a man of colour, pleaded with people of colour to forget their differences and unite.¹²⁵ On March 23, the Barbados Auxiliary Anti-Slavery Society met to draw up a resolution regarding the act. The society's membership was largely non-white, with a committee of 12 men of colour, but Solicitor-General Clarke and one or two white clergymen and planters were also members.¹²⁶ At the meeting Clarke

¹²⁰ *Liberal*, 18 April 1840. The Court of Appeal reduced the fine to £25.

¹²¹ CO 28/134 No. 35, MacGregor to Russell, 9 April 1840, enclosure B, police magistrate of St. Philip to Garraway, 3 April 1840.

¹²² *Barbadian*, 2 February 1842.

¹²³ PP 1842 vol. 29 "Quarterly Reply..." 1 January- 31 March 1840, No. 3 St. George. Cummins was appointed to the magistracy and the Council in early 1839.

¹²⁴ *Liberal*, 18 April 1840.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 March 1840.

¹²⁶ *Barbadian*, 28 March 1840. The committee consisted of Samuel Prescod, Thomas Harris, Edmund C. Haynes, S. B. Arthur, Henry Pinheiro, Edward W. Archer, Henry Hawkesworth, W.R. Haynes,

introduced motions to adopt the British Anti-Slavery Society's condemnation of indentured emigration as a means of supporting sugar cultivation, and a motion stating that "this meeting deems emigration inimical to the true interests of the labouring population of Barbados." With the exception of Prescod, the committee, including Harris, voted in favour. However, seven members of the committee, including Prescod and Harris, issued a counter-statement, saying that they owed it to themselves and "to their laboring brethren, and to the Country" to condemn the 1840 act, saying that it would only worsen social relations in the island. After the meeting the *Liberal* distributed handbills around the island condemning the act, on behalf of the society.¹²⁷

The divide in the Barbados Anti-Slavery Society did not neatly reflect the factions among electoral reformers, and most of the men on the Society's committee were élite merchant-tradesmen, in addition to the St. Mary's Boys' School teacher and the Bridgetown Methodist minister. However, the divide was damaging for Prescod and his supporters who wanted more far-reaching franchise reform. In the aftermath of the Barbados Anti-Slavery Society's meeting, MacGregor blamed pre-emancipation free people of colour for their continuing political marginalisation, and dismissed them as a political force of significance. In a somewhat condescending tone, he informed the secretary of state that:

... [A]lthough no impediment, even when emanating from the Coloured Body themselves, — as in the Case of the Auxiliary Anti-Slavery Society — will alter or induce me to discontinue my steady, although quiet exertions in contributing towards their further elevation, I much fear that the political partizanship [*sic*], in which they have imprudently allowed themselves to be involved, may retard that amicable intercourse with their White Brethren which has of late been gradually gaining ground.¹²⁸

The governor and other emigration opponents took the opportunity presented by

Joseph Kennedy, L. Bourne, Samuel J. Prescod, Joseph Hamilton and Anthony Barclay. Also present were Anglican clergyman and planter named Wiltshire Stanton Austin, who chaired the meeting, and Solicitor-General R.B. Clarke.

¹²⁷ CO 28/134 No. 35 MacGregor to Russell, 9 April 1840. Joseph Thorne, London Bourne and Joseph Kennedy voted against the counter-statement, Pinheiro and Arthur abstained.

¹²⁸ CO 28/134 No. 35 MacGregor to Russell, 9 April 1840.

the internal rift to characterise Prescod publicly as a hypocrite. The disagreement was a minor victory for élites of colour who opposed both Prescod and labour emigration. In his correspondence with the secretary of state MacGregor referred to the “perverse inconsistency” of Prescod’s behaviour, and asserted that his conduct had led to uneasiness among other people of colour such as “the universally respected Joseph Thorne.”¹²⁹ Thorne himself supported this statement, and in December 1841 wrote:

The ascendancy acquired over the minds of the people was both great and general, and I regret to say that the press, advocating the case of Mr. Day by false representations, has contributed greatly towards inducing many to leave the island. And I cannot help adding that the editor of the *Liberal* stated publicly that he did so because he thought the emigration law restrictive, although he had previously declared that the emigration system was the worst thing that could happen to the labourer of this island, and he believed that three out of every four would die; this he stated openly at a public meeting.¹³⁰

In 1840 Thorne, who had been elected in 1839 to Prescod’s Elective Franchise Committee, switched sides, and campaigned for the Solicitor-General Robert Bowcher Clarke in the latter’s bid to be returned as the representative for the parish of St. Michael, once Bridgetown merchants had collectively endorsed Clarke as their candidate.¹³¹ During the 1840 elections, this activity provoked a sarcastic comment from an anonymous writer who hinted that Thorne’s support for Clarke might earn him a police magistracy, where he might at last “reserve the exercise of his powerful and extensive influence, among the colored classes, for a more propitious cause.”¹³² Thorne’s involvement in Clarke’s campaign probably helped him in his later bid to become the second man of colour on the Bridgetown vestry board.

In their efforts to silence Prescod, the legislature was readily assisted by the divisions between people of colour, including former slaves, when, in late 1840, a

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ PP 1842, vol. 29 “General Reports for 1840,” Thorne to Felix Bedingfeld, Governor’s Private Secretary, 11 December 1841, pp. 131-132.

¹³¹ *Barbadian*, 3 June 1840.

¹³² *Liberal* 3 June 1840.

white police magistrate named Frederick Watts sued Prescod for libel. In the previous year Watts, the magistrate for St. George, had read a scathing comment which Prescod had written about him, accusing him of being a tool of the planters, to a group of headmen from the parish. A delegation of 54 St. George superintendants, or “headmen”, signed their X’s to an address contradicting Prescod’s claims, and took it to the governor’s residence “on behalf” of all the labourers from St. George.¹³³ Prescod dismissed the delegation as consisting of “the favourite tools (superintendants and drivers) of the [planters]”, who assisted the planters in “oppressing the laborers.”¹³⁴

Prescod’s libel trial illustrated the ambivalence of the political and social role of ex-slave headmen and pre-emancipation free people of colour in post-emancipation society. While some of the headmen clearly participated in the case under duress, fear and material self-interest were ultimately stronger motivations than any sense of empathy with an advocate of labourers’ interests, such as Prescod, or any sense of injustice regarding the harsh conditions of rural life. During the trial, which lasted from December 1840 to January 1841, many of the men confessed that they could not read and were not certain what they had signed. Others said they had signed because they felt they had no choice, or, in rare cases, denied having signed the address in the first place. Several, however, were fully aware of what they had signed, and one “under Manager”, named Robert Jordon,¹³⁵ who may have been a pre-1834 free man of colour, admitted that he had not consulted the labourers from his estate before signing the statement: “They knew nothing about it. I did not mention the Address to them — I only questioned them relative to their condition, and I considered that sufficient to authorize me to go to the Governor.... I thought I

¹³³ *Liberal*, 16 November 1839; *Barbadian*, 20 November 1839; CO 28/133 MacGregor to Russell, 24 January 1840, enclosure C no. 1, “Address from the Laborers of the Parish of St. George”; CO 28/134 No. 118, MacGregor to Russell, 26 December 1840, enclosing the *West Indian*, 21 December 1840, report on the proceedings of the court of grand sessions.

¹³⁴ *Liberal*, 20 November 1839 and 20 February 1841; *British Anti-Slavery Reporter*, February 12 1840.

¹³⁵ See reference to Robert Jordan, possibly same individual, in chapter 3, pp. 164-165.

had a right to sign it.” Many signed in order to deny Prescod’s claim that the labourers in their district were being oppressed. One of the leaders of the deputation, a man named Cushey Alleyne, said that he had been told that Prescod had called labourers “savages” and he felt that such a statement “could only have been written by one of their worst enemies.” Another headman, Tobias Went, was quoted in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* as having said he would not have signed the address had he known it was directed against Prescod, but in court he denied making this statement.

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Ironically, the trial could be seen as a victory for the long civil rights struggle. “[B]y an unprecedented coincidence”, as MacGregor informed the Colonial Office, “several respectable coloured and black gentlemen served in the Grand Jury, and... that Individual occupying from his Station, as Member of Council, the first rank amongst the descendants of Africa, in Barbados, presided, during the Sessions in the high and honourable Office of Chief Justice”. MacGregor was referring to the fact that Thomas Cummins was the Chief Justice of the 1840-1841 Court of Grand Sessions — the first time a man of colour had filled that post — and presided over Prescod’s case. Three men of colour — Joseph Kennedy, Henry Brathwaite and Henry Wilkins — sat on the jury which sentenced Prescod to five months in prison and fined him £200.¹³⁷

One suspects that the presence of men of colour on the jury and on the bench was not, in fact, a coincidence, but a rather thin disguise for the fact that this was a political trial. The harshness of the fine and jail term suggests that the jury was collaborating in a state-orchestrated attempt to shut the *Liberal* down. During the proceedings, Prescod argued that the court was prejudiced against him because he was a man of colour, a claim which Solicitor-General Clarke described as nonsense, since such distinctions had been abolished along with slavery. Clarke added that

¹³⁶ *Liberal*, 12 February 1840 and 20 February 1841; *British Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 12 February 1840.

