Jamaican Revolts in British Press and Politics, 1760-1865

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Jamaican Revolts in British Press and Politics, 1760-1865

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Master of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2016

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This research examines the changes over time in British Newspaper reports covering the Jamaican rebellions of 1760, 1832 and 1865. The uprisings: Tacky’s Rebellion, the Baptist War and the Morant Bay Rebellion respectively, represented three key moments in the history of race, slavery and the British Empire. Though all three rebellions have been studied, this work compares the three events as moments of crisis challenging the British public discourse on slavery, race and subjecthood as it related to the changing Atlantic Empire. British newspapers provided the most direct way in which popular readers and the growing literate public examined and explored distant relations with colonial peoples. This research sheds light on the significant impact these rebellions had on rhetorical choices regarding race and slavery, and establishes that by forcing a public discourse on the topics of subjecthood and race, the rebellions in Jamaica had a dramatic trans-Atlantic impact.
Introduction

There is a popular political cliché that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” While rhetoricians and philosophers may debate the validity or meaning of the phrase itself, the underlying message of the aphorism is that relation defines perspective, and in the case of civil violence the line between morally justified and morally repulsive is thin and regularly crossed. Whether this is true for contemporary observers of insurgency conflicts and the War on Terror is a question best left to sociologists and political scientists, but such conflicts are not inventions of the twentieth century nor are public interpretations of the perpetrators of civil resistance.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the British Empire experienced a series of local civil insurrections, riots, rebellions and attempted revolutions. These imperial disruptions not only shook the reality of British rule on a political and economic front but also challenged popular understandings of the moral righteousness of British power. During these periods newspapers represented the most direct and widely available means by which British subjects learned about and interpreted challenges to British rule. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries featured dramatic shifts in the Empire, including substantial and in some cases quite radical changes in the geographic reach and racial makeup of the British Empire, and with these changes came significant questions regarding what it meant to be a British subject.

Questions regarding national belonging and the rights of imperial subjects generated conflicts, as rival interpretations about the role of non-white imperial subjects boiled over from civil unrest into outright rebellion. Localized uprisings, such as those Jamaica experienced in

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1 A note about spelling and grammar: From primary source documents I have attempted to keep the spelling as reflective of the printed word. I have replaced the archaic use of the “f” with an “s” for more accurate understanding, but have left capitalization as written.
1760, 1831 and 1865, challenged both colonial legal and social conventions regarding race and subjecthood as well as British metropolitan interpretations of the role of racially diverse peoples within the growing Empire. The Jamaican uprisings of 1760, 1831 and 1865—taking place at the height of the slave era, on the eve of Emancipation, and in the post-Emancipation era had a dramatic impact on popular social interpretations of both the role of the Empire and the meaning of race.

By analyzing all three rebellions, this study will illustrate the pivotal roles of race, loyalty, and empire in dictating how British newspapers interpreted and broadcasted narratives of resistance to British imperialism. The revolts serve as signposts of the three stages of black existence in the Empire: from African chattel to domestic slaves and finally to free British subjects. Beginning with Tacky’s rebellion in the 1760s, British newspapers began to echo official calls for amelioration and depicted rebels in a sympathetic and relatable light despite the great risk to British control and power represented by Tacky’s rebellion.

In 1832, as slavery and race took a more central role in the public discourse surrounding the West Indian colonies, newspaper coverage became more divisive. Newspaper accounts helped to transition sympathetic rhetoric from the wronged slaves onto the victimized white missionaries. By the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, when the British Empire had by and large done away with both slavery and the plantation economy, race became central to the narratives of the rebellion. The more Britons became certain of their power and place in the world, the greater role race played in determining who would receive metropolitan sympathy during episodes of colonial resistance and rebellion.

This study traces the confluence of empire, media, and race and it is a study of intellectual understanding, popular discourse and interpretation. As such this research builds
upon a large scope of existing scholarship including work on the British Empire, the Atlantic
world, slavery and resistance, the Caribbean, and newspapers in eighteenth and nineteenth
century Britain and Jamaica. Much of what has been written on the history of newspapers in
Georgian and Victorian England has focused the role of newspapers as a tool for communication,
as well as a venue for public dialogue and mobilization.

Aled Jones’s *Power of the Press*, Simon Potter’s *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and
Britain*, and Lucy Brown’s *Victorian News and Newspapers* all focused on the practical role
newspapers played in British and Irish culture. These scholars not only tracked the physical
development of presses and individual papers, but also the growing role newspapers had in the
lives of individual Britons. Jack Greene, Catherine Hall, Catherine Molineux, George Boulukos,
Dilip Hiro, Srividhya Swaminathan, Adam Beach, and others explored ideas of race and slavery
within Britain and the Empire, while historians such as Rowan Strong, David Armitage, David
Cannadine, Julie Evans, David Meredith and Michael Havinden have focused on understandings
of the Empire beyond the bounds of race and class.² All of this scholarship serves as the
foundation for this work by establishing the importance of the newspaper in British society and

demonstrating the role of textual and contextual narratives in influencing British popular interpretations of the events in Jamaica.

Scholars have questioned whether the press was an accurate tool not only to measure public opinion but also to incite public engagement and participation in Empire.³ Aled Jones and Kathleen Wilson have both argued for an acknowledgement of the significant power of newspapers in impacting political discourse, while Simon Potter believed this trend of influence shifted away from newspapers with the arrival of the mid-nineteenth century.⁴ Meanwhile, Lucy Brown argued that the British press arose in the eighteenth century as a result of political parties seeking their own propaganda mouthpieces.⁵ Douglas Lorimer believed them to be less reliable as sources of understanding than were unpublished manuscripts and private correspondence.⁶ These works form a historiographical debate regarding the value and importance of the newspaper as a tool for understanding popular discourse.

In this study, newspapers serve not only as windows into public discourses, but also as powerful weapons of mobilization and action. In Britain newspapers could make or break men and states; they were not just tools of information but also instruments of authority and power.⁷ They provided what Benedict Anderson described in Imagined Communities as the symbolic


representation and realization of the “secular, historically clocked, imagined community,”\(^8\) that would in time become a modern shared national identity. Historians, for all their disagreements, have recognized the press not only as vital to understanding Britons as historical actors but also as a means through which contemporary Britons could understand each other and the wider world.

Newspapers in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain had an ability to, in the words of Aled Jones, exert a “material, even a transforming influence on social relations.”\(^9\) While this work recognizes the limitations of printed news press on illuminating understandings of race and class in the Victorian age as identified by Douglas Lorimer,\(^10\) it will seek to explore how newspapers came to represent the major tool allowing Britons to observe and critique their empire. Newspapers, for all their potential flaws as historical documents, were also sources of information and not merely pulp fit for passing the time of day; they were real and vital elements to establishing and spreading concepts of community, identity and empire.

The swirling influences of race, class and empire were complicated further by the voice and experiences of the colonists themselves: British subjects in a trans-Atlantic environment. Jack Greene has identified these subjects as the creole “others” in *Evaluating Empire*; Greene perceived a difference in language as it regarded the West Indians who were allegedly tainted by their despotic cruelties and, in the minds of the British mainlanders, fell from the grace of being

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considered true Englishmen. The free, the slave, the black and the white all entwined both in the functional life of the colony itself and in the representations and understandings of that colony in the British popular imagination.

Ideas about identity and empire and the relationship between the two were not static constructs during the century covered in this work, and historians have addressed these concepts in a range of ways. And certainly at the time white and non-white Jamaicans and Britons experienced and contextualized ideas of race, empire and subjecthood differently. As this study primarily focuses on the perspective of the British public, it is important to ground the definition of these ideas from that perspective. Subjects, as defined by William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), were those who owed allegiance to the king, “in return for that protection which the king affords the subject.” This would have served as the prevailing understanding of what a subject was, one who returns loyalty for protection and who was born in the realm of the king. That realm began to shift with the introduction of the Empire, which from the perspective of the newspapers included both the geographic and moral extent of British power. The Empire, especially in the nineteenth century, could contain both subjects and non-subjects, and this study will seek to examine some of the influences which defined that dichotomy.

Political theorist and lawyer James Otis Jr. most succinctly summed up this confrontation of hierarchies by arguing, “that the colonists, black and white, born here, are free born British

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subjects, and entitled to all the essential civil rights of such.”

Could such an idealistic understanding of equality survive the outbreaks of violence inevitably erupting as a result of the realities of colonial rule? It is into this linguistic and conceptual crossroads that this study fits, as an attempt to explore the shared communities of the English people and their subject peoples, as described, established and codified in the press.

Beyond the broad ideological, political and economic ties between empire and colony the trans-Atlantic empire was a connected world in constant dialogue, and the British colonists and African slaves who arrived in Jamaica brought with them preconceptions of the world. These preconceptions represented some realized ties between metropolitan and colonial subject. Death, liberty and empire were all realities to the people of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both in England and the colonies, and scholars have addressed this by moving past ideology and economy and examining perspectives and everyday lives in the trans-Atlantic world.

Death was central to Vincent Brown in his work, *The Reaper's Garden*. In Brown's study, death featured not only as a result of the West Indian environment but also in the actions and attitudes of the inhabitants, both black and white, and was a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. Death, like the ideas of liberty and freedom explored by Jack Greene, was a concept that shaped the understanding of imperial citizens in the home country as well as the colonies. This specter of death, and the legal use of death, played a key role in Vic Gatrell's study of judicial corporal punishment in Georgian and Victorian England. Gatrell's *The Hanging Tree* explored the role of judicial death and corporal punishments from the English perspective, and his work allows for a

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comparison between understandings of death in the West Indies and their interpretation by English subjects.\textsuperscript{15}

The stories of the Jamaican rebellions of 1760, 1831 and 1865 were full of death, violence and savagery, as well as judicial and state acts of corporal punishment and executions. Geographically distant British observers of the rebellions would have interpreted the stories of violence through their own understandings both of West Indian life and of punishment and violence as experienced within Great Britain itself. The West Indies colonies were tied in a myriad of ways to the British homeland, in terms of experience, economics, and politics and perhaps most radically, race.

The presence of Africans in England became so common that by the latter half of the eighteenth century people of African and mixed ancestry would form a not-insubstantial part of the population of the city of London.\textsuperscript{16} This presence led to a certain familiarity with slavery and a growing understanding of race in the British imagination, but it was not alone as an influence. The presence of Afro-British peoples, both slaves and free, complicated the racial relationship between white and black. The familiarity of the British with slavery bred what George Boulukos has described as the “grateful slave” ideal, a conceptualization of black slaves as sentimentally sympathetic but also inherently grateful in their own enslavement.\textsuperscript{17}

Eventually reformers and religious leaders would mount substantial challenges to the institution of slavery in England and across the Empire. While the legally groundbreaking


\textsuperscript{17} Boulukos., \textit{The Grateful Slave}, 4.
Somerset Case of 1772 did not radically change the lives of most Britons, it did serve as an important point in shifting acknowledgement of the institution within British life and clearly delineated black colonial objects (slaves) from black metropolitan subjects (free blacks in Britain). This case centered around an escaped slave named James Somerset, and questioned the legality of an attempt by his white owner to seize and hold him aboard a ship bound for Jamaica—essentially returning him against his will.

The critics of slavery, who would eventually coalesce into a nascent abolitionist movement, saw this as a signal fire for action and in part due to their agitation that Lord Mansfield, the judge presiding over the case, ruled in Somerset’s favor. This marked one of the great non-violent challenges to the institution of slavery and was observed, discussed and disseminated by the newspapers of the time. Popular interpretations and presentations of the trial were part of the milieu that helped establish a “status quo” of popular white understanding about race and slavery in the empire. As a result of the ruling, a legal delineation in racial and subject status began to separate the West Indian colonies from the mother country.

Of the Atlantic colonies forming the economic hub of British power in the West Indies, Jamaica dominated as the sugar king and lynchpin. As Vincent Brown argued, it was not only the wealthiest of the colonies but also the most diverse and the most vital to British interests in the trans-Atlantic system. As with the other major West Indian colonies, plantation slavery formed the core of Jamaica’s wealth and power, and as with other colonies across the Atlantic world, the slaves themselves repeatedly sought to undo that system of power.

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18 There is some disagreement about the proper spelling of Somerset’s name, for a detailed list of all the various spellings see Folarin Shyllon’s *Black Slaves in Britain*, (New York Oxford University Press, 1974), 76.


Three major moments of crisis struck both the slave system and the post-emancipation racial hierarchy of Jamaica: Tacky’s Revolt of 1760, the Baptist War of 1831-1832, and the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865. These three upheavals were not only very real challenges to the British economic order of the West Indies, but also represented the three general phases of coerced African existence within the Empire and provided an effective chronology of racial development in Jamaica.

Tacky’s revolt featured primarily African-born slaves recently transported to the island. Native born Jamaican slaves led and participated in the 1831-32 revolt (with the slave trade having officially been outlawed as of 1807); while the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 took place after Emancipation and represented the discontent of subjects of African and mixed ancestry with Victorian era imperial rule. These three key moments of violent resistance encapsulate a transition both within the island colony and with the Empire as a whole as abolitionists and politicians sought to reshape the British Empire from afar and as oppressed masses of people rose up to secure rights for themselves.

For Eugene Genovese, the Jamaican rebellions occurred as a series of meaningful and organized actions aimed at social revolution. According to Genovese, Tacky’s rebellion of 1760 was an attempt at “restoring an African past,” while the 1831 rising was a precursor to Jamaican nationalism and influenced in no small part by the French and Haitian revolutions. For Genovese these were acts within a wider world of resistance, part of a trans-Atlantic struggle by Afro-Americans in reshaping the colonial world. Horace Campbell likewise placed the actions of 1831 and 1865 within a wider realm of resistance but in a significantly different way. For Campbell these uprisings were a part of a large scale history of anti-colonialism containing both

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violent outbreaks in the form of the various slave and free black uprisings as well as the small scale and constant acts of resistance to slavery and racial oppression.  

Michael Craton examined the local political and social milieu enabling and encouraging the 1831 revolt. For Craton, rebellion was not only a part of the history of unrest in Jamaica but also a specifically rational response to the economic and social conditions of the island in the first half of the nineteenth century. Regardless of the universality of resistance, these studies have examined what ideological or practical influences led slaves and freemen in Jamaica to rise up when and how they did. What is missing from these studies is an investigation into what contemporary observers would have thought of the motivations of those involved in these uprisings and what role if any these observations would have had on popular and official British reactions and policies.

This work will be divided into three chapters, focused on the three great upheavals of 1760, 1831 and 1865 respectively, and will attempt to explore the contemporary interpretations of the rebellions in British newspapers published in and distributed throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland. While a focus on newspapers necessarily represents a limited view of the public understanding of rebellion and resistance within the British Empire, it does enable a review of the specific rhetorical and narrative choices that defined one of the most widely read and easily accessible forms of public discourse.

In each chapter this study will explore both the narratives of the rebellions as modern historians understand them but also the eruptions of violence as understood by contemporaries,

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and examine the changing role of various intellectual concepts in the British imagination. The changing influence of popular understandings of race, empire, resistance and liberty all played a role in dictating how the British people interpreted the newspaper narratives; but the stories and letters and bulletins also represented the most direct source of information for British subjects as to the goings on in the far flung corners of the Empire.

Newspapers represented an interplay between a news outlet that conveyed and transmitted information about the empire, and a device simultaneously reflecting and shaping public opinion about the meaning of distant events. This thesis will argue that newspapers, as vessels of narrative discourse, established a popular understanding of the three rebellions and, with the exception of 1865, gave significant impetus to the growing trends of abolition and imperial reform that dominated the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Chapter 1 argues that the newspapers helped inspire a shared idea of empire in the late eighteenth century, and thanks to the ongoing Seven Years War helped make amelioration both a morally and a politically advantageous policy. Chapter 2 proposes that the portrayal of white victims of planter violence had a greater role in generating sympathy and support for the reformers who called for emancipation among the British than did the discussions of the cruelties of racial slavery. Contradictory trends in the influence of the British press on popular discourse are detailed in the final chapter. As newspapers became more and more ubiquitous they also became more pluralistic, and race emerged as the prevailing theme in the narratives of 1865, and this had a marked impact on the changing sympathies of the British public.

This work is a cultural history, specifically a print cultural history, and it will call upon elements of intellectual and racial history to contextualize this print culture. The surveyed newspapers for this study represent a truly “British” scope, but are also overwhelmingly
metropolitan, including a heavy focus on newspapers from Edinburgh, Dublin, London, Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester. This represents a relatively cohesive national examination of public discourse among the majority of literate Britons. While those in the empire who were involved in the plantation economy or the emancipation movement would have had a specific and obvious stake in the goings on in Jamaica, most Britons would not have been so intimately connected to a distant entrepôt of British commerce. Therefore, these newspapers, becoming more widely read and more significant in the lives of British subjects in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, would have formed a cornerstone of British knowledge about and interpretations of empire and Atlantic slavery. When subjects in the mother country wanted to know what was happening during the Seven Years War, in the heartland of slavery and in the shifting locales of British imperial dominance, they turned to newspapers, media that in turn crafted an interpretation of the British Empire providing the backbone of this work.

The three uprisings in Jamaica in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries represent pivotal moments in the history of British people of African descent, as well as subject peoples of all races. By taking up arms, the Afro-Jamaican rebels of 1760 and 1831 took active measures to stake a claim to the rights of British subjects, and in the British public mind the slaves were entitled to some degree of recognition. However, by 1865 the growth of race in the public discourse turned the rebellious black Jamaicans from disillusioned and sympathetic subjects into ungrateful savage outsiders.
Chapter 1
Tacky’s Rebellion of 1760: A System Shock

Part 1: “Tacky’s Rebellion”: A slave uprising in the news

As the British Empire expanded across the globe in the eighteenth century it transformed the island of Jamaica into a shining jewel in the West Indies and a vital hub of agriculture and trade. Along the way, war, death, disease and rebellion would all play their parts in helping turn the island from a maroon-infested backwater into a vital piece of Britain’s global economy. Colonial rivalry between England and Spain brought the island into England’s burgeoning Atlantic empire in 1655, and over the course of the next century expansion of slavery and the introduction of sugar would radically alter the island’s place in the world.

Plantation owners in the West Indies established slave agriculture as the cornerstone of economic growth within the British Empire, and this economic system provided the foundation of the trans-Atlantic triangle trade, a network so influential that, according to Eric Williams, it created a “triple stimulus to British industry,” and helped spur on the Industrial Revolution a century later. But slavery was not an institution built on stable ground, and the violent and oppressive regimes of white overlords were answered in kind by violent resistance from the enslaved. In the course of over two centuries of British rule in Jamaica a series of violent clashes between the white hegemonic powers and the black resistance broke out.

The earliest of these were conflicts between the British settlers and the free Spanish slaves, known as the Maroons. Following the Maroon War of 1731, pitting the English colonists against the free slave communities in the mountains of Jamaica, the next great upheaval on the island was the 1760 uprising of slaves remembered as “Tacky's rebellion.” While the local

impact of Tacky’s rebellion in Jamaica has warranted more attention than the role it played in the wider history of the empire, this moment of upheaval was nonetheless crucial to the history of Atlantic slavery.

Slavery and slave resistance were of critical importance not only to the colonists who exploited slave labor but to the metropolitan subjects who profited from and consumed the products produced by the plantations. One of the most prevalent sources of information for metropolitan Britons concerning all aspects of their empire, and slavery in particular, was the newspaper. Despite the significance of newspapers, historians who have sought to explore British understandings of the empire have long ignored the print periodical.\textsuperscript{25} Recent work, however, has demonstrated the centrality of the newspaper to the lives of Britons as both social influencers and political mobilizers.\textsuperscript{26}

Although eighteenth-century Britain’s democratic structures were notoriously corrupt and would remain in that state until at least the Reform Act of 1832, Britain did have a vibrant public sphere and myriad forms of popular political expression. Newspapers therefore provide a means of exploring how the British people understood the slave revolts of 1760, and the role those revolts had in influencing public and political opinion in Britain. While most reports coming out of the colonies would have covered mundane events, these moments of crisis offered a new and unsettling perspective to British readers. In Tacky's rebellion the British public saw not only a


threat to its overseas economic engine but also a violent reaction against the economic and social order itself. Were these rebels viewed as broken cogs in a worthwhile machine, or was there a more complicated connection between rebel, planter, island and empire? It is through the interpretive lens of the newspapers, connecting the metropolitan reading public to the wider Empire, that we can explore the answers to these questions.

For most scholars of the press and abolition, Tacky’s rebellion of 1760 did not have a great impact on English public discourse concerning Jamaica or its slaves. It was instead the Mansfield ruling that began to shift British policy towards slavery in the Empire. In some ways then, historians have downplayed the critical role of the rebellion of 1760 in the broader scope of British imperial history. In the field of slavery and resistance movements, Tacky’s rebellion featured far more prevalently. There was a fear among readers at the time that Tacky’s plan was to drive all the whites from the island and proclaim its independence from Great Britain, so at the time there was at least some degree of interpretation of the rebellion as a conservative reaction by Africans.27

Other scholars have also focused on the importance of the African origin of the instigators of Tacky’s rebellion, both from the perspective of contemporary white Jamaicans and from that of the African rebels themselves.28 Some historians have cited more systematic and material influences on what inspired and drove the 1760 uprising, including the role of the

27 Leeds Intelligencer, September 2, 1760, in The British Newspaper Archive, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, for the sake of space future newspapers pulled from this website will identified with the abbreviation (BNA).

Maroons and resource scarcities. \footnote{See: Michael Mullin, \textit{Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean 1736-1831} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995) and Mavis Christine Campbell, \textit{The Maroons of Jamaica, 1656-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal}, (Granby, Mass: Bergin & Garvey, 1988).} Scholars of slavery and slave resistance recognize the importance of Tacky’s rebellion, but to the question of scale few have gone as far as Trevor Burnard, who described Tacky’s rebellion as the most significant revolt in the Americas prior to the American Revolution “in terms of its shock to the imperial system.” \footnote{Trevor Burnard, \textit{Mastery, Tyranny, & Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and his Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 10.}

In the years following the uprising the Jamaican assembly passed a series of harsh laws designed to reinforce white controls over slaves and prevent future insurrections. \footnote{Burnard, \textit{Mastery, Tyranny & Desire}, 155-156.} The laws failed to have the desired effect of suppressing future uprisings and the enslaved population of Jamaica would rise up repeatedly throughout the 1760s. In light of the insurrections following Tacky’s rebellion in Jamaica and elsewhere, this was the tipping point for large scale resistance to slavery within the British Empire. As an action of racial, economic, and political upheaval against the Atlantic slave system, Tacky’s rebellion represented a far more pressing challenge to public understandings of the Empire and its power than the Mansfield ruling.

While Mansfield’s decision impacted metropolitan concepts of race and freedom, it had very little impact on what occurred in Jamaica. The rebellions of 1760 represent a far clearer trans-Atlantic system shock. This chapter represents an attempt to understand that shock, not just from the perspective of the Jamaican white hierarchy but on a broader British scale. Through an examination of the changing newspaper narratives published at the time and private political correspondence this work will show the larger impact of Tacky’s rebellion both on British
Atlantic slavery policy and on public understandings of the institution of slavery within the
Empire.

Part 2: “Some Disturbances”: The Rebellion begins

At its height in the mid-eighteenth century Jamaica was the most substantial sugar colony
in the British Empire. By the turn of the nineteenth century the Jamaican slave population,
according to B. W. Higman, would surpass 300,000,\textsuperscript{32} and in a contemporary account by Bryan
Edwards, black Jamaicans made up eighty-nine percent of the island’s total population of
280,000 in 1791.\textsuperscript{33} By comparison, Liverpool, developed and enlarged by the successes and
riches of the slave trade, did not reach that number of inhabitants until after 1841.\textsuperscript{34} Over the
course of the eighteenth century, Jamaica emerged as a keystone of British overseas power,
becoming an island, as Vincent Brown argued, that was not just important but vital to British
interests.\textsuperscript{35} It was in large part a piece what Eric Williams examined in detail in his study of the
economic engine of the British Empire in \textit{Capitalism and Slavery}.

Williams, in his survey of the whole system of transatlantic trade, believed the island held
a high value as a source of imports and exports from the North American mainland.\textsuperscript{36} In the
century between Oliver Cromwell’s capture of Jamaica in 1655 and Tacky’s revolt in 1760

\textsuperscript{32}B.W. Higman, \textit{Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica}, 1807-1834, (Kingston: University of the West Indies
Press, 2000), 255.

\textsuperscript{33} Bryan Edwards, \textit{The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies of the West Indies}, Book IV,

\textsuperscript{34}Per the British History Online records taken from \textit{A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 4}, accessed
online at http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lancs/vol4/pp37-38#h3-0003.

\textsuperscript{35} Brown, \textit{The Reaper’s Garden}, 9.

\textsuperscript{36} Williams, \textit{Capitalism and Slavery}, 54-55.
Jamaica rose from what Richard Dunn described as an unsustainable outpost of piracy and violence into a thriving entrepôt of British influence in the West Indies. The back-breaking, and regularly fatal, work of slaves and the overwhelming consumer desire for sugar in Europe made this development a reality.  

The success of sugar plantations manned by slave labor in developing Jamaica and the other West Indian islands had a remarkable impact on the cultural and social makeup of the British Empire, both in the island colonies and at home. In Jamaica this new makeup was dominated by the planter class, white nouveau landed elites who, if they remained on the island, ruled over massive populations of black slaves imported from Africa. These white planters were the large-scale land owners who, according to Dunn, sought and failed to transplant a re-imagined Britain in the West Indies.  

