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Waters of Liberation: An Environmental History of Nineteenth-Century Jamaica

presented by

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May 8th, 2023

Waters of Liberation: An Environmental History of Nineteenth-Century Jamaica

A dissertation presented

by

Ryan Joel Fontanilla

to

The Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

History

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

May 2023

Dissertation Advisor: Vincent Brown Ryan Joel Fontanilla

Waters of Liberation: An Environmental History of Nineteenth-Century Jamaica

Abstract

The structural conditions that gave rise to present-day climate refugees of the Caribbean harken back to the history of endemic water and food scarcity in the largest, most profitable, and deadliest slave society of the nineteenth-century British empire: Jamaica. This dissertation explores the inter-generational freedom struggles of enslaved and free Black Jamaicans to meet their food and water needs over time. It shows how ordinary people adapted African and Jamaican material culture and knowledge to deal with the environmental contingencies of daily life in ways which crucially shaped the eruption and outcomes of major events in nineteenth-century Jamaica. I argue that Emancipation must be understood as an environmental event that scrambled the customary rules and power relations governing the distribution of land and water among the Black population. Black Jamaicans learned and taught one another how to take advantage of environmental circumstances and their cultures and knowledges of water, weather, and rainfall in order to accumulate wealth and stay safe through the practice of mobile, semi-nomadic lifestyles. But the resource scarcity that conditioned Black communities to build networks of care and mutual dependency also revealed weaknesses for hostile outsiders—both human and non-human—to attack. By the 1870s and 1880s, the slow violence of environmental enclosure and the fast violence of ecological crises culminated in the near-total enclosure of extant natural resource reserves and the mass expulsion of Black farmers from the rural hinterland. The environmental and hydraulic history of nineteenth-century Jamaica underscores how and why alternative regimes and meanings of enclosure and environmental racism developed in imperial post-slave societies of the Anglo-Caribbean and the broader Atlantic world.

The successes and failures of the last generation of the enslaved and the first generation of free people offer vital clues as to how poor, marginalized, and vulnerable peoples of the Global South today have adapted, and may yet adapt to, global climate change.

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Dedication

To DeAnza, for nourishing my soul and teaching me how to love again.

To Josh and Austin, the best friends I will ever have in this life.

To Mandy, for melting my iron heart.

To every Jamaican who shared their homes, hopes, and knowledge with an outsider like me.

To Robert, Faith, Pauline, Mercy, and Diana, my Kenyan family, who adopted me as their own.

To the Haitian refugees at sea that I could not save.

To my late father.

To the depths of the ocean, where a piece of me will always reside.

Acknowledgements

This project has been brewing in my mind and on the pages for over a decade. Many people gave me their labor, time, kindness, and mentorship to complete it. I am indebted most of all to DeAnza Avonna Cook, my partner-in-crime, with whom I spent countless days, nights, walks, car rides, excursions, and dreams talking through every nook and cranny of this project. My primary advisor, Vincent Brown, took me under his wing and taught me the arts of the historian's craft with the precision and discipline of a master sensei. Walter Johnson, my secondary advisor, showed me how to practice history with a sense of radical charity and spiritual clarity, lessons I will carry so long as I walk the earth. Alison Frank-Johnson provided the intellectual resources to give life and shape to my project while it was still in its inchoate stages, and I have consistently strived to mirror the critical edge as an historian in my own praxis. Joyce Chaplin warmly shared her experience and expertise in environmental studies, encouraging me to approach my study as a means of furthering the mission to achieve environmental justice for indigenous Native Americans and all colonized peoples throughout the world, in the first and last instance. Christine Desan taught me about how financial and legal architectures constrain and enable historical possibility for ordinary people usually hidden and erased by history. Mary Lewis offered key insights in the transnational study of Atlantic history during multiple phases of this project. I am grateful for every moment I was able to share space and time with such a group of indefatigable historians. I will forever be in their debt.

Numerous communities at Harvard supported my work through thoughtful critique. Vincent Brown, Mary Lewis, and the members of the Atlantic history workshop helped me improve my skills and voice as a writer of African Diasporic culture, environment, life, and politics. Liz Cohen, Lisa McGirr, and members of the 20th century history workshop shared their space with a historian eager to connect early modern and modern history together in a unified conceptual framework. Bruno

Carvalho and the folks with the Harvard Mellon Initiative helped me orient the themes and vision of this project to speak to interdisciplinary audiences.

The Mahindra Humanities Center, the Harvard History Department, and the Charles Warren Center each provided key financial resources for me to bring this project to fruition. Their support was indispensable for having the time and financial resources to visit archives in England and conduct fieldwork in Jamaica. I thank them for their steadfast support and belief in the significance of my project.

Dan Bertwell and Josh Mejia were always willing to help me solve every administrative challenge I encountered during my time at Harvard. Their expertise and positive attitudes are unmatched in my professional experience. They are the gems of the Harvard History Department.

Intellectual conversations, festivities, and laughter shared among my peers, friends, and interlocutors helped bring this project to fruition. I shared many hours with Nina Halty and Brandon Mancilla creating a close-knit community of historians. The first years of graduate school would have been infinitely more boring and lonelier without them. Sarah Sadlier, Kirin Gupta, Noah Pinkham, and Nate Grau attentively listened to and engaged with my ideas from the birth of this project to its completion. I emulated the examples of my friends and colleagues Robin McDowell and Bradley Craig to achieve my research and professional goals. Their openness and support helped me keep my eye on the final prize. Chloe Chapin and Jon Booth kindly offered critical comments on numerous chapters of this project, influencing its final form.