¹³⁷ CO 28/134 No. 119 MacGregor to Russell, 26 December 1840, enclosing MacGregor to the Provost Marshal General, 24 December 1840.

Prescod and others like him were responsible for any lingering racial divisions.¹³⁸

During the trial, at a public dinner in his honour, Prescod declared that he still wished to see the desegregation of public offices, but, perhaps because of his experience in court he asked: "Why should it be called liberality, and so much credit assumed for the act, when a black or coloured man [is] appointed to fill a public situation[?]"¹³⁹

A Defeat for the "Tinkers, Shoemakers, and Tailors": The Failure of Franchise Reform

Governor MacGregor pardoned Prescod and released him from jail. The trial confirmed his popularity with the non-white majority of Bridgetown, and, upon his release, Prescod was greeted at his home by "an immense number of the inhabitants of the town" and was "heartily cheered by the assembled multitude."¹⁴⁰ His legal problems did nothing to silence the *Liberal's* opposition to the conditions of rural labour, and the next year Prescod served as the emigration agent for Trinidad.¹⁴¹ In 1840 Prescod became the leader of the Liberal party, a loose coalition of like-minded candidates seeking election to the House of Assembly, among whom were liberal white merchants and planters.¹⁴²

In 1840, the legislature passed a new electoral franchise bill setting the qualification for all male Barbadians at a house value of £20 or 5 acres of freehold land. The qualification was now equal regardless of colour, and the bill created a separate constituency for Bridgetown, which was a victory for merchants and some small shopkeepers and tradesmen, but it disenfranchised a significant number of whites. Furthermore, few potential voters of colour owned 5 acres of land, and very

¹³⁸ CO 28/134 No. 119 MacGregor to Russell, 26 December 1840, enclosing *West Indian*, 21 December 1840.

¹³⁹ *Liberal*, 19 September 1840.

¹⁴⁰ *Liberal*, 19 December 1840.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1841; CO 28/139 No. 25 MacGregor to Russell, 17 March 1841.

¹⁴² Hilton Vaughn. "Samuel Jackman Prescod: Eulogy," p. 3; Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 120.

few owned their homes at all, much less homes worth £20.¹⁴³ What remained of the Elective Franchise Committee held a public meeting to oppose the act, arguing that a tax-based franchise of £2.10 would have redressed the imbalance against the “respectable shopkeepers and tradespeople” excluded by the new act.¹⁴⁴ Prescod sent a petition to the Colonial Office on behalf of several people of colour, arguing that the new bill would in fact decrease the electorate from around 1100 to just over 800. He further asserted that the act, although it did not state it openly, was discriminatory against people of colour. Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord John Russell was favourable to his petition, and initially disallowed the act. However, shortly thereafter, the government of Sir Robert Peel replaced the Whig administration in which Russell served. In the wake of the 1839 Jamaican constitutional crisis, the new secretary of state, Lord Stanley, the man who had drafted the act of emancipation, was determined to pursue a less confrontational policy towards West Indian planters. Stanley reversed Russell’s decision, and the act came into force in November 1842.¹⁴⁵

In fact, the new franchise act changed little. After the act the electorate now numbered roughly 1100, just over 400 of whom were in St. Michael, which was more or less the same as before.¹⁴⁶ The *Barbadian* hailed the bill as a victory for the legislature over Prescod and his “thirteen hundred tinkers, shoemakers, and tailors.”

¹⁴³ Of the island’s 1874 registered landowners in 1841, 668 owned 5 acres or less of property. Most of the island’s 383 female landowners, who could not vote, would have been in this category, along with the majority of poor whites (See CO 28/140 No. 27 Lieutenant-Governor H.C. Darling to Stanley, October 28 1841, enclosing “Report of the Joint Committee of the [Council and Assembly]...” 16 October 1841).

¹⁴⁴ CO 28/140 No. 27 Darling to Stanley, enclosing Prescod to Russell, 13 July 1840. In the document, the Committee is called the Franchise Extension Committee, which might be a mistake on the Lieutenant-Governor’s part, but might also suggest that the membership and demands of this 1840 committee were different from the original committee elected in January 1839.

¹⁴⁵ CO 28/138 Prescod to Lord John Russell, 13 July 1840; CO 30/23 No. 727, “An Act to amend the Representation of the People, and to declare who shall be liable to serve on Juries...,” passed 29 April 1840; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 56-57; Schomburgk, *History of Barbados*, p. 488.

¹⁴⁶ PP 1845, vol. 31, Grey to Stanley, 4 September 1845, “Questions [for] the... Magistrates,” No. 11, Bridgetown.

¹⁴⁷ Once the imperial government had accepted the bill, there was little that its opponents could do, and the struggle for a broader franchise vanished without having achieved its stated aim.

The bill made the greatest difference in St. Michael, where, during the 1840s, the urban élite of colour became quite influential in the politics of Bridgetown and St. Michael, with the backing of white and non-white merchants and tradespeople. Men of colour in politics trod a fine line between confronting the problem of racial segregation, and maintaining the support of white Bridgetown residents. When the new franchise act was brought into operation, white Bridgetown merchants urged Prescod to run for one of the new Bridgetown seats as the merchants' candidate, and he agreed to do so "expressly on the consideration that he was to receive support from that class of voters."¹⁴⁸ His decision to participate formally in politics clearly affected the content of his newspaper. The *Liberal* still published articles on matters pertaining to the rights of labourers, but noticeably less frequently, and the Liberal Party was careful to avoid the issue of race in political campaigning. Its candidates relied on the votes of white merchants and, in rural areas where they had less success, white planters and small farmers. In an election notice describing his political platform, Prescod outlined his *laissez-faire* liberal and utilitarian principles, declaring: "As regards my politics... I need only state here that freedom, full and unrestrained, in all things, is the rule; limitations and restrictions the exception. My object, the greatest possible good to the greatest possible number." He added that the rich had no right to oppress the poor, that trade "flourished best when least meddled with" and that he supported education for all people.¹⁴⁹ Such principles, although progressive, were vague enough to appeal equally to urban merchants, wealthy but liberal whites, and the small minority people of colour and ex-slaves who could vote. Prescod and his running mate, a white man named B.L. Trimmingham,

¹⁴⁷ *Barbadian*, 19 February 1942.

¹⁴⁸ *Liberal*, 18 February 1843.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 31 May and 3 June 1843.

were opposed by two conservative candidates, one of them being Henry Sharpe. Merchants endorsed Prescod, and he won the election with 185 votes, becoming the first man of colour to sit in the House of Assembly. Sharpe came second with 168 votes, the other conservative candidate third, and Trimmingham last.¹⁵⁰

Support for the Liberal Party consolidated the racial integration of élite merchant politics, first nurtured by common support for electoral reform during the early apprenticeship period. In 1844, to commemorate the anniversary of his election, a delegation of merchants of both colours gave Prescod \$300 to buy a printing press. In accepting the gift Prescod stated that:

The composition of this delegation, in which I am inexpressibly gratified to find every shade of complexion from pure white to pure black represented, assures me that the greatest and most formidable obstacle of all has been surmounted. We are no longer a white, or a black, or a coloured party, struggling, as a class, for class privileges. We are a body of free men, labouring to free the institutions of our country for the blight of corruption which hangs festering over them, engendering all sorts of maladies in our public affairs.¹⁵¹

However, the race and class divisions which characterised Bridgetown life were as evident in the elections of 1843 as they had been in 1834. The atmosphere of celebration among people of colour which had surrounded Sharpe's candidacy in 1834 now characterised Prescod's campaign. Between 1834 and 1843, Sharpe had ceased to consider himself a "liberal", a decision which greatly improved his relations with the legislature as Attorney-General, and destroyed his popularity with the non-white Bridgetown poor.¹⁵² According to Governor Sir Charles Grey, Prescod's victory gave "great pleasure to the numerous class of colored inhabitants."¹⁵³ Prescod's campaign provided a vehicle for the non-white urban poor to express their hostility towards the wealthy, and various reports mentioned that Sharpe and the other conservative candidate were hissed at in the streets, and greeted with cheers of "Prescod forever!" While campaigning, Sharpe's wife rebuked Prescod's non-white

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 7 June 1843.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 12 June 1844.

¹⁵² Ibid., 22 July 1843.