Beneath the white aristocracy came a series of free classes of peoples, including free whites, free mixed race Jamaicans (in the parlance of the time known as “mulattoes” or, more generally, “people of color”) and free blacks, including both Maroons and freed slaves. It was a social structure ripe for upheaval. While the literate British populace would have had some degree of understanding of Jamaican society, the shadows of crisis offered perhaps the most illuminating moments of perspective. Moments of insurrection represented challenges to the status quo, and forced a re-examination of shared understandings of what the status quo meant. These were the moments when, according to Randolph Starn, the “national character and

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38 Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 338.
institutions were thought to have been decisively shaped and tested.” and in the case of the British West Indian colonies that national character and institution was slavery.

However, Tacky’s rebellion was not what introduced slavery to the British newspapers. Jamaica developed from what Richard Dunn described as a violent and disorderly pirate haven “founded in blood” into a bastion for king sugar on the backs of thousands of slaves, and Britons followed this development in newspapers, novels and other printed materials. The adventures of white colonists, conquering armies, slave traders and African slaves did not occur beyond the gaze of the English people.

In 1739 the *Ipswich Journal* published a complete summary of the slave trade, noting not only the substantial economic value of a slave, but also the various means of enslavement. More surprisingly, the *Journal* recognized how “the poor wretches, while yet in sight of their Country, falling into such deep grief and despair in the passage” and “that a great part of them languish, fall into Sickness, and die.” The *Journal* did not hide the brutal truths of slave misfortune from the British public, and the readers of the *Journal* were confronted in plain press with the wide range of means slaves used to “dispatch themselves” rather than face their uncertain future.

The British people were by no means unable to comprehend and learn about the desperation of the African slaves; likewise, Britons were aware of the potential threat that black slaves posed to their white masters. In the *Newcastle Courant*, a letter from Antigua dated 1749 told the tale of a shipboard insurrection when the “Slaves rose upon them [the white slavers]” and cut down the ship's carpenter when he made the mistake of “trusting to the Mercy of the

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40 Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 147.

41 “Part of the Article Negro” *Ipswich Journal*, March 10, 1739. This article was an excerpt from *Chamber's Dictionary* (BNA).
These were stories of violence and resistance centered on the slave trade itself, rather than on Jamaican slavery specifically, but they highlight a key component of the interpretation by the media of the slaves’ actions.

These accounts portrayed the slaves as aware of their separation from “their Country” and with a comprehensible, or at least somewhat sympathetic, desire to resist their fate. These slaves were “poor wretches,” pitiful and hardly the equal of an Englishman but also specifically not purely chattel to be herded, bought and sold without a thought to their agency to react or respond. And most strikingly the slaves were capable of violence of their own, and the fate of the naive carpenter would be shared by anyone who let down their guard and put their faith in the forgiveness of the enslaved. The slave was sympathetic, foreign and violent, and the master who ruled him was tasked to remember that lest he let down his guard and face bloody consequences. This narrative, of foreign and violent slaves who due to their ill-treatment and the foolhardy nature of the white overlords would rise up by force of arms, appeared again in the wake of the great upheaval of 1760-1761.

Given the oppressive nature of the system of slavery, and in the West Indies it was exceptionally oppressive, resistance to slavery became a common feature of Jamaican life, though largely on a small scale with individuals attempting to break free of the system. Runaways attempted to hide out from white pursuers or flee to join the Maroon communities, to various degrees of success. The importance and striking nature of Tacky’s Rebellion was that it represented the first mass reaction against slavery in Jamaica by British owned slaves. The response to this upheaval would set the course of Jamaican history for the next century and influence how the British public understood the Jamaican slave system. The revolt would

drastically impact the lives and social roles of all members of the Jamaican population, and the response by the Jamaican Assembly would create an ever more racially binary society as the white planters sought to reinforce their own hegemonic power.\textsuperscript{43}

Tacky’s rebellion began on Easter Sunday of 1760, and would continue in the immediate sense until October 1761, though violent uprisings would occur throughout the 1760s after the suppression of the first rebellion. The revolt broke out in a culture of growing apprehension among the white planters due to the ongoing Seven Years War and the rising population of slaves, many of whom had come from the same region of Africa, and whose status as recent immigrants made them more dangerous and more prone to acts of resistance.\textsuperscript{44} An over-reliance upon the Maroons, with whom the British signed a treaty trading peace for help suppressing future runaways, and the general laxity of security brought about by the Easter holiday gave the “Gold Coast,” or “Coromantee,” slaves the perfect opportunity to unite and mobilize into what Michael Craton referred to as “marronage on an unprecedented scale.”\textsuperscript{45}

Observers at the time recognized that white absenteeism and the lack of immediate supervision were significant catalysts for rebellion, and in his \textit{History of Jamaica} Edward Long explicitly blamed “the proprietors, who, by their absence, had left the slaves in want of due control.”\textsuperscript{46} This narrative, however, was not universally accepted among the planters. Bryan


\textsuperscript{45} Craton, \textit{Testing the Chains.}, 127, for more on the lack of preparation by whites see Reynolds, “Tacky and the Great Slave Rebellion of 1760,” 8.

Edwards, a future MP and pro-slavery advocate whose uncle owned an estate whose slaves rose up during Tacky’s rebellion disagreed. He argued in his *History of the West Indies* that Tacky was a chief of the Gold Coast Africans who, despite the “singular tenderness and humanity” provided him by the white overseers, rose up in an act of violence befitting African savagery.

Long published *The History of Jamaica* in 1774, a decade after Tacky’s revolt; he referred to Tacky as the slaves’ “generalissimo in the woods” and laid the inspiration for the rebellion itself upon his shoulders. The rebellion began in St. Mary’s parish when slaves from a number of estates rose up, killed nearby whites and seized arms and supplies. The rebel slaves would escape into the wilderness and wage a two-month long guerilla war against loyal slaves, white militia and maroon brigades. Over the remaining year and a half, a series of smaller uprisings, plots and attempted insurrections would spark up across the island keeping the whites in a constant state of panic.

If both the despair and violent resistance of slaves in the North American and Caribbean colonies were not new concepts to the British media, what made Tacky’s rebellion so impactful? While the scope of the rebellion had the obvious impact of making the upheaval statistically larger than previous acts of resistance, the nature of the slaves themselves made the rebellion more personal to the British people. The rebels of 1760 were not apocryphal slaves on an unnamed slave ship; instead these were African slaves laboring in a vital and productive British Atlantic colony. Tacky did not represent a potential or symbolic threat to future imperial

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50 The attitude and fear of the whites in Jamaica will be seen in the legal response to the rebellion, but can also be seen in the diary of Thomas Thistlewood and in the work of both Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 125 and Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny & Desire*, 170-171.
commerce, but instead posed a concrete challenge to British wealth, power and prestige; he led a brutal physical assault on Jamaican slave society and sought to overthrow white hegemony. While later acts of resistance would receive more widely publicized recognition, in no small part due to the growing ubiquity of newspapers in Victorian society, Tacky's rebellion was covered in newspapers across Great Britain.

The first reports, among those papers surveyed here, were published in late June and early July of 1760. The *Derby Mercury* made first mention of the revolt in June, while the *Leeds Intelligencer* published its first story in early July; other papers followed suit with the story reaching Edinburgh by way of the *Caledonian Mercury* by July 2\(^{nd}\), Oxford by the 26\(^{th}\) and Newcastle by the first weeks of August. By the time the revolt ended in 1761 the news had also spread to the *Bath Chronicle*, and papers in Dublin, Ipswich and Manchester. While this period came before the development of a syndicated news agency many of these papers printed the same stories and often cited the *London Gazette* as a source.

Due to the nature of eighteenth-century papers sharing many of the same stories, a shared perspective can be drawn up. While readers in Ipswich may never have conversed with readers in Dublin or Edinburgh, they were reading the same stories in the newspapers. These shared stories created a single narrative and a unified understanding of the events in Jamaica and influenced readers from across Great Britain. This narrative created a broad interpretation of events in Jamaica cutting across regional and political lines, and while the future rebellions of 1832 and 1865 would inspire a wide plurality of reactions presented to British readers, the 1761 revolt lacked a real range of narrative opinions.

As British newspapers began to report on the insurrection, the rebellion, or as it was called “some Disturbances among the Negroes” in the *Derby Mercury* of June 20\(^{th}\), quickly
expanded into three separate insurrections by the 27th. Over the course of June, July and August, the size and scale of the revolt varied from report to report. Both the rebellious slaves and their white masters committed acts of violence, and both engaged in seemingly barbarous cruelties. The *Derby Mercury* reported gruesome and scintillating details about the rising tide of violence. The paper reported the rebel plan to turn skulls into drinking vessels and informed readers that the white loyalists collected ears as tokens of their kills.\(^51\) When the rebels fell upon a group of whites led by an overseer, they killed them all but for one who was instead “mangled in a most shocking Manner.”\(^52\)

These initial stories fell into the stereotypical understanding Britons would have had of their colonial partners. Jack Greene labeled this the “deviant and distinctive”\(^53\) Creole character that came to dominate British interpretations of the American, and especially West Indian, colonists. To some degree this alleged lack of colonial civility was to become confirmed in the opinions and actions of the Jamaican Assembly and governing figures who, as will be examined later, had a great deal of trouble reigning in the unruliness of the local militias. However, this interpretive understanding quickly became challenged by the newspaper reports; commentators shifted the focus from gory depictions of extreme acts of violence to a more complicated examination of what was happening and what led the slaves to take up arms.

In the two months from June to August, those initial disturbances had blossomed into reports of outright rebellion that had “been of bad Consequence to the whole island.”\(^54\) Now the

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\(^{51}\) *Derby Mercury*, August 1, 1760. (BNA).

\(^{52}\) *Derby Mercury*, August, 1, 1760 (BNA).


\(^{54}\) *Derby Mercury*, August, 1 1760 (BNA).
revolting slaves were not merely a rabble of malcontents but instead an organized band. “Their Design was to rise at Kingston and Spanish Town,” reported the *Mercury*. The *Mercury*, the *Dublin Courier* and the *Caledonian Mercury* identified this upheaval as a “Rebellion” seeking “in one Night, to have set Fires to these Towns in several Places at once and to murder everybody in them [Kingston and Spanish Town].”\(^5\) This was not the language of a spontaneous reaction or minor disturbance, but instead represented a carefully thought out, well-plotted rebellion.

The earliest reports from July of 1760 followed in a similar vein. Violence cut across racial lines, and both whites and blacks united to put down the rebellion. The *Scots Magazine*, *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Sussex Advertiser* each printed the same “Extract of a letter from a Gentleman at St. Mary’s” in July of 1760, spreading the early messages of extreme violence. The article discussed in detail the means allowing the rebels to gain control of powder and shot, and the various strategies used by the loyal slaves and white colonists to counteract the uprising. The stories included a description of how the rebels attacked at night but suffered casualties and many were wounded, including, most notably, “their leader” Tacky. The ways the newspapers described the events unfolding was important to shape readers’ understanding of the insurrection.

The rebels “rifled” a storehouse, taking a “Pair of Silver mounted Pistols, a quantity of dry goods and about half a pipe of Madeira wine.”\(^6\) Despite the time given to planning this great upheaval, the actions of the rebels were petty crimes of murder and pillage. Having stolen their ill-gotten gains, the rebels “sat down to regale themselves” by the side of the road. But who were these rebels? At no point in the “Extract of a letter” were the rebels identified entirely by race,

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\(^5\) *Derby Mercury* August 1, 1760, *Dublin Courier*, August 6 1760, *Caledonian Mercury*, August 9, 1760 (BNA). 
\(^6\) *Caledonian Mercury* July 9, 1760, *Scots Magazine*, and *Sussex Advertiser*, July 7, 1760 (BNA).
instead they are referred to as “they” or “the rebels.” Racial identification was unimportant; the
rebels were not rebels because they were black, but they were rebellious because they were
African others, cruel and savage outsiders who could be associated with objectifying language.
Indeed, the early stories went to lengths to identify the leadership of the rebellion as Africans.

The news reports identified the leadership of the rebellion as foreigners, not disloyal
English slaves or subjects, but rebellious others, specifically the papers highlighted “Two
Coromantee”\(^{57}\) Negroes” and “three other chieftains of their country”\(^{58}\) as the cadre of instigators.
These were enemies from a country other than Jamaica, motivated by greed and acting in brutal
and petty ways. In an “Extract of a letter from a Gentleman at St. Mary’s April 14, 1760”, the
_Caledonian Mercury_ reported on the full scale of the revolt, and again indicated the rising was a
result of a plot by African leaders, but left off the stories of brutality and violence featured in the
other reports.\(^{59}\)

The leadership, although importantly not the slaves en masse, were described as savage,
violent and rebellious Africans, and these descriptions fit in well amongst the other stories
concerning foreign enemies and violent battles raging across the globe during the Seven Years
War. What was more revealing was the manner and style the _Mercury_ used to highlight the
interracial makeup of the forces arranged to suppress the revolt. While the initial reports
identified the victims of the rebellion as white (the _Mercury_ reported on the initial violence

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\(^{57}\) Named for the fort from which the slaves were sold, likely Ashanti Africans.

\(^{58}\) _Sussex Advertiser_, July 7, 1760 (BNA).

\(^{59}\) _Caledonian Mercury_, July 9 1760 (BNA).
including named victims as well as “three other white men” and “two other white men”), the
cforces arrayed against the rebels were not.⁶⁰

A militia leader named Mr. Bayley “had with great celerity collected near 130 whites and
blacks”, and later on the 10th of April “the rebels were attacked by a party of Crawford town
Negroes.”⁶¹ A collection of loyalists (or loyal mercenaries in the Maroons from Crawford town),
united together against an enemy force clearly identified as African. Loyalty, like violence, was
not unique to either race. And foreigners were driving the uprising, not unruly domestic subjects.
It appeared, at least in the first narratives to emerge, that Tacky’s rebellion was a conflict
between African chieftains and white planters, not a rebellion seeking to overturn the system
from within. So long as the rebellion was purely a struggle between African foreigners and
Jamaican colonists it would not reflect on wider imperial policy.

Newspapers continued to describe the forces of the Government and its auxiliaries as a
multiracial and laudatory group of men worthy of praise and notoriety for their daring-do. In
addition to Mr. Bayley's party, a Captain Hynes organized a group of Crawford Town blacks and
assaulted a fortified position of rebels in the woods. The rebels fell upon the loyalists, but were
forced to retreat at the cost of two men and women slain and two women and a child captured.
Another hero of the rebellion in the “Extract” and printed in all three papers, Mr. William
Trowers, led twelve black loyalists against a large rebel force and “boldly engaged” with the
enemy.⁶²

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⁶⁰ This would change as time passed, and by the time the rebellion was put down the list of slain would include
free and enslaved black, mixed race and white Jamaicans, including both women and children according to Edwards,
*A History Civil and Commercial*, 78.

⁶¹ *Caledonian Mercury*, September 7, 1760 (BNA).
A white leader of black troops from three separate “negro towns” also led an assault against rebel defenses. He charged his troops forward “with great impetuosity” and came away with victory. In comparison to the petty criminals who made up the rebellion, the colonial Jamaican forces were brave and vainglorious. The rebels survived after these battles and the wounding of Tacky was a rough lot, with the wounded and lame “immediately killed” by Tacky for fear of losing them to white capture. And to make matters worse “there was such dissensions among them” that no great unity could develop and the rebellion petered out.63

Though led by white commanders, the black loyalists showed bravery and courage, the rebels (also black) were cowardly and dastardly. Race did not decide the kind of warrior, but instead loyalty to the colony was the mark for positive portrayal. In a time of war with ancient enemies in France and Spain, loyalty was a pivotal element to Imperial policy, as will be seen in later British reactions to the West Indian merchants and planters, so the cross-class unity in the face of African insurrection was a powerful tool. The response to Tacky’s rebellion in the press was to coalesce, to bring together the disparate elements of the Imperial domain into a single unified British Empire. But to do that required not just a shared enemy, but a shared purpose and understanding of what should come next, and in turn required an understanding of why the rebellion had occurred.

In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion some newspapers attempted to examine the possible causes of the outbreak of colonial violence. The Leeds Intelligencer claimed in July of 1760 that the revolt was “occasioned by one of their masters refusing them a holiday on Easter-Monday,”64 a story and justification that was not only a stark contrast to the planned and plotted...

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63 Leeds Intelligencer, July 1, 1760 (BNA).

64 Leeds Intelligencer, July 1, 1760 (BNA).
rebellions reported elsewhere but was also nearly sympathetic. The masters had violated “a
custom on that island for many years,” and while the rebellion was crushed, the *Intelligencer*
made no mention of acts of brutal or barbaric violence by the slaves. Meanwhile the *Oxford
Journal* shifted the focus of the revolt entirely to the role of black and mixed race Jamaicans, as
black rebels fought a “Party of Volunteer Mulattoes and Negroes,” and the *Journal*’s report
made no mention of violence towards whites or destruction of property by the rebels.

In the initial months after the rebellion, the English press told a series of stories,
advancing different angles mostly upon the same theme. The African rebels, who were if not
named at least understood to be black, fought against loyal black Jamaicans and their white
commanders who persevered and defeated the African insurgency. The numbers and specifics of
the rising were still muddled; even the *Leeds Intelligencer*, claiming to know the cause of the
rebellion, actually reported “three different insurrections on the North side of the island.” But a
very clear shift began to occur as the rebellion went on and stories in July, August and
September of 1760 began to tell a slightly different story.

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65 *Oxford Journal*, July 26, 1760 (BNA).

66 *Leeds Intelligencer*, July 1, 1760 (BNA)., Likely a reflection of the three stages of the rebellion in the aftermath of the initial uprising.
Part 3: “The Negro Way”: The shift towards a racial binary

Let Me not Faction's partial Hate
Pursue to Britain's Woe,
Nor grasp the Thunder of the State
To wound a private Foe.”
-“The Patriot's Prayer, August 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1760\textsuperscript{67}

As time passed and news of the rebellion in Jamaica spread further and its impacts became more apparent, the language used to describe both sides of the conflict became more and more strikingly divided by race. In the same edition of the \textit{Newcastle Courant} containing “The Patriot's Prayer,” the editors printed a significant retelling of Tacky's revolt. Rather than an intrepid band of multiracial volunteers bravely fighting the unidentified rebels, the rebellion became a struggle between “the Negroes in the several Plantations” and the “very strong Parties of Sailors, Regulars and Militia.”\textsuperscript{68}

By late August the troops of African or mixed descent had been pushed aside, and their contributions were replaced by warriors who would have been understood by the reading audience as white, namely British sailors, militiamen and regular troops. All of this re-centered the idea of loyalty and righteousness back to the white colonial hierarchy. By removing any hint of color, white leadership hoped to enable further racial oppression. This shift towards a more racially bi-polar conflict continued when the press turned its attention away from the rebellion itself and towards the punishment of rebels. While previous reports had detailed some degree of reaction to the rebellion, by August those responses had become entirely juridical.

The Acting Governor Henry Moore declared martial law, and those slaves unfortunate enough to be caught by the militia found themselves “gibbeted alive in Terrorem,” a particularly

\textsuperscript{67} Author Unknown, \textit{Newcastle Courant}, August 23, 1760 (BNA).

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Newcastle Courant}, August 23, 1760 (BNA).
brutal and painful fate. To be gibbeted was to be hanged in a cage; but it was not an uncommon act of judicial punishment across the eighteenth century world. According to Vic Gatrell, gibbeting became common enough to make hanging bodies a common part of English landscape during the 1770s. The language of bravery and praise had been completely replaced by the language of justice and punishment. In just two months the black population of Jamaica had gone from sharing in military triumph with whites to sharing in ignominious justice with English murderers.

What led to this shift in reporting? As the stories of tantalizing brutality gave way to the stories of juridical reprisal, British newspapers began to craft a divisive understanding of Jamaica as a racially binary society. Whites were no less violent, but they were dominant, and they were fellow British subjects. Black Jamaicans, who had been the instigators of the rebellion, now became the objects of legal vengeance. It is possible that one influence on this shift was economic. While the initial reports coming out of Jamaica tracked some level of vandalism to property and elements of petty theft and plotting, no real account was given of the scope of the economic damage. That filtered in later. Letters written in November of 1760, and published early in 1761, had a far greater focus on the economic impact of the revolt.

Articles in the *Caledonian Mercury*, *Derby Mercury*, *Ipswich Journal* and *Scots Magazine* all shifted focus from the daring-do of fighting the rebels to the havoc wrecked upon the plantations and the cost of martial law. These papers reported: “The Rebellion of the Negroes in Jamaica has for a long Time put a great Stop to Trade of all Kinds.” This was not only a clear and immediate identification of the rebels but the newspapers also pointed to their

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70*Bath Chronicle* January, 22, 1761 (BNA).
culpability in disrupting trade. It appeared that early reports of the white victory were premature. A letter from November published in February by the *Caledonian Mercury* was “sorry to inform you, that the insurrection of the Negroes is so far from being at an end, that it is almost become general”\(^71\) and that the struggle, while certainly not in the terrifying stages of April and May, was still on going. The *Leeds Intelligencer* even believed that the rebels sought to drive out all the whites from the island and create a black-only nation, a foretelling of the violent revolution on Saint-Domingue thirty years later.\(^72\)

The rebellion had not yet abated and it was still unleashing severe consequences on both the lives and the fortunes of Jamaican settlers. According to the *Leeds Intelligencer* of the 17\(^{th}\) of February 1761, “they [the rebels] continue killing all the cattle and negroes they meet with” whilst burning down entire parishes and destroying plantations. The “mischief of their evil minds”\(^73\) was strangling Jamaica. The fears of violence and economic destruction led to what the *Scots Magazine* called the “uneasiness” of the whites on the Island.\(^74\) It was clear that by the end of 1760, the British press had completely forgotten the racial unity of the loyal troops. While the *Scots Magazine*’s copy of the November 11\(^{th}\) report from Jamaica admitted to their being only “about 300” rebels left, this small group still wreaked considerable havoc.

The *Magazine* reported for one gentleman a loss of some £10,000.\(^75\) For the English this was now a financial crisis that not only damaged the commercial enterprises in Jamaica, but threatened trade and required the deployment of troops from England. Though, according to the

\(^71\) *Caledonian Mercury*, February 16, 1761 (BNA).

\(^72\) *Leeds Intelligencer*, September 2 1760 (BNA).

\(^73\) *Leeds Intelligencer*, February 17, 1760. (BNA).

\(^74\) *Scots Magazine*, March 2, 1761 (BNA).

\(^75\) *Scots Magazine*, March 3, 1761 and March 2, 1761 (BNA).
Derby Mercury in March of 1761, those troops arrived with “little Occasion for them, as the Rebellion amongst the Negroes was quite supress'd.” Despite some stops and starts, the rebellion appeared to be over by the arrival of British reinforcements. But it was also clear that as the rebellion dragged on and as the cost began to mount, the divide between black and white became starker. This would prove to be vital to the long-term impact of Tacky’s rebellion on British understandings of the role slavery played in the empire.

The story of the Tacky Rebellion came in a four-part process to the people of Britain: first the hints of discord, then the story of brave struggles, then the rise of racial division before the final aftershocks and settling of accounts. The language of rebellion, struggle and race defined the transitions between these stages. The initial reports were sensational: tales of collecting ears, burnings at the stake and bold and audacious battles against superior numbers. These were all stories fit for the wild world of the Caribbean. The Oxford Journal placed its story on the execution and decapitation of Jamaican rebels alongside reports on sailing fleets of the Atlantic and fierce battles between the French and Dutch.

It was foreign news, not domestic. This was a conflict of note to the Britons, in the same way as the Suriname rebellion of 1760 against the Dutch, or the activities of privateers in French waters: as news of the world. It was only when the foreign became domestic that the divide between races became more clear. One possible explanation beyond pure economic and national interest could be the interpretation and perception by Britons of slaves and blacks prior to the revolt. Tacky's rebellion occurred a full twelve years before the Somerset ruling challenged

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76 Derby Mercury, March 7, 1761 (BNA).

77 For more on the rising importance of international news, as well as the growing calls for a strong hand in empire to counter the French, see Wilson, The Sense of the People, 178-179.
slavery in England itself, so while there were free blacks in England there was no real legal or public challenge to the institution of slavery.

Black Africans were also not complete aliens to the British imagination in culture and print. Edward Scobie's *Black Britannia* tracked the growth and spread of the African in English imagination in detail. By at least the 17th century blacks were appearing as characters in plays and masques, and with the Stuart Restoration, blacks began to be kept as domestic servants and novelties.78 Just four years after the Jamaican revolt, the first slave auction would be held in England, and black slaves would become a not-insubstantial part of the population of the metropolis.79 Slaves and the institution of slavery also impacted the British interpretation of race, and gender, in a wide range of ways as historians including Gretchen Gerzina, Susan Amussen and Catherine Molineux have all examined.80

This familiarity bred what George Boulukos described as the “grateful slave” ideal: a conceptualization of black slaves as sentimentally sympathetic, but also inherently grateful to civilized Britons for their own enslavement.81 Tacky then was the ungrateful slave, and he rejected the guiding hand of his white overlords. In Jamaica Tacky’s uprising was an actualization of the terror identified in Edward Trelawny's *Essay Concerning Slavery*. To Trelawny and his contemporaries the Africans were not sub-human, but would-be grateful

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subjects of a benevolent hand, for whom, in their own interest, the threat of violence had to remain constant in order to keep the peace. But for Britons in the metropole, a very different understanding of how slaves should be treated would develop.