Beyond Harvard, Kerri Arsenault, Marsha Weisiger, and members of the Understories Writers' Workshop unlocked my voice and aspirations as a storyteller of human predicaments, loss, and love in a world slowly disintegrating under the weight of environmental catastrophes. Brooke Newman also provided helpful comments on Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

You all will forever have my gratitude.

Preamble

One night about a week before August 1, 1838, the day of final Emancipation, the Wesleyan missionary Hope Masterson Waddell peered out of his window upon the streets of Spanish Town. The clamorous sound of Black joy, laughter, drumming, and dancing cut through the air.

Waddell was annoyed. "L----, a wild fellow, had erected a booth, proclaimed a ball, and gathered a company of loose and disorderly people from all quarters."[1]

Quiet, order, civility, respect for racial hierarchy. L-----'s party contravened each of these ideals—the white man's ideals.

The real insult was that these people were still enslaved. Their blatant defiance against the inviolable law of the whites was too much for Waddell to bear. He dressed himself, lit a torch, and rushed into the street to put an end to the festivities.

L----- must have anticipated Waddell's imminent arrival. When Waddell approached the booth, he "found all suddenly enveloped in darkness and silence."[2]

L----- emerged from the shadows. He proclaimed that if Waddell ever "[came] that way again to spoil *his* meeting," Waddell "should not leave the negro town in a whole skin." After August 1, "he would be as good as me then," and "he would split my skull if I came into his yard that way again."[3]

Waddell returned to his house. The booth was relit. People were drumming, singing, and dancing again.

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[1] Hope Masterson Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1863), 147.

[2] Ibid, 147,

[3] Ibid, 147. Original emphasis.

The festivities continued through the rest of the night into the next afternoon, promising no signs of abatement.

In his defeat, the cowardly Waddell scurried to the local magistrate to beg for assistance.

The constables soon arrived and tore down the booth. The party was over.

L----- threatened to kill one of the constables. He was arrested, tried, and incarcerated.[4] His first day in a Jamaica without slavery was spent in a jail cell.

The meaning of freedom for L----- was not necessarily tied to lofty abstract ideals of unity, nationhood, and making the world a better place for everyone. His meaning of freedom was sharing time, space, wealth, drink, sonic delights, and vibrations with other Black people. The booth was a miniaturized, ephemeral world of safety and sociality that he created and defended in the name of his guests. L----- was done playing the theatrical role of the slave. He would choose how and with whom he spent his precious time with forevermore, the laws of the whites be damned. And he was willing to use physical force to bend the world in his favor.

L-----'s vision for freedom may appear limited and politically ambivalent to those who never experienced the daily indignities and humiliations of racial slavery. But, as the following study reveals, if we situate L-----'s protest in its environmental register, his simple demand to host a party with his chosen family emblematized one of the most radical forms of inter-generational Black freedom struggle in the nineteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic world.

[4] Ibid, 147.

Introduction

Not the Land of Wood and Water

The Accursed Isle

In the middle of 1910, Marcus Garvey collected every shilling he could muster. He was twenty-three years old, landless, and unemployed. He needed the money to book passage on the next steamer in Kingston bound for the banana plantations of the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica.[1]

Marcus would count among the 13,109 Jamaicans who quit the island in 1910. More than 10,000 of them headed for Central America to work on banana plantations run by U.S. agrarian capitalists.[2] Only the healthiest, strongest young men in their working prime were desirable candidates. The workers slashed and burned the tropical rainforest. They trudged through mud and dug drainage and irrigation ditches. They planted and harvested bananas as quickly as possible. When the soil's nutrients were exhausted, they simply moved on to new ground like a swarm of locusts.[3]

Migration off island, as opposed to migration within the island to other towns, plantations, or the agricultural frontiers, offered the best chance for unemployed, landless men to lift themselves

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[1] Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24; E. David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 14.

[2] See also Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 7, 69. Between 1850 and 1914, more than 300,000 West Indians left their homelands to work on railroads, canal construction, and by the early 1890s, to work on banana plantations.

[3] Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat, 25.*

out of grinding poverty. Their mission was to save enough money to purchase a plot of land, build a house, and grow a family back in Jamaica. Many of them never returned home. They died from "natural causes": exhaustion, starvation, disease.[4] Others were simply murdered. A Jamaican man in 1959 remembered that his brother worked the banana plantations in Colon and came home with a pocket full of cash. He went back to Colon on a double-or-nothing bet. A former soldier-turned-overseer shot him dead soon thereafter.[5]

In his youth, Marcus probably envisioned a different life for himself. He was born on August 17, 1887, into a relatively wealthy Black family. Malchus Moziah, Marcus's father, had been a master mason and never felt the chains of slavery. His labor had remained in high demand no matter the season. Black artisans with Malchus' skill usually earned at least two to three times more than a well-paid unskilled fieldhand.[6] He married Sarah, Marcus' mother, who was born around 1845 to a family of independent small-scale farmers. A deeply religious woman, she split her time between church, tending the home garden, and serving as a domestic worker for hire. Through their work and combined income, the Garvey family acquired several plots of land and a fine house on the outskirts of St. Ann's Bay. Friendly Wesleyans facilitated Malchus' land acquisitions.[7]

Marcus had been a rambunctious youth. Looking to teach Marcus the meaning of discipline and hard work, Marcus' parents sent him to work for his maternal uncle, Joseph Richards. Richards

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[4] Ibid, 24.

[5] Anonymous, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the Jamaica Gleaner, 1959, 7/12/140, Jamaica National Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica (hereafter JNA).

[6] Mary Lawler, *Marcus Garvey: Black Nationalist Leader* (High Point, North Carolina: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), 4-5; Grant, *Negro with a Hat,* 8.