¹⁵³ CO 28/156 No. 47 Grey to Stanley, 17 June 1843.

political supporters for being “turncoats”.¹⁵⁴ Although the *Liberal* asserted that “some of the most respectable Merchants” were among those celebrating in the streets after Prescod’s victory, during the election the following year, a journalist from another newspaper contrasted Prescod’s and Sharpe’s followers in class terms, sarcastically referring to Prescod’s “radicals” as:

... Demagogue brawlers, without a doubloon that they could honestly call their own... *Jobbers* — metamorphosed into Patriots and *Economists*... [whereas Sharpe’s supporters are] gentlemen, the *Elite* of the wealth and respectability of the city; Gentlemen — five of whom shipped last year fully *five-sixths* of the whole staple crop of this sugar producing colony; and two of whom probably contribute to the Treasury of this Island fully as large a sum as the grand total of the Radical faction all put together.... [The Liberals/Radicals are] paupers, the large majority of them — with nothing to lose, and every thing to hope for in the event of their succeeding in upsetting the old constitution of the Colony... [and introducing a] *mobocracy* in to the House of Assembly....¹⁵⁵

Prescod’s campaign and election in 1843 illustrate how, during the 1840s, the Bridgetown non-white merchant élite withdrew from the overt discussions of racial discrimination which had characterised their public discourse in the first few years of emancipation. His decision to run was publicly endorsed in a letter from a group of 15 leading Bridgetown residents, at least nine of them merchants of colour. However, in contrast to the tone of the racial equality agitation of the 1830s, they made no reference to colour, or to the importance of having a man of colour in the legislature. Instead, they thanked him as merchants for “the zeal and ability which you have displayed on all occasions connected with the general welfare of the Island, more especially on those relating to Trade and Commerce....”¹⁵⁶ This reluctance to make overt references to race was also evident in the decision by the St. Mary’s Society for the Education of the Coloured Poor to drop the word “Coloured” from its name during the 1840s. Despite the name change the Society still provided relief exclusively to impoverished people of colour, and its governing board consisted of 16 “gentlemen of colour”, along with the Anglican bishop, the parish rector and the curate of St.

¹⁵⁴ *Liberal*, 7, 17 and 21 June 1843, letter from “Pliny.”

¹⁵⁵ *Liberal*, 27 July 1844, letter entitled “The Globe’s say.”

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 February 1843.

Mary's church. ¹⁵⁷

It was also some years before Prescod was free from the accusation that his supporters were not "respectable", and, although he was backed politically by a wide cross-section of people, there were social divisions between them. Of those who signed the 1843 address, only Anthony Barclay, a shopkeeper, attended a dinner held in early August to celebrate jointly Prescod's election and the anniversary of emancipation, possibly the last such event commemorating the end of slavery until the twentieth century. ¹⁵⁸ Some of the men who spoke, such as Barclay and another man named Edward Archer, were long time philanthropists and participants in the struggle for political and civil equality. However, not even the few wealthy and leading merchants who had previously participated in such dinners, such as Joseph Kennedy, were present. ¹⁵⁹ These élite men may have been unwilling to socialise with the lower class tradesmen and shopkeepers who supported Prescod.

Men of Colour in Politics, 1840-c1854

Despite this ambivalence, the presence of men of colour in the St. Michael vestry influenced the vestry to assume a greater responsibility for poor relief for people of colour. In 1841, during Thomas Cummins' tenure as churchwarden, the vestry gave £1150 to the St. Mary's Society, more than to any other charitable organisation, including the Ladies Association. ¹⁶⁰ By 1845-1846, when there were at least five men of colour out of 16 vestrymen, and Joseph Thorne was churchwarden, there had been a significant shift in vestry policy. At the request of the St. Mary's Society,

¹⁵⁷ St. Michael vestry minutes, 18 November 1845.

¹⁵⁸ Higman asserts that, on the jubilee of emancipation in 1888, Barbadian planters "were joined by black and coloured leaders in promoting a collective forgetting" (Higman, "Remembering Slavery," p. 92).

¹⁵⁹ *Liberal*, 2 August 1843.

¹⁶⁰ CO 28/164 No. 27 Grey to Secretary of State W.E. Gladstone, 25 July 1846, enclosing Joseph Thorne, Churchwarden, St. Michael, 18 November 1845. See reference to Cummins' churchwardenship in chapter 4, p. 216. Cummins was also the secretary of the St. Mary's Society (*Liberal*, 26 July 1838).

the vestry assumed responsibility for the Society's poor relief asylum and for its pensioners on the grounds that "the relief of the colored poor [is] now more a parochial concern, than as it was [sic] formerly dependent upon the voluntary exertions of individuals asserting themselves for that purpose."¹⁶¹ Vestrymen of colour also challenged racial segregation in the vestry's educational services. In 1851, when Joseph Thorne was once again churchwarden, he seconded a motion making the continuation of the Central School's grant conditional upon the vestry being able to select 10 boys for the school, a method of forcing the school's trustees to accept pupils of colour. Even though the trustees agreed, the vestry still redistributed some of the money which it provided for parish education from the Central School to other schools for children of colour.¹⁶² In 1853, several members of the vestry tried to delay making a decision on renewing the salary of Edward Archer, the teacher of the St. Mary's Society Boys' School. Thorne, still the churchwarden, put his foot down, saying that the school was "as important to the parish as the Central School", and the decision should be taken immediately. Archer's salary was renewed.¹⁶³

Prescod took a somewhat different view of the issue of poor relief from that of the St. Michael vestrymen of colour. Like them he opposed the racial segregation of charitable provision, and argued that, if vestries provided poor relief for whites, then they should also offer it to people of colour.¹⁶⁴ However, he did not support the idea of government accepting a greater role in public provision for people of colour. In 1842, when a planter, who was also a Liberal Party candidate, published a political platform advocating greater legislative responsibility for poor relief, Prescod opposed the proposal, arguing, on the basis of classical liberal principles, that poor relief provision was properly a private matter:

¹⁶¹ CO 31/43, 13 May 1845; St. Michael vestry, 13 March 1846.

¹⁶² St. Michael vestry, 1 May and 19 July 1853.

¹⁶³ *Barbadian*, 6 April 1853.

¹⁶⁴ *Liberal*, 17 March 1838.

Legislative provision for the destitute poor sounds very philanthropic, and has a remarkably fine appearance to superficial theorists; but it is really a thing of very questionable principle, and in practice is most apt to generate the very evil which it was meant to destroy. It is decidedly the most expensive and wasteful mode of relieving the distress of the poor; and there can be no guarantee, as in the administration of private charity by an individual or society, that the relief will generally be extended to the most deserving and in proportion to the distress. The pious zeal and the fidelity with which one dispenses alms from his own pocket, are seldom to be found in those commissioned to dispense it from the pockets of others... [Public charity would] stifle every manly sentiment of independence — every ennobling aspiration by which the human mind is prompted to struggle on against surrounding difficulties on the way to improvement... and destroy personal industry and forethought, by giving lien upon those of others.... [It would be a] grievous wrong done to the really industrious and provident, by forcibly taking from them to bestow upon the idle and improvident....¹⁶⁵

In Prescod's view, free movement of labour, rather than more state intervention, was the solution to the problem of poverty. He argued that the number of paupers in the island was increasing because planters continued to prevent emigration, and he described emigration as "the only safety valve for the evils under which our Peasantry are now groaning."¹⁶⁶ After his election, Prescod stopped publicly advocating emigration, probably out of political prudence and possibly because it was a hopeless cause, given the restrictiveness of the anti-emigration laws. However, his record in the House of Assembly indicates that he remained consistent in his economic views, advocating lower taxes and reduced state spending as an answer to the island's dire financial woes during the 1840s.¹⁶⁷

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the political fortunes of pre-emancipation free people of colour were mixed. While the decline of the political and civil rights struggles reflected shifts in the imperial role of the West Indies, there were also critical points of internal debate which contributed to the process, most importantly the debate over estate labour and emigration. Wealthy men of colour benefitted from limited electoral reform, however most lower class people were

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 14 December 1842.

¹⁶⁶ CO 28/134 No. 35 MacGregor to Russell, 9 April 1840, enclosure D no. 3, Minutes of the Barbados Auxiliary British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society... 23rd March 1840"; *Liberal*, 9 December 1840.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, CO 31/53, 3 October 1843; 13 May 1845; 9 May 1848.

permanently excluded from the formal political process in 1840. Samuel Prescod, although clearly the most important political figure of colour of the time, was not the only politician or activist of colour. Even after the damaging rifts of the early 1840s and the outcome of the struggle for franchise extension, free people of colour continued to play an important and influential role in the island's politics at various levels.

Although their role was ultimately limited by the lack of any significant changes in the distribution of property, emancipation brought about important shifts in the socioeconomic boundaries among pre-1834 free non-whites and ex-slaves. The final section examines these shifts, illustrating the lasting impact of emancipation on the socio-political position and everyday living conditions of pre-emancipation free people of colour during and after the 1840s.

**Equality in Poverty:
Pre-emancipation Free People of Colour and Ex-slaves, 1840-1854**

Captive Labour and the Growth of the Non-Agricultural Sector

As Philip Curtin argues, the reason for the severe post-emancipation socioeconomic hardship experienced throughout much of the British Caribbean cannot simply be attributed to the removal of imperial tariff protection for Caribbean sugar in 1846 and the declining fortunes of the British Caribbean sugar industry. Rather, an explanation must be sought in a combination of changing international circumstances and the methods chosen by “each individual colony to meet the challenge of emancipation.”¹⁶⁸ The methods used by Barbadian planters to maintain rural unemployment as a structural feature of the economy¹⁶⁹ ultimately drove down the living standards of the rest of the population. This section examines the specific effects of socioeconomic decline on pre-emancipation free people of colour.

¹⁶⁸ Philip Curtin, “The British Sugar Duties and West Indian Prosperity,” in Beckles and Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom*, p. 314.