The British press accompanied the shift in language from multiracial loyalists to racially divided enemies with a second notable change. The initial reports portrayed the rebels as Africans not Jamaicans, enemies foreign not domestic. The “Extracts” referred to the leaders as “Coromantee Negroes” and their allies as commanders from that country (being Africa), but later reports disregarded the nature of the leaders as foreigners. This presence of a foreign enemy, subjects to a foreign crown not objects of a domestic labor force, was important. These early accounts not only fit into the Wild West narrative of the Caribbean but also the wider world of international affairs and foreign wars.

In the Edinburgh Magazine of June of 1760 the story of the rebellion (with loyal blacks led by audacious whites) was arranged just behind a story of a split between the Kingdom of Portugal and the Holy See, a thoroughly foreign affair. Then there was a shift towards the domestic. September saw the Leeds Intelligencer not only refer to the rebellion as “the Negro way,” but also describe in detail the various legal punishments inflicted upon the rebels including “executed, some burnt, others hanged: others gibbeted alive.” These were notable internal and legal punishments for criminals, objects of state authority not subjects of a foreign crown.

What remains open to investigation is how this rhetorical shift, and the changing and adjusting of Britons in the light of new understanding and interpreting events far from home,

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83 *Edinburgh Magazine*, June 1760, (BNA).
84 *Leeds Intelligencer*, September, 30 1760 (BNA).
influenced the decisions and opinions of the British government. While the Tacky rebellion did not have the same broad impact on British policy as the Baptist War of 1831-32 or the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, it was a significant moment in the history of the slave colonies. In some ways it was a watershed: one of the first major moments of resistance by the enslaved against their enslavers. The Maroon War of 1731 was clearly an international affair between the descendants of escaped Spanish and English slaves, the savage yet sovereign outsiders, and (fairly) recently arrived English conquerors, but Tacky’s revolt was radically different.

The initial depictions of the war portrayed a foreign enemy, but that focus shifted as immediate victory turned to longer struggle and brutal retaliation. The enemies who were once foreign now became domestic; the uniquely African nature of the rebels became less important to British readers, even if it remained vital to Jamaican planters. Was this merely a rejection of the “grateful slave” trope and a reflection of the economic hardships endured by the colony? If it was merely economics, why did the slaves never appear as part of the economic loss? For the slaves and owners and rebels the conflict of 1760 was a life and death struggle, either for freedom (for the slaves) or security (for the slaveholders). For the British people the struggle was something more complicated, a balancing act of race, nationality and status within a changing empire. And in the aftermath of rebellion both the cost of maintaining an empire and the role of slavery as a threat to British power became the focus not only in the British newspapers but also in the Colonial Office.
Part 4: “With my Sword Girt On”: The Cost of Self Defense

In the aftermath of the rebellion the attitude of interested parties evolved over the course of a year and a half in both the public sphere of the British press and within the halls of power in London. Mirroring the shift in coverage by newspapers, the discussion within political circles became one of bickering and economic debate, before finally settling on a tone of practical unity and utility. Fears of overwhelming and destructive racial violence in Jamaica gripped the minds of the Jamaican Assembly and the planter class, but for the British government and press more pressing concerns took hold and the practicalities of running a global empire and waging a world war took center stage.

Eventually Jamaican fears over slave insurrection would be subsumed entirely into the need for imperial ambition, and fears of an armed black populace would be deemed less important than the utility of the black population of the island. Jamaica, while a key colony and economic engine of the Empire, was not yet seen as a moral sign post of the larger colonial slave system. Public and policy responses to Tacky’s rebellion made no mention of emancipation; there was no assault in the public sphere on the institution of slavery, but instead the island itself assumed a more active role in the larger discussion of empire. This was not always purely in terms of its political importance, as Jack Greene has illustrated British authors and actors transformed the West Indies, and slavery, into a subject of mockery and ridicule.\(^85\)

From the perspective of the press this is unsurprising given that eighteenth-century newspapers were, according to Kathleen Wilson, written with an audience of urban white male readers in mind and offered only token acknowledgement of the role the larger body of peoples

\(^{85}\) Jack Greene, Evaluating Empire, 175-176.
in the British Empire.\textsuperscript{86} The morality or immorality of slavery was not a topic on the minds of the vast majority of British people, at least not yet. Perhaps more surprising was the longer term reaction of the newspapers and the politicians: a practical realization both of the importance of Jamaica in the imperial scheme, and the risk posed by slavery to that scheme.

After the initial shock of the rebellion had passed there came a period of determining just when the insurrection was ended, and what was to be done in the aftermath. By March of 1761 the \textit{Caledonian Mercury} reprinted a letter from London announcing that, at long last, the rebellion was ended but for ten surviving rebels.\textsuperscript{87} The loyal Jamaicans had so thoroughly suppressed the rebellion that just three months later the \textit{Derby Mercury, Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette}, and \textit{Ipswich Journal}, reported on the uselessness of the Independent Companies who had been called in for aid.\textsuperscript{88} These Independent Companies would become a feature of debate in Jamaican political discourse for the two years following Tacky’s rebellion.

The Independent Companies served a role within eighteenth-century Britain as an answer to Parliament’s fear of standing armies. They were raised for specific purposes and used in various conflicts throughout the empire, including the English conquest of New York, the Seven Year’s War and the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{89} Unfortunately for the Jamaicans, these Independent Companies not only arrived after much of the rebellion was suppressed, but also arrived

\textsuperscript{86} Wilson, \textit{The Sense of the People}, 49.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, March 18, 1761, (BNA).


underpaid and undersupplied, a status representing the standard operating procedure when it came to the Independent Companies.90

These underpaid and underutilized troops arrived in Jamaica under the unwelcoming gaze of an Assembly with very little interest in supporting them. The arrival of the Independent Companies forced the Governor of Jamaica, Henry Moore, to recall the assembly. The Governor made sure to address this added chore in a letter to the Colonial Office in 1760.91 The Governor made it clear in no uncertain terms that calling together the Jamaican Assembly repeatedly was a burden, and one that required some degree of appeasement on his part. To the members of the Assembly the Governor attempted flattery; he apologized to the members for pulling them away from their home parishes, and assessed his motives as “so powerful” and he saw this work as an “absolute necessity.”92

The Governor called the Assembly again in March of 1761 for the specific purpose of compensating and provisioning these newly arrived Independent Companies. The Assembly and the Governor had agreed that a force might be required in Jamaica to secure the island from future rebellion. Despite the perceived need and the stated fears of further outbreaks of violence, the Jamaican gentry who made up the Assembly were resistant to contribute further to the care of the troops. In response to Governor Moore’s request for additional aid the Assembly claimed to have already “cheerfully and readily” provisioned the Independent Companies that “his Majesty has been graciously pleased to send over for our protection by putting them upon the same

Establishment with the rest of his Majesty’s Forces in this Island.” There appeared then to be some degree of disconnect between the Governor, who called for additional aid, and the members of the Assembly, who desperately resisted having to foot the bill. With the imminent threat of the slaves pushed away, the idea of sinking additional money into protecting the social and racial order of Jamaica was anathema to the aims of the planter class.

For their part the Jamaican Assembly appeared a bit ungrateful. Just a few months earlier in December of 1760 the Assembly passed a missive to the King requesting reinforcements. At the time they had foreseen further threats to their security thanks to the “insufficiency of the number of Regular Troops” stationed on the island, and called upon the King to transfer a detachment of troops from the African stations and the Mosquito Coast to Jamaica. The intransigency of the Assembly towards paying for the Independent Companies highlighted their primary concern in the aftermath of the rebellion: their own personal economies. To the landowners and Assemblymen, the burden of the rebellion had primarily been tied up with the impact of martial law on trade.

Complaints about, and justifications for, the use and extension of martial law were a common feature both in the messages of the Governor to the Colonial Office and in the newspapers. To the readers of the British newspapers, martial law was an imposition hoisted upon the Jamaican whites, posing undo financial hardship on both the Jamaicans and Britons back home. The government of Jamaica had “subjected” the people to martial law according to

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94 “To the King’s Most Excellent Majesty in Council,” December 13, 1760, Colonial Office and predecessors: Jamaica, Original Correspondence, CO 137 /32, British National Archives, Kew, London.
the *Derby Mercury*\(^{95}\) and as early as July 1760 was blamed for harming the economic stability of the island by the *Newcastle Courant*.\(^{96}\)

Even those reports out of Jamaica that portrayed martial law as less burdensome did little to endorse the Governor’s decision. While the Governor may have “sounded the trumpet and proclaimed martial law”\(^{97}\) and in turn put an end to trade and business on the island, it was regular troops and the navy who were credited with defending and protecting Jamaica. Martial law was a declaration that “every man was a soldier”\(^{98}\) but the militias raised by its proclamation appeared to do more harm than good. The *Caledonian Mercury* printed a letter from Jamaica dated June 18\(^{th}\) 1760 decrying the “horror, confusion and martial-law” forcing the author to “write with my pistols before me, my sword girt on and my fuse lying by me.”\(^{99}\)

The author of that letter was not alone, as the *Newcastle Courant* reported that “Every white Man caries Arms and Martial Law is every where executed.”\(^{100}\) On top of being a financial burden and a cause of misery on the island, it appeared that martial law was having no positive impact at all; as late as October of 1760 the *Manchester Mercury* reported that no matter how well the Leeward rebellion had been crushed, continued attempts at uprisings forced the whites to be kept “under Constant Alarms.” Martial law was clearing having little perceived role in safeguarding the safety of individual whites who had to take their own measures for safety.

\(^{95}\) *Derby Mercury*, May 15, 1761, (BNA).

\(^{96}\) *Newcastle Courant*, July 5, 1760, (BNA).

\(^{97}\) *Derby Mercury*, August 1, 1760 (BNA).

\(^{98}\) *Derby Mercury*, August 1, 1760 (BNA).


\(^{100}\) *Newcastle Courant*, September 13, 1760, (BNA).
In December of 1760 the Jamaican Assembly passed bills not only to raise more volunteers to suppress the rebellion but also to bring into line both the militia and the white poor who attempted to flee the island to avoid service during the rebellion. Serving in the militia, at least in the opinion of the Jamaican Council who met in December of 1760, was a burdensome expense, and in return the members of the Council (planters and their representatives) demanded recompense. Here there was no civic duty, no loyalty to the Colony or Crown; these men were interested in securing their fortunes and being compensated for their time and energies. Eventually the Governor relented and requested reinforcements, and the metropole responded by sending help in the form of the Independent Companies.

It was not that the militia and Maroons could not suppress the rebellion, they did; but the men of worth were unwilling to be burdened by the requirements of their own defense. Unfortunately for the Governor it appeared that he was fighting a battle on two fronts. Not only did he have to answer to the Council and Assembly for the imposition of Martial Law, but he sent repeated letters back to London defending his decision to mobilize the island. But for the Governor the necessity of martial law had less to do with the threat of insurrection and more to do with the threat posed by his own militia forces. In a letter from 1760 to London, the Governor decried the “obstinacy and Infatuation of the people” forcing his hand. The British regulars stationed on the island had proven insufficient and the militia had proven unreliable.


102 “The letter which I had the honor of receiving from Your Lordships,” 1760, Colonial Office and predecessors: Jamaica, Original Correspondence, CO 137 /32, British National Archives, Kew, London.

It was not the mobilized militia who put down the attempted insurrections following Tacky’s uprising, but instead the “vigilance of the Officers.”\textsuperscript{104} In September the governor, speaking before the assembly, referenced the “great Defects of the last Militia Law” and was forced to defend his decision to uphold the martial standing of the island despite it being “severely felt by the Community in General.”\textsuperscript{105} Time and time again the governor was required to call upon the Assembly to see to their own security, and given the repeated nature of his requests it appeared that his demands went unanswered. This constant cycle of requesting aid and then seeing it as insufficient in number, inadequate in quality or too expensive in maintenance would surely have created some degree of frustration in Briton. And in many ways that frustration was played out in the newspapers following the end of Tacky’s rebellion.

The debate between the Governor and his Assembly concerning the expense and utility of deployment of troops to Jamaica was played out in the British press as well. In August of 1760, as reports of the Jamaican rebellion were still rushing in, the discussion of the cost had already begun. In the \textit{Caledonian Mercury} a report claimed that the cost of the stationed troops in Jamaica was a million pounds, representing sixteen percent of the whole English fleet’s cost to the crown.\textsuperscript{106}

While the accuracy of the numbers and figures are questionable at best, the concern over the cost of further investment in defense for the island was obviously beginning to take root. The expense of stationing more troops in Jamaica was even more in doubt given the questions surrounding the loyalty of the colonists themselves. In a letter printed in the \textit{Derby Mercury} the


\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, August 11, 1760, (BNA).
focus of colonial attention shifted from protecting the white planters from black insurrections towards protecting the Empire from planter and merchant greed.

Britain’s “natural and inveterate Enemies” were being supported by means of black market trade between the English colonies and their French and Spanish counterparts. The “Wretches” who were profiting from the Seven Year’s War had become enough of a nuisance that the author of the letter in the *Derby Mercury* suggested stationing troops into the region for an invasion of the Mississippi region, a campaign that would not only alleviate the British soldiers from the heat of Central America, but also provide the English a defensive position “in the Case of the rebellious Negroes in Jamaica grow more powerful.”¹⁰⁷ No one, outside of the Jamaican Assembly, seemed to want to station troops on Jamaica itself. If the whites of Jamaica could not be bothered to pay for their own defense, and were profiting from the larger struggle of the empire, why should Briton be forced to shoulder another hardship?

### Part 5: “Their Merciless Masters”: Reform and Punishment

Jamaica had become, thanks in part to the fears that it would fall to a foreign or internal enemy, a key component of the geo-political discussion in the midst of the Seven Year’s War. While the colonists and the citizens of the homeland seemed to agree that the investment of additional funds may not be desired (though in this case the debate was more one of who was to do the paying, not the paying itself), where they disagreed most dramatically was in how future outbreaks of violence could be truly prevented. For the first time we see the British press taking an active role in calling for real social reform in Jamaica. For the colonists however the real

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¹⁰⁷ *Derby Mercury*, February 27, 1761 (BNA).
problem in Jamaica was not how masters treated their slaves, but in how much leeway the Jamaican government gave blacks, both free and slave, in their own personal freedom.

Given the nature of the Seven Years’ War it is unsurprising that English commentators drew comparisons between the threat facing Jamaica in 1760 and the conquest of the island in 1655. The *Caledonian Mercury* produced a history of the island, including the story of how English troops only drove out the last of the Spanish defenders thanks to the aid of disloyal and mistreated slaves. The *Mercury* provided a clear warning to the Jamaican planters, and a warning to the British readers who may have thought the overlords to be just in their treatment of the slaves:

> For as the negro slaves of that island, of which there are about one hundred thousand, their merciless masters know too well the cruelties they have practiced upon those miserable wretches, to expect any other return than betraying them to an enemy, or cutting their throats; and of this there hath been such recent experience, by an open rebellion of the negroes in various parts of Jamaica for many months, that only chance this nation hath of preserving it, if attacked, seems to be that of preventing the enemy from effecting a land.\(^\text{108}\)

For the first time the British press depicted the rebellious slaves of Jamaica entirely as victims, with a certain moral justification and understanding in their violent response to oppression. While in normal circumstances the ill treatment of slaves may have been an acceptable cost of their value as producers, in a time of war when the British nation was engaged with its historic enemies of Spain and France, the risk was far too high.

\(^{108}\) *Caledonian Mercury*, March 13, 1762 (BNA).
The idea of improving slave treatment for security reasons was not new. Two years earlier the *Caledonian Mercury* published a letter from London regarding the threat Jamaica faced at the time. During the tensest moments of Tacky’s rebellion, the Jamaicans had feared an invasion from the neighboring island of “Martinico.” The brief article expressed the dread that, using an army of well-treated slaves trained to be soldier, the invaders would unite with rebellious Jamaicans and capture the island for France. These calls for improved treatment of slaves were shared in the halls of political power in London, and the Governor of Jamaica transmitted this message to the Council in December of 1760. The Governor called upon the overseers and owners to secure the island’s safety not just through civil commitment to justice, but also to “keep their Negroes steady in the Affection” and prevent future uprisings through compassion rather than control.

The Crown had a second reason to court the sympathies of the black population of Jamaica: so that the slaves and free blacks could be used to fight against the Spanish and French in the Americas. On the 6th of April the Governor announced the declaration of war against the Spanish to the Assembly of Jamaica, and set about attempting to raise a force of five hundred free blacks and two thousand slaves to be used in the coming conflict. The *Leeds Intelligencer* reported on the arming of blacks being proposed in the Jamaican assembly as early as October 27th 1761. Although the Maroons and free blacks were already engaged with the rebels by this

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109 *Caledonian Mercury*, July 19, 1760, (BNA).


point in time, the *Intelligencer* put forward that the motion “had been strongly opposed, and
carried in the negative.”

Instead of arming the slaves as requested, the Jamaican Assembly focused on suppressing
them further. In December of 1760 the Assembly passed two acts calling for the raising and
arming of parties used to suppression the rebellion, and one passed to reward those slaves who
had aided the colony by turning on their fellow slaves. On top of the fiscal response of raising
more defenses and rewarding loyalty, the Assembly also redefined the social status of all non-
Whites on the island. Specifically, the legislature sought to restrict assemblies of slaves, prevent
the ownership of arms by slaves and require the possession of travel tickets for slaves away from
their plantations.

The act went even further; as material restrictions did not fully abate the fear of the white
Assembly. The Assembly banned the “Practice of Obeah”, the religious traditions the slaves
carried from Africa, and required “all free Negroes, mulattoes and Indians” to register with local
parishes. The Jamaican aristocracy had no interest in reconciliation or amelioration, despite
pressure from Great Britain, and continued a long history of juridical black objectification going
ever further to consolidate white social, economic and legal authority.

Regardless of the cause of the rebellion or the fault for its intensity, both Jamaican and
English observers believed that corrective action and retribution was required. Punishment in
Hanoverian England was, according to V.A.C. Cottrell a common and unremarkable event, and,

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112 *Leeds Intelligencer*, October 27, 1761, (BNA).

113 “To the Right Honorable the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations,” November 4, 1761, Colonial

114 For more on the topic of Jamaican racial and social laws regarding both free blacks and mixed-race
descendants see Brooke N. Newman, “Contesting ‘Black’ Liberty and Subjecthood in the Anglophone Caribbean,
in the rare occasions when it was recorded in the newspapers was often done under non-violent
euphemisms. But there were no euphemisms here in the language used by the press,
executions were described regularly and in detail. The language used by the newspapers
concerning both the punished and the punishments. Specifically, the newspapers referred to the
captured slaves in the language of the criminal and the juridical. Numerous papers made repeated
mentions to the trials of slaves.

The Caledonian Mercury reported in July of 1760, that eleven of the surviving rebels
were brought from St. Mary’s parish to St. Jago de la Vega (Spanish Town) for their trials. The
Leeds Intelligencer and the Oxford Journal each reprinted the same story in the summer of 1760.
Clearly the message coming out of Spanish Town was that the rebels were being given the
treatment reserved for criminals, namely a trial in the city. In July reports began of the
executions, with the Manchester Mercury and the Derby Mercury both reporting that the
ringleaders of the rebellion “were taken and executed.”

What was missing in the language of trial and execution was the language of justice.
While justice was an amorphous concept to the Hanoverian British, it was not beyond the veil of
understanding for individual British newspaper readers. To the British, Jamaican law and
order appeared to be bereft of justice and full of unfiltered violence.

Later stories reported back from Jamaica began to show much more of the violent and
corporal punishments instead of the trials and legalities. Starting with the end of July, reports
began to in tantalizing detail the visceral and physical punishment inflicted upon the rebels. The

115 Gatrell, The Hanging Tree, 29.
116 Manchester Mercury, July 1, 1760, (BNA).
117 Gatrell, The Hanging Tree, 196.
Oxford Journal, in telling an altered version of Tacky’s rebellion putting the plan for the rebellion on the amorous attentions of Tacky towards the Governor’s wife, also told of one of the rebels being “hanged in Chains alive.”

Later in the same edition, the Journal reported over several rebels who were executed, decapitated and displayed as warnings for other slaves. Decapitation, burning at the stake and gibbeting continued as the punishments de rigueur for the rebellious slaves. Punishment was not just death, but also posthumous bodily mutilation, banishment and other physical tortures. The Derby Mercury reported in August of 1760 that the victorious whites decapitated the lifeless body of Tacky and had his severed head “stuck upon a pole,” while his compatriots were to be hanged alive in “an excessive hot place” where they lingered till death nine days later.

The Leeds Intelligencer, retelling the same lurid tale of Tacky and the Governor’s wife, reported that the rebel leaders were hanged in chains and lived for some time in the state of torture. The Caledonian Mercury further illuminated the fates of the condemned, reporting on two more hangings (followed by decapitation), two more burnings and a two more slaves who the whites gibbeted alive “twenty foot high.” These were, according to the Mercury, “the most rigorous punishments.”

The most detailed stories of state violence often identified the slaves by name, providing a humanizing element to the victims. The Caledonian Mercury printed the story was of a slave named Davy who had both of his arms broken prior to being hanged for promising to kill ten white men; a severe punishment for boastful talk, although perhaps unsurprising given the

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119 Leeds Intelligencer, July 29, 1760, (BNA).
120 Caledonian Mercury, August 9, 1760, (BNA).
serious fears held by White Jamaicans over continued violence. It was only these moments of uniqueness, or moments when the victims of state violence were personalized, that the reader felt any real impact. According to Gatrell, it “took an imaginative effort or personal shock to realize that the concept of normality failed to connect with the fearsomeness of what happened,” and so when newspapers made a concerted effort to identify and personalize the victims of state violence those stories became more meaningful.

A second slave, named Pompey, who was purported to be one of the leaders of the rebellion was posthumously decapitated, while a third slave named Harry was executed in Spanish Town for “being principally concerned in the contriving and intending to carry on an insurrection at Louidas.” The *Oxford Journal* of August 23, 1760 published a second detailed report on the fate of specific slaves. The authorities executed Quaco and Antony, both accused of having taken part in the rebellion, by burning one at the stake and hanging the other. Their female counterparts: Sappho, Princess, Sylvia and Doll, watched the executions “with Halters round their Necks” and then the authorities banished the women from the island.

The punishment of banishment, through rarely reported, must have been common. Among the laws passed by the Assembly in December of 1760 was an Act designed to “prevent a Captain, Master or Super Cargoe of Any Vessel bringing back slaves Transported off the Island.”

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121 Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, 283.

122 *Caledonian Mercury*, October 1, 1760, (BNA).


Deportation was a common fate assigned by the state to women in the early nineteenth century West Indies, and so it is likely that a similar treatment was often reserved for slaves in the British colonies. But banishment is hardly as exciting as gibbeting and hanging and conflagration.

Whether or not the punishments would have been seen as excessive or uniquely cruel would be difficult to prove without some sort of record of public response. But there was a second narrative constructed by the newspapers, focusing on the strength and resilience of the condemned. If providing names made them more human, and telling only tales of bloody executions made them more interesting, the stories of boldness and strength in their death throes portrayed the slaves as strong and in some ways sympathetic. The Oxford Journal reported that the slaves who were hanged in chains alive for their crimes managed to survive for eight days, and the Leeds Intelligencer included commentary about the survival of one slave for two days in the same condition.

The Dublin Courier went furthest in painting the slaves with a sympathetic brush. The whites of Kingston captured, tried and condemned a group of slaves to be gibbeted alive twenty feet high, and survived for nine days. In those nine days they, allegedly, complained not about the excessive heat (as would be expected on a tropical Caribbean island) but instead “they complained more of the cold in the night.”

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125 Caledonian Mercury, July 27, 1764, (BNA).
128 Leeds Intelligencer, July 29, 1760, (BNA).
129 Dublin Courier, August 6, 1760, (BNA).
even in the face of impending and inevitable death. The authority tried the slaves, found them guilty, and condemned them to die.

But what was most vital was that these were men who were executed with a bravery often unseen in British executions, or when it was seen it was rarely believed. For Gatrell the bravest men on the scaffold were often seen as drunkards or fools\textsuperscript{130}, not so in the case of the slaves of Jamaica. These were men of laudable strength who were put to death and not put down like animals. The slaves who rebelled were subjected to law and the state’s authority, not personal whims or slaughter like property. Even though the slaves had been introduced to the British as savage, foreign or monstrous, they had not become objectified. They remained subjects of the crown and the law.

This lack of objectification found its roots in what George Boulukos argued were the “broader cultural differences between England its colonies”\textsuperscript{131} shaping how each viewed race in both a legal and theoretical sense. Boulukos believed that the concepts of more modern understandings of racial superiority developed from novels and fiction working to allow colonial citizens to transmit their understandings of race back to the metropole. He went further to argue both that amelioration, the lessening of the burden of slavery through better treatment, was considered the acceptable solution to an unfortunate economic reality by the time of the Somerset Case of 1772, and that concepts of racial hierarchy and superiority developed among both the white planters and the white citizens of Britain proper. For Boulukos it was the Somerset case marking the transition to a “non-racial view of humanity.”\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} Gatrell, The Hanging Tree, 37.