[7] Cronon, *Black Moses*, 6; Grant, *Negro with a Hat,* 8-9.

was a prosperous farmer holding tenancy over at least fifty acres of land. Marcus served as his bookkeeper. Richards offered Marcus a substantial cut of the profits—13 shillings per week—derived from the farms.[8]

Marcus' world began to unravel in 1902. Malchus had subscribed to a newspaper for over twenty years, but he never paid for it. After the death of its publisher, Malchus was hit with a £30 debt, which he refused to pay. The state seized a large chunk of the family's land to terminate the debt. Disputes between Malchus and his white neighbors over land boundaries encouraged the latter to use the courts to seize the rest of Malchus' land.[9] In the end, all that remained was the plot where the family house stood.

Dejected over the loss of his life's work, Malchus abandoned Marcus, Sarah, and Indiana, Marcus' sister, to fend for themselves.

Then, Joseph Richards' landlord revoked the lease on all his lands, reducing Richards to a destitute pauper. His spirit, too, was broken.[10]

Marcus struggled to support himself, his mother, and his sister. He bounced from St. Ann's Bay to Port Maria, pulling in income by working in the printing industry. At eighteen years old, he moved to Kingston to work in his maternal uncle's print shop, rising to the status of master printer and foreman. His mother and sister accompanied him.[11]

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[8] Grant, *Negro with a Hat,* 11.

[9] Lawler, *Marcus Garvey: Black Nationalist Leader,* 5, 8; Cronon, *Black Moses,* 6.

[10] Grant, *Negro with a Hat,* 12-13.

[11] Lawler, *Marcus Garvey: Black Nationalist Leader,* 9-10; Cronon, *Black Moses,* 11.

Marcus suffered one catastrophe after another. In 1907, a great earthquake wrecked Kingston. Food availability crashed and food prices skyrocketed. Once the rain fell, the cracks and pits of the city filled with water, transforming the downtown milieu into a disease-infested swampscape. One man remembered that Admiral Davis of the U.S. had landed with a detachment of armed Marines to assist in food distribution and disaster relief. Governor Alexander Swettenham refused because of legal technicalities; "many did not know if a foreign nation land armed forces on British soil it was a challenge for war."[12] Inhabitants relied on British ships to ferry drinking water to the city; those living in Port Royal were allotted but a gallon of water per day.[13]

The next year, print workers at Marcus' firm went on strike. Although he was offered a hefty salary increase to side with the bosses, Marcus cast his lot with the strikers. He was fired.[14]

Sarah died shortly thereafter.

Marcus tried to start his own newspaper, *Garvey's Watchman*. It failed to take off. Marcus was on his own.[15]

Marcus eventually raised enough money to depart Jamaica.[16] Over the next four years, he worked with, and heard the stories of, other men belonging to the second generation of freed Black

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[12] Anonymous, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the Jamaica Gleaner, 1959, 7/12/30, JNA; see also Cecil Levy, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the Jamaica Gleaner, 1959, 7/12/26, JNA.

[13] P. Nelson-Ward to Secretary of the Admiralty, February 5, 1907. Parliamentary Papers [1907], *Correspondence Relating to the Earthquake at Kingston, Jamaica, on 14th January 1907*, 76.

[14] Grant, *Negro with a Hat,* 18-19.

[15] Cronon, *Black Moses,* 12; Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 23.

[16] Lawler, *Marcus Garvey: Black Nationalist Leader,* 15. Indiana, Marcus' sister, also migrated to London to work as a nanny.

Jamaicans driven from their homeland. In early 1911, Marcus founded another newspaper after witnessing a strike led by Jamaican workers. A conflagration in Limon that May inspired Marcus to criticize local authorities for allowing Black neighborhoods to burn. The cops destroyed his press, jailed, and roughed him up. Following his release from prison, Marcus migrated to Panama.[17]

In his future travels to the United States, England, and back to Jamaica, Marcus Garvey wrote and spoke incessantly about the need for people of African descent in both Africa and the Americas to unify. He envisioned the dawn of a great commercial, agricultural, and maritime Black powerful enough to beat white European and American imperialists at their own game. Only then would Black children, no matter where they were born and raised, always have a home, a place of refuge, to call their own.

The Political Ecology of Liberation Dreams

> We declare that we are not taught to go to the woods, or bush, or wilderness, for the purpose of finding dreams; or that dreams are required to determine the progress made in religion, according to character of such dreams; and we declare that we pay no attention to dreams, as the unscriptural so-called operations of the Spirit.[18]
>
> - The Baptists of Sutter's Hill, 1843

Chattel slavery in Jamaica was one of the most violent, racist, and deadly labor regimes in human history. White Europeans monopolized the lion share of the wealth and profit forged in the furnace of Black misery and death. Three to five percent of the Black population perished each year,

[17] Colby, *Business of Empire,* 105.

[18] "Protest of members and inquirers in connection with the Baptist Church Sutter's Hull against 'Remonstrance' of the Presbytery of Jamaica, compiled by Theodore George Blythe; made at a meeting held on Friday the 9th of June, 1843," in John Clarke to James Hume, D/CJL/2/2, The Angus Library and Archive, Oxford, United Kingdom (hereafter ANG).

requiring the constant importation of new slaves from Africa.[19] Chattel slavery also reproduced itself by robbing enslaved mothers (and fathers) of their children, in perpetuity. The endemic violence of slavery engendered a martial landscape in which the fears of whites pivoted upon the ever-present possibility that the terrorism they wrought daily upon the enslaved might boomerang back against the enslavers. From the simplest act of theft or murder to the prosecution of full-scale war—the highest social form of class struggle—slavery and colonialism helped drive whites into an unshakeable state of semi-hallucinatory paranoia and madness. Whites covered up their existential angst with eloquent public discourse about how their science of slaveholding best ensured the security and sanctity of white rule.