¹⁶⁹ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, pp. 111-112.

Trevor Marshall argues that, after 1838, “although Barbados underwent several adjustments to emancipation, Barbadian society remained virtually the same as before 1834.”¹⁷⁰ In so far as an “adjustment” to emancipation involved re-distribution of economic and political power between the plantocracy and other groups in Barbadian society — merchants, landless or peasant farming whites, ex-slaves and pre-emancipation free people of colour — then changes were limited. Barbadian planters retained firm control of the island’s legislature, and, therefore, its economic policy. Emancipation did not lead to a redistribution of property-ownership and political influence which might have created the basis for serious political challenges to planters by urban and non-white political candidates. In 1834, Governor Smith suggested to the House of Assembly that limited franchise reform was a safe option in Barbados, precisely because it would remove the obvious racial discrimination without endangering the plantocracy’s political dominance.¹⁷¹ In 1840 there were 934 freeholds of less than 10 acres, most of which pre-dated emancipation.¹⁷² In the rare cases where ex-slaves bought property, it was rarely more than one or two acres, not nearly enough to meet the franchise requirement.¹⁷³ In 1842, 441 of the island’s 508 estates controlled 81 per cent of the land.¹⁷⁴ As Woodville Marshall has argued, by 1850, “the plantation’s land monopoly was still unbroken, and this, combined with a rising demand for land by ex-slaves, ensured the persistence of high land prices....”¹⁷⁵

Very few of those emancipated in 1838 ever acquired land. In 1849, there were

¹⁷⁰ Trevor Marshall, “Post-emancipation Adjustments,” p. 103.

¹⁷¹ CO 28/113 Smith to Stanley, 30 April 1834, enclosing Governor’s message to the House of Assembly, 10 April 1834.

¹⁷² CO 28/140 No. 27 Darling to Stanley, 28 October 1841, enclosing “Report of the Joint Committee”; Watts, *The West Indies*, p. 330. Janet Momsen states that there were 1,367 freeholds of less than 10 acres in 1840, but the source of this figure is unclear (see Momsen, *Post-emancipation Rural Settlement in Barbados*, Dept. of Geography, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1988).

¹⁷³ PP 1845 vol. 31, Grey to Stanley, 4 September 1845, enclosing “Questions [for] Magistrates,” Nos. 1-12; PP 1846 vol. 28, magistrates’ reports for October 1844 to June 1845.

¹⁷⁴ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p. 114.

¹⁷⁵ Woodville Marshall, “Villages and Plantation Sub-Division,” in Marshall (ed.), *Emancipation III*, p. 8.

1,469 people owning one to five acres of land, a number which had increased to 2,098 by 1875, less than 1.5 per cent of the total population in both cases. However, as Woodville Marshall shows, the growth in the number of small landholders during this period was mainly due to the subdivision of inherited plots, rather than the acquisition of new land.¹⁷⁶ Between 1842 and 1854, the electorate went from only about 1,100 to 1,444, although the population grew from an estimated 103,000 just before emancipation to 152,722. By 1876 when the population was 162,042, there were just 1,644 voters, of whom 613 were in the parish of St. Michael. Thus, during the first three decades after emancipation, an average of less than 1 per cent of the population could vote.¹⁷⁷

The evidence presented in the first section of this chapter suggested that emancipation initiated a trend of labour movement out of the agricultural sector, and increased competition for work in non-agricultural occupations. However, such an assertion is difficult to corroborate with statistical evidence. At emancipation, slaves were 81 per cent of the population. Praedials accounted for about 60 per cent and non-praedials for 40 percent of the apprentice population, including children.¹⁷⁸ In 1844, when a census was taken, 30,005 adults out of a total population of 122,198 people were returned as agricultural labourers, while 28,125 adults, among them 15,777 women, were employed in a "trade", and 8,956 were listed as having no employment. The term "trade" in the 1844 census seems to have encompassed artisans, mechanics, domestics, hucksters, shopkeepers and merchants, while a person "working in agriculture" might have been a planter, a managerial estate

¹⁷⁶ Woodville Marshall, "Rock Hall, St. Thomas: the search for the first free village in Barbados," Paper presented at the 14th ACH Conference (Guyana, 1977), p. 37.

¹⁷⁷ George Belle, "The Abortive Revolution of 1876 in Barbados," in Beckles and Shepherd (eds.), *Caribbean Freedom*, p. 181; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 119. As no census of the entire population was taken in 1834, the 1834 population figure is based on varying estimates for 1829 of between 101,288 and 103,983 (See David Gobert and Jerome Handler [trans.], "Barbados in the Apprenticeship Period: The Report of a French colonial official [April 1836], *JBMHS*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1979), p. 111 and Schomburgk, *History of Barbados*, p. 86).

¹⁷⁸ Higman, *Slave Populations*, p. 550. "Field labourers" were 56.7 per cent of the slaves enumerated for compensation. The actual number of slaves classified as non-praedial was 33,948.

employee, a headman or a field labourer. Similarly, it is not clear how many of those listed as having “no employment” were wealthy people who did not work, paupers, elderly or disabled people or, as in slavery, working class people who did non-agricultural work. No employment statistics were given for the 55,112 people under 18 years old who were counted. However, as this thesis has shown, written evidence suggests that many children were withdrawn from field labour to attend school, learn a trade, become domestics, or be cared for by family.¹⁷⁹ Since the 1834 compensation records only refer to slaves, and the 1844 census ignores child labour, the two sets of statistics are not comparable. Furthermore, the 1844 census was taken in part to buttress planter opposition to a proposed imperial measure to end the West Indies’ preferential trade status with Britain, and it was in the political interests of planters to exaggerate the scale of their difficulties. The census is therefore unreliable as an occupational guide, and cannot be used to establish changes in occupational distribution over time in Barbados.

However, comparisons of the 1844 Barbados census statistics with those of other islands are instructive. The census shows that 48 per cent of working Barbadian adults — 25 per cent of the total population — were employed in non-agricultural work in 1844, and the population had increased from about 103,000 in 1834 to 122,198 in 1844, an increase of one-fifth. This percentage, like the distribution of property, remained more or less the same for decades, even though the population grew. According to the 1876 census, 27 per cent of the total population were adults who worked in agriculture, while the total population reached over 162,000.¹⁸⁰ According to Riviere, in British Guiana in 1844, 24 per cent, and, by 1847, 30 per cent of Kittisian and 40 per cent of Antiguan adults worked in agriculture. In 1847, the estate labour force of Trinidad had fallen to 37.5 per cent of its 1838 strength.

¹⁷⁹ Peel Papers, Vol. 381, General Correspondence, 24 February-5 March 1845, British Museum Additional Mss. 40.651, f. 366, “Census of Barbados taken in 1844 (enclosed in J.P. Mayers, agent for Barbados, to Sir Robert Peel, 27 February 1845, ff. 364-366”;
Barbados Blue Book, 1844.

¹⁸⁰ Belle, “Abortive Revolution,” p. 181.

Jamaica, where about 9 per cent of the total population worked on estates in 1847, embodied the worst expectations of the plantocracy.¹⁸¹ It is therefore not surprising that there was a severe labour crisis for planters in Jamaica. However, in Barbados, St. Kitts and Antigua, there was no labour shortage during the 1840s, whereas in Trinidad and British Guiana, there was, even though the figures for these territories were roughly comparable.

Riviere attributes this difference to “the considerably smaller size of these islands [Barbados, St. Kitts and Antigua], which dictated a situation in which labouring populations proved adequate” for agricultural cultivation.¹⁸² Bolland rejects arguments based on the availability/scarcity of labour or land being determined by the size of the territory and the density of the population as “simplistic and inadequate.”¹⁸³ Using the example of Belize, where there was ample land and a relatively scarce population, he shows that planters maintained labour control by ensuring that ex-slaves were perpetually indebted to estate shops. Bolland argues that planters’ ability to manipulate the political, judicial and economic system to restrict ex-slaves’ options determined the effectiveness of post-emancipation labour control. He exhorts historians to “examine the ‘land factor’, not as a geophysical fact determined by man/land ratios... but as a social aspect which is affected by such factors as available technology and, especially, the distribution of social power.”¹⁸⁴ In Barbados, he argues, by means of legislation such as the contract act, planters manipulated their monopoly of land to limit “the independent cultivation of provisions to the function of supplementing wages earned from regular estate labour.”¹⁸⁵

This thesis supports Bolland’s principal assertion that planter and legislative policy was responsible for limiting the alternatives available to ex-slaves. Although planters

¹⁸¹ Riviere, “Labour Shortage,” pp. 11-13; *Sugar Question*, p. 10.

¹⁸² Rivere, “Labour Shortage,” p. 13.

¹⁸³ Bolland, “Systems of Domination,” pp. 110-111.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109-110.

in Barbados, as elsewhere, complained in the early 1840s that they could not get former field labourers to work regularly on the estates, Barbadian labourers still did more hours of estate labour a week on average than workers elsewhere in the Caribbean.¹⁸⁶ However, Bolland does not recognise the role of population control in the success of Barbadian planters' labour policies. Planters were aware that there were more people in Barbados than there was work to employ them all, but justified the legislature's anti-emigration stance on the grounds that "a redundant population" was necessary to cultivate sugar.¹⁸⁷ After emancipation, the legislature successfully restricted labour migration, the only available means of earning enough money to improve labourers' circumstances at home.