\textsuperscript{131} Boulukos, The Grateful Slave, 98.

\textsuperscript{132} Boulukos, The Grateful Slave, 107.
Slavery did not burst into the main in 1772; both slavery and the slaves themselves paid ample tribute to Briton’s social make-up, and as Edward Scobie has noted even legally the status of individual slaves could be improved by court action, including though legal amelioration and the prevention of deportation.\textsuperscript{133} The portrayals of the slaves, even those who were violent rebels against the crown, in any kind of sympathetic light hints more towards an understanding of slaves, and black Jamaicans in general, not as property or objects of state control, but as subjects of the state’s legal authority and protection. While the slaves were certainly portrayed as violent and rebellious, they were no more violent than their free counterparts both white and black.

The binary and strict lines of race eventually defining American slavery did not yet exist in British imaginations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Racial understandings formed around what Roxann Wheeler defined as a “multiplicity,”\textsuperscript{134} and existed across a spectrum of conceptualization with black and white not being polar opposites. This only began to shift during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and while black and white were still further apart than other racial divides it was not a purely diametric divide until the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{135} Violence was merely a symptom of the West Indian condition although white planters would try to portray violence as a purely African influence.\textsuperscript{136} The slaves who rebelled were given reasons for their actions, some in the form of legitimate grievances and others in the form of lust for power. But in either case they were rational, reasoned and understandable motives.

\textsuperscript{133} Scobie, \textit{Black Britannia}, 22.


\textsuperscript{135} See Wheeler, \textit{The Complexion of Race}, 139-141 for a discussion of the role of race and intermarriage, specifically the lack of black-white inter marriage in popular British culture and Molineux, \textit{Faces of Perfect Ebony}, 131, for the theatrical use of slaves as a familiarizing but not sympathizing, force.

\textsuperscript{136} Molineux, \textit{Faces of Perfect Ebony}, 138.
The language used by the newspapers established clearly that the slaves were able to comprehend what they were doing, and this made them human.

Just twelve years after the end of Tacky’s rebellion the British courts would distinctly differentiate the role of race and slavery between the metropole and the colonies, \(^\text{137}\) and serve as an inspiration for anti-slavery advocates like Wilberforce and Sharp who would mobilize to topple the slave trade. While Eric Williams has made a persuasive argument that it was economics driving abolition, the power and role of the newspaper as a force of social enlightenment and mobilization must not be overlooked. Boulukos and Srividhya Swaminathan traced the genesis of this force to newspaper and literary reactions to the Somerset case, however it is clear that the true birth of British understandings of slaves as people worthy both of alleviation in their burdens but also praise in their strength came prior to 1772.

British press understandings and interpretations of the rebellious slaves in Jamaica in 1760 were the interpretative and rhetorical framework upon which the changes in British social and legal circles concerning slavery were formed over the next three decades. The British newspapers recognized the need for amelioration and reform, and they were joined by politicians and government figures as near to the source of the conflict as the Governor of Jamaica himself. But for Jamaican planters the response to this great threat to their economic security was not an amelioration of conditions but a doubling down.

While, as Boulukos has argued, the planters would eventually take the “seemingly humanitarian, sentimental representations of plantation slavery”\(^\text{138}\) as a softer cudgel in favor of


\(^{138}\) Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave*, 140
slavery, it was as a defense mechanism and not a true reflection of any moral resolution to be better masters. The abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807 marked a monumental victory for reform minded Britons, but attempts to end slavery in the Empire entirely faltered for another three decades. Instead of amelioration, the stubborn commitment by white Jamaican land owners to further restrictions of slave movement, rights and religious practices signified the attitude eventually leading to another eruption of violence in 1832 in the final years of slavery in the British Empire.
Chapter 2
The “Baptist War” of 1831-32

Part 1: The “Baptist War” or the Revolt of 1831-32

By the 1830s, slavery in the British Empire was in its dying days and in the seventy years since Tacky led African slaves in outright rebellion, reform minded activists in the British Empire had overturned the foundation of the Atlantic slave trade system. In the aftermath of Tacky’s rebellion, calls for amelioration gave way to legal challenges, including most famously the Mansfield ruling of 1772. British reformers waged a struggle in metropolitan cultural, legal, and political spheres: first to challenge and bring an end to the slave trade in 1807, and then to end slavery itself throughout the empire by 1834.

Religious missionaries and political reformers united both to mobilize the British people into anti-slavery activism and to spread the message of reform beyond the bounds of the British Isles and into the peripheries of the empire. Resistance to slavery from the slaves themselves continued as well in the wake of Tacky’s rebellion. In the immediate aftermath of the 1760 rebellion, slaves organized a series of plots, attempted and aborted uprisings, and insurrections in European colonies across the Caribbean.

Most famously, the 1791 Haitian Revolution saw the large scale mobilization of the enslaved in active resistance, leading to independence and the end of slavery on the island. It sent shockwaves of terror and consternation across the Atlantic, especially in slave colonies like Jamaica. Jamaica’s white planter elite occupied a precarious precipice, and with pressure both from the British colonial hierarchy above and the black Jamaican majority below the planters found themselves facing the final days of their social, political and economic order.
The 1831-31 rebellion, called the “Baptist War” for the role played by Baptist Missionaries in the lead up and reaction to the uprising, features in many of the histories of slavery and slave resistance, but has been largely absent from many of the histories of the emancipation movement. While some scholars have portrayed the uprising as the dying eruption of slavery in the Empire, often times it has been understood in the context of other histories, either the geographically isolated histories of specific colonies or in the history of slave resistance or slavery in the empire.¹³⁹

The uprising of 1831-32 occurred just a year before the end of slavery,¹⁴⁰ and for many historians the Baptist War represented a watershed event in the history of slave resistance in the Americas. Scholars also focused on the role of leadership, both among the black rebels and their Baptist missionary allies,¹⁴¹ and other scholars have attempted to explore the understanding by slaves of their place in the changing conditions of non-whites in the Empire.¹⁴² For Michael Craton, Sam Sharpe, the leader of the rebellion in Jamaica, played a great influence as a labor organizer who led slaves in a form of general strike and only became violent in response to the brutal reaction by the planters.¹⁴³


¹⁴⁰ Though the 1833 act, which took effect in 1832, is generally seen as the end of slavery, slavery in the Empire continued to exist beyond 1833, see: Julie Evans, et. al. *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous Peoples in British Settler Colonies, 1830-1910* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 92.


¹⁴² Richard Burton downplayed the role of the leadership but focused more heavily on the awareness of slaves to their own growing influence in the colony in *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 83-84.

Each of these scholars highlighted the significance of the 1831-32 rebellion on the history of slavery in the British Empire and saw the insurrection as the last significant moment of slave resistance in the British colonies. Historians have also examined the moral and cultural catalysts, seen as, to various degrees of success, the primary influences to the rising abolition movement, \(^{144}\) while others have tracked a combination of economic and political factors that radically altered British society and paved the way for slavery’s demise. \(^{145}\) By and large historians have perceived the Baptist War in a vestigial sense: it was secondary to the larger narratives and wider scope of the histories in question. But to the British public, the discussions of Britain’s imperial morality, slavery, emancipation and resistance were all tied together along with race, labor and economics. In 1830 the *Morning Post* described in detail the petition from planters in the West Indies for a full review not only of the status of slaves in the West Indies, but also of “their [the slaves’] comforts, property and progressive civilization” as well as “the productiveness of Free Labour in Sierra Leone.” \(^{146}\) Clearly at the time of the rebellion of 1831-32, resistance, emancipation, labor and the role of the British Empire as a progressive force in the world were all tied together in the public discourse.

The changes in British moral and political discourse on the topic of slavery was accompanied by a series of significant changes to the media who broadcast the voices of the

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146 *Morning Post*, November 25\(^{th}\), 1830.
various sides of the debate, namely the newspapers themselves. Newspapers in Britain took a radically different approach to reporting on the rebellion of 1831-32 from their reporting on the 1760 rebellion led by Tacky. In the 1760s the narrative constructed by the British press presented a more or less united story not only of the rebellion but also the responses it engendered.

The calls by the press for amelioration in the aftermath of Tacky’s rebellion, in order to prevent future rebellions and secure the Caribbean against Franco-Spanish aggression, emerged generally without a great deal of printed debate. After seven decades of political and public debate concerning slavery, the slave trade and the rising civil debate concerning the role of British subjects within the new British State. It was unsurprising that the discourse concerning the 1832-32 rebellion was far more active and contentious than the debate of 1760.

The British press constructed three general kinds of stories in reaction to the rebellion of 1832-31: generally neutral narratives of the rebellion; criticism of the planter aristocracy and government of Jamaica; and pro-slavery defenses of the planters designed to undercut calls for emancipation. These three strands of public discourse represented the culmination of the changing role of debate in the news press and in turn led both to the end of slavery and a notable shift in how Britons began to view colonial subjects of non-European and mixed ancestry.

In the wake of the French Revolution, growing movements for both reform and repression fought for control across Europe, and Britain was by no means immune from the upheavals of the first three decades of the nineteenth century. While Britain avoided the massive upheavals faced by the continental powers in Poland, France and Italy, it did confront various political and social movements including the luddites, abolitionists, and chartists. Violence, both from the masses at the Bristol Riot of 1831 or the Swing Riots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and from the state in the suppression of these outbreaks of civil disorder, had become a familiar occurrence in the public discourse of many of many Britons.¹⁴⁸

Newspapers reported on the “alarming character” of the “dreadful and criminal excesses”¹⁴⁹ of British citizens in Bristol in November of 1831, and on the brutal murders committed by Luddite “banditti.”¹⁵⁰ These were domestic acts of violence and horror, spanning the two decades following the victory at Waterloo, and most shockingly erupted in the 1819 Peterloo massacre, still a source of public discussion and debate into the 1830s.¹⁵¹ In the shadow of this violence the British public debated the concept of civil liberty and political engagement itself in the light of growing political stratification and the movement for increased suffrage and Parliamentary reform.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ For more on the general impact of these civil disturbances on British public and political life see: Adam Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror: Political Paranoia and the Creation of the Modern State 1789-1848*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

¹⁴⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, November 4, 1831, (BNA).

¹⁵⁰ “Luddites” *Chester Chronicle*, August, 1813, (BNA).

¹⁵¹ As evidenced by the *Newcastle Journal* among other papers which referred to the “celebrated Henry Hunt and the Peterloo Riot,” January 1, 1829, (BNA). Henry Hunt was primary speaker at Peterloo prior to the outbreak of violence.

In the colonies the additional fearful influence of another revolution in the style of Haiti was an ever-present sword of Damocles hanging perilously over the head of the white aristocracy, and the agitation and growing reach of emancipation-minded missionaries were a constant thorn in the side of the establishment. In the months following the outbreak of violence in Jamaica, newspapers would use both Haiti, and the Baptist missionaries as key elements to the narrative of the uprising. But perhaps even more worrying to the planters was the rising knowledge that the plantations themselves were no longer the economic engine of a global British Empire. As much as planters may have wished to blame their failures on inadequate labor from their slaves, the reality was that sugar plantations no longer provided the stimulus they once did.  

It was within this mixture of political and social turmoil at home, and economic stagnation in the sugar colonies, that the British public read the news of the Christmas rebellion of 1831.

Historians have recognized a second significant shift in the history of Jamaica while studying the 1831-32 rebellion, and that was in the changing demographics of the slave population. In 1760 non-Christian Africans who sought to overthrow the system of slavery in an immediate way led the rebellion, but by the nineteenth century, the Jamaican slave population was of a Christian creole origin and fought not to overthrow an acknowledged system of dominance but to secure a right granted by their King to all British subjects across the empire.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed dramatic and substantial changes and debates concerning the role and meaning of the rights of man, but also substantive debates and challenges regarding the rights of men as subjects, namely rights to property, inheritance, political engagement and economic access, both internationally from the American

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and French Revolutions, but also domestically thanks to the works by legal scholars like Sir William Blackstone who would continue to be a point of reference for the rights of British subjects into the late nineteenth century.154

Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765) divided rights into those owed and those given, and the Jamaican slaves, in their submission to the King for protection, recognized their requirement to submit to the “legal obedience and conformity” required by subjects. In return however, the masters and white leadership in Jamaica were denying the “natural liberty of mankind”155 due in return for that legal obedience. Being a British subject had specific and important meaning, and so securing recognition of that status was vital. British subjects could own land, expect fair legal treatment and security and thus be in possession of the “most intricate and most extensive object of legal knowledge”156 and by extension be an active part of the body politic.

The leaders of the 1831 rebellion were educated, informed and aware of the wider world of British imperial policy, and the growing conversation among whites of the rights of man. They understood not only Jamaica’s place in the wider imperial sphere, but also the growing agitation in Britain for the reformation of the slave system, identified by Christopher Brown as the root of a “status anxiety” pitting the planters’ desire to avoid the taint of tyranny against their reliance on slavery.157 These various changes in Jamaican society and imperial policy combined

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to force the white creole establishment into a tricky rhetorical situation, and in the wake of other outbreaks of slave resistance white leadership was forced to define slaves in relation to their loyalty and not their status as objects of possession.\textsuperscript{158}

Meanwhile external factors, such as the rise of the industrial class in Britain, and the uplifting impact of the American Revolution on the status of people of color, not only manifested in the enlistment of slaves into the British Army,\textsuperscript{159} but also in a shift within Britain to reclaim the moral high ground by striking out against the institution of slavery.\textsuperscript{160} These developments shaped and impacted British interpretations of racial diversity within he Empire. The 1830s represented a dramatically different world, conditionally and rhetorically for both the slaves and the free people of Jamaica and Britain when compared to 1760, and that difference played out in the narrative interpretations by newspapers of the Baptist War.

The Jamaican white settler population was fighting a long losing battle against amelioration over the course of decades, and in a flurry of violent and apocalyptic rhetoric the white planters dug in their heels against the encroaching calls for emancipation.\textsuperscript{161} The reformers and activists spread pro-emancipation rhetoric so successfully that in order to assuage the fears of planters and administrators King William IV issued a call to the slaves to obey or face royal

\textsuperscript{158} David Lambert, \textit{White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition}, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 121.

\textsuperscript{159} Morgan, \textit{Slavery and the British Empire}, 132.


\textsuperscript{161} Craton, \textit{Testing the Chains}, 294-295.
displeasure. But this had no impact and Christmas of 1831 came and went with a growing sense of terror among the white population of Jamaica.

Two days after Christmas, terror transformed itself into reality as thousands of slaves effectively went on strike. Led by educated and well placed slaves, as well as free people of color and Baptist missionaries, the slaves set out to non-violently, and with due loyalty to the crown, declare and confirm their rights as free men. The missionaries served both as white allies to the slaves, and also as sources of unification and communication through religious services. Upwards of 60,000 black Jamaicans joined the rebellion at its height, and the total death count of the response exceeded 500 black and fourteen white Jamaicans. At the time Jamaican demographics had shifted somewhat dramatically, though the population of black and mixed race Jamaicans outnumbered whites, there was a growing presence of free black Jamaicans on the island. B. W. Higman estimated that the slave population in the first half of the 1830s averaged 313,000, while Gad Heuman but the number of free people of color (those

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164 For more on the important role of leaders and the initial aims of the rebellion see Mullin, Africa in America, 255-260.


166 Craton, Testing the Chains, 291.


With the outbreak of violence, the rebels inflicted a serious and substantial blow both in terms of damage to property and goods but also to the surety of white influence over the future of Jamaica. As newspapers would later come to report, the rebels first targeted the tools of the economic oppression that had dominated the island for the last two centuries. Initially the slaves put plantation houses and sugar storage to the torch, but people of color were not the only vandals, and after the rebellion white Jamaicans destroyed Baptist missions and churches in retaliation. By its suppression in 1832 the rebellion had rocked the island to its core, and brought Jamaica, slavery and the fate of the slaves themselves into the center of focus in British political and public discourse.

The rebels first act of resistance, and the initial spark of large scale violence, was the burning of the Kensington Estate, serving as a signal to the people of color who mobilized around a series of well-known black leaders including George Taylor, Thomas Dove, and, most famously, Samuel Sharpe. According to Michael Craton, Sharpe sought to organize a resistance to work on a large scale to force the issue of freedom, and while his lieutenants may have had more violent intentions, Sharpe at the very least sought a peaceful recognition.\footnote{Craton, \textit{Testing the Chains}, 301.} The rebellion quickly sparked and spread across a range of parishes. In response, the governor called upon both the militia and the British regulars under General Willoughby Cotton. As was so often the case in rebellions in the plantation colonies, the slaves were unable to mobilize across the island. Early successes gave way to white victory, and the initial clashes between bands of armed men
in open conflict transitioned into “simply a war of attrition, of posts, patrols, and occasional skirmishes.”\textsuperscript{170} Juridical punishments began in earnest almost immediately.

To satisfy the bloodlust of the wronged planters and enact justice for the uprising, the Assembly and British Military put to death hundreds of slaves.\textsuperscript{171} The Jamaican government executed Sam Sharpe on May 23\textsuperscript{rd} of 1832 and thoroughly and broadly put down the rebellion, though from the perspective of the British public this was merely the start of the troubles. While the British newspapers were sparse in the details of the narrative of the rebellion they examined the response by the Jamaican government in great detail.

\textbf{Part 2: “The West Indian Question”- Slavery and the Slaves in the British Empire}

The earliest published news of the rebellion came from a Jamaican packet from January 7\textsuperscript{th} and was reprinted in full or part by numerous newspapers. The description of the rebellion explained the insurgency by parish, and attempted to explain precisely what had happened. News reports immediately after the event focused overwhelmingly on the damage done to property, including the destruction of St. James and Trelawney parishes, while in a note of optimism the only death reported was that of a lawyer named Mr. Jackson. Included in the general report were a series of letters from various Jamaican parishes, decrying the general destruction and violence unleashed by the slaves and blaming the missionaries for stirring up the insurgency.

A letter from Montego Bay dated January 3\textsuperscript{rd} contradicted the initial positive spin by highlighting the “daring violence” of the slaves, who “on such estates as they thought proper to

\textsuperscript{170} Craton, \textit{Testing the Chains}, 311.

\textsuperscript{171} Craton, \textit{Testing the Chains}, 313.
commit murder, they have not allowed any to escape.” Alongside a story arguing the rebellion to be less violent than expected, the planters and correspondents from Jamaica expressed their terror at the violent rage of the slaves. Much like the early reports of 1760, the initial narratives emerging in the British Press in 1832 were filled with confusion and contradiction.

Another letter published by the *Sheffield Independent* of the 24th of February referred to the rebellious slaves’ aims as a series of “diabolical schemes” and ignored any rationale behind the uprising, while the *Waterford Mail* deemed the quest for freedom to be “a thing so respectable in the whites” and offered a more favorable interpretation. There existed strikingly divergent viewpoints in the newspaper narratives of the 1831-32 rebellion, and this divergence of opinion reflected a growing split in the sphere of public discourse between the white Jamaican planters and their rivals, the Baptist abolitionists. This struggle between planter aristocracy and dissenting reformers did not emerge from the 1831 revolt, but instead the revolt served as a crisis point and bone of contention between the conflicting sides.

Another widely published report came off the merchant ship *Mutine* [sic] and a range of newspapers published the packet in part or whole. The initial stories of the rebellion were “so wildly and unconnectedly given” that a single narrative was difficult to piece together. But what did emerge was an understanding that General Willoughby Cotton’s presence had sufficiently ended the general uprising and driven only those few hardliners still left into the interior. But again, despite the terror of the planters, the letter from the *Mutine* did not “find that the lives of the white inhabitants were at all an object of sacrifice.” The language of violence and destruction

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172 *Sheffield Independent*, February 24, 1832, (BNA).

173 *Waterford Mail*, February 25, 1832, (BNA).
was entirely limited to the destruction of property, and on the whole the “excretions… of the regular troops, the militia and the Maroons had been so far crowned with success.”

Some newspapers articles, such as one published by The Examiner on February 26th, focused on the critical role of labor in relation to the rebellion. In this version of events, the slaves rose up not for their freedom but out of an unwillingness to work. The Examiner argued that the slaves “expressed their determination not to work after New Year’s-day” and reported that “nine-tenths of the slave population had refused to turn out to work” in Trelawney. Despite planter attempts to discredit the slaves, newspapers in Britain by and large did not see the insurrection as an act of wanton violence and savage killing, but overwhelming as a civil dispute over labor and liberty.

Although Sam Sharpe and the other Jamaicans began their rebellion in the midst of a larger trans-Atlantic world of activism and upheaval, to the newspapers of the time the insurrection was a specifically Jamaican affair. The pro-government Dublin based Freeman’s Journal identified the uprising as “Another Conflict and Massacre in the West Indies” and went on to portray both the whites and blacks as “victims of colour and clime.” Even with its conservative leanings and tendency to support the institutions of traditional power, the Freeman’s Journal recognized elements of the creole other the barbarous or fearful distant foreign amalgamation (both white and black) separated by the Atlantic who was prone to violence and savagery.

174 Yorkshire Gazette, February 25, 1832, (BNA). This is notably one of the few mentions of the Maroons in any of the newspaper articles concerning the rebellion. The inter-racial nature of the counter-insurgency is left entirely absent from most reports, in sharp contrast to the early reporting regarding the 1760 rebellion.

175 The Examiner, February 26, 1832, (BNA).

176 Freeman’s Journal, March 7, 1832, (BNA).
But acts of violence between whites and blacks were merely a symptom of the larger issue at the heart of British imperial policy. It was the “West Indian Question” needing an answer all the more pressingly due to the outbreak of violence in Jamaica. The question surrounded the role and place of the slaves in Jamaica and the other West Indian colonies within the wider empire: were the slaves themselves objects with limited government protection, or subjects owing loyalty and allegiance to the British Crown in return for basic rights and protections?  

The *Bristol Mercury* directly addressed the question by positing whether a relationship of total or limited dependency led to the best results for workers. In a lengthy reprint of an article from the *Quarterly Magazine and Review*, the *Mercury* asked:

> Whether, as a general truth, it is best for a labourman to labour as an hired labourer or as a slave? Whether it is best for him to labour for wages which shall be his own, or to be dependent upon his master for what he shall please to give him? Whether it is best for him that his wife should be independent of his employer, or should be his master’s slave? Whether it is best for him to be subject to no penalty except for his own crimes, or to be liable to be sold for his master’s debts? Whether it is best for him to be secure from punishment until found guilty on fair and open trial, or to be left as his master’s discretion to be flogged, imprisoned, and tortured whenever his master pleases?  

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178 *Bristol Mercury*, April 28, 1832, (BNA).
At the heart of the West Indian question was the assumption that the slaves in Jamaica were laborers: workers and subjects of British authority and therefore subject to British law. This represented a radical change from the rebellion in the previous century, where newspapers described the slaves as foreigners, or objects, acting in their own interests and not as members of the larger British polity. In the case of this article, the editors described slaves as men and fellow laborers and “unoffending British subjects,” with “an unquestionable right to the King’s protection.”

These new workers entered the shifting linguistic environment surrounding labor, work and free enterprise in a time when the works of Adam Smith, Joseph Priestley, and Jeremy Bentham were all having a marked impact on discourse concerning the role of labor and the economy. The growing authority of Liberal economic and political thinkers left little room for something as old fashioned as slavery, and thus the slaves became an anachronism needing a place in a new economic order. The British public was under no illusion about the nature of power, authority, and labor in Jamaica during the nineteenth century. An article in the *Caledonian Mercury* laid out the population of all the major West Indian islands and broke the demographics into three groups: the slaves, the free blacks and the whites. In the six islands listed the slaves and free blacks outnumbered the whites by over 500,000 in total, and in Jamaica alone by over 350,000. When reports came into Britain announcing the course of the rebellion, the readers would surely have understood this population disparity as a substantial threat to white authority. The *Morning Chronicle* estimated that 50,000 slaves had participated in

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179 *Bristol Mercury*, April 28, 1832, (BNA).

180 Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, Nevis, Grenada, and St. Kitt’s.

181 *Caledonian Mercury*, May 12, 1832, (BNA).
the rebellion, and even that small percentage of the island’s total black population represented two times the population of the whites.\(^\text{182}\)

While the main body of rebels sought only to gain their freedom through open struggle with British arms, roving bands of slaves were committing “barbarous murders.” Although the newspaper begged caution in accepting the stories as true, it did report on “some most horrid and brutal outrages by the rebels on several unfortunate white females who fell into their hands.” But even in the light of these terrible crimes, the whites did not escape criticism. Despite being at the mercy of a black majority, the white defenders of Jamaica acted with wanton cruelty. The \textit{Morning Chronicle} accused them of violence, savagery and recklessness, and printed a story accusing the whites of the murder a slave woman and her child as she tried to surrender. Both sides were committing acts of violence, in cruel and specific ways, and the violence was simply escalating. With a black population so large, and with violence so commonplace, it was clear that the insurrection would not die down and instead the rebellion would raise “her hydra head again”\(^\text{183}\) in due time.

If violence was a symptom of the West Indian slave system, some Britons went on to argue, emancipating the slaves would only bring about further unchecked violence. This was the tone of a letter to the editor of the \textit{Carlisle Patriot} printed in March of 1832. Written by a “Constant Reader,” the letter argued that the slaves shared nothing with the Poles, who had so captured British imagination in their struggle for freedom against the Russians in the 1830 November uprising. In fact, the slaves were unenlightened non-Christians who disregarded the

\(^{182}\) \textit{The Morning Chronicle}, April 9, 1832, (BNA).