The abolition of slavery in 1838 marked a turning point in this history. In the registers of property law and natal alienation, the reign of "social death" expired.[20] At least in theory, Black Jamaicans were now free liberal rights-bearing subjects of the British crown. Unlike smaller, flatter islands like Barbados and Antigua, Jamaica's large size and mountainous topography provided nooks and crannies for Black Jamaicans to continue their tradition of cultivating subsistence and minor export crops on their own account. The scale and scope of production achieved by what contemporaries and future scholars would term the "Black peasantry" was peculiar among other

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[19] Trevor Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 96. See also the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#statistics. These numbers reflect the total number of people disembarked, not the total number of persons deported from Africa for the purposes of enslavement in the Americas. Over this time period, death rates on the slave ships fluctuated from 15% to 40%. See also Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the West Indies, 1680-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 215-17. Contemporary planters pointed to the wide availability of naturally growing fruits as evidence for the ease with which enslaved people could eat without working. But diets high in Vitamin C and low in fat required thiamine/Vitamin B1 to process these organic molecules, which was scarce when corn was out of crop and no fish or pork was available. Deficiencies led to eye afflictions, dirt eating, beriberi, edema or dropsy, and infant tetanus. Intestinal worms also prevented absorption of Vitamins A, B12, and C.

[20] See also Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 35-76.

Anglo-Caribbean slave societies.[21] Black people avoided the brutal labor tempos of the plantation by growing and selling their own food. For the first time since the colonization of Jamaica, the Black population increased by natural means.

This should not deceive us into thinking that life was easy. Quite the contrary. The emancipated started out with a loaded deck. Not a shilling of the debt-financed £20,000,000 indemnity payment dispensed to enslavers for the loss of their fictive chattel property returned to the emancipated. The latter were forced to pay off the principal and the interest through exorbitant taxes levied upon the imported goods they needed to live decently. This debt was not terminated until 2015.[22]

After Emancipation, Jamaica's bosses—former enslavers—could no longer sell, purchase, and immolate their employees—the formerly enslaved—at will. This was crucial. But not one novel positive right for Black Jamaicans was stipulated in the colonial legal code after Emancipation. In the British colonies, Black citizen-subjects were essentially slotted into the same ostensibly colorblind legal frameworks governing the working and agricultural classes of the metropole. On a formal level, the event of Emancipation was *not* an example of *reparatory injustice*. It was instead a negative event which evacuated space of legal prescription and proscription. In these voids of state-power, the planter classes acted under the sign of the state. Free Black Jamaicans were disabled from ever

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[21] See Sidney Mintz, "The Jamaican Internal Marketing Pattern: Some Notes and Hypotheses," *Social and Economic Studies* 4, no.1 (March 1955), 95-103; Sidney Mintz, "The Role of the Middleman in the Internal Distribution System of a Caribbean Peasant Economy," *Human Organization* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1956), 18-23; Sidney Mintz, "Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as Oikoumene," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 2 (June 1996), 289-311. See also Woodville K. Marshall, "Part I: Aspects of the Development of the Peasantry," *Caribbean Quarterly* 18, no.1 (March 1972), 30-46. See also Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 217-20.

[22] See Kris Manjapra, "Necrospeculation: Postemancipation Finance and Black Redress" *Social Text* 37, 2 (June 2019), 29-65; see also Holt, *The Problem of Freedom,* 337. As Holt notes, between 1867 into the 1930s, the Jamaican government derived three-fourths of its revenue from customs duties on imported goods.

claiming sovereign rule over their communities and they country they built with their blood and sweat. "Social death" was reborn in the re-stigmatization of Black Jamaicans as foreign, alien, institutionally marginalized Forever Outsiders.[23] Thus, Black freedom was underpinned by an implicit threat: forgive the whites and forget the past—or else. By the twentieth century, the illusion of a colorblind world manifested in what Horace Atlink calls "the unwritten rule not to talk about race" and colorism in the public sphere. When people of lighter and darker complexions interacted with one another in such spaces, each relied upon unspoken cues and signs to determine who could and could not degrade others with impunity, on the basis of race.[24]

Thomas Holt remains the quintessential thinker of race, racism, and legal subjectivity in nineteenth-century Jamaica. He shows that the least and most liberal British white elites were never truly serious about incorporating free Black people as equal citizen-subjects of the British sovereign. At first, humanitarian missionaries and jurists pretended hope that free Jamaica would prove to their peers that a heterogeneous admixture of Europeans and Africans could coexist peacefully as unequal members in a multi-racial hierarchy. By the early 1850s, however, the steady decline of the sugar industry, coupled with the apparent disregard of Black Jamaicans for Victorian norms of sexual propriety and religion, dashed these hopes. In the aftermath, pro-slavery and anti-slavery fractions of the old order reunited under the banner of anti-Black racism. "Racism became an essential solvent," Holt argued, "for dissolving the otherwise blatant contradictions between liberal democratic

[23] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* 46.

[24] Henrice Atlink, *Public Secrets: Race and Colour in Colonial and Independent Jamaica* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 124. Atlink argues that the combination of Black disbarment from state positions and the reticence of Black Jamaicans to seize the organs of the state to exercise their political and economic rights facilitated the entrenchment of colorblind forms of racism in Jamaican society.

ideology and colonial practice."[25] Planters thus turned to indentured East Asian (i.e., Coolie) labor to compensate for the contraction of Black labor forces after Emancipation. Contemporaries of all political persuasions stood in agreement that nominally free, contractually bound, non-white labor represented the premier labor regime of the future.