Planters' labour policy had a ripple effect throughout the population. On the one hand, the shift to free wage labour benefitted pre-emancipation shopkeepers and tradespeople, because former slaves now had more money to spend. Magistrates observed that, after 1838, ex-slaves wore clothes "of a superior kind and texture" than during apprenticeship, and often "indulge[d] in luxuries which they are now able to procure".¹⁸⁸ However, these benefits were offset by increasing competition in non-agricultural sectors, because the limitations placed on ex-slaves' economic activity meant that the only jobs for ex-slaves who either could not or refused to work in field labour were shopkeeping or huckstering, domestic and artisanal work. After emancipation, numerous "hucksters' shops" appeared all over the country, established mainly by male ex-slaves. The magistrate of St. Andrew reported in 1841 that: "A very large number of the labouring population have become hawkers and pedlars; bakeries and retail shops of every description have sprung up on the lines of the highway", which he blamed for the irregularity of the labour supply and the island's continued heavy dependence in food imports. There were similar reports

¹⁸⁶ PP 1842 vol. 13, Testimony of William Sharpe, 12 May 1842, Questions 1515-1548; PP 1842 vol., 29, Darling to Russell, 19 September 1841, "Questions... directed by Lord John Russell," No. 3 St. Andrew, 31 July 1841.

¹⁸⁷ PP 1842 vol. 29, "Quarterly reports," 1 July - 30 September 1840, No. 8 St. Joseph.

¹⁸⁸ PP 1842, vol. 29., 1 April- 30 June 1840; No. 6 St. Peter and No. 11 St. Michael Rural.

from all parishes. The Bridgetown magistrate stated that: "Whenever a spot of land can be obtained near any populous road, small hucksters' shops invariably shew themselves..." selling a variety of local but predominantly imported goods such as liquor and items of clothing.¹⁸⁹ By 1846, there were 63 such shops in St. Philip, for example, and 121 by 1854. The names listed indicate that the majority of the shopkeepers were male ex-slaves, since their first names were either common slave names, or they had no surnames.¹⁹⁰ Even in St. Joseph, one of the poorest parishes, there were 24 such shops in 1848. These shops were, allegedly, "a constant source of drain to the unfortunate labourer, whom they have kept continuously in debt to them..."¹⁹¹

The growth in the number of hucksters' shops was accompanied by the rapid expansion of the skilled trades. Riviere shows the importance of this category in Barbados as compared with other territories. In 1844 10 per cent of the Barbadian male population was listed as being employed in a trade, as compared with 6.9 per cent in Antigua, 5.5 in St Vincent, and between 4 and 5 per cent in Montserrat, Jamaica, Guiana and St. Kitts.¹⁹² While many who wished to become tradespeople, domestics or hucksters went to towns, other remained in rural areas, evading the provisions of the contract and vagrancy acts, finding work around the countryside.

Government for the Planters: Colonial Policy Towards the Poor

Rural hucksters' shops were a significant source of competition for pre-emancipation urban shops and itinerant hucksters, who were probably predominantly female. They sold the same type and range of imported products as established

¹⁸⁹ PP 1842 vol. 29, Darling to Russell, 19 September 1841, "Questions directed by Lord John Russell..." No. 3 St. Andrew, No. 5 St. Thomas, No. 6 St. James, No. 8 St. Michael Rural, No. 10 St. Philip, No. 12 Bridge Town.

¹⁹⁰ St. Philip vestry minutes, 25 March 1846 and 1854.

¹⁹¹ *Barbadian*, 23 February 1848, speech of E. Packer, at the meeting of the General Agricultural Society, 22 December, 1847

¹⁹² Riviere, "Labour Shortage," p. 24.

urban shops, and a wider variety than itinerant hucksters. When the manager of Codrington established a shop in 1837, he reported that apprentices and others in the area were now using it to buy goods for which they would once have gone to a town.¹⁹³ Although the Codrington shop was an estate initiative, the effect of shops established by ex-slaves would have been the same. Urban shopkeepers and artisans also contended with increased competition from rural-urban itinerant huckster traffic after 1838. In 1846, for example, the House of Assembly received a petition from Bridgetown butchers who worked in the market, complaining that meat was being butchered and sold outside the market, and being sold door to door, to the detriment of their business.¹⁹⁴

The local legislature, however, was not predisposed to intervene and help small businesspeople and artisans of colour. The colonial government was more concerned about the non-white population, both pre-emancipation free people of colour and ex-slaves, as a potential source of either criminality or tax revenue. The island's economic situation worsened during the 1840s, and a prolonged drought severely affected all agricultural production. In response, the colonial government shifted more of the tax burden away from landowners on to merchants and consumers. To cut the island's budget deficit in 1840, the colonial government imposed the first of a number of consumption and trade taxes, charging duty on all imported merchandise. Although Barbadian labourers were paid comparable wages to their counterparts elsewhere in the early 1840s, most of the goods consumed in the island were imported, in contrast to most other territories, making retail costs among the highest in the British Caribbean. Bridgetown merchants protested that the taxes would force them to raise prices, thereby reducing the buying power of their customers and imposing an additional burden on the working poor.¹⁹⁵

The legislature also tried to ignore the problem of growing poverty and

¹⁹³ *Barbadian*, 29 April 1837, SPG report on Codrington.

¹⁹⁴ CO 31/56 27 January 1846.

¹⁹⁵ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, p. 96 and 112-113; Riviere, "Labour Shortage," p. 29.

unemployment, preferring to leave education and welfare provision to vestries, private philanthropists and the church.¹⁹⁶ In 1840, the new imperial administration announced that, over five years, it would abolish the imperial grant which supported thousands of schools for children of colour across the West Indies. As the grant was reduced, the colonial government refused to fill the gap, only agreeing in 1846 to grant £750 a year for the next three years to the Church of England to fund its schools.¹⁹⁷ To cope with the grant reduction, most schools raised fees, and parents, unable to pay, began to withdraw their children from school. In April 1842, there were 40 Anglican schools with 3,356 pupils, whereas three years later there were 2,975 children in the island's 41 Anglican schools.¹⁹⁸ Although there were many children of colour in private schools or schools sponsored by other Christian denominations, no examination was conducted of the grant reduction's impact on these schools, nor did the legislature grant them funding to make up for the cuts.¹⁹⁹

The impact of the grant reduction underlined the class differences between the non-white élite and the poor. Wealthier free people of colour were unaffected by it, and in 1848, the *Barbadian* commented on how "very gratifying" it was to see "gentlemen of the coloured community sending their sons to England to receive liberal educations" in fields such as divinity, medicine and law. At the same time, the newspaper acknowledged that few people of colour could afford this.²⁰⁰ The same newspaper rebuked white and non-white labouring class parents because they "refused" to pay for their children's education.²⁰¹ In the late 1850s, Joseph Thorne's

¹⁹⁶ Richard Carter, "Public Amenities After Emancipation," pp. 49-69; Leonard P. Fletcher, "The Evolution of Poor Relief in Barbados, 1838-1900," *JCH*, vol. 53, no. 2 (1992), pp. 171-207.

¹⁹⁷ CO 30/24 No. 876 "An Act authorizing quarterly payments for a limited period from the public towards the moral and religious education of the people of this island," passed 14 July 1846.

¹⁹⁸ PP. 1846 vol. 28, *Papers... relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies*, pp. 164-165, No. 4 Grey to Gladstone, March 23 1846, enclosing Bishop of Barbados to Grey, 29 December 1845.

¹⁹⁹ CO 31/56, 1 July 1846. Prescod voted against this bill precisely because it only assisted Anglican schools, but was the only member of the House to oppose it.

²⁰⁰ *Barbadian*, 19 July 1848.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 28 March 1849.

son received the first Island Scholarship from Codrington College, and went to study divinity at King's College, London.²⁰² However, it is likely that the children of artisans and mechanics fared better than those of labourers. In 1846, whereas nearly all rural magistrates reported that the number of children in schools was decreasing as parents were forced to withdraw them and send them to work as agricultural labourers, the Bridgetown magistrate replied that:

The children of the middle and lower classes of people dwelling in Bridge Town are generally employed at home by their parents or friends; some children are employed as domestic servants, and others as apprentices [in trades]; but their employment in such capacities are [sic] unattended (as far as we have observed) by a corresponding decrease or increase of those at school.²⁰³

The problem of unemployment and underemployment grew in the 1840s. In August 1845, the vestry of St. Philip met to discuss a report from the poor law overseers which described the "general Poor" of the parish as being in a state of "Actual starvation." The vestry responded by giving the overseers the meagre sum of \$120 to buy provisions for those who could not afford them.²⁰⁴ St. Michael was one of few parishes whose vestry listed names of both white and non-white paupers, and, in 1845, there were 1,123 people officially classed as paupers in Bridgetown, which only included those who received poor relief.²⁰⁵ Despite growing urban poverty, town life still offered marginally greater possibilities than life as a rural labourer, and people continued to move to towns. The *Barbadian* complained in 1849 that Bridgetown was "infested with crowds of young persons, most of them having been formerly slaves, as well as others who have been born since the abolition of slavery, who are in a state of shocking demoralization". The editor claimed they took every opportunity to steal, and referred to cases of "highway robbery."²⁰⁶

²⁰² Ibid., 29 July 1857.