\(^{183}\) \textit{The Morning Chronicle}, April 9, 1832, (BNA).
biblical tradition and justification for slavery.\textsuperscript{184} Even on the precipice of emancipation, the old arguments justifying slavery were being disseminated in light of the rebellion.

While in 1760 British writers looked at Jamaica within the context of the wider world both of Jamaican history (as it related to the Spanish conflict) and the British Empire (in the midst of the Seven Years War), by 1832 the understanding had become much more narrowly focused. This revolt had to do with specifically West Indian issues and in turn complicated both the role of the West Indies in the empire and the place of the black majority in Jamaica. Not only did the rebellion make “the whole affair of slavery more difficult”\textsuperscript{185} but it also had very real economic impacts. The \textit{Chester Chronicle} reported a 50\% decrease in sugar production over the previous seven years, and estimated further drops as a result of the insurrection. According to the \textit{Clonmel Herald}, the island itself was at risk of being “completely and almost irrecoverably ruined”\textsuperscript{186} and even the kindest and most beneficent owners had to worry for their personal and financial security. The planters had long clung to financial plight as a means of garnering pity, and even before the outbreak of violence the planters had approached the Governor of Jamaica and “complained of poverty and distress.”\textsuperscript{187}

It seemed that while the particulars of the rebellion were different from 1760, the calls for fiscal support remained. Numerous papers reported on the parliamentary debates concerning the plans for financial restitution for the planters in light of the rebellion.\textsuperscript{188} But the calls for

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Carlisle Patriot}, March 1, 1832, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Chester Chronicle}, March 2, 1832 (BNA).

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Clonmel Herald}, March 10, 1832 (BNA).

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register}, March 3, 1832, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{188} Including: \textit{Bury and Norwich Post}, March 28, 1832, \textit{Derby Mercury}, February 28, 1832, \textit{London Evening Mail}, March 2, 1832 and March 26, 1832, \textit{Hull Advertiser}, June 1, 1832, \textit{Liverpool Mercury}, June 1, 1832, (BNA).
fiscal relief were not the only tactic taken by the planters, and unlike 1760, the planters made an active attempt at winning the hearts of minds of the British public.

Part 3: “With British Hearts to Wield Them”- In defense of the planters

The first full accounts of the uprising to reach the British Papers came in February of 1832, from the Jamaican papers of December 30th of the previous year. This first report called primary attention to the physical damage and murders committed by the slaves. The Caledonian Mercury of the 2nd of February 1832 printed an hour-by-hour report of the burning of the Palmyre, Adelphia and York estates, illustrating the scale of the uprising and its potential impact. The rebellion was “of rather a serious nature” and as a result “it is absolutely necessary that some shootings and hangings must take place.”

Already the stories arriving in Britain were laying the groundwork for the coming retaliation. The “poor deluded slaves” who were led into the rebellion by “these canting incendiaries” were in for a serious reprisal. Blood was being promised, and casualties would be high; the Jamaican papers foresaw exactly what kind of attitude the public would take when news of reprisals reached Britain. The calls for amelioration after 1760 would pale in comparison given the radical rise in emancipation-minded activists in Britain. The Chester Chronicle of the 24th of February warned that “the horrors of fire and sword pervade this part of the world,” and despite “the havoc committed… the negroes will, of course, be put down.”

By and large the initial introduction of the British public to the rebellion in 1831 was accusatory and defensive in tone. The reports coming out of Jamaica, mostly pulled from letters by white Jamaicans or from

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189 Caledonian Mercury, February 20, 1832, (BNA).

190 Chester Chronicle, February 24, 1832 (BNA).
Jamaican newspapers, laid the groundwork for the eventual deliverance of justice, and observers already predicted this violence to be brutal and violent.

The planters and Jamaican authorities had reason to worry. The positive public response to abolition over the prior thirty years had placed slave owners on the defensive in the court of popular opinion. Over the course of the 1790s and 1800s, the slave trade had come under assault both in the houses of Parliament and in the press, leading to the 1807 abolition act. Srividhya Swaminathan tracked the delaying tactics the planters used in the slave trade debates, and illustrated the growing power of moral language behind the political actions of the British relating to their empire. ¹⁹¹

This meant the planters were not only on the wrong side of the economy but also on the wrong side morally, acting counter to the Empire as a force for good. The growth of non-conformist churches and centers of worship in the rapidly developing British metropolises represented a shift away from the traditional religious and social hierarchy which had sustained and supported planters in the West Indies. And while the Church of England may have tacitly supported the slavery, these new dissenting religious groups often did not. By the 1820s the legacy of the abolition movement was taken up by these smaller religious movements such as the Baptists and Quakers. ¹⁹²

This new wave of reformers and religious firebrands were also capturing the attention of the people at large. *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* was a lightning rod for articles and stories in opposition to British slavery routinely focusing on Jamaica, and the editors of more general interest newspapers would reprint full stories in broadsheet format. The *Bristol Mercury* of the

¹⁹¹ Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade*, 204-205.

22\textsuperscript{nd} of February 1831, a full year before news of the rebellion would reach Britain, printed a
diatribe against the planter elite of Jamaica taken from \textit{The Anti-Slavery Reporter} No. 76. The
story described the slave owners not only as ungrateful to the point of near disloyalty, but also as
“anti-Christian” and full of “ancient and most inveterate prejudices.”\textsuperscript{193} West Indian slaveholders
were therefore on the defensive long before the rebellion broke out.

To some degree, the pro-slavery defense was successful. The early depictions both of the
rebellion and the rebels themselves were negative and accusatory. The \textit{Caledonian Mercury} of
the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of February referred to the slaves as having a “spirit of insubordination,”\textsuperscript{194} while the
\textit{Dublin Morning Register} referred to the slaves as “insurrectionists”\textsuperscript{195} and the \textit{Essex Standard}
referred to the “excesses” of the “rebels” and saw the captured slaves as “poor deluded
wretches.”\textsuperscript{196} This was not sympathetic language; the initial narratives did not grant much
understanding of slaves who took up arms to secure their freedom.

These stories made no attempt to justify or explain the rebellion in terms that the British
public would support or understand, and accepted the Jamaican newspapers’ tendency to put the
full blame for the uprising on the Baptist missionaries. With a rhetorical sleight of hand, these
newspapers actually credited the white planters as the peacemakers and compromisers. The
\textit{Dublin Mercantile Advertiser} ran a lengthy story covering the rebellion and praised a Colonel
Lawson who “anxious to avoid the necessity of having recourse to the militia… delayed the
detachment from marching” so that he could try and peacefully resolve the crisis when he

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Bristol Mercury}, February 22, 1832, (BNA), and \textit{The Anti-Slavery Reporter}, no. 76, February 15 1831,
accessed online at https://archive.org/details/antislaveryrepor76soci.

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Caledonian Mercury}, February 24, 1832 (BNA).

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Dublin Morning Register}, February 23, 1832 (BNA).

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Essex Standard}, February 25, 1832 (BNA).
“endeavored to expostulate with the negroes, telling them he came as their friend.” Lawson, however, was rebuffed by the “riotous and disorderly” slaves who forced the hand of the military.\textsuperscript{197}

British newspapers described the rebellion and its chief players in military terms. The conflict was waged in “skirmishes” and the initial victims of state juridical violence were “executed under sentence of a court martial,”\textsuperscript{198} or “hung by sentence of drumhead court martial; and others have received military floggings.”\textsuperscript{199} The rebels, upon their initial failures appeared to have “taken to the interior and the commanding heights.”\textsuperscript{200} these narratives described the rebels as warriors, soldiers, and enemies foreign not domestic. And, war was rarely won by compromise or capitulation, instead victory required a show of strength and force, something the planters sought to justify in the aftermath of the uprising.

The Jamaican reports proclaimed General Cotton a hero for his defense of the island, and the missionaries who supported the slaves seen as enemies of the state. The slaves were not merely mistaken, but had been lied to and the rumors of freedom had been “industriously propagated”\textsuperscript{201} by the missionaries. The \textit{Cambridge Chronicle} went even further and placed the blame on the Whig Ministry of Earl Grey, who had so far failed to keep his promise of ending slavery and instead given Jamaica over to a “sacrifice \textit{a la Bristol}.”\textsuperscript{202} The theme of sacrifice was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{197} \textit{Dublin Mercantile Advertiser}, February 27, 1832 (BNA).
\item \textsuperscript{198} \textit{Exeter and Plymouth Gazette}, February 25, 1832 (BNA).
\item \textsuperscript{199} \textit{Cambridge Chronicle and Journal}, March 9, 1832 (BNA).
\item \textsuperscript{200} \textit{Exeter and Plymouth Gazette}, February 25, 1832 (BNA).
\item \textsuperscript{201} \textit{Manchester Courier}, February 25, 1832, (BNA).
\item \textsuperscript{202} \textit{Cambridge Chronicle and Journal}, March 2, 1832, Bristol in reference in to the Bristol Riot of 1831. This was also referenced in the \textit{Dorset County Chronicle} of March 1, 1832, (BNA).
\end{itemize}
shared in other accounts, as the lands and estates of Jamaica had “fallen a sacrifice to the deluded and inflamed passions, and falsely excited hopes of the slave population.”\textsuperscript{203} This was part of the larger attempt by the planters to both garner sympathy but also shift blame, and to accomplish that the planters needed an enemy rally against.

The planters needed a scapegoat for the outbreak of violence for two very specific reasons. The rebellion brought into sharp focus Jamaican relations with the capital and Jamaican portrayals of Africans and racial slavery in popular culture. As illustrated by Andrew O’Shaughnessy, ever since the American Revolution, a political divide had sundered the West Indians from their domestic cousins.\textsuperscript{204} In many ways this separation went back even earlier and encompassed not only cultural differences developing between the West Indians and their British cousins but also questions over the loyalty of the white merchants and planters during times of crisis.\textsuperscript{205} These questions did not dissipate in the half century following the American Revolution, and in the months after the Christmas Rebellion the question of West Indian loyalty re-emerged. In April of 1832, a group of West Indian notables met to discuss British policy for the colonies and slavery, and as the \textit{Hereford Journal} reported, “if relief cannot be afforded them [The planters] by the country to which they profess allegiance, why not permit them to transfer that allegiance to America?”\textsuperscript{206}

Despite the wavering loyalty of the planters, in the wake of the rebellion of 1832 and the Great Barbados Hurricane of 1831 the West Indians were terrified of the potential for total

\begin{footnotes}
\item[203] \textit{Dorset County Chronicle}, March 1, 1832, (BNA).
\item[205] See Chapter 1.
\item[206] \textit{Hereford Journal}, April 11, 1832, (BNA).
\end{footnotes}
economic collapse. The planters wanted help in the form of subsidy and financial support from the British government, assistance something even more necessary as early reports from 1832 showed a decline in sugar sales in the aftermath of the upheaval.\footnote{Bristol Mercury, March 6, 1832, (BNA).} The Jamaican Assembly and planters had also pushed back against the growing interest of the British government in regulating slavery in the colonies. Anti-Slavery advocate and MP Dr. Stephen Lushington claimed that the West Indians had “mocked the country [Great Britain] with a code of laws [the Slave Law of 1828]” and Mr. O’Connell\footnote{Likely Daniel O’Connell, an Irish politician and MP for Dublin City.} believed the West Indians had “no right for compensation”\footnote{Hull Advertiser, June 1, 1832, (BNA).} for the damage caused by the slaves. This was a united front by emancipation minded politicians against the interest of the Jamaicans. In the defense of the planters, future Conservative Prime Minister Robert Peel could only offer a delaying tactic, and he called for caution and argued that calls for emancipation would risk inspiring another rebellion.\footnote{Hull Advertiser, June 1, 1832, (BNA).}

If the planters could not cast blame for the rebellion for someone other than themselves or the slaves, they would be faced with yet another round of criticism concerning their institutions, prosperity and social organization. Whereas if the rebellion was really the fault of meddling missionaries, then emancipation would accomplish nothing, and in fact may even have inspire additional violence. Even opponents of slavery recognized that “the planters are living on a mine which may explode,”\footnote{Bristol Mercury, June 2, 1832, (BNA).} and recognized the risk posed by so dramatic a sundering in the public order. Under white planter supervision the slaves could be controlled and kept docile, and introduced to British freedoms in time.
Scholars have debated the emergence of the “black” racial stereotype and its strength as a scientific concept, with some arguing that by the nineteenth century some racial ideas had become conventional and widely accepted. Roxann Wheeler has argued that the dominance of white over black as a scientific racial classification was an invention of the mid-nineteenth century, and prior to that race was a more fluid and complicated concept.\(^{212}\) English thinkers of the early nineteenth century certainly valued the idea of English superiority, and African (and at times Creole) inferiority, but the later nineteenth century racial concepts were still in a nascent phase. People of African and mixed ancestry were intrinsically tied to plantation slavery, even in the minds those who fought to overturn slavery.\(^{213}\)

For the abolitionists this came in the form of passive, pitiful and needy victims of white greed, and helping the slaves was a method allowing the glory of British generosity to shine through.\(^{214}\) This was in some ways the same narrative portrayed by defenders of slavery. Instead of being victims of white greed, slaves were passive, happy and contented workers serving under benevolent white overlords, and while defending slavery in its totality was difficult, slavery could be used as a bridge to let the uncivilized and timid Africans come into the Christian world of civilization.\(^{215}\)

Additionally, slaves were still property, and the proto-Liberalism of early nineteenth century England was a powerful rhetorical tool for planters arguing against rapid


\(^{213}\) Lorimer, *Colour Class and the Victorians*, 72.


emancipation. But armed insurrection led by domestic slaves ran totally counter to this image of the slave as a docile and submissive creature in need of enlightenment. Men willing to fight for their freedom were far more like free Englishmen than mindless chattel, and this had to be explained away by the white planters who sought to maintain the status quo. This, then, was the role played by the missionaries; they corrupted, misled and turned the slaves from docile supporters of their white benefactors into violent insurgents who sought mass devastation and destruction.

The Jamaican white leadership not only portrayed their enemies as misled masses, but in turn took on the mantle of the oppressed for themselves. In an article published in the Jamaica Courant, the entire need to bind Jamaica’s future to Britain’s was brought into question: “There is however, one comfort – that the day is past when the opinion of the government of the mother country has any weight with the inhabitants of Jamaica. A faction has vowed our destruction; but while we have the command of 25,000 bayonets, with British hearts to wield them, we shall laugh at the opinion of our oppressors”

The language of oppression was entirely reversed. Now it was not the slaves who were too busy displaying the “symptoms of sullenness and indisposition to labour” who were truly being oppressed in the West Indies, but the whites and land owners who had to put up with the burden of British supervision. But it’s equally important to note that the Jamaican colonists were not referring to themselves as Jamaicans; in their eyes they were filled “with British hearts.” It was the mother country, and the agitating missionaries who flocked from it, who had lost its

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217 Cheltenham Chronicle, April 26, 1832.

218 Hampshire Advertiser April 14, 1832.
way. The slaves, the missionaries and the Government were all ungrateful; they no longer recognized the contributions of the white planters to the empire and had forsaken the British subjects of the West Indies.

Domestically the planters argued that, far from being cruel and heartless masters, they had in fact behaved with an open and generous hand. In a memorial of 1832, the Jamaican assembly remarked upon the “unusual Indulgences… granted to the Slaves by their Masters” and deplored the knowledge that “the Leaders and Chief Promoters of the Insurrection should appear to have been almost exclusively composed of Persons employed in confidential situations” and “belong[ed] to a Class of People to whom additional Comforts are afforded by the Masters.” The white Jamaican leadership felt betrayed, by the missionaries who misled the slaves, by the slaves who cast aside their well-earned loyalty, and by the British Government, leaving them alone to face this monumental task. A fair number of British newspapers across the British Isles took the planters at their word on these betrayals, and many more may have had it not been for one vital decision in the aftermath of the insurrection.

This understanding of oppression and fear was not just a public relations move, it was real, or at least real for the Assembly of Jamaica. In the wake of the 1760 rebellion, the Assembly had focused on suppressing African cultural legacies and the freedoms of persons of color in Jamaica. The planters had pushed back at any suggestion that they take on the burden of providing for their own defense or any calls for easing the burden on the slaves. 1832 represented a radical shift in that regard. Not only did the Assembly pass a series of bills relating to the funding of militia, repayment of debts accrued during the war and “An Act for the Relief

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of Insolvent Debtors Imprisoned for Debt,” but they went even further and funded updates to the security apparatus of the island including the establishment of a permanent police force.\textsuperscript{220}

Whereas the 1760 revolt had led to immediate legal action against African traditions and civil freedoms for people of Africans descent, whether enslaved or free, this was not the Assembly’s immediate response in 1832. Instead, in a dramatic shift from the eighteenth century, the Assembly’s focus was overwhelmingly on funding, paying for and reestablishing a civil defense force, and this included rewarding and expanding the rights of the Maroons within Jamaica. In reaction to “an event which will be deplored as having brought ruin and devastation to one of the most fertile districts of the Island”\textsuperscript{221} the Assembly was somewhat subdued. In the letters sent to the Colonial Office, the Assembly avoided the fiery rhetoric shared in the newspapers, and instead used the language of despair, disappointment and melancholy.

In many ways the Jamaican government as a force for influence was also on the back foot and fighting a defensive battle. In a letter to Colonial Secretary Viscount Goderich from September of 1831, Governor Belmore stated explicitly that there was no attempt by Jamaica to counteract the course of emancipation, and (as it would turn out foolishly) repeated that there was no cause for alarm from the slaves in Jamaica who were, despite attempts by Missionaries, under no motivation to rise up. The governor additionally had to defend Jamaica’s recent slave laws, and called for “some reasonable time to be allowed” before judgment was passed.

This request for time was sent on December 21\textsuperscript{st} and would certainly not have arrived before the outbreak of the rebellion four days later. The governor attempted to defend the planters who had acted with decisiveness and boldness and without worrying about the “brink of

\textsuperscript{220}From list of laws passed by the Jamaican Assembly, in CO 139/71, British National Archives, Kew, London.

\textsuperscript{221}“Letter from the Jamaican Assembly,” February 3, 1832, CO 137/181, British National Archives, Kew, London.
danger on which they stood.” 222 This defense proceeded in a series of letters both highlighting
the need for military engagement, and addressing the course of the rebellion, including on
January 2nd a letter explaining the results of prisoner examination and bringing out the names of
the leaders of the rebellion including most famously “General Ruler Sharp, alias Daddy Ruler
Sharp.” 223

The examinations of slaves and whites recorded during the aftermath of the rebellion
revealed a great deal, but the problem for the planters was that it made them as guilty as the
“sectarians.” In his testimony, Lieutenant-Colonel George Codington summed up the two
influences he believed had led to the outbreak of violence:

My opinion of the cause of the rebellion is, in the first instance, the agitation of
the question both in the newspapers in England and in this country, and its being
imprudently discussed by the proprietors themselves in the hearing of the slaves,
thereby making them acquainted with those improper opinions which are very
often expressed in those publications. In the second place, by the imprudence of
the sectarians in their language addressed to the slaves. 224

This was not the smoking gun the planters needed to justify their tyrannical response to the
Baptists in the British press, and in fact found the planters themselves equal parts guilty for
maleficence when it came to the minds of the slaves. Without the ability to defend themselves,
how could the planters hope to win over the public in the face of growing moral condemnation?

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Part 4: “Fine Hanging Woods”- Punishment and the Missionaries

While one trend of newspaper stories clearly followed the Jamaican party line, the second was critical both of the slaves for committing acts of violence and of the Jamaican planters for their decision to target the missionaries as culprits. Newspapers in Britain reported on the trials and punishment of various missionaries, including the execution of Sam Sharpe. These newspapers portrayed the missionaries not as traitors who were responsible for the inciting of slave rebellion, but lambs sacrificed to the greed and wanton cruelty of the barbarous planters. Between newspaper articles, anti-slavery societies and interested activists who wrote letters to the editors, a collection of defenders united in the British press to rally around the accused missionaries.

The primary focus of this defense was on a small cadre of men, including three noteworthy ministers, Knibb, Whitehorse and Abbot, who became the standard bearers for the oppressed religious leaders in the West Indies. In their name, men like J.G. Fuller (whose brother was a Baptist minister and ally to William Knibb) argued publically in defense of the religious activists. In a letter to the editor of the Bristol Mercury in February of 1832, Fuller argued that some of the accusations against the anti-slavery advocates were “too contemptable for formal refutation,” and it was not possible that “these men are guilty, though a host of rebels may rise to condemn them.”

Certainly this was no defense of the slaves; in fact, the slaves themselves rarely came up in these defensive letters. But Fuller reserved his greatest vehemence for those defenders of slavery who slandered the missionaries. Fuller identified these men as villains whose “impure

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lives are a stigma on man who have professed unblushingly the horrid principles of Atheism” and were men who were “haters of morality… the lovers of sensuality.”

Another activist and anti-slavery agitator, the Reverend John Dyer, secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, wrote a similar letter to the editor of the London Evening Standard in February 1832. For Dyer, the pro-slavery forces were not just lacking in character, but were in reality the true bringers of violence to the West Indies. Dyer was unsurprised that the planters once again sought to frame the missionaries, but Dyer believed that “the blameless and inoffensive” preachers had long suffered from the “causeless hostility” of the planter elite. Dyer did not seek to examine the causes of the “lamentable disturbances” rocking Jamaica “or what grievances, real or supposed may have led to the destruction of property which has taken place,” instead he focused his ire and attention on the attempts by the white planters to target and punish the missionaries.

The missionaries took the battle for public opinion (in this case the opinion of the “unprejudiced reader”) to the press to counter the accusations of the Jamaican planters. Certainly no amount of public discourse would actually impact the fate of the missionaries in Jamaica, by the time these letters were published the rebellion had already been put down. But the legacy of this rebellion could define how the British populace and government reacted to slavery going forward. To Dyer, this was a struggle between the blameless and inoffensive against the “anonymous and hostile individuals” who named the missionaries as traitors.

Both the proponents and opponents of slavery made skillful use of the language of loyalty. When Reverend Thomas Burchell was accused of instigating the rebellion, it was

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226 Bristol Mercury, February 28, 1832, (BNA).

227 London Evening Mail, February 22, 1832, (BNA).
claimed by the *Chester Chronicle* that for Burchell to leave Jamaica would be “dishonorable,” despite the “unnecessary roughness” doled out to missionaries at “the instigation of the white inhabitants.” In the *Chronicle*, it was made clear that that loyalty and honor belonged to the missionaries, and roughness and cruelty to the white inhabitants of Jamaica.

Again, the slaves were secondary to the narrative, and in this article the *Chronicle* made only one passing reference to the slaves (calling them the “colored inhabitants”) and no reference to the damages done by the slaves to the plantations. The *Chronicle* did mention damage done to the Baptists, specifically it referenced the destruction of the Baptist chapel in Montego, not by the slaves but by the whites of Jamaica.²²⁸ Even more neutral observers looked upon the Jamaican reaction as overly critical and caustic, and called instead for a wait for the legal process to work itself out. The *Liverpool Mercury* viewed with some trepidation the violent rhetoric of the *Jamaican Courant*, and believed that the missionaries had no logical reason to incite a rebellion they could not hope to win. But when the *Jamaican Courant* stated that there were “fine hanging woods” and hoped “that the bodies of all Methodist preachers who may be convicted of sedition may diversify the scene,”²²⁹ it left the editor of the *Mercury* with real concerns about the fairness of a trial in Jamaica.

The Jamaicans, and specifically the white Jamaicans, were untrustworthy, violent and disloyal; the missionaries were oppressed, under assault and ill-treated. The slaves made very few appearances in these articles, as the focus rapidly shifted from the story of the rebellion itself, and newspaper reports focused overwhelmingly on religious figures. Religious minorities in Britain did not represent a unified political or social front, and it is hard to describe en masse

²²⁸ *Chester Chronicle*, May 11, 1832 (BNA).

²²⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, February 24, 1832, (BNA).
the attitudes of non-conformist religious groups as it related to reform in the nineteenth century. Certainly as religious outsiders and a minority group, the Baptists would have been to some degree outside the norm. But not so far outside as to be exiled and kept away from the structures of power. While it took an act of emancipation to normalize Catholic relations within Great Britain, other religious minority groups had less difficulty in achieving success and reform in high office.

The most well-known political figure in the abolition of the slave trade, William Wilberforce, was a powerful Member of Parliament and a renowned politician, but he was also an Evangelical Christian and in the fringes of the accepted state church. Wilberforce was not alone, and the influence of his allies in the Clapham Sect, a group of religious reformers on politics in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain, was substantial. But these men were within the established Church of England, not in non-conformist churches like the Methodists and Baptists.

While Baptists, Independents and other breakaway protestant sects took part in revolutionary and reformist action, other minority churches did not, most notably the Methodists who stood as a sort of conservative bulwark even against the reformation minded activists.

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The Baptist missionaries, in the wake of the outbreak of violence in Jamaica, adopted an opinion outside the main, and argued that the rebellion had “been the means of incalculable good; and that from depression and defeat itself, have arisen ultimate success.”