Building on Holt's work, Diana Paton's examination of race and carcerality in post-Emancipation Jamaica emphasized how contemporaries interpellated wealth generation among the Black population through a Manichean duality. Free Black Jamaicans might appear respectable, loyal, Christian, and law-abiding on the outside. But on the inside, they remained disrespectable, disloyal, vengeful, superstitious, and lawless. It was not only that unenslaved Black Jamaicans could not be relied upon to work for their former enslavers. Freedom itself also bred Black criminality.[26]

The primacy of race as the arche-determining factor of anti-Black punitive governance and historical possibility resurged with a vengeance. Racialized conflict between whites and people of African descent culminated in what Holt terms the "peasant war" of Paul Bogle at Morant Bay in 1865. Governor Eyre led a counterinsurgent, counter-revolutionary war against them, leaving over 439 (and perhaps as many as 1500) Black people dead and 1000 homesteads burned to the ground.[27] After this event, metropolitan elites and resident planters had all the proof they needed to see that only the threat and actuality of military force could prevent a future race war from erupting between reactionary whites and revolutionary Blacks. Home Rule was abolished in 1866, and Jamaica became

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[25] Holt, *The Problem of Freedom,* 215.

[26] See Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[27] Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 299-302. See also Edward Eyre to Sir James Hope, November 8, 1865, ADM/128/48, Kew National Archives, London, United Kingdom (hereafter KEW). Eyre estimated that as many as 800 people had been shot in the woods by the Maroons, and so it was impossible to ascertain the true death count.

a Crown Colony. People of dark complexion were henceforth practically disbarred from capturing positions of prestige and power in the civil government, no matter how much money and property they held.[28]

Whites soon harvested the fruits of racism and martial terror. As Veront Satchell has demonstrated, by the 1880s and 1890s, the expansionary trends of the Black peasantry entered a phase of reversal. Land sales by established Black farmers started to eclipse land purchases by new Black farmers. Most of these lands were sold to large-scale planter interests, mercantile firms, urban professionals, and institutions. Black freeholders became rarer, and tenancy became the norm. Many aspiring independent farmers gave up the struggle and headed to Kingston for scarce work—or they quit the island, as Marcus Garvey would do in 1910. The dream that, one day, every Black Jamaican might hold a plot of land to call their own and pass down to future generations, was dying.[29]

Historians conventionally ascribe this shift to top-down legal mechanisms of land dispossession. In essence, once Jamaica became a Crown Colony, the Colonial Office obtained the power to reclaim old Crown lands and debt-encumbered lands for the purposes of sale. By 1885, American agro-capitalists, most notably Lorenzo Dow Baker of the Boston Fruit Company, absorbed thousands of acres for shillings to the pound. Reinvigorated by the influx of capital, the planter class mobilized the organs of the state to expel undesirable Black freeholders, tenants, and

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[28] Ibid, 303.

[29] Veront Satchell, *From Plots to Plantations: Land Transactions in Jamaica, 1866=1900* (Kington: University of West Indies Press, 1990), 2, 154; Veront Satchell, "'Squatters or Freeholders?' The Case of Jamaican Peasants During the Mid-19th Century," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 23, no. 2 (January 1989), 175-76. Satchell adds that "between 1871 and 1881, agricultural laborers stood at a constant 74% of the agricultural population while that of ground provisioners stood at 22%. By 1891 and continuing through 1900, agricultural laborers increased to 83% of total agricultural population while ground provision growers – peasants – declined most significantly to 9.9%." See also Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1991), 8-9; and Holt, *The Problem of Freedom,* 339.

squatters from the agricultural frontiers.[30] The wide utilization of Coolies in the sugar and banana industry further depressed the availability of work and the average rate of wages across the island.[31] The resurgence of the plantation complex helped to undercut the hitherto dominant economic position of the Black peasantry in the non-sugar commodity sectors. Those who maintained precarious, and often familial, linkages with those of the rich white and colored classes had the greatest chance of survival as independent farmers.

Marcus Garvey's family initially avoided this fate. But like most Black Jamaicans, they, too, eventually collapsed under the pressure.

There are many low and dirty truths in this traditional narrative. But a set of over one hundred reports collected from the Black agricultural zones of the colony in 1881 tell an alternative story about the decline of Black agricultural power: an *environmental* story. After many years of good weather, the acute troubles began in 1880, when a great hurricane destroyed crops that bore their yields above ground—maize, millet, coconuts, breadfruit, plantains, and bananas.[32] A megadrought preceded and outlasted the hurricane. Root tubers and new plantings succumbed to the unmitigated effects of the sun in a world without rain. The cycle repeated in 1885 and 1886 when another drought struck, followed by a hurricane in 1888.[33]

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[30] Holt, *The Problem of Freedom,* 337, 341-42.

[31] Bryan, *The Jamaican People*, 149-53.

[32] Philip J. Morgan, "The Caribbean Environment to 1850," in Philip D. Morgan, John Robert McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz, eds., *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 108. Millet was cultivated extensively by enslaved farmers because it was more drought resistant than other food crops, and it also provided more calories per weight.

[33] Testimony of J.T. Palanche, April 2, 1897, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III, Containing Parts VI. To XIII: Proceedings, Evidence, and Documents Relating to the Windward Islands, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica,* 301, 307, 425. Hurricane hit Jamaica in 1880-81 and 1888. In these years, the import of

Groups of bandits coalesced to exploit the environmental contingency. They scoured the countryside for prey—whatever remained of Black farmers' crops. Some of these thieves were motivated by hunger. Others had more sinister intentions. Indeed, Black farmers complained to authorities that thieves had even destroyed the *seedlings* of their crops, a symbolic act of vengeance which yielded neither nutritional nor monetary value.[34]

Thousands of Black farmers saw the writing on the wall. They either suspended agricultural operations or they abandoned the land altogether. In their desperation, those who continued eking out a precarious existence in this ruined, desiccating world entertained the resurrection of a technology that harkened back to the days of racial slavery: *flogging convicted thieves in the public marketplace*. In fact, some hoped this exemplary punishment might even take the place of incarceration for theft entirely.[35]

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foodstuffs exploded because locally produced food crops were, as contemporaries claimed, completely lost to the droughts that preceded and followed the hurricane of 1880-81. Droughts struck again in 1885 and 1888.