²⁰³ PP 1846, vol. 28, Grey to Stanley, 4 September 1845, enclosing "Questions [for] Magistrates," No. 12 Bridgetown.

²⁰⁴ St. Philip vestry minutes, 14 August 1845.

²⁰⁵ PP 1846, vol. 28, Grey to Stanley, 4 September 1845, enclosing "Questions [for] Magistrates," No. 12 Bridgetown..

²⁰⁶ *Barbadian*, 22 August 1849.

Crippling financial crisis finally set in between 1846 and 1848. In 1845 parliament passed the long-expected imperial Sugar Duties Act, which gradually abolished the duty on foreign sugar imported into the British market over five years, from 1846 and 1851, thus removing tariff protection for British West Indian sugar. When the reduction began in 1846, planters lowered resident estate workers' wages to 1s 3d — even as low as 7d at one point — making wages in Barbados the third lowest in the West Indies.²⁰⁷ Then in 1847 the West India Bank, one of a number of banking institutions established by Caribbean planters and legislatures after emancipation to help finance estate operations,²⁰⁸ went bankrupt, taking with it the revenue of the state. As a result, the country came almost to an economic standstill. Wage payments stopped, and many labourers turned to cultivating their own gardens for subsistence. Several vestries ran out of money, and planters stopped making their payments to urban merchant houses.²⁰⁹ Although the particular crisis of 1846-1848 passed, the island entered a prolonged period of economic depression. Between 1842 and 1852, the average price paid for Barbadian sugar halved, and planters responded by increasing production from 15,628 tons to 37,150. Although wages gradually returned to pre-1846 levels after 1848, food prices continued to rise. During the 1840s and 1850s, Barbadian labourers had the lowest real incomes in the British Caribbean.²¹⁰

The Class Boundary Between the Elite and the Working Poor

The economic conditions of the 1840s confirmed the post-emancipation socioeconomic boundaries between pre-emancipation free people of colour and ex-

²⁰⁷ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 109-113; Riviere, "Labour Shortage," p. 29; *Sugar Question*, p. 7 and 9.

²⁰⁸ Lobdell, "Patterns of Investment," p. 321. The Jamaican Planter's Bank and 13 West Indian merchant houses also failed that year (Deerr, *History of Sugar*, Vol. II, p. 438).

²⁰⁹ CO 28/167 No. 80 Governor William Reid to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 7 December 1847.

²¹⁰ Deerr, *History of Sugar*, vol. II, p. 194; Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, p. 231 and 247; Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar and Federalism*, pp. 112-114.

slaves. Urban merchants remained the core of the élite of colour, both in terms of social and financial status, and for a generation they remained, almost to a man, the same individuals who had constituted the free élite of colour during slavery. Those Bridgetown merchants whose business relied on trade with rural plantations and overseas weathered the storm of the 1840s. Similarly, nearly all of those men who held elected or appointed political positions up to the mid-1850s were pre-emancipation free people of colour, and nearly all of them had earned their wealth as merchants.²¹¹

By contrast, as early as the 1830s, the *Watchman*, a “brown” Jamaican newspaper, was predicting nervously that ex-slaves would soon be elected to the Jamaican house of assembly, and during the 1850s, tradesmen and small shopkeepers were elected to the house.²¹² In 1849, there were 13 house representatives of colour in Jamaica,²¹³ compared with one man of colour, Prescod, in the lower house of the Barbadian legislature, and Cummins, possibly still the one man of colour in the legislative council at that time. Although there were a few men of colour at the level of vestry politics, a second man of colour was not elected to the Barbadian house of assembly until 1874.

Some merchants, notably John Montefiore and possibly Cummins, became planters themselves during the 1840s. In 1842, Montefiore bought the 149 acre Neal’s plantation in St. Michael,²¹⁴ and Davy noted that there were other men of colour who became substantial property owners after emancipation: “... [A] few [coloureds] are landed proprietors, respectable men, and, I believe, generally esteemed. Those whom I had the pleasures of knowing, were it not for their color,

²¹¹ Thomas Ellis, a planter of colour, ran unsuccessfully as a conservative candidate in the House of Assembly elections from a St. Peter seat against a white Liberal Party candidate in 1843 (*Liberal*, 24 June 1843).

²¹² Heuman, *Between Black and White*, pp 61-75.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

²¹⁴ St. Michael vestry minutes, 24 March 1842; BMHS Catalogue of Barbadian Estates; *List of property owners of one acre or more, 1842*, BDA.

could have been in no way distinguished from other proprietors.”²¹⁵ Those who managed to penetrate the highest levels of politics and property ownership also found a certain degree of social acceptance in élite white circles which would have been unthinkable before emancipation. Thomas J. Cummins, for example, crowned his political success by joining the large and influential St. Philip’s District Agricultural Society, a planter association.²¹⁶

With the exception of involvement in charities and church activities, élite women of colour who were the relatives of merchants were almost completely excluded from public life. Davy noted that he could say little about upper class women of colour because they were “so little in society. From the few opportunities I had of judging, they appeared inferior in manners, and greatly inferior in information to the men, the natural consequence of a more secluded life, and a more limited and imperfect education.”²¹⁷ In 1844, a delegation of “Ladies” of colour presented Prescod with \$300 to celebrate his election victory, a rare reference to any élite female involvement in politics.²¹⁸ After emancipation, “respectable” upper class women of colour were expected to marry men of colour, and ‘concubinage’ with a white man was considered a “disgrace”.²¹⁹ By the 1850s, although women of colour who owned hotels, inns and brothels continued to flourish,²²⁰ women of colour who survived as the unmarried partners of white men probably enjoyed a social status not far above that of prostitutes.

The class boundary between rural ex-slave labourers and the urban “middle class” of tradespeople and small shopkeepers was more permeable than between

²¹⁵ Davy, *Before and Since Emancipation*, p. 80.

²¹⁶ PP 1846 vol. 28, Grey to Stanley 4 September 1845, enclosure No. 1, “Questions [for] magistrates, No. 1 St. Philip, “Fifth Annual Report of the St. Philip’s District Agricultural Society of Barbados, for the Year 1844.” Cummins also became the police magistrate for Bridgetown, the most important judicial post beneath that of court of appeal judge, in 1849 (*Barbadian*, 14 April 1849).

²¹⁷ Davy, *Before and Since Emancipation*, p. 81.

²¹⁸ *Liberal*, 12 June 1844.

²¹⁹ Davy, *Before and Since Emancipation*, p. 79.

²²⁰ Neville Connell, “Hotel Keepers,” pp. 162-185.

the non-white or merchant élite and the white landed aristocracy,²²¹ and many ex-slaves became tradespeople, hucksters and domestics in the first years after emancipation. However, the conditions of the late 1840s put a ceiling on social mobility for the working poor, and further upward mobility became very difficult. By 1854, Davy claimed, although “there are no such distinctions as castes... there is a tendency to them, as there are in indeed, in most societies. It is best seen in their marriages; domestic servants seldom contract marriages with field labourers, or these with those, or either with tradespeople and artificiers.”²²²

Davy’s statement was probably an exaggeration; however by the end of the 1840s, the substantial early post-emancipation movement of ex-slaves into non-agricultural work had slowed. Occupation probably became a far more significant marker of social position than past legal status among the majority of people of colour. Existence was difficult for both pre-emancipation free people of colour and ex-slaves, and many saw emigration as the only solution to hardship. In 1845, the Bridgetown magistrate noted that it was impossible to keep an accurate record of emigration because so many labourers, artisans and paupers, from among the town population in particular, were illegally emigrating to neighbouring colonies.²²³

Fleeing Hardship: Emigration and Colonisation Schemes as Responses to Poverty

By the end of the 1840s, the euphoria of emancipation has passed. Many people of colour had turned their attention away from the local struggle for equal rights, and instead focussed their hope of a better future on the possibility of emigration. In late 1847, Charles Phipps, who was still unsuccessfully petitioning the Colonial Office for a government post in West Africa, sent a proposal to the secretary of state. He suggested that tradesmen and mechanics from Barbados be sent to Sierra Leone

²²¹ Sewell, *Ordeal of Free Labour*, pp. 67-69.

²²² Davy, *Before and Since Emancipation*, p. 105.

²²³ PP 1846 Vol. 28, Grey to Stanley, 4 September 1845, “Questions [for] the... Magistrates,” No. 11 Bridgetown.

(accompanied by himself, it would seem) in order to teach the “natives” trades.²²⁴ Later that year the Barbados Colonization Society was founded, and, under the auspices of the society, 103 Barbadians of African descent offered to emigrate to Africa to help the British government with “the suppression of the slave trade and the introduction of civilization into Africa.” They explained that they wished to help save British lives, and were “actuated... by a consciousness of their physiological fitness for the Task they would undertake” because of their “constitutional congeniality to the African Climate” as well as the certainty that “the knowledge and habits which they have acquired in a civilized community, must peculiarly fit them for carrying out the benevolent intentions of Government.”