But seeing a silver lining in a terrible storm was not necessarily that radical a way of viewing the world, and the Baptist speakers, authors and lecturers featured in countless pages of the newspapers during the course of the 1831-32 rebellion. But much of what was written about the missionaries was written by other Baptists, though often printed by more mainstream and moderate presses. In the aftermath of the rebellion, public discourse transformed the Baptists into a sort of metaphor and legacy in British imagination, and the persecution the Baptists faced for daring to bring knowledge to the slaves was seen as part of tradition of oppression and resistance to democratic forces. So while the missionaries may never have been the mainstream of British society and held reformist values and beliefs putting them at odds with some of the social and political standards of the time, they did occupy a role in British society. The Baptists were important and influential, both as political figures and leaders and as publishers and dictators of public discourse.

After the rebellion, a second trend in newspaper narratives took root, and drew focus to the racial divide of Jamaica that was in some ways bolstered by the religiously minded writers in the wake of the 1831-32 rebellion. In 1760, there was some degree of nuance as it related to racial depictions both of the perpetrators and victims of violence. By 1832 the narratives were presented in a more binary fashion. Much of this emerged from the writings of the missionaries, not as it related to black violence towards whites, but to white Jamaican violence towards missionaries.


234 *The Examiner*, September 8, 1832, (BNA).
The *Coventry Herald*, in printing a report from the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society, specifically related the violence gripping Jamaica as emerging from the instigation of the white population. With the end of the period of martial law, the whites were able “to wreak their vengeance, in every possible mode… in the illegal and atrocious outrage.” ²³⁵ It was not just that the whites were in power and of questionable loyalty, but they were in fact the savages, as the *Drogheda Journal* made explicit. Resistance to white cruelty and planter savagery was to become a rallying cry, and the *Journal* believed “the whole British nation will learn against what virulent hostility they [the missionaries] have to contend.” ²³⁶

While most of the stories stated that the missionaries had escaped actual punishment, the *Dublin Morning Herald* reported in April of 1832 that one missionary had been executed as a result of court-martial. And in the *Fife Herald*, a newspaper heavily critical of the slaves thus far, the treason of the planters became enlarged to cover the entirety of the West Indies, where “there is a secret understanding among the leaders of the Assemblies of the different Islands, and that they are determined to bully the Government.” ²³⁷ In the extreme, the whites of Jamaica were murdering innocent missionaries and plotting a mass betrayal of the British government.

The range of these articles criticizing the planters was not geographically limited to London, Liverpool, Manchester and other large cities. Aside from the papers already mentioned in Coventry, Chester, Bristol, Hampshire, and Cheltenham, in England, Fife in Scotland and Drogheda in Ireland, there were also critical reports printed in Hereford, Hull, Leeds, Leicester,

²³⁵ *Coventry Herald*, May 4, 1832, (BNA).
²³⁶ *Drogheda Journal*, March 10, 1832, (BNA).
²³⁷ *Fife Herald*, May 10, 1832, (BNA).
The growing criticism of the planter aristocracy was a clear representation of the declining influence of the planters not only as an economic force in the Empire but also as a political and social force as well. West Indian influence was on the wane and their only attempts at influencing the newspapers came in the form casting blame upon the missionaries, whereas the missionaries countered with claims of cruelty, savagery and disloyalty. It was as though the planters had become the slaves, replacing the savage African pagan with the violent and cruel white overlord. The language used in the criticism of the planters: words like savage, vengeful, and hostile, was specifically designed to negate the complaints of the planters. White West Indians had portrayed the slaves as docile or calm by nature, subservient to their masters who in turn were held to the expectation of a certain *noblesse oblige*.

While the planters argued that it was the missionaries who turned the slaves to violence, the missionaries made a far more compelling case that it was in fact the planters who delivered violence to the West Indies and not the slaves. It was notable that even anti-slave story printed in the *Durham County Advertiser* took measures to point out the generally lack of violence in the rebellion when it made note that “great damage has been done to property, but not much to life: the slaves seeming to be more eager in burning the houses, and devastating the plantations, than in offering violence to the persons of their employers.” The slaves were merely “poor ignorant fellow-creatures” who did not know any better. But the planters were educated and wealthy whites who looked the Empire in the eyes and plotted behind her back. They struck out with savagery, violence and vengeance, destroyed houses of worship and killed missionaries. It was

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238 It is worth noting here that criticism of the planters appeared far more frequently in English newspapers, whereas Irish and Scottish papers tended to either take a more neutral tone or be critical of the slaves.

239 *Durham County Advertiser*, February 24, 1832, (BNA).
thus unsurprising that sympathy should so quickly and decisively fall on the side of the abolitionists.

In the aftermath of the 1831-32 rebellion, the most dramatic shift in the history of Jamaica occurred. This did not come from planter action or specifically as the result of the uprising of the slaves, but from Parliamentary reform. In 1833 the two houses of Parliament passed a law emancipating slaves across the Empire beginning in 1834.\footnote{With some exceptions.} It was the death knell for the traditional social and economic structure of Jamaica. But this did not occur in a vacuum within Britain. The role of the slaves as agricultural workers fit them alongside many British agricultural laborers still looking for a place in the rapidly changing world of the nineteenth century.

The slaves, and the free people of color who emerged after abolition, were a people with an uncertain future, especially in light of the growing agitation in England over labor and technology.\footnote{For more details on the role of slaves both as a metaphor for English labor and as a reflection of labor strife see Thomas Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 38-41.} What followed the end of slavery in Jamaica was not a Haitian uprising of brutal retaliation but instead a peaceful transition from slavery to a different form of oppressive labor control. The apprenticeship system, lasting from 1834 to 1838, subjected freed slaves to another form of forced labor even if they were technically “free.” And racial and economic oppression was not somehow washed away in the tide of emancipation. As the value of sugar fell and the economic, social and political tensions boiled up over the three decades following the Baptist War another upheaval loomed in the distance.
But in the immediate wake of the 1831-32 revolt, the slaves of Jamaica were seen not as potential insurgents merely waiting for their time to overthrow and massacre the whites, but as another class of British subjects who deserved basic rights. These had been men and women willing to take up arms in the name of liberty, a liberty they felt their gracious king had granted to them. It was an act of loyal civil disobedience not unfamiliar to British subjects at home living through an era of riots and social and political reform movements. The Baptist War had come at a confluence of influences enabling the missionaries to call upon the language of loyalty and violence in such a way that the rebellious slaves transformed from violent insurgents to secondary players in a struggle between white aristocrats and religious zealots. Racial slavery may have been the battle ground but it was, at least in 1832, not the primary deciding influence on understandings of loyalty.
Chapter 3
The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865

Part 1: The Mid Victorians and their Empire

Unsurprisingly, the end of slavery did not end the difficulties for black Jamaicans, and by the middle of the reign of Queen Victoria a confluence of agitations, including economic stagnation, land disputes, racial tensions and constitutional and juridical inequalities, combined to create a rising instability. Years of declining economic opportunities for the majority of the Jamaican population, and the failure of the apprenticeship system in the years following emancipation, created tinderbox conditions for acts of civil disorder. Political activism among members of the non-white community gave rise to a corps of leaders of African and mixed ancestry willing to agitate for better social and economic conditions and political reform. Meanwhile, in the metropolis, a new wave of interest in the empire had taken hold.

Britain’s imperial reach drastically expanded in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the religious, cultural, scientific and political communities in the metropolis all underwent dramatic changes and British perspectives on the empire’s place in the world. British imperial conflicts in India (the 1857 Indian Mutiny), China (the 1850-1864 Opium Wars), New Zealand (the 1845-1872 Maori War) and most famously Crimea (the 1853-1856 Crimean War) had, in the decade preceding the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, dramatically redefined British discourse concerning the empire’s relationship with war, conflict and foreign peoples. The rise in newspaper coverage, editorials, stories and printed images of the Morant Bay Rebellion payed testament to the steady increase in public interest concerning the role of the British abroad and resistance to British authority in the colonies.
The Morant Bay uprising of 1865, though it paled in size and scope when compared to the previous revolt in Jamaican in 1832, gripped public imagination across Great Britain. In the wake of the Indian Mutiny, the American Civil War, and Britain’s growing role as an imperial power, the rebellion in Morant Bay came to represent a battleground for the various factions within the British Empire to battle for public opinion. The ambiguous results of the early months of public discourse transformed the previously clear battle lines between those who were critical of the Jamaican government and those who defended it into a less definitive public divide where race, unlike any previous Jamaican rebellion, played most critical role in determining the sympathy expressed by British newspapers for the victims of violence.

The rebellion of 1865 played an equally important role in the growing British struggle with defining what it meant to be a citizen of the British Empire, most especially viz the growing number of non-white peoples within the British sphere. Indians, Africans, Asians and Afro-Jamaicans all represented a growing influence on and presence in the Empire, but they also struggled within their localities in exerting their position as subjects and equal, or at least semi-equal, members of the British society. Morant Bay’s violent outburst reflected the growing animosity between oppressive local governments and agitated colonial subjects, and provided an opportunity for large numbers of the oppressed subjects of the Empire to express frustration and agency against local imperial authority.

Scholars have focused with some intensity on the mid-Victorians and their empire. This was the Great Britain of Dickensian imagination; it was an empire expanding in directions economic, social and political. Victorian Britain was home to radical thinkers and revolutionaries, and gave rise to and sustained ideas as diametrically opposed as John Stewart
Mill’s liberalism and Karl Marx’s Communism. This was an era when, in the words of K. Theodore Hoppen, the people of Britain found themselves “at a time when a variety of social and economic interests contended for master,” and neither the capitalist bourgeoisie nor the medieval aristocracy held complete sway over the hearts and minds of the people.

A new wave of reformers, activists and agitators emerged to take up the mantle from the successful abolitionists, and many of the same men who argued to free the slaves took an active interest in what was to happen to the slaves after they were granted their freedom. Victorian Britons were more engaged, more aware and more informed, and after 1855 the popular availability of the British press led to a surge in specialized and content-specific newspapers.

The 1860s in particular saw a sharp increase in affordable religiously based newspapers, many run by non-conformist religious sects such as Baptists and Methodists, both of whom played an important role in shaping public opinion concerning both the 1832 and the 1865 rebellions in Jamaica.

These rebellions helped dramatically and significant influence British understandings of the Empire, and the newspaper provided the most ready source for expressions of that influence and source of knowledge for contemporary observers. Newspapers, long influential in the British political scene, became more and more diverse, and more popular outside of London after

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242 Mill would go on to play a key role in the aftermath of the 1865 rebellion in Morant Bay, and led a committee which sought to prosecute Governor Eyre. For more see Catherine Hall, et. al., *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and The Reform Act of 1867*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 64.


1855,\textsuperscript{247} and readers within Great Britain began more often to compare events overseas to their domestic circumstances.\textsuperscript{248}

The public developed a taste for international stories of war, conflict, aggression and revolution, and throughout the 1860s and 70s, according to Lucy Brown, events abroad helped spur on the rise of popular newspapers.\textsuperscript{249} The British public had become more aware of the Empire both as a physical and political entity as well as an idea; a moral and emotional conceptualization and by interpreting the events of the nineteenth century Britons began to understand what the Empire meant to them. Scholars have studied in detail both the positive and negative portrayals of the empire in the British popular imagination, as well as the developing and changing concepts of race, concepts that became increasingly codified and scientific by the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{250}

In light of the American Civil War, and the history of racial struggles in Jamaica, the British population had an active interest in the events following the march in Morant Bay, and the response of Governor Eyre to the rebellion would represent a battle ground for rival ideas of what the role of the British Empire was to be: either the British Empire would be a forceful arm for civilizing the disparate and savage people of the world, or a moral beacon ruling through good example and righteous virtue. While the rebellions of 1760 and 1832 were tied up in the

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\textsuperscript{250} These scholars include David Cannadine in \textit{Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire} Andrew Thomson’s \textit{The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century}, Catherine Hall, et. al’s \textit{At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World}, and Douglas Lorimer’s \textit{Color Class and the Victorians} for a discussion on the development of a more codified scientific racism in Victorian Britain.
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struggle for freedom, the uprising in 1865 was more closely linked to constitutional and economic inequality. The British public was well aware of the ongoing economic struggles of the island, and in the months leading up to the October outbreak of violence the Baptist Missionary Society produced a series of stories regarding the fiscal stagnation, economic inequality, and rising crime in Jamaica. The Underhill letter, written after a visit by the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society visited Jamaica and met with members of the Jamaican public, would significantly shape public discourse on the Morant Bay Rebellion, and the Jamaican whites were aware of the severe dangers this letter represented to their hegemony.

Gad Heuman tracked the preamble to the rebellion in detail in ‘The Killing Time’ and when the petitions and committees following the Underhill report came to naught, “some people were preparing for war.”\textsuperscript{251} The Underhill petitions and committees represented a civil and political attempt by people of color in Jamaica to push through reform, a last ditch effort by the black community at compromise. However, to the whites, it appeared to be yet another assault on their place in the social hierarchy of the island led by religious firebrands. Many papers would refer back to the role of the Baptists in 1831, and it appeared that once again a black Baptist activist would be at the center of a Haitian-like revolutionary movement.\textsuperscript{252} In 1831 this had been Samuel Sharpe, and in 1865 the role of figurehead was played by George William Gordon, whose execution during the suppression of the rebellion provided a bloody shirt for critics of the Jamaican government.

The traditional powers of Jamaican society, the white aristocracy, planter elites and government officials, continued to subject Jamaicans of color to perpetual economic and political

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\item[252] Heuman saw numerous reference to Haiti, and many would also appear in the British press, see Heuman, 59.
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deprivation, and, as Thomas Holt described, Jamaican policy makers and public figures rejected
the idea that the black peasants of Jamaica could even comprehend the economic and intellectual
achievements of their white betters. In the British popular imagination, the changing ideas of the
role of workers in a Liberal economic society made the position of free people of color in
Jamaica even more difficult. Jamaicans of color, who refused to work for minimal wages under
the burden of economic and political inequality, became racially defined as unable or unwilling
to accomplish or achieve like their white counterparts at home. 253

Like the laboring poor in Britain, the Jamaicans of color were property-less but deemed
racially distinct and therefore inferior. Jamaican petitions for political and economic reform to
the British government went unanswered, and when Jamaican authorities attempted to arrest Paul
Bogle, a local notable and Baptist preacher in Stony Gut, the tensions building up finally boiled
over. The people of color in Stony Gut captured the police who had arrived to arrest Bogle, and
having seized weapons and ammunition, marched on the local vestry meeting in Morant Bay.
That a political assembly was the target of this protest was unsurprising, given that in the decade
before the uprising of 1865, black suffrage had dropped to just 1,903 total voters, according to
Holt, and non-white members of the Jamaican Assembly made up the minority, despite their
majority on the island. 254

The march quickly turned violent as Bogle and his cadre killed white and mixed race
Jamaicans and set fire to the courthouse. Violence quickly spread, and the Governor called out
the British army to suppress the uprising. Bogle and his fellow leaders were captured and
executed, as were a score of other figures tangentially related to the violence. What had begun as

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253 For a breakdown of this change see Thomas Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race Labor, and Politics in

a protest march turned into a brutal outburst of violence that left hundreds dead, though most fell victim to violence unleashed by the Jamaican government after the rebellion was put down.²⁵⁵ Holt believed the relationship between Bogle as a figure of political and social importance, as well as a religious leader, made him and his community uniquely suited for mobilization, and the Baptist church in particular provided a cultural cohesion that may not have been present in different circumstances.²⁵⁶ Bogle and the other future rebels in Stony Gut were motivated to action by the mistreatment of George William Gordon, a mixed race politician and activist who had a long and turbulent relationship both with the local government of Morant Bay and the governor of the colony.²⁵⁷ When police arrived in Stony Gut to arrest Bogle, the local black Jamaicans confronted them, and held them hostage; then the protestors mobilized and marched on the Morant Bay vestry meeting resulting in an outbreak of violence and left many notable whites dead and the government panicked. The initial body of rebels was small, especially compared to the 1831 rebellion, but the numbers soon spread and demonstrations and protests ignited beyond the bounds of Morant Bay. As a result, Governor Eyre called for military aid and unleashed a swift and, some would say, brutal response, and with the aid of British troops, local militia and the Maroons put down the uprising. In the aftermath hundreds of black Jamaicans were dead, including Paul Bogle and George William Gordon.

The execution of Gordon was to have a profound impact on the public discourse concerning the rebellion in Morant Bay, and would inspire a radical re-alignment of the narrative

spread by many British newspapers. The same language used by the newspapers to describe the violence committed by the black Jamaicans would be used to describe the government’s actions. Not only did Governor Eyre’s retaliatory violence incite notables like John Stewart Mill and leaders in the scientific, abolitionist and political spheres, but it also produced a wave of anti-Government stories in the newspapers.

These stories came in rapidly during the months immediately following the outbreak of violence, and between November of 1865 when the first reports of the uprising arrived in Britain, and January when the flow of stories began to slack, the narrative of the rebellion transformed from an isolated outbreak of colonial violence reminiscent of the lamentable Indian Mutiny, into a critical debate concerning colonial governance, constitutional authority and moral righteousness. The British newspapers attempted both to understand the events occurring in Jamaica and also to cast judgment on the actors involved.

Newspaper stories focused on the roles of Governor Eyre, George Gordon, the Colonial Office and the Jamaican Assembly, and attempted not only to cast aspersions upon the guilty parties but also to win the struggle for public opinion. Unlike the previous rebellions of 1760 and 1831, the British press was in many ways more self-aware in 1865. The debate within the public sphere was not fought merely with competing narratives of the rebellion, but with open and public debate about the language being used and the political alignments of the commentators themselves. This perspective, combined with the massive scale of news coverage in the aftermath of the uprising, made British understandings of the 1865 rebellion unique.

The bulk of newspaper stories covering the rebellion were printed in the three months following the outbreak of violence, and the flow of news stories kept the British population up to

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date on events abroad. As a result, the newspapers, and their readers, became divided between those who supported the repression by the government, and those who balked at so cruel a response. Unlike 1832, where the slaves and Jamaican free people of color took a backseat to the struggle between Baptist preachers and Jamaican whites, British newspapers focused clearly and definitively on race, and newspaper readers were forced to pick a side: either white or black.

**Part 2: “In a community composed of two races”: Race and changing perspectives of Jamaicans**

Prior to the news of the outbreak of violence, the British press was already in the process of discussing the future role of the people of color in Jamaica in light of the end of the Civil War in the United States.\(^{259}\) The *London Daily News* of October 23\(^{rd}\) recognized that Jamaica, unlike the Confederate States of America, was isolated and removed from the “sight and sympathy of foreign philanthropists”\(^{260}\) and would thus continue its racially disharmonious policies. Clearly this was not to be the case and later articles from English “philanthropists” would illustrate that Jamaica was not so isolated as to protect it from the gaze of agitating reformers.

Others saw Jamaica as a model for the South, although not a positive one. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, another London paper, referred to the policy of the United States towards their freed slaves as an attempt to “imitate the evil policy of those of Jamaica”\(^{261}\) and recognized the need for government intervention and support for the newly freed communities, something observers would have seen as a post facto cause of the rebellion.

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\(^{259}\) For the sake of clarity, “person of color” in this paper represents anyone of African descent, where identification between Afro-Jamaicans and people of mixed ancestry is important it will be identified as such.


\(^{261}\) *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 23, 1865 (BNA).
The newspapers, and the public who consumed them, were cognizant of racial tensions in Jamaica in the months leading up to the Morant Bay Rebellion. Furthermore, in the legacy of the Indian Mutiny, the 1831 Baptist War and the Haitian Revolution, the British public understood concepts of racial and colonial resistance on a real and experienced level.\(^{262}\) No longer was the rebellion by Jamaicans of African and mixed ancestry a purely local event; instead, British observers saw events in Morant Bay as part of the larger relationship between the white imperial state and the racially distinct (and, to many, inferior) colonial subjects.

The *Newcastle Journal*, in its first report of the rebellion, illustrated two distinct elements of this larger relationship between the center and periphery of the empire. The “Reported Insurrection” not only put in jeopardy the “continuance of British sovereignty in the island” but also illustrated the ungrateful nature of the descendants of the freed slaves. The *Journal* saw these members of the Jamaican population as “the negroes of the West Indies” who owed “a large debt of gratitude to Great Britain, both for past and present favors.”\(^{263}\)

These rebels were distinctly separate from the British people, as part of the British polity, a people who had been “‘emancipated’ at very great cost.”\(^{264}\) The British themselves seized upon the language of victimization in the discussion of West Indian slavery, and the freed slaves transformed into ungrateful and selfish abusers of British virtue. This realignment of victim status furthered a growing divide between the British, who provided freedom and civilization, and their colonial subjects who in return owed loyalty and gratitude.

\(^{262}\) Haiti was cited far more frequently in the British newspapers surveyed here than it was in 1831-32 seen in chapter 2.

\(^{263}\) *Newcastle Journal*, November 17, 1865, (BNA).

\(^{264}\) *Newcastle Journal*, November 17, 1865, (BNA). “emancipated” was in quotations in the original, potentially illustrating a certain doubt that the slaves were ever in need of emancipation.
The initial news of the outbreak of violence immediately evoked comparisons in the press to Haiti, and just as quickly brought caution that such comparisons were ill-founded. The earliest discussions surrounding the rebellion focused on the role of government, be it Jamaica’s existing colonial government, or the potential new Haiti sought by the rebels. While the British press only tangentially made a point to recognize the difference between Afro-Jamaicans and those of mixed heritage, in Jamaica the difference was much starker.

While whites retained a majority of the power in government, a growing number of mixed-race Jamaicans involved themselves in the government. Men like George William Gordon, who according to Holt represented a typical mixed-race Jamaican of the time, held positions of some authority, owned land, married white women and held generally moderate political positions. But Afro-Jamaicans continued to struggle, and in the mid-1860s the black majority faced a series of diseases, natural disasters, political inequality and economic hardships.

The British press engaged in a very real debate concerning the constitutional and legal structures of Jamaica and this systematic inequality on the island even before news of Eyre’s violent reprisals reached England. Even as late as December 23rd, reports came into Britain of Jamaican fears that “nothing but a strong Government can prevent this island [Jamaica] from lapsing into a second Hayti.” Not only was Haiti used by the press as a means of justifying the overly strong response of the government but it was also a retrograde, a “lapse,” and a warning that if the British Empire failed to heed the words of the Jamaican planters, violent Franco-Haitian brutality would inevitably follow.

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266 *Kentish Chronicle*, December 23, 1865, (BNA).
The *Pall Mall Gazette* of November 3rd addressed the Haitian references and sought to direct blame away from racial conspiracy and instead to the Jamaican Assembly, an institution long operating beyond the reach of the British government and, the *Gazette* argued, who had stirred up trouble with an onerous tax and other harsh impositions upon the black population. The *Gazette* went even further and called into question the very idea that an insurrection had broken out, claiming that “for a white race living amidst a black one always believes itself the object of menace,” and that the whole event was likely “only a riot.”

From the opposite end of the argument came an article reprinted by various newspapers but originally from the *Times* referring to the rebellion as an attempt to create a new Haiti, inspired in turn by infiltrators from Haiti and it was “by no means improbable that some of the negroes in Hayti [sic] may have been practising upon the population of our dependency.” This article from the *Times* was referenced or reprinted in newspapers in Manchester, Belfast, and Edinburgh on the third and fourth of November. The fears of an Afro-Caribbean overthrow of white and British power gripping the planters for so long had not dampened in the seventy years since the start of the Haitian Revolution, and now British newspapers were transmitting those same fears to the British public. In December, the *Western Daily Press* in Bristol printed a letter from Stuart Town, Jamaica decrying “a grand and comprehensive scheme to convert this fair island into a second St. Domingo,” and declared that those of European descent on the island were willing to wage a struggle unto death to prevent such a fate. The British press and public fully comprehended the perpetual fears of racial conflict in Jamaica.

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267 *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 3, 1865, (BNA).


269 *Western Daily Press*, December 6, 1865, (BNA).
After the initial stories of the rebellion reached Britain, many papers attempted to either downplay the significance of the uprising or disregard the news as false. The *Morning Post* printed a letter from the Secretary of the Jamaican Cotton Company claiming that the island was at peace and the weather was fine.²⁷⁰ No credence was given to the stories of the uprising, whether this was out of ignorance or an attempt to calm nervous potential investors in the Cotton Company is impossible to determine. The *Leeds Mercury* referred to the uprising as an “Alleged Rebellion”²⁷¹ but put greater stock in the more conservative report from the Jamaican Cotton Company. The *Western Daily Press* of the 4th of November referred to the uprising as an “ugly rumor, which, we trust, will turn out to be baseless,”²⁷² and the *Londonderry Standard* argued that the black population of the island had “absolutely no grievances to serve even as pretexts for rebellion.”²⁷³

Even in the light of the Underhill letter, and with the growing British interpretation of racial superiority of white over black as a scientific reality, the British press held out hope that another rebellion had not ignited. Even those papers that eventually accepted the certainty of the uprising did so with a proviso blaming the presence of Haitian agent provocateurs, with Haitian infiltrators playing the same role as Baptist missionaries had in 1832. In light of the British experiences with the Mutiny and the 1832 uprising and the ongoing Fenian crisis²⁷⁴ it did not take long for British newspapers to acknowledge the rebellion as a real danger.

²⁷⁰ *Morning Post*, November 4, 1865, (BNA).

²⁷¹ *Leeds Mercury*, November 4, 1865, (BNA).

²⁷² *Western Daily Press*, November 4, 1865, (BNA).