[34] "Report of the Bishop of Jamaica's Committee on Praedial Larceny, 1881" *Despatches from Sir Anthony Musgrave, Governor of Jamaica, Volume III,* CO/137/501, KEW, 590-602, 612, 623, 631. The Bishop of Kingston was the primary actor responsible for gathering reports about the intersection between theft and the droughts in 1881. A few examples of respondents' claims capture the general ecology of fear. H.J. Kimble wrote that, organized thieves had "severely crippled…the cultivation of all products, particularly food." (612) Elizabeth Coach of St. Ann's (profession unlisted) claimed that "poor people [were] most" affected; "I gave up [farming] on account of thief." (614). Reverend E. Reinke, a Moravian at May Hill, fretted that "Manchester on the road to ruin [and I know] 1000 persons. Theft is the rule. It is cruel to call the crime petty larceny. It is 'death' to honest black people. Thieves are in gangs and watch by reliefs. Men can't supply their wants out of 6 or 7 acres of cultivation. … [I] fear bloodshed if crime gets worse. People desperate." (623) Reverend J. Cork added, "[Theft] is rampant in field, factory, roads, wharf, shipboard. Everywhere sapping industry. … [F]ears of Obeah will prevent masses aiding." (623). Mrs. East of Raymond Hall, St. Andrew's, stated that "Cyclone left little for thieves. A few days ago lost everything out of cocoa field. Several must have been engaged in the robbery." (631)

[35] Ibid, 608-619. The Bishop of Kingston summarized his and his respondents' perspective on the question: "My own opinion is that whipping in prison, followed by a period of imprisonment, is not so much a deterrent than ordinary imprisonment. If whipping is to be continued at all, as a punishment for this crime [theft]…it should be administered in the district where the offence has been committed, and should take the place of imprisonment." Several respondents suggested using the marketplace or the police station as fitting locations for the display of violence. Many also claimed to have held well-attended public meetings with the general black population of their regions, many of which supported the return of public corporal punishment; the "inhabitants of Brown's Town" in St. Ann's Parish didn't approve of Village Superintendents and increasing the police, but "whipping in public in the district" was approved. See also Jonathan Dalby, *Crime and Punishment in Jamaica: A Quantitative Analysis of the Assize Court Records, 1756-1856* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2000), 87. Corporal punishment for praedial larceny was legal for second and subsequent offenders

Thus, it was the *conjuncture* between environmental pressures emanating from the bottom-up and juridical and racialized pressures emanating from the top-down that brought down independent Black farming communities. To understand the progressive closure of the agricultural frontiers from future Black settlement, we must reckon with the environmental conditions and circumstances that both established and aspiring Black farmers faced in their struggle to survive. And in this specific context, the challenges posed by the natural environment were specifically *hydrological* and *meteorological* in nature. The environmental crisis created an epidemic scarcity of not just food, but rainfall and drinking water.

With few notable exceptions, legal, political, and economic histories of Jamaica rarely address environmental change in their analyses, much less the hydrological and meteorological. Resisting this tendency to grasp the meaning of the 1880s raises new, pressing questions concerning the vexed relationship between water and land access that reach back to the unresolved dilemmas of slavery and Emancipation. How did Black Jamaicans meet both food and water needs over time? What role did conflicts over water and land play in shaping axes of competition and cooperation among whites and Black Jamaicans? What place did freshwater and rain hold in the cultural and spiritual categories that Black Jamaicans appropriated to survive and thrive in a congenitally racist society? If Black farmers grew and flourished for over four decades after Emancipation, how did they historically deal with droughts—and, more importantly, endemic water scarcity? How did they manage to defend themselves, their families and friends, their homes, and their property from shadowy agents, both human and non-human, for so long?

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by at least the 1850s, though, according to Jonathan Dalby, it was seldom practiced outside of the context of martial law. By 1864, whipping returned as a punishment for first time offenders for praedial larceny.

Waters of Liberation: An Environmental History of Nineteenth-Century Jamaica addresses these questions by examining the inter-generational freedom struggles of Black Jamaicans for water and food sovereignty. These struggles were never exclusively about the seizure of political and economic rights in the key of liberalism. They were also always inexorably intertwined with making and enforcing claims over ecology and nature. I argue that Emancipation in Jamaica must be understood as an environmental event that scattered the preexisting power relations and customary rules hitherto governing the distribution of natural resources among the Black population. The slaveowners of yore had always relied on the enclosure of land and water to ensure that the enslaved, as a class, would never have enough access to land, food, and water to sustain autonomous communities over time. Post-Emancipation white planters readapted this tradition to deter Black escape from plantation space. It galvanized new ecological social struggles from above and below to steal, hoard, selectively share, and ruthlessly defend access to water, food, and land.