Despite these lofty political aims, a resolution passed at the inaugural meeting of the society stated that the project was also a response to the appalling living conditions in Barbados, which was: “... [O]verstocked with inhabitants, who are increasing in such a rapid degree, that it will be morally impossible, in a short time, for them to find adequate employment, in fact, in the present depressed state of the Island, there are hundreds who are in this predicament, and who could well be spared....” The organisers of the scheme were clearly hoping that it would become a long-term means of dealing with the pressing problem of poverty, pointing out that: “... [S]aid emigrants must ultimately benefit themselves as well as others, as the means will thus be afforded of effecting a mutual interchange of the already civilized to a place where civilization and industry are required, and of the uncivilized to already civilized Countries.”²²⁵

The proposal was published in the newspapers, and proved popular. In October, 234 men of colour, among them 120 married men who offered to emigrate with their families, signed a follow-up petition, making a total of 671 people offering to emigrate to West Africa. A detailed list of their occupations was provided, which shows a

²²⁴ CO 28/169 Misc. 338 Barbados, Petition of Charles Phipps to Earl Grey, 4 January 1848.

²²⁵ CO 28/168 No. 33 Reid to Earl Grey, 7 May 1848.

variety of backgrounds, ranging from schoolteacher to “general agriculturalist”, possibly a reference to being an independent peasant farmer. None was listed as a labourer, and most were artisans.²²⁶

Lacking the money themselves for such an undertaking, this group appealed to the imperial government for assistance to help them emigrate. Unable to foresee a better life for themselves in Barbados, they asked for their own Liberia or Sierra Leone. However, the Secretary of State for the Colonies declined his assistance, and nothing came of the project.²²⁷ That same year, 965 tradesmen and mechanics, led by a politically vocal tradesman of colour named Henry Dayrell, sent a different petition to the House of Assembly, also asking to be allowed to emigrate because of the depressed state of business, but without specifying a destination.²²⁸ The petition, which the house ignored, was one of the largest it had received since emancipation on any subject.. It is likely that all the signatories were men of colour, since the organisers of the meeting at which the petition was first discussed were criticised in the press for not inviting any white tradespeople.²²⁹

Despite these failures, merchants of colour continued to support church-sponsored colonisation projects, and were centrally involved in organising an Anglican mission from Barbados to the area of West Africa which is now Gambia,

²²⁶ The occupations were: 1 draper; 3 storekeepers; 12 schoolmasters; 45 cabinet makers; 49 tailors; 1 architect; 4 millwrights; 14 wheelwrights; 20 carpenters; 18 shoemakers; 6 turners; 1 newspaper reporter; 4 masons; 4 clerks; 1 saddler; 5 upholsterers; 4 blacksmiths; 2 druggists; 1 farrier; 3 coopers; 2 shipwrights[?]; 1 gold and silversmith; 1 hairdresser; 1 sailmaker; 1 butcher; 1 baker; 1 registered tailor; 20 agriculturalists; 1 bookbinder; 1 coach panelist; 5 fishermen; 3 netmakers; 1 plumber and coppersmith; 2 mattress makers; 1 general agriculturalist (see CO 28/169 Misc., unnumbered, Charles Phipps and Edward Archer to Grey, 9 October 1848).

²²⁷ CO 28/169 No. 10 Earl Grey to Governor William Colebrooke, 22 November 1848.

²²⁸ CO 31/56 11 April 1848.

²²⁹ *Barbadian*, 28 February 1848. This was an entirely separate group from the Colonization Society. Dayrell, who had until recently been a member of the Barbados Colonization Society and had initially supported the colonisation scheme, left after a rumour spread that the Society’s scheme “intended establishing a republican government so soon as they got to Africa” (*Barbadian*, correspondence between Dayrell and Charles Phipps and Edward Archer of the Barbadian Colonization Society, 1, 5, 8, 21 and 26 July 1848).

which was established in 1855.²³⁰ Additionally, in 1865 the American Colonisation Society, with whom Barbadian colonisation activists had close contacts, granted \$10,000 to assist “in furtherance of Barbadian Liberian Emigration”, which one newspaper in Barbados described as “a scheme so benevolent to an Island so overpopulated as Barbadoes”. The money enabled 346 Barbadians of colour to emigrate to Liberia later that year.²³¹

However, between the late 1840s and 1850s, conditions for people who had no regular employment deteriorated steadily, and tradespeople and itinerant hucksters were probably the groups most at risk. In the wake of the 1854 cholera epidemic, which killed about one-fifth of the population, the colonial government admitted that poverty and poor living conditions, particularly in the continually expanding Bridgetown slums, were the root cause of the rapid spread and devastating impact of the epidemic.²³² The colonial state slowly began to expand its role as a provider of social services. However such changes were limited, and the state made no attempt to keep pace with the growing poverty rate.²³³ In the 1870s, when the emigration restrictions were lifted and assistance provided to make it easier for people to migrate to other colonies, thousands took the opportunity. Census statistics for other parts of the British West Indies indicate that between 1861 and 1891, around 30,000 Barbadians were resident in other territories, mainly British Guiana and Trinidad.²³⁴

In the long run, full freedom had a harsh and lasting impact on early pre-emancipation free people of colour and their descendents. By the mid-1870s,

²³⁰ See Bishop's Court records, microfilms BS 33-38, particularly BS 38 (BPL); CO 28/173, No. 73 Colebrooke to Grey, 29 November 1850, enclosing Bishop of Barbados to Colebrooke, 28 November 1850, enclosure no. 4, “Proposed Mission from the Church of the West Indies to Western Africa.” Barbados: Barbadian Office, 1850. Thomas J. Cummins, John Montefiore and London Bourne were members of the committee for this project. See also recently Karch, “London Bourne,” pp. 21-31.

²³¹ “Extracts from the *Times*, February 1865, *JBMHS*, vol. 30 (1976-77), quoted in Karch, “London Bourne,” pp 27-28.

²³² CO 28/181 No. 74 Governor Colebrooke to Grey, 27 November 1854, enclosing a “General Report on the Condition of Bridgetown.”

²³³ Fletcher, “Evolution of Poor Relief,” pp. 173-176.

²³⁴ Chamberlain, *Narratives*, p. 24.

although there were probably very few, if any, pre-emancipation free people of colour who were old enough to remember slavery, urban paupers, mechanics and artisans, along with poor whites, still accounted for the majority of emigrants.²³⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, pre-emancipation free people of colour were affected by the socioeconomic changes caused by emancipation in a variety of ways. Emancipation led to the acceleration of rural-urban migration, as rural labourers sought to escape a harsh labour regime by migrating to towns. Pre-emancipation free people had to cope both with this competition, and with the repressive measures instituted by the government to stop ex-slaves withdrawing from estate labour. Like ex-slaves, many pre-emancipation free non-whites sought better opportunities through migration to neighbouring colonies, but Barbadian anti-emigration legislation made this difficult, and the experience abroad often brought disappointment.

Pre-emancipation free people of colour continued to play an important role in politics after 1838, even though differences of class, competing political ambitions and disagreements over emigration divided non-white political and civil rights agitators. The debate over labour relations and emigration fragmented the struggle for franchise reform. During the first decades of emancipation the elite status of a small group of pre-emancipation free men of colour was confirmed, as they gained access to the previously segregated world of upper-class politics and society. At the same time, the majority of pre-1834 free people of colour and ex-slaves found themselves in an increasingly marginal and difficult socioeconomic and political position. Although many former rural labourers entered non-agricultural types of work which had previously been reserved for free people of colour and the slave elite, a combination of population pressure, harsh government regulations and economic depression lead to declining living standards for working class people.

²³⁵ *Poor Relief Report*, pp. 11-12.

In conclusion, pre-emancipation free people of colour, as a group, influenced by example the kinds of choices which ex-slaves made about exercising their freedom, and participated in crucial political debates about the meaning of freedom. Yet, in spite of their own efforts and limited influence, the social, political and economic legacy of slavery continued to marginalise pre-1834 free people of colour, even after 1838, and their lives continued to be shaped by the struggle between labourers and planters. Ultimately, they were caught between the plantocracy's efforts to control the rural labour force and ex-slaves' determination to resist this coercion. After 1838, free-emancipation free people of colour had very limited opportunities to influence the processes of social evolution which structured their lives. They remained simultaneously the victims and beneficiaries of slavery and emancipation.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the process of emancipation in the British Caribbean from a perspective which has received scant attention in the historiographical literature, and has sought to fill some of the gaps in the historical analysis of free people of colour. It has discussed how race, class and gender shaped the impact of the emancipation process on free people of colour in Barbados during the late slavery and early post-emancipation periods. At the same time, it has re-examined the role of free non-whites in the development of slavery, nuancing the historiographical concept of the “marginality” of free people of colour in Caribbean slave societies. Although free people of colour were economically and legally marginalised in Barbadian slave society, they were an integral part of the social structure, and shaped the evolution of slavery in the island. Furthermore, although historians have argued that emancipation had little impact on socioeconomic relations in Barbados, this study has shown that significant changes did occur, particularly in relations between the majority of people in Barbados who were not wealthy landowners, whether white or non-white, free or slave.