²⁷³ *Londonderry Standard*, November 4, 1865, (BNA).

²⁷⁴ Irish Catholic Republican rebels who would begin a series of raids in Canada in the late 1860’s. Though the first raid did not occur until 1866, the British Press at the time regularly ran stories warning of the growing threat of Fenian rebels. Numerous articles about the Jamaican uprising would reference the Fenians and the *Punch* comic of
But by casting the rebellion in the light of a plot, be it Haitian or American, the newspapers could dissuade and alleviate British fears that the rebellion was the fault of poor policies or poor government by transitioning blame from the poor policies of the British or white Jamaicans, and towards the malicious intervention of foreign enemies. On the 6th of November, the Morning Post reversed course from its previous refusal to address the events in Jamaica and acknowledged the reality of the rebellion. The paper printed both a letter from a General Doyle confirming the outbreak of violence and an account from Reuters attempting to explain the circumstances leading to the uprising.

The Reuters report referenced the economic hardships facing the people of color living on the island and attempted to address the white authorities’ inability to aid them. The Morning Post included a caveat that the reports were still new and incomplete, and cautioned that the only solution to the “intestine warfare” so long gripping the island was the deportation of the Maroons from Jamaica to Sierra Leone. Other papers attempted to explore the various causes of the rebellion, and began to recognize the reality of the inequality continuing to grip the island. The Glasgow Daily Herald supplied a summary of the various rumored causes including “the scarcity of food” and “sympathy with the rebellion in the Republic of Hayti” leading either the poor Jamaicans or the Jamaicans of color in the military to take up arms.

The Newcastle Journal continued the discussion of the legal and constitutional issues, including the attempts to prevent Afro-Jamaicans from forming political parties, as well as the

\[275\quad \textit{Morning Post}, \text{ November 6, 1865}, (\text{BNA}).\]

\[276\quad \text{Though the editors appear to have forgotten the presence of the Maroons still in Jamaica.}\]

\[277\quad \textit{Glasgow Daily Herald}, \text{ November 6, 1865}, (\text{BNA}).\]
focus of power in the hands of the Jamaican executive and away from Assembly who could be influenced by a black majority,\textsuperscript{278} contributing to the outbreak of violence, and while the \textit{Journal} rejected the idea that the whites had passed laws intending to harm the black population, it did admit that the Assembly acted without considering the needs of the poor black Jamaicans.

There existed, in the British newspapers, a real understanding of the injustices and inequalities within Jamaica. The \textit{Journal} recognized the destructive influence of unfair constitutional structures, and addressed both the necessity of a fair judiciary and the common cause between Jamaicans and Britons:

This is the want of satisfactory tribunals for the settlement of ordinary disputes. Even in this country the relations between employer and employed give rise to quarrels which are peculiarly unpleasant, and it will readily be understood that in a community composed of two races, in which, moreover, slavery existed within the memory of a generation, differences about wages assume a character which does not attach to them elsewhere. Now it has been well known for a long time that the constitution of the local courts in Jamaica – those which decide the ordinary disputes between the labourer and his employer – is such that the negroes feel no confidence whatever in them.\textsuperscript{279}

The \textit{Journal} demonstrated an understanding that the root of the problem in Jamaica was both racial and economic, and the readers would have understood that whatever one may have thought of the behavior of the rebels, their cause was not without some justification. This was important, because as opinions began to shift and the public ire turned towards Governor Eyre and the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{278} Holt, \textit{The Problem of Freedom} 241 and 250.
\item \textsuperscript{279} \textit{Newcastle Journal}, November 7, 1865, (BNA).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Jamaican Assembly, the pre-existing notions of inequality and oppression on the island would form the crucial backdrop to the eventual backlash against Jamaican authority.

Though some newspapers still attempted to make the rebellion a purely Jamaican affair, such as the *Nairnshire Telegraph* whose authors attempted to blame an “unusually irritating dose of the ‘prickly heat,’”280 most of the British press had moved beyond seeing the uprising as an isolated incident. The *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* believed the rebellion to be in line with the general attitudes of liberated slaves, and pointed out that the rebels were in fact “free subjects of Great Britain” who had failed to progress as a people in the aftermath of their freedom. This was not necessarily a Jamaican problem, but a problem with colonial racially diverse peoples across the globe, and the *Gazette* warned American readers of the potential threat facing them now that the Civil War had won freedom for the slaves. In light of the “causeless, meaningless, objectless, utterly irrational disturbances” of Jamaican people of color who had “the most favourable circumstances in which a negro population can be placed,”281 people of color across the empire must be observed as dangerous. The *Southern Reporter* broadened the comparison and examined the struggle against Jamaican rebels in the memory of similar struggles against the southern Africans,282 Maori of New Zealand and Indians during the Mutiny, as well as the attempts by the Turks and Portuguese to suppress the independence of the Greeks and Brazilians respectively.

After the announcement of the suppression, the *Reporter* predicted “wonder, pity and regret” would come to dominate the nation’s feelings towards the Jamaicans as yet another backwards people fell to the power of the British Empire. The *Southern Reporter*, predicting a

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280 *Nairnshire Telegraph*, November 8, 1865, (BNA).

281 *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, November 9, 1865, (BNA).

strong surge of public pity for the plight of the rebellions, assumed that the rebellion must have been stirred up by some enemy of the empire intent on disrupting the public unity.\textsuperscript{283} Much of this was likely a reflection of the changing understandings of race in the British imagination. The introduction of a “scientific” interpretation of race in the mid-nineteenth century radically altered British interpretations of race, and by the 1860s, according to Douglas Lorimer, “many educated mid-Victorians had rejected all hope of alien peoples assimilating to English ways,”\textsuperscript{284} and this included people of African and mixed ancestry in Jamaica.

Depictions of violence, commentaries on savageness and the general trend of narratives to portray Afro-Jamaicans as violent brutes all stem in some way from this change in public white interpretations of these colonial races. The Jamaican rebellion of 1865 both furthered the use of violent and savage language in depictions of Afro-Jamaicans, and also served as a verification of the pre-existing racial interpretations as one of, what Patrick Brantlinger has argued, the six crucial events of the mid-1800s codifying and defining a new racial interpretation between the superior Anglo-White Britons and the inferior racially diverse subject.\textsuperscript{285}

**Part 3: “Morant Bay is Ruined”: Violence and ‘African’ Savagery in Morant Bay**

By mid-November news began to spread of the rebellion and the defining acts of violence surrounding the uprising. The *Carlisle Journal* of the 10\textsuperscript{th} of November reported that “the negro insurrection is very serious” and “the negroes were committing great barbarities.”\textsuperscript{286} Those

\textsuperscript{283} *Southern Reporter*, November 9, 1865 (BNA).


\textsuperscript{286} *Carlisle Journal*, November 10, 1865, (BNA).
barbarities would be specifically detailed in the coming weeks, and many reports focused on the unfortunate fate of Baron Von Ketelhodt, a German immigrant who had become a figure of some renown in the local Jamaican government and who had made himself a target of resentment for his personal crusade against George William Gordon.  

Von Ketelhodt was widely reported to have been the first victim of rebel violence, and his fate was detailed in especially gruesome language. The *Liverpool Mercury* described how the unfortunate Baron was “brutally butchered and then literally cut to pieces,” but that was not all, as the rebels humiliated the Baron after death when “his brains were mixed with rum and drunk by the murderers, and the women cut out his bowels and shoved them in the street.”

*The Herts Guardian* of Hertfordshire referred to the uprising as a full of “frightful cruelties” and the court-house where the poor victims were hiding was turned into a charnel house as the rebels cut down men as they fled. In this account Baron Von Ketelhodt was again “literally cut to pieces… his right hand was cut off joint by joint. His body stripped of all save his socks, was left exposed in the street,” and in this story the violence was not directed just at white leaders but persons of color as well. “Black Price,” who attempted to escape the burning courthouse, was “subjected to the most horrid and appalling indignities” simply for having associated with the white leadership of the island. The violence was becoming more brutal with each retelling, and it appeared to the *Guardian* that “Morant Bay is ruined.”

These were gruesome acts of barbaric violence harkening back to the initial reports of 1760, and like 1760 the British newspapers spread fear of racial war on a massive and

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287 Heuman, *The Killing Time*, 66-67. Many newspapers did not print a correct spelling of his name, I have used the spelling used by Heuman in *The Killing Time*. In quoting papers, I will use the printed spelling.

288 *Liverpool Mercury*, November 14, 1865, (BNA).

apocalyptic scale. According to the British newspapers the rebels were guilty of “a series of barbarous outrages, the very narration of which is calculated to excite a strong feeling of resentment against the coloured race.” But despite these savage brutalities newspapers cautioned against heaping blame solely upon the rebels themselves. The *York Herald* argued that “jobbery, injustice, oppression and over taxation have each and all helped to make the position of the negro more and more unbearable,” and in light of the structural inequality in Jamaica, rebellion was a natural outcome.

This represented a return to the brutality of the early reports of 1760, stories of brutality largely missing from 1832, but this time overwhelmingly focused on violence by people of color against primarily white Jamaicans. This was not an issue of creolization making people into violent savages but of racial differences turning one group of Jamaicans into “poor victims,” and the other into “brutal murderers.” The rebellion was “attended by all the ferocity and cruelty which mark a contest in which a semi savage race are engaged,” it was a struggle between two races—both subjects of Britain but caught up in local divisions. Race, though important in the previous newspaper stories about the rebellions of 1760 and 1832, became central in 1865.

The fears of the racial divide in Jamaica and across the West Indies were realized in both the actions of the Jamaican authorities and the rhetoric of the British press. Many newspapers espoused the idea that the Jamaicans of non-European descent were by no means capable of ruling the island and increased power in the hands of the people of color would lead to Jamaican ruin. Governor Eyre, in a letter back to the Colonial Office from December 13, 1865 illustrated

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290 *York Herald*, November 18, 1865, (BNA).

291 *York Herald*, November 18, 1865, (BNA).

292 *Dundee Advertiser*, November 14, 1865, (BNA).

293 *Banffshire Journal and General Advertiser*, November 14, 1865, (BNA).
this mindset clearly when he decried the “absence of a large proportion of the Proprietary Body, and the cessation of any influence of persons from Europe of high standing,” and argued that the rise of the non-European influence would “eventually lead to anarchy.”

The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* propagated this same belief, and claimed that “in the time of slavery the Jamaica negro was dangerous from his propensity to rise against his masters” and that it was “almost impossible to eradicate the original savageness of the African blood.” The rebels were organized but destructive and represented a taste of what the island could expect if white rule was ever extinguished. According to the Sheffield Daily Telegraph, the rebels were committing acts of violence so despicable “we should have supposed none but cannibals capable.” Cannibalism was a convenient and ready symbol for pagan savagery, having been used in depictions of the terrors of the Maori rebellion as well, and encapsulated the relapse of metropolitan understandings of their colonial subjects. This was the ultimate failure of British social evangelism, and years of British rule had not quelled the savage African heart within the former slaves who now “relapsed suddenly into the savage habits of the ‘untutored African’” according to the *Western Times*.

The narrative established by the British Press in the early days after the outbreak of the rebellion was one of retrograde evolution. This was part of the wider interpretive transition among Victorians, identified by Catherine Hall, who mentally transitioned people of color from

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296 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, November 14, 1865, (BNA).


298 *Western Times*, November 14, 1865, (BNA).
“brothers to black peoples as a new kind of ‘other.’” Such a narrative encompassed changing understandings of race as a scientific and biological construct as well as the political and legal condition of the British Empire as an institution. The unification of British identity across the empire, tracked by David Armitage to the 1740s, had given way to a more complicated relationship between subject and empire. In the 1830s the colonial language of savagery and barbarism began to make its way into British interpretations of the domestic poor, and a clear divide between the noble upper classes and the beastly laborers became strikingly pronounced.

These interpretations by the British press of the savage return to Africa reflect this larger divide on a racial scale; the poor people of color had become the animalistic laborers to the upper class austerity of the whites. The British press was clear, unlike in 1760, that these rebels were subjects of British dominion and as the *Newcastle Journal* reported, the insurgents had risen “against the authority of the Queen,” but they were also distinctly separate because of their race. The rebels were not terrible because of their status as British subjects or their Jamaican residence, but instead it was their race that weakened their claims, because “there is no race of men on the face of the globe more cruel than the negro when his passions have been roused.”

This was not only a struggle between races within the British body politic but a struggle between opposite forces: between order and chaos.

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302 *Newcastle Journal*, November 13, 1865, (BNA).
The violence of Jamaica was filled with the brutality and strife “which invariably accompany the efforts of savages to secure the mastery over civilised man.”\textsuperscript{303} The language of racial savagery was a vital element to the initial narratives, because it clearly depicted the side of order and righteousness as the side of the government. But when Governor Eyre’s draconian response found its way into the British newspapers, the clear-cut lines between good and evil became jagged.

Much of the language used in the early criticisms of the rebels focused specifically on the transition of the people of color into a more dangerous and darker savage. The \textit{Dumfries and Galloway Standard} referred to the rebels as “the dusky mob, headed by a ruffian bearing the ominous name of Paul Bogle,” and made mention of the rebel’s “\textit{black} in a double sense” flag.\textsuperscript{304} Color played a pivotal role in this narrative, both as an attempt at wit and as a derogatory label. These men were “rioters” full of “hot negro blood” whose “black Chief, Mr. Paul Bogle, is a Fenian emissary.”\textsuperscript{304} This indicated a unification both of the familiar enemy, the Fenian Irish rebel, and the racial ‘other.’ The comparisons of people of color in Jamaica to Irish rebels created a fascinating confluence, both represented a people whom the British had emancipated in the 1820s and 1830s, and both continued to resist attempts at British enlightenment. The rebels in Jamaica represented the ungrateful slave of 1760 and the rebellious freedom fighter of the 1830s. The \textit{John O’Groat Journal} blamed “Yankee and Fenian agitators” for stirring up trouble in “our blacks” and leading them in “a war of extermination” with “every white and every half-breed being put to death.”\textsuperscript{305}

\textsuperscript{303} \textit{Dublin Evening Mail}, November 13, 1865, (BNA).
\textsuperscript{304} \textit{Dumfries and Galloway Standard}, November 15, 1865, (BNA).
\textsuperscript{305} \textit{John O’Groat Journal}, November 16, 1865, (BNA).
This apocalyptic language divided the world between those loyal, including some regiments staffed by people of color who had not turned coat, and those who were disloyal agitators and foreign provocateurs. The status of the rebels as subjects of British authority was not in doubt, merely their ability, or inability, to accept their position within society. The person of color in Jamaica was “noted among his race for his dangerous character” and from their position as the physical majority, the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* believed the Jamaican people of color had “been able to exercise an influence beyond what their intelligence should give them in any well governed State.”

Like in 1760, the rebels were depicted as brutal, savage and violent, but like 1831 the British also understood and sympathized with the Jamaicans to some degree. The British press in 1831-32 described the rebels as justified at best and misguided at worst, and in 1865 this attempt at empathy returned. While the British did not justify or give approval to the brutality of the rebels, they did attempt to understand the endemic inequalities leading to such actions. Most newspaper stories did not discard the people of color in Jamaica without merit in their discomfort.

While they characterized them as savage and backwards Africans, the British to some degree admitted in their own failure in the civilizing mission to bring British civility and culture to the savage peoples of the rest of the world. The person of color was “a man and a brother” but also “a somewhat disagreeable and intractable customer,” whose “spirit of devilry” prevented him from truly developing as a free man. The British leadership had “increased the healthiness of the women” and introduced marriage as “an antidote to the immorality customary in slave

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306 *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, November 16, 1865, (BNA).

At the end the British newspapers determined that the British civilizing mission had failed, but it was not due to British maleficence but Jamaican misrule, and the rebellion was the fault of the local leadership and not British imperial policy in general. Blame on the Jamaican government began in earnest in early November, though it would become more specifically focused on Governor Eyre in particular in late November and early December after news of Gordon’s execution reached the homeland. In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion some newspapers began to point to the mismanagement as the primary cause of the troubles on the island, and many went back to the Underhill letter for proof.

All of this language was starkly more racial, and more racist, than any issuing from the presses in either 1760 or 1832. The rebels were depicted as ungrateful, backwards, violent and pernicious, and the Jamaican government was seen as inept, powerless and a failure. This commentary offered a volatile mixture of racial prejudice and political dissatisfaction that, combined with growing domestic interpretations of the scientific nature of race and the noble mission of British imperialism, boiled over into outright resentment both towards the ethnic makeup of the rebels and the failures of Governor Eyre.

The early newspaper narratives of the 1865 uprising set a clear line of demarcation between victim and victimizer in a way that was not so clear in the previous century. The white and mixed-race Jamaicans were victims of black Jamaican violence and government ineptitude. When news arrived in England of the execution of Gordon, a local dignitary of mixed race, British press narratives drastically shifted focus from the brutality of rebel violence towards

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308 *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 13, 1865.
white and mixed race victims to Governor Eyre’s brutality towards Gordon and other Jamaicans. This dramatic shift from a clear racial violence to a more nuanced legal and constitutional violence created a sense of ambiguity and a plurality of opinion.

Whereas in the aftermath of 1760 and 1832 the British public were left with a clear understanding of the way forward: amelioration in 1760 and emancipation in 1832, in 1865 the new understandings of British Imperialism and racial order left nothing settled and 1865 faded in the British public discourse without significant alteration to public understandings of imperial policy.

Part 3: “Everybody is Talking about the Insurrection in Jamaica”

Jamaican stories dominated the pages of late 1865, but this was not news coming unannounced. Often inspired by the work of the Baptist Missionary Society whose members continued agitation for reformation in Jamaica even after the emancipation of the slaves in 1833, British newspapers circulated stories and reports of Jamaican inequities throughout the months preceding the Morant Bay Rebellion. Influential Baptists like Dr. Underhill, and the railroad engineer and businessman Samuel Morton Peto, helped turn the public discourse surrounding the rebellion away from the actions of the rebels and towards the behavior and ineptitude of the Jamaican government. Underhill’s letter had predicted “great disappointment will result” and that “despondency of all classes will be aggravated by the expectations the inquiries of the Governor have awakened.”

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Meanwhile Morton Peto returned from America and began to speak on his experiences, including by giving a speech published by the *Leeds Mercury* who believed would cast doubt on the “revival of those old stories which represent the negro… as half tiger and half monkey - a compound of irreclaimable idleness and irreclaimable ferocity, who must be chained to a vigilant keeper or shut up in a narrow cage if anything human or civilized is ever to be made of him,” and the *Mercury* also hoped these new accounts would discredit the “the paper [The *Times*] which has always, when a decent pretext could be found, laboriously reiterated these often-refuted calumnies.”

The *Mercury* compared the experiences of the people of color in Jamaica with the recently freed slaves in the United States and in this the *Mercury* found the British to be lacking. It was not the savage blood of Africa that drove the rebellion at Morant Bay, but instead the government’s failure to “secure the rights of the freedmen against the oppression of his former master,” something the Northern States had managed to accomplish, and thus avoid the uprising and violence now rocking Jamaica. The Jamaican insurrection, by the middle of November 1865, was clearly a topic of significant discussion and debate, between those who saw the rebels as savage and deceitful failures of civilization, and those who saw the Jamaican Government’s failure as the primary motivation for the violent upheaval. As time went on the newspaper discourse transitioned from a discussion of the rebellion itself into a form of meta-conversation concerned less about the events in Jamaica and more about the conversation concerning those events.

The *Caledonian Mercury*, a paper up until now generally critical of the rebels, declared that “everybody is talking about the insurrection in Jamaica, and everybody has reason to talk

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about it,” and while the conversation was full of voices and opinions, it was also missing the mark. The *Mercury* criticized those who believed in the “mischievous restless hand of our American cousins” and those who shared the “views of several of our ‘blood and culture’ friends” for spreading inaccurate understandings of the causes of the rebellion. The *Mercury* sarcastically declared that it would have been easy to abandon the people of color in Jamaica as a people deficit “in moral and mental condition and character” who were “not to be entitled to take the rank with the race of man.” But the *Mercury* argued against these “delusions” because it was not race nor culture nor color that caused the outbreak of violence, but that the rebellion’s causes were “want of food, want of clothing, want of labour, want of remuneration when labour has been obtained, want of consideration, want of good government and want of justice.”

Whatever else may have been believed about the nature of the Afro-Jamaican laborers, their dissatisfaction was not without legitimate cause according to the *Mercury*.

The *Caledonian Mercury*, like its namesake in *Leeds*, made reference to the Underhill letter as evidence to the inequalities and difficulties of life in Jamaica. Even articles exceptionally critical of the rebels paid heed to Underhill’s experiences, such as the brutal tale told by the *Stamford Mercury* recounting the savageness of the rebels at Morant Bay in detail, but also recognized the potential that the public discourse on people of color was inadequate. The *Mercury* believed rather paradoxically that in “the mass of all honest experience… if the negro be in want, it is because he will not work” but also “that the poor negro was suffering because he could not get work.”

But the *Stamford Mercury* paid greater credence to the report from Governor Eyre who argued that “Dr. Underhill’s letter, and the meetings where people told they were tyrannized, 311

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311 *Caledonian Mercury*, November 16, 1865, (BNA).
over and ill-treated, were over-taxed, were denied political rights, were misrepresented by her Majesty’s Government by the authorities and planters and where, in fact, language of the most exciting and seditious kind was consistently used.³¹² Even in the defense of the Jamaican government, Governor Eyre revealed that the rebels had the perception of legitimate grievances against the government. In light of the popularization of the Underhill narrative, the critics of the rebels had to correct their narrative to shift blame again away from the race of the rebels and towards the agitations of agent provocateurs in the memory of the 1831-32 “Baptist War.”

This attempt by the Governor was not accepted without an eye to his own bias, and the mounting criticism of Underhill by Eyre and Colonial Secretary James Caldwell led the *Islington Gazette* to bemoan the revelation that “England, too, it seems has its Siberia - not a territorial one, to which the victims of Imperial animosity may be exiled, but the Siberia of wholesale calumny and ostracism - an exile from good opinion.”³¹³ The British government’s decision to defend Eyre, perhaps from the very reasonable understanding that he, as their representative, had acted in the best interest of the empire, would become a public relations nightmare as the growing criticisms of Eyre mounted in the press.

Governor Eyre had served as a public servant for decades, and had specific experience dealing with discontented populations of colonial subjects of color,³¹⁴ and so it was likely that the British colonial office who had appointed him trusted his ability to deal with the insurrection. Governor Eyre, for his part, was quick to point out his own innocence in any wrong doing and

³¹² *Stamford Mercury*, November 24, 1865, (BNA).

³¹³ *Islington Gazette*, November 24, 1865, (BNA).

³¹⁴ See the introduction to Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*. 

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was well aware of the growing public criticism of his behavior. In a letter back to the Colonial Office, Governor Eyre decided to rebut the outcry by addressing his own actions.

Immediately, Eyre brought to the Colonial Office’s attention the fact that he had asked for support well in advance of the rebellion, and had known “as far back as August last” that “a spirit of disaffection and disloyalty pervaded very many of the Parishes.” Eyre also made sure to note “that the Negro is a creature of impulse and imitation, easily misled, very excitable, and a perfect fiend when under the influence of an excitement which stirs up all the evil passions of a race little removed in many respects from absolute savages.” Eyre argued not only had he acted with good speed in response to the uprising, but that his methods were appropriate given the threat he faced.

Governor Eyre, who had governed the island from 1862 until the rebellion ended his public career, placed himself at the center of the controversy in the aftermath of the outbreak through his punishment of accused rebels. In much of modern scholarship Governor Eyre has come to represent a particular breed of career colonial official, and his failure in Morant Bay represented the government’s inability to establish a racial *Pax Britanica*. His legacy became all the more relevant in light of the sesquicentennial of the Morant Bay rebellion in 2015. But in the afterglow of the fires of Morant Bay, Eyre was to become the figure for public scorn and criticism over colonial mismanagement.

By the first week of December the rising public tide against Eyre had grown strong enough that the *Manchester Guardian*, by way of the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, reported

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315 “Governor Eyre to Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for the Colonies,” December 8, 1865. CO 137/390, British National Archives, Kew, London.

on “excellent authority that Government [sic] will not attempt to defend the atrocities practiced in Jamaica in the suppression of the miserable outbreak there.” The public formed committees, and sought not only for the public defamation of Governor Eyre but also for his prosecution. In 1865, a committee put out public requests for funds specifically “for the prosecution of Mr. Eyre” and by December of 1866 the Dublin Evening Mail reported that the “so called Jamaica Committee” had drawn up a writ for his trial. Eyre would be recalled by the government and, while he was not found guilty of any crime, see his political career come to an end in the aftermath of the uprising.

The collapse of official support for Eyre came in the aftermath of the Governor’s response to the rebellion, specifically and most dramatically due to the Government’s execution of George William Gordon. Gordon, a noted advocate for the Jamaicans of color and for government reform, was connected both to Morant Bay and to Paul Bogle, and was arrested and executed by the Jamaican government for his perceived role in instigating the uprising. The execution of a mixed-race politician and civil reformer who had no clear connection to the actual violence occurring sent shockwaves through Britain, where democratic and moral traditions made such brutal juridical violence towards political opponents shocking.