Drawing on an extensive and eclectic range of sources, including government correspondence, printed contemporary works, planters' and missionaries' diaries, newspapers, and folklore, *Waters of Liberation* tells the story of how enslaved and free Black Jamaicans drew upon African and Creole traditions of water use, agriculture warfare, and diplomacy to recapture land and water on their own terms. Centering Black relations with the natural environment highlights the temporal rhythms and flows that governed the diurnal and the weekly, the foundations occasions through which history took place in the lives of everyday Black Jamaicans. It uncovers the potency of the most ordinary people—water gatherers, sugar workers, mothers and fathers, farmers and fisherman, ritual practitioners, thieves, strikers and strikebreakers, rioters and rebels—as world-making actors in the minor and major events that shaped the environmental future of nineteenth-century Jamaica. By rite and right of custom, they held whites and one another to their words and

promises. And they were prepared to employ political violence against anyone who violated their covenants.

Of course, the nature of the archive presents several challenges to investigate the precise ways in which Black Jamaicans related to rainfall, freshwater, and their natural environment. There *aren't any boxes* in the archives conveniently labeled "water," "drought," or "ecology." Water and food scarcity were so banal and quotidian that white contemporaries documented them primarily during moments of acute crisis—interruptions in maritime commerce, hurricanes, famine, and droughts. When those contemporaries documented Black voices, the former interpellated the latter's words, ideas, and perspectives on the natural world through economic and political categories like wages, taxes, and property—things that white people could understand. In this reading, water possessed no independent status in Black freedom struggles for access to land and jobs. This can give the mistaken impression that Black Jamaicans didn't think or talk about water beyond a framework of conventional liberalism.

Waters of Liberation employs alternative conceptual frameworks drawn from the natural sciences, Black ecologies, carceral studies, archaeology, and anthropology to disrupt this myth. Our mission to understand the politics of water and food before, during, and after moments of environmental crisis is one of reverse engineering. *Waters of Liberation* effectively rewrites the environment and material culture back into our understanding of political and economic structures of oppression and resistance. Conversely, natural phenomena that appear largely independent and immune to human manipulation and control must be resituated immediately into their cultural, political, and economic contexts. When political and economic pressures pushed free Black people off their ancestral homelands on the plantations and pulled them toward the agricultural frontiers, for example, environmental pressures constantly threatened to push Black farmers off their lands and pull them back to the plantations or toward the burgeoning urban milieu—and even beyond

Jamaica. In other words, *Waters of Liberation* refuses to treat one domain as intelligible without reference to other domains.

Doing so reveals that Black Jamaicans practiced what I think of as "land holism." In essence, every time Black people thought about land—building homes and farms on it, renting and buying it, moving across it—they had no choice but to factor the variables of (1) water access and (2) defensibility into their settlement decisions and mobility strategies. By meeting land, water, and defense imperatives simultaneously, Black Jamaicans helped create and exploit cracks and fissures in the edifice of white rule. It was through these breeches that Black Jamaicans claimed and enforced political and economic power to create semi-autonomous communities, not the other way around.

Ultimately, *Waters of Liberation* strives to illuminate the core political, ecological, and hydrological determinants which governed patterns, strategies, and practices of Black migration and settlement within Jamaica during the nineteenth century. As we shall see, it took the slow- and fast-moving organized destruction of Black livelihoods by environmental, judicial, and extra-judicial means to corrode and topple the collective power of Black people to meet food and water needs on their own terms. White planters, the colonial courts, tax-collectors, and the police and prisons played important roles in this process. But without taking advantage of environmental flux and crisis, these institutions alone were incapable of smashing the water-based freedom dreams of Black Jamaicans. The ways in which Black Jamaicans of the present confront the pernicious effects of modern global climate change reach back to the lived experiences and historical memories of their ancestors, in both slavery and freedom, against the concatenation of anti-Black racism, economic dislocation, and environmental catastrophe in the past.

Waters of Life, Waters of Death

Jamaica derived its English appellation from *Xaymaca,* the Taino-Arawak word for land of wood and water. Contemporaries' accounts of Jamaica tended to portray the island as a water-rich, tropical paradise where fruit and carbohydrate-rich crops grew with little human intervention. They give the impression that freshwater scarcity and years of little rainfall were somehow abnormal and unexpected episodes in Jamaica's historical development. Modern-day tourists, who stick to all-inclusive resorts with constant water twenty-four hours a day or go on eco-excursions to the rain-soaked mountains, help to perpetuate this ideology of limitless hydrological bounty.

The Taino knew better. Wide swaths of the southern savannas and alluvial plains were, in fact, subject to long periods without rainfall. In some areas, freshwater streams and rivers might be separated by tens of miles. Taino settlements thus hugged the coastlines near steep mountains where spiritually meaningful water caves and fissures in the earth spit freshwaters out to meander downstream to human and non-human animal populations. People did not live in the drought-prone forested, swampy, and hilly areas of the rain shadow (e.g., the present-day southern coasts and Santa Cruz mountains of St. Elizabeth parish, the savannas and mountains in Manchester parish, the Liguanea plains north of Kingston). Instead, they used them seasonally as nomads for temporary habitation, in activities like hunter-gathering and fishing. Traveling without knowledge of where water could be resupplied was a death wish.[36]

Like the Spanish colonizers before them, the first English planters after Jamaica's conquest in 1665 appropriated Taino natural knowledge and then erased it from their subsequent retellings of history. Their installation of plantation monoculture was firmly wedded to the exploitation of

[36] See also Leslie-Gall Atkinson, editor, *The Earliest Inhabitants: The Dynamics of the Jamaican Taino* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006).

existing waterways. As scholars like Barry Higman have expertly demonstrated across his corpus, sugar plantations could not emerge nor reproduce themselves without this constant access to the rivers to manufacture sugar and, over the course of the eighteenth century, to power the water mills. Archaeological evidence at Seville and Drax Hall estate testifies to the general pattern of placing sugar mills and factories as close to riverways as possible to facilitate transporting cane growing on either side of the river, minimizing the encroachment of buildings on the fertile alluvial plains. Planters relied upon rivers, ponds, canals, water tanks, and groundwater wells to hydrate their bonded laborers, which became firmly African and enslaved by the late seventeenth century. Their symbiotic brothers, the pen-keepers, used limestone-rich, water-poor, and drought-prone areas of poor soil for sugar and food crop production at scale as grazing lands for cattle adapted to survive on the low-protein content of native grasses. These properties satisfied water needs for cattle and enslaved people with wells and hand-dug ponds.[37] The absence of perennial freshwater supplies was deleterious for the health of Black people. To survive, the enslaved had to accustom themselves to drinking water contaminated by cattle and bird excrement and corpses.