The thesis has shown the importance of bringing an international perspective to the study of free people of colour in Caribbean slave societies. It has used comparative examples in order to place free non-whites in Barbados in the wider Caribbean, imperial and international context of the time. This international and comparative analysis helps to illustrate how their activities, views and position in the Barbadian social and political hierarchy were affected by shifting international political, economic and intellectual currents. However, this study has also sought to demonstrate the importance of detailed local studies of free people of colour and emancipation in the Caribbean. Events in Barbados were the fundamental factor shaping the fortunes of the island’s pre-emancipation free population of colour, its relations with other socio-legal groups and its responses to the emancipation process.

This combination of detailed local study together with a wider perspective on the events and intellectual currents of the time is particularly crucial for the study of emancipation's impact on the concept of 'race' in former slave societies. The thesis has sought to go beyond the simple acknowledgement that race is a historically constructed category of identity which changes over time. It has undertaken a detailed examination of precisely how free people of colour in Barbados constructed a new discourse of racial and community identity in the context of the abolitionist struggle. The racist foundations of Barbadian slavery created a sense of community among free people of colour, as well as room for a degree of shared racial identity between them and slaves. However, while this awareness of common racial origins was always a factor which lent coherence to the social and political activities of free people of colour, racial solidarity was constantly undermined by differences of legal status, class and political beliefs. Yet, by 1838, even élite men of colour who had once supported slavery were celebrating emancipation as a victory over the principle of racial inequality. Led by radical abolitionists like Samuel Jackman Prescod, political and civil rights agitators demanded racial equality as part of an international 'brotherhood' of people of African descent. Emancipation refined the embryonic racial and African diasporic consciousness which people of colour evinced prior to emancipation. People of colour sought to reconcile their sense of themselves as simultaneously Barbadians, "the children of Africa" and the loyal subjects of the British empire.

The articulation of such a racial discourse was not an automatic process, and the thesis has shown how the specific events of emancipation in Barbados helped to bring this about. As the anti-slavery struggle intensified, amelioration policies gradually undermined many of the legal and cultural distinctions between free people and slaves, and white and non-white during the 1820s and early 1830s. The debate over slavery and imperial support for the christianisation of free people of colour and slaves created space for élite free people of colour to challenge their subordination in

public space through ostensibly non-political means. They established philanthropic and educational institutions for poorer free non-whites and slaves, which gave them an influential public role denied to them by racial segregation.

At the same time, class differences among free people of colour shaped the methods and aims of the anti-discrimination struggles of free people of colour throughout the period of transition from slavery to freedom. During the 1820s, less affluent free people of colour entered the struggle against racial discrimination, occasionally with the assistance of slaves, staging public demonstrations against the old élite and against racial segregation. The intervention of lower class free non-whites in the anti-discrimination struggle increased the potential for class conflict, but also helped to broaden the demands of the struggle. After the imperial government adopted a strategy of pursuing slave amelioration as an emancipation measure in 1823, lower class free people of colour challenged the non-white élite's presumed role as the political leaders of all free non-whites, and spoke out against the élite's anti-imperial views on slave emancipation. Although this challenge failed, pro-slavery arguments ceased to be a tool of the pursuit of civil rights during the 1820s. Instead, civil rights campaigners proclaimed themselves neutral on the issue of slavery, trying to establish a middle ground between the imperial government and the colonial legislature.

Although class antagonism continued to be a divisive feature of free non-white oppositional politics, by 1829, even élite civil rights campaigners were demanding equal *political* as well as civil rights, challenging the fundamental assumptions of racial inequality which were central to the maintenance of slavery. Just months before the imperial emancipation act was passed, the Robert James rape case illustrated the corrosive effects of amelioration on the legal boundary between slave and free. As white hostility reached fever pitch, a group of free non-whites finally condemned the racism of slave society, and declared support for the imperial government's reform measures. Their condemnation illustrates a growing sense of

'race consciousness' and political community which they felt towards their free non-white "brethren" in slave societies elsewhere, as well as with slaves.

Despite the class rifts which threatened to divide free people of colour, their equal rights struggles assumed more coherent political definition. Towards the end of slavery, lower class free people of colour, led by Samuel Jackman Prescod, succeeded in forcing the more cautious political élite of colour to adopt a more combative pro-imperial tone in its demands for equality. As the legislature resisted pressure from the imperial government and free people of colour to reform discriminatory legislation, élite men of colour temporarily became more willing to support the anti-discrimination protests of lower class free people of colour and include them as part of the struggle for equal rights.

Although historical studies of emancipation tend to focus on relations between planters and slaves, this thesis has argued that the increasingly vocal and public activities of free people of colour played a crucial role in shaping race relations in the island during the transition from slavery to emancipation. Whites found collaboration between the British government and free people of colour, and the implicit expressions of community and racial feeling which non-white philanthropy represented, unsettling. White hostility towards free people of colour increased during the 1820s and 1830s. At the same time élite whites were forced to respond to these challenges by redefining acceptable public behaviour for whites, particularly white men. Elite free people of colour questioned the presumed moral authority and superiority of whites, and, during the apprenticeship period, used their public Christian 'respectability', as a tool in their struggle for franchise reform and full legal equality with whites. Although white élites eventually accepted non-white philanthropists as 'respectable', they continually reinforced the rigid racial segregation of public institutions.

Free people of colour hoped that, after emancipation, the British government would support their struggle for full equality, and just before and during

apprenticeship, the colonial office successfully pressed the local legislature to repeal discriminatory legislation and appoint men of colour to political posts. However, the imperial government was concerned that post-emancipation estate collapse in other Caribbean territories would lead to political dominance by pre-1834 people of colour and ex-slaves. After apprenticeship, it withdrew support for the equal rights struggle of free people of colour in Barbados.

As their political influence waned after emancipation, differences of class, strategy and political ideology finally turned non-white political leaders against each other. The governor and the colonial legislature exploited these divisions, appointing affluent and conservative men of colour to the posts which they coveted, and alienating radicals like the editors of the *Liberal*. The post-emancipation labour crisis, and the debate over the right of ex-slaves to emigrate to other territories in search of better wages, finally irrevocably undermined the political influence of pre-emancipation free people of colour as a group. By the early 1840s, although they had achieved their aim of equal civil rights, only a tiny wealthy minority benefitted from political reform. While radical reformer Samuel Prescod became the first man of colour elected to the House of Assembly in 1843, the majority of pre-emancipation free people of colour, like most ex-slaves, were permanently shut out of the formal political process.

This thesis offers one of few examinations of the apprenticeship system's operation in a particular territory. Although apprenticeship was an attempt to manage the process of emancipation without too much disruption, the system caused upheaval in the relations between different legal groups. Apprenticeship created new and marginal groups of free people of colour, particularly children freed on August 1 1834. It also unsettled relationships within families of free people of colour and slaves, as slaveowners now reneged on the arrangements which had allowed free people of colour to live together with their unfree family members.

Finally, this is the first detailed study of emancipation's impact on relations

between different groups of people who occupied interstitial positions in slave society, and were neither wealthy planters nor rural field labourers. Freedom had an enormous economic impact on the entire society, particularly landless free people. Free people of colour, especially women, who had depended on slave labour for their economic survival and social status, found themselves facing financial ruin. During apprenticeship, ex-slaves began a pattern, reminiscent of free people of colour and runaway slaves, of abandoning field labour in favour of itinerant non-agricultural labour, setting up small retail shops, or migrating to towns in search of work. These choices brought increasing numbers of slaves into competition with free people of colour for work. By the mid-1840s, a combination of financial crisis and repressive government policies on labour, taxation and emigration were severely affecting working people, including pre-emancipation free people of colour. The socio-economic adjustments which occurred after emancipation did not significantly damage the economic interests of either the plantocracy or the island's wealthy merchants. As a result, the post-emancipation socio-economic order remained quite similar to that of slavery, and there was a wide gap between the rich non-white élite and the majority of free people of colour and ex-slaves.

As the hope of achieving real equality in Barbados faded, many pre-emancipation free people of colour, like ex-slaves, turned to emigration in their search for a better life. Colonisation schemes to West Africa which had first emerged out of the idealism of the late 1830s and early 1840s, became a matter of economic necessity during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Pre-1834 free people of colour tried, with limited success, to organise emigration schemes to West Africa. Despite the restrictive emigration laws, a significant portion of emigrants from the island during the mid-nineteenth century were probably pre-emancipation free people of colour and, later, skilled workers.

Thus, emancipation created new opportunities for free people of colour in Barbados, raising their hopes of change. Yet it underlined the divisions which had

always existed among them as well as the structural inequalities between them and whites, which, in the absence of redistribution of wealth, could not be redressed. By the 1850s, the wealthy pre-emancipation élite were the greatest beneficiaries of change, with a small number of them entering the island's political establishment. As a group, however, pre-emancipation free people of colour remained politically, and, after 1834, became increasingly economically marginalised in Barbadian society.

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