British papers reported on a series of protests and inquest meetings taking place across Britain including in influential urban centers like Liverpool and Manchester. Attendees of the meeting in Manchester demanded investigation into the Government’s response, and had sincere doubts about Governor Eyre’s “discretion, his temper and his sense of justice.” The public

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317 Dumfries and Galloway Standard, December 6, 1865, (BNA).
318 Yorkshire Gazette, October 13, 1866, (BNA).
319 Dublin Evening Mail, December 24, 1866, (BNA).
meeting called upon two specific actions by Eyre as highly questionable, including the attempt to shift the blame for the rebellion to Dr. Underhill, and “infinitely graver,” Eyre’s “so-called trial and execution of Mr. George William Gordon.” Whether or not Gordon was guilty was irrelevant to the growing chorus of protesters; what mattered most was the Governor’s provision of inadequate legal justice.

The rule of law was central to the argument being made by the protestors, and the idea that Eyre and the government of Jamaica had circumvented this made the British public highly critical of the whole affair. Whereas the 1760 and 1832 rebellions had been dominated by the discussion of the impact of martial law on the economic wellbeing of either Jamaica or the empire, the 1865 rebellion specifically focused on the moral and juridical use of force. The “forms and pretenses of legality” were vital to British interpretations of their rule in Jamaica, and the constant references to the legal and proper means enabling the emancipation of the slaves illustrated that even those critical of the rebels believed that a certain structured moral and legal proceeding should be dominant in British imperial rule.

Eyre had violated the legal order and he had supplanted British traditions of moral righteous governance in his quest for vengeance. While there was a rising tide against governor Eyre he retained a strong cadre of supporters in the British Press as well. The *Wexford Independent* went on the offensive against the “nigger-mad” critics of the Governor, while the *Leeds Intelligencer* believed the critics to be the “most vituperative, and the most violent of them call for little less than condign punishment to Governor Eyre.” The *Intelligencer* also

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320 *Liverpool Mercury*, November 23, 1865, (BNA).


322 *Wexford Independent*, November 29, 1865, (BNA).

323 *Leeds Intelligencer*, December 2, 1865, (BNA).
attempted to justify the earlier narratives and wash away Governor Eyre’s alleged
mismanagement by highlighting the great stress threatening to overwhelm the besieged governor.

Very few of his defenders attempted to justify the actions of Governor Eyre, but instead
they attempted to re-structure the narrative and imply that the full story was not yet known, or
that the opponents of Eyre were flawed and vengeful without cause. This effectively transitioned
the debate from one of events and decisions to one of political allegiance and ideology. In stark
partisan terms the British press divided between those who criticized the Governor and those
who supported him, and unlike 1832 this divide was not an overseas split imposed upon British
society. This was not the struggle between the Baptists and planters in Jamaica transposed to
British public discourse, but a real divide within the British body politic and represented the
growing plurality in British popular politics.

The question of Eyre’s guilt relied heavily on two specific questions: the first surrounded
the accuracy of the official narratives of the rebellion and the second focused squarely on the role
of Gordon and the other victims of state juridical violence. Some papers printed the accounts of
Jamaican newspapers, including the Jamaica Guardian, identifying Gordon as “the prime mover
of the rebellion” and believed “that the country owes undoubted thanks to the Governor for
crushing out the rebellion.” 324 Other newspapers attempted to reframe the understanding of
legality based upon the location of the events, and the London Evening Standard suggested “that
Governor Eyre has acted in perfect and strict accordance with law… in the district and locality
where the imputed crime has been committed.” 325

324 Leeds Intelligencer, December 2, 1865, (BNA).
325 London Evening Standard, December 6, 1865, (BNA).
Arguments such as these attempted to drown the narrative of Eyre’s draconian response in tricky questions of legality and jurisprudence surrounding martial law and the role of the British constitution in colonial affairs. *The Morning Post* continued this legal-constitutional debate through an examination of the role of martial law in times of crisis, and came to the conclusion that “the Governor of Jamaica had as good a right to hang Mr. Gordon in a district where martial law had not been proclaimed as in one where it had; provided he was satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that such an act was absolutely essential to the suppression of the rebellion and safety of the colony.”

Perhaps the most tendentious new story in wide circulation was based upon a letter written by Governor Eyre’s sister, who defended the “consistent advocate of the coloured race” [Eyre] against his enemies who believed him to be “‘a wholesale murderer and a Robespierre,’ who ought to be hung with the same rope with which he hung Gordon.” Mary Eyre’s letter addressed both Eyre’s reputation and the public outcry against him.

Eyre’s defenders were fighting for time, hoping that as more news came to Britain it would both justify his actions and return the narrative to one featuring Eyre as the victim not the perpetrator. The hyperbole of “Robespierre” Eyre was being used to call attention to the alleged heavy hand of Eyre’s assailants, for surely a man as noble and protective of people of color as Governor Eyre could not be the savage and terrible hangman he had been so far named?

But the execution of Gordon was not the only blunder highlighted by Eyre’s critics, and the rapid defense of Eyre’s handling of Gordon left these other criticisms unanswered. The *Norfolk News* argued that the governance of Jamaica under it’s “’New Constitution’” was “of the

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326 *The Morning Post*, December 7, 1865, (BNA).

327 *Bedfordshire Times*, December 12, 1865, (BNA).
most arbitrary and despotic character,”\textsuperscript{328} and the \textit{Hull Advertiser} pointed to the “tremendously despotic”\textsuperscript{329} new laws being passed by the Governor. A letter to the editor of the \textit{York Herald} meanwhile attacked the Governor for his decision to tax the dissenting religious churches in an effort to recoup the cost of the rebellion.

This was not only seen as an assault on religious liberty in the British Empire but also a “treatment so contemptuous, humiliating and injurious”\textsuperscript{330} to the faithful religious minorities. Eyre’s decision to tax the dissenters stirred up the old memories of 1831 and the struggle between the Baptists and the white planters, and inspired a new wave of critics among the religious clergy and parishioners of the dissenting churches. Not only was Eyre being attacked for his judicial overreach, and his constitutional chicanery, but now he was accused of “slanderous attacks” and of unleashing “fires of persecution.”\textsuperscript{331} The \textit{Suffolk Chronicle} believed the men who ruled Jamaica had “gone mad” and described in detail the religious bills under consideration in Jamaica under the heading of “Persecution of Dissenters.”\textsuperscript{332} The “bloody policy”\textsuperscript{333} of Governor Eyre was the cause of a growing gallery of opponents, and that policy was dominated by the execution of George William Gordon and his allies in the communities of Jamaica.

\textsuperscript{328} \textit{Norfolk News}, December 23, 1865, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{329} \textit{Hull Advertiser}, December 16, 1865, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{330} \textit{York Herald}, December 16, 1865, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{331} \textit{Brecon Reporter}, December 9, 1865, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{332} \textit{Suffolk Chronicle}, December 9, 1865, (BNA).

\textsuperscript{333} \textit{Leeds Mercury}, December 8, 1865, (BNA).

Throughout the mid nineteenth century American emancipationists toured Great Britain giving speeches on slavery, the emancipation movement and the looming threat of war in the United States. The British emancipationists, who had won their goal in 1833, slowly began to turn their attentions to the United States, and imported white activists, free people of color and runaway slaves to give a series of lectures, letters and speeches pushing for activism. Among these activists was Sara Parker Remond, who penned a letter to the editor of the London *Daily News* in November of 1865. In this letter Remond stood up for the defense of “the most hated race in the world” who now faced persecution at the hands of the Jamaican authorities. And furthermore she asked a question to be taken up by newspapers across Britain in the coming months:

Now, take for granted, if you please- I do not- that all the cruelties reported during the recent insurrection in Jamaica are true: take also for granted that the negroes are entirely the aggressors, and I appeal to every candid mind to answer this question, whether the aggressors would have been deal with in so summary a manner if they had belonged to the dominant race, and their complexions had been white instead of black?  

A similar question asked by *The Irishman*, a newspaper in Dublin, in light of the regular references to the Fenians, sought to highlight the most obvious disparity between Irish and Jamaican rebels: race. In a surprisingly vitriolic essay, the author, D. H., illustrated the great advantages the Irish faced, arguing that “having white skins aforesaid, there is a chance that, no matter what you may be charged with, you will enjoy the privilege of trial by jury.”

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335 *The Irishman*, November 25, 1865, (BNA).
the larger constitutional debate may have been, the heart of the issue for many of the critics of Governor Eyre was that the race of the rebels decided their fate, not their actions.

One of the earliest debates in the British newspapers concerned what exactly to call the insurrectionists. Certainly the terms rebels, insurrectionists, and the regular racial signifiers were common, and a letter published in the *Stirling Observer* named the rebels a “mob”\(^\text{336}\) while those authors who sympathized with the discontented Jamaicans labeled them rioters, and tried to reframe the story of the rebellion as a mere riot or demonstration. Clearly, given the brutality of the acts committed, the uprising was something more than just a riot and the activists had aims of a political nature in mind when they took up the arms of the kidnapped policemen in October of 1865. But there is no evidence that the rebels actually had aims at establishing a new Haiti or overthrowing the rule of British law.

In fact, according to Heuman the insurrectionists of 1865 expressed a sincere and real loyalty to the Queen, much the same as the rebels of 1831 had believed the white planters were disobeying the orders of the Crown who granted the slaves their freedom.\(^\text{337}\) Much as the pro-Government newspapers may have desired to portray the rebellion as a sort of violent upheaval against the British crown, it was never the case in any organized sense.\(^\text{338}\) But equally incorrect were the reports downplaying the violence and brutality of the early days of the uprising. White and mixed race Jamaicans were killed at Morant Bay, and the initial days were full of terrifying violence.

\(^{336}\) *Stirling Observer*, November 16, 1865, (BNA).


\(^{338}\) Heuman does identify some of the language used by the rebel leaders as reflective of the fear of a Haitian style revolution, but these stories primarily emerged from the Maroons after the fact, and the Maroons, as in 1831, represented a counter-revolutionary force which had much to gain from continued fears of racial conflict between the free people of color and the whites in Jamaica.
While the motives ascribed to the rebels by newspapers like the *London Evening Standard* were incorrect, the tales of the “murderous outbreak” were not far off. Hyperbole clearly led to cries over the extermination of all white Jamaicans, and the perpetual fears of Jamaica falling into the hands of the black population had long been a calling card of the defenders of brutal repressive responses. Similarly apocalyptic language had been used in 1760 and 1832, but markedly different in 1865 was the specific response of the public to the execution of one of the alleged ringleaders, George William Gordon.

In 1760 the British press had endowed certain victims of the state’s violence with a humanity and individuality bordering on the sympathetic, and in 1832 the pro-Baptist newspapers had described a shared humanity between white and black. In 1865 these two trends came together squarely in the figure of George William Gordon. As a man of mixed descent, Gordon represented free people of both races and also served as a figure of political opposition; a vital element to a free democratic society. While much of what was written in the British papers about Paul Bogle related to his brutality or vicious aims, such as the *Ulster Gazette*’s description of Bogle as a man “too well adapted for carrying out any deed, however atrocious and diabolical” and as a “viper.”

Gordon meanwhile quickly became a figure of sympathy and praise, and his relationship both with the people of Jamaica on a political level and his wife on a personal level became matters of public discourse. The *Caledonian Mercury*, holding Gordon responsible for the rebellion in early November, made mention that Gordon’s wife would likely be joining him on the scaffold, and from that news came a series of articles attempting to reclaim the character of Gordon from a rebellious threat to a sympathetic reformer.

339 *Ulster Gazette*, November 25, 1865, (BNA).
This came most dramatically in a letter written by Gordon to his wife on the eve of his
execution published by a range of British newspapers. The letter painted Gordon in a most
sympathetic light, and included praise for the British soldiers and a resignation to the “will of my
Heavenly Father.” This was not the language of a viper or a heartless savage, but the calm
melancholy of a noble man off to die for an unjust cause. The language used to characterize
Gordon became not just political but religious. He was a summation of the moral and the
constitutional complaints directed at Eyre, and represented a form of the success of British
colonialism. He was a religiously devout, political active, loyal subject of the crown, who had
been made a “martyr” by the cruelties of the Jamaican government. Reporting on a sermon given
in December of 1865, the *Islington Gazette* reported with “astonishment” that the “meek, mild,
modest, unassuming man was a member of the Jamaican Parliament!”

Certainly this was not universal, and character assassinations such as the vitriolic piece
written by the *Cambridge Chronicle* still attempted to portray Gordon as “a great pretender in
religion” who could “defraud all those who were so unfortunate as to place confidence in
him.” But these attempts appeared in vain; the ambiguity of Gordon, and by extension all
Jamaican victims of Eyre’s heavy hand, was too hard to dislodge. Much of what would occur for
Eyre surrounded the legality of actions, but these were only moderately relevant to the public
debate whirling around him.

The newspapers in Britain were engaged in a debate concerning morality and justice and
race, not nuanced legal interpretations concerning the responsibility of a Governor for his actions.

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340 *Dover Express*, December 2, 1865, (BNA).


342 *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, December 16, 1865, (BNA).
in suppressing a rebellion. While newspapers made certain legal arguments to buttress once side or the other, at its heart the debate raging in the British press concerned the fairness and humanity of the people of color in Jamaica. This debate created two distinct results, the first: while Jamaican people of color were subjects of the British crown they were specifically different from white Britons; and second: these people of color were either victims or victimizers due to that difference. British newspapers faced the question of race more directly and more repeatedly in 1865 than they ever had in 1832 or 1760.

In the aftermath of the Morant Bay Rebellion, Jamaica, Eyre, Gordon and Underhill all featured as key players in a large struggle in British society concerning the role of race, religion and empire. Gordon’s widow, having not been hanged beside her husband, was used as a prop by Dr. Underhill against Eyre, and the struggle between the various factions in the Jamaican Committee over the fate of Eyre played out before the devouring eyes of the British public. The violence of Morant Bay and Eyre’s response represented, to Catherine Hall, a reckoning by the British public of the “broader questions concerning imperial power,” and required a deep review of the role of British power and the presumed place of the white race in the wider world.

The debates surrounding racial hierarchy would certainly not dissipate following Morant Bay, as the Zulu Wars of the late nineteenth century would come to show. And for all the bluster and debate and raging controversy, Morant Bay left very little settled. While it led to significant changes in the role of Jamaica in the British Empire, including the transition of Jamaica from self-governing colony to a direct colony of the crown, the Morant Bay rebellion did little to alter British understandings of their empire. The relationship between race and imperial power was

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343 Hall, Civilising Subjects, 419.

344 Hall, Civilising Subjects., 423.
not yet settled, and British attentions turned to more mundane and domestic debates in short order. Eyre would return to England, but the British courts did not indict him for his reaction to the rebellion, and within thirty years Eyre transformed into a form of precedent both in legal circles, and in the discussion of public discourse.\(^\text{345}\)

The preeminent feature in the public discourse of 1865 was ambiguity. The outbreak of violence in Morant Bay came at a complicated time when the varying strands of empire, race, religion and morality were coalescing in the Mid-Victorian period. The British Empire as a concept was a force in the lives of the British people, but not the only force and by no means the most influential. It was moments like 1865 where the periphery forced its way into the public conscious most dramatically.\(^\text{346}\) But in the cacophony of voices making up public discourse in 1865, it was difficult to form a single strong narrative of what was happening a world away. Though by 1865 communication was faster and more accurate, it was also widely more pluralistic.

Britain was a world spanning empire, and British people were more engaged with the world as a result. Into the bloody wake of Paul Bogle’s march on a meeting of the local vestry in Morant Bay flowed conversations about Fenian rebels, American racial policies, British imperial righteousness and the significance of race. While the 1760 rebellion set the wheels of emancipation into motion and the 1832 rebellion galvanized public opinion against the white Jamaican aristocracy, the 1865 uprising had little permanent impact in public discourse.

\(^{345}\) Articles in 1899 referenced Eyre, both as a figure against whom revolutionaries struggled (Dundee Evening Telegraph, June 27, 1899) and as a legal precedent for colonial rule (London Evening Standard, June 19, 1899) (BNA).

\(^{346}\) Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class 154.
A majority of the British papers here reviewed sided with the forces of law and order, and while many were critical of the actions of Governor Eyre or laudatory for the courage of Gordon, none were supportive of the people of color as a whole. For all that 1865 represented a high water mark for public discourse about race and resistance in Jamaica in the British press, it also failed to represent a watershed moment of any kind. The questions of race, and the relationship between imperial policy and racial resistance were left to future generations to answer.
Conclusion

“Our fellow creatures who are known by the epithet of negroes”

Dr. Benjamin Rush, famed American physician and politician, penned an article on the medical cause of blackness in Africans in 1799, arguing that “our fellow creatures who are known by the epithet of negroes, are derived from a modification of that disease, which is known by the name of Leprosy.” Thirty nine years after the rebellion of 1760, learned Anglo-American thinkers referred to black inhabitants of the Americas as “fellow creatures”; while not a note of brotherly affection it was a scientific and philosophical admission of fellowship.

The British observers of the 1760 and 1831 uprisings shared this kind of interpretation of the Afro-Jamaicans as fellow members of the British public, worthy of sympathy in suffering and understanding in resistance. British newspapers helped to spread these ideas of shared humanity in the midst of conflict and inculcated a sense of reformation among British readers. Though separated by race, class, and the Atlantic, British metropolitans shared in the humanity of the rebellious slaves through these narratives, and played out a debate over what it meant to be a subject of the Crown and a citizen of the Empire. Narratives of suffering and sympathy in 1760, combined with the real-politick needs of a growing empire helped pave the way for the abolition of the slave trade, while the shared struggle for liberty and citizenship in 1831 between black Jamaicans and white Britons buoyed the success of the emancipationist cause. It seemed in 1832 that some degree of cultural harmony could exist in the British Empire.

But by the mid-nineteenth century the narratives of resistance and suffering shifted dramatically. The experiences of a growing empire, the dramatic increase in the presence of and

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resistance by cultural aliens and changing public and scientific understandings of race all
combined to dehumanize the rebels of 1865. Newspapers served as a vessel for the British public
and body politic to debate the role of the Empire, either as a force for civilization or as a moral
example to the world, and in the case of the Morant Bay rebellion civilization won out. The
narratives of 1865 contained a clear shift in language from sympathetic shared humanity to
racially divisive pejoratives.

The use of the language of savagery and the dehumanizing tone of newspaper narratives
cast aside all the gains of the previous century, and left the rebels of Morant Bay, who had
legitimate grievances and were no more or less violent than their rebellious forefathers, painted
in a negative and highly critical light. It is difficult to assign any one influence to this shift,
certainly changes in racial understandings and experiences in the metropole by British citizens
would both have impacted newspaper narratives to some degree. But the clearest indication of
the influence of race on perceptions of the black rebels of 1865 comes with the rhetorical choices
made by the newspapers. Even those newspapers highly critical of Governor Eyre and the
Jamaican Assembly did not hesitate from using the language of animalistic savagery and African
barbarism, it was a clear attempt at tying together the violence of the rebels not with their
grievances but with their race.

For the Jamaicans who rose up to secure for themselves some degree of freedom, power
or rights, things were not so clear cut as race. Jamaican slaves, and free people of color, made an
active decision to engage in acts of civil disobedience or militant violence in an effort not simply
to lessen the burden of their existence but to make substantive change to the society in which
they lived. While black Jamaicans would become, to some degree, subjects of the British
Empire, this was not a guarantee for the actors in any of the rebellions. In 1760, predominantly
African rebels sought to break free of Jamaican white dominion, the idea of being loyal British subject only emerged in 1832. By 1865 the rebels were clearly subjects of British rule and law, but responded to a system failing to ensure security or liberty. This was not a century long struggle for British subjection, but instead a struggle against a series of systematic inequalities.

The sad tragedy in the interpretation of rebellious acts in Jamaican history is that for a time race was not the deciding factor in determining the positive or negative language used to describe the rebels themselves. Black rebels in Jamaica were criticized not because they were black but because they were rebels, and as much ire was directed at the inept or disloyal white leadership as was directed at the justified insurrectionists. But by 1865 the justifications and importance of loyalty gave way to the ugly specter of racism. The rebels of 1760 and 1831 were “fellow creatures,” the rebels of 1865 were savage Africans. By 1865 race determined what it meant to be a domestic subject or foreign object within the British colonial sphere, not loyalty or religion or language.

That newspapers were more inclined to show sympathy for definitively non-Christian African rebels in 1760, and enslaved non-Anglicans in 1831, but not for free British subjects in 1865 illuminates a great deal about the role of race in the mid-Victorian interpretations of the British Empire. In 1760 the British popular voice viewed and described as potential subjects, people who would trade loyalty to the British crown for fair treatment and protection. In 1831 the British press outright named the slaves as subjects of the crown, and called for the protection of the Crown for these oppressed people. But in 1865 this relationship was gone, and with it any real conceptualization of a cross-racial interpretation of Britishness within the Empire.

In 1831 the metropolitan voice called the rebels British first and African second, and in 1865 the roles were reversed. What then can be made of this? Certainly scholars have shown the
dreadful influence of racial interpretations on public discourse before now, and scholars have studied the relationship between white and black in the British Empire in detail. What this study sought to do was examine the methods and rhetorical choices of British interpreters of resistance and moments of colonial crisis, and as such provides a window into how acts of resistance, especially those involved non-white populations, have been interpreted in the past.

This study seems all the more pertinent given the rise of the modern global media and the growing vocal presence of activist organizations and civil disobedience movements in the United States and elsewhere in the Western world. It is difficult, if not impossible, to assign to any one news story or newspaper article an entire shared interpretive experience, people would have received influences on interpretations of the events in Jamaica from other sources including word of mouth and personal biases, states of understanding that are nearly impossible to truly track.

But through an examination of the newspaper narratives this study has tracked the major trends in rhetorical narrative interpretations of resistance to colonial rule in Jamaica. By examining these as a trans-Atlantic creation, and in a comparative context, this study has sought to explore how distance, both physical and temporal, chance have a dramatic impact on the values and definitions given to events.

Britons thought of British subjecthood in terms of rights, liberties and loyalty, and while the British likely thought of other Britons as white, race was not a key element to these early expectations of subject loyalty. What this study did not attempt to do was explore these same concepts from other perspectives, the voice of white Jamaica, and for that matter black Jamaica, was largely absent. Instead this was truly a trans-Atlantic study, a study of how one side of the Atlantic viewed, understood and reacted to the other.
This work was limited by the resources of time and reach, as well as by its broad nature. A more narrow focus in terms of comparative events (say just 1760 and 1831, or 1831 and 1865) would have allowed for both a more detailed analysis as well as a broader scope the sources. More newspapers, more locations and more types of printed materials such as books, plays and advertisements would provide a richer expression of popular discourse on acts of resistance and racial interpretations by the British of subjecthood, and a fuller comparison of these narratives with other interpretations of race and resistance in other contemporary contexts would provide a more unique look at what was special about Jamaica.

At its core this work fits into a larger history of trans-Atlantic interpretation, for most Britons the Empire was something that existed in and around them, but was not something in which they were actively engaged. Most Britons would not have seen Jamaican slaves or understood the various social and political realities of life in the colonies, and so reports back from the far flung outposts of British power would have been their only interpretative lens. Historic public opinion is difficult to track and nearly impossible to prove; we lack Gallup polls for eighteenth century Briton, but popular media most certainly would have had a great impact either in spreading pre-existing interpretations or in establishing new ones, thus the newspaper represents the most convenient and most accessible form of information both for contemporaries and later historians.

It is certain that the rebellions in Jamaica had an impact on public discourse in the British Empire, the countless newspaper reports pay testament to that. But did anyone, outside of those with a real stake in the matter, care? I would argue that the sheer amount of newspaper articles, the newspaper being a medium that only succeeds if people want to buy it, and the growing voice of the pro and anti-slavery lobbies in British politics prove that people did in fact care. Jamaica
was an intrinsic part of the British imagination of the reach of the empire, and violence outbreaks of civil disobedience there would have been on the minds and tongues of British citizens at home.

This study initially began as an examination of the interpretation of Jamaican slaves as subjects or objects in the British imagination, but quickly transformed into something less concrete. Subjecthood is a difficult topic, and one which does not always lend itself to straightforward definitions. While at times the British were unequivocal in their depictions of the slaves as subjects of the Crown, owing loyalty in return for protection, and thus in some ways justified in resistance when that protection was denied. And while legally, and perhaps in the minds of some slave owners, slaves were chattel, objects of possession, it was never so clear cut in the interpretations by the British subjects at home.

It is unlikely that most British metropolitans, with their limited interaction with people of color, could have imagined life in Jamaica. But, for at least a century of British rule in the West Indies the British people tried to imagine what Jamaica was, and came up with a land full of violence, oppression and death. While very few narrative accounts attempted to equate the white British metropolitans with their black Jamaican contemporaries, many, if not most, did humanize and in some way justify the actions of many of the rebellious slaves.

Up until the moral crusade to end slavery in Britain was successful there remained a sense of unease with the situation in Jamaica, a tacit acknowledgement in the British press that the oppressive nature of the slave system was at the root of uprisings. It was only after the British Empire transformed into a beacon of civilizing expansion in the mid-nineteenth century and found itself faced with resistance from colonial peoples across the globe that this unease gave way to indignation.
For a time the British people rhetorically shared more in common with African rebels and Afro-Jamaican slaves than they did with later free British subjects living in Jamaica, and recognized the subjecthood of people who had no rights or freedoms of their own. Humanity and sympathy represented the keys to unlocking a shared understanding of suffering and subjecthood, and when those gave way to racism and resentment, so too did the shared understanding.
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Vita

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