But unlike the Taino and the Spanish, English agro-capitalists rationalized the space of plantations in straight lines and relatively level grades of elevation. The ideal plantation was situated on flat land, replete with a river and positioned close to the sea to minimize transport costs. Most planters depended on rainfall, rather than expensive, maintenance-heavy irrigation canals to water their crops. After two or three intense crop cycles, cyclical flooding restored the fertility of alluvial

[37] Barry Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1988 Barry Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739-1912* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1998); Barry Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2005); Philip J. Morgan, "The Caribbean Environment to 1850," *Sea and Land,* 32; Douglas V. Armstrong, "Reflections on Seville: Rediscovering the African Jamaican Settlements at Seville Plantation, St. Ann's Bay," in *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica,* edited by James A. Delle, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 85, 87-89.

fields; when practiced, the application of cattle manure was usually unsystematic and inefficient. As more plantations crowded out spaces along major rivers, new planters tried to open space for plantation monoculture at further distance from riverways in more topographically diverse and meteorologically unpredictable lands vis-à-vis rainfall, to a variable degree of success.

The space of the ideal riparian and coastal plantation thus overlapped with freshwater morasses and swamps, which were fed by underground springs, streams, and rainfall. Slave villages were often situated in these wetland zones that held no value for white people except as hunting grounds. In the dominant Galenic tradition, planters associated these spaces with deadly disease-causing mists and humors. As Katherine Johnston has recently shown, Anglo-American planters throughout the period of slavery intentionally did so knowing full well that Africans and Europeans alike suffered higher mortality when exposed to such watery environments. The physical Black body was not, on the basis of fixed, innate racial differences, predisposed to survive these environments better than a white body.[38] Slaveowners balanced the imperative to emplace slave villages in sight of white authority figures' houses while keeping them as close to marginal forested wetlands and as far from arable land as possible.

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[38] Katherine Johnston, *The Nature of Slavery: Environmental and Plantation Labor in the Anglo-Atlantic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 12-13, 193-95. Hence, rich slaveowners like Edward Long and Simon Taylor duly recognized that, under perfect circumstances, all newcomers had to undergo a process of "seasoning"—receiving extra food rations, slowly habituating themselves to new (micro)climates, and being eased into plantation work—to survive. Climatic racism was the byproduct of contemporaries' disavowal that environmental and labor conditions, not race, governed human mortality rates. Of course, I find it probable that most slaveowners, when faced with the imperatives of the planting and harvesting seasons, ignored the idea and practice of seasoning anyway and forced new arrivals to work as fast as possible. See also John McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). McNeill's work reveals the historical potency of yellow fever, malaria, and mosquitos in affecting both major military events and the nature of European and African migration in the Greater Caribbean. In essence, the more non-immune soldiers and settlers that showed up in a given Atlantic colony, the greater the quantity and faster the rate of death among them. Africans and Creoles, due to their exposure to yellow fever as children, when the disease wasn't as deadly, raised the probability to a greater number of their populations would survive. The work of Katherine Johnston offers a critical rejoinder to this perspective. In her view, McNeill-style historical narratives are wrongheaded because they proceed as if there was an inkling of truth to the slaveowners' racialized division of European and African bodies according to their ability to survive disease in the tropical climes.

The enslaved were surrounded by freshwater, but they were unable to access it unconditionally. Their enslavers claimed the exclusive right to withhold and distribute access to these spaces. This power was a cornerstone of slave governance. As Robert Dirks illustrated through the analysis of the Saturnalia and Jonkonnu festivals of the Christmas holidays, slaveowners designed this spatial configuration to create an enslaved population that teetered on brink of starvation and dehydration. The enslaved lived and died every day in a state of hunger and thirst.[39] The science of slaveownership was rooted in keeping Africans in a state of bare life long enough to realize profit, replacing the crippled, debilitated human waste product of this process with a fresh enslaved human body *ad infinitum*.[40] From the perspective of slaveowners, starving and thirsty slaves might run away from the plantation, but they would lack the physical strength to rebel; and starving and thirsty slaves were primed not to cooperate, but to compete, with one another in the battle for daily survival. There was nothing natural about how Black Jamaicans interacted with the natural environment.

Structures of race-based and racist environmental oppression were articulated along the temporality of the diurnal through the enclosure of natural resources. Physical barriers, such as fences and stone walls, blocked access to lands and waters within plantation space. With the permission of the slaveowners, enslaved insiders were permitted to use portions of these waters and lands for their own purposes. Juridical barriers likewise prohibited outsiders from benefiting from

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[39] Robert Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1987). See also Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the West Indies, 1680-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); See also Kenneth Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). This tradition is seeing a resurgence in interest with more concerns about environmental racism. In the 1990s and early 2000s, this tradition fell out of favor due to accusations of environmental determinism and cliometric styles of historical description and explanation.

[40] See Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

unfettered use of the natural resources encompassed by the real abstractions of laws that were both written and unwritten. By selectively withholding and distributing land, food, and water to enslaved and free Black populations, planters sought to preempt the ever-present possibility of mass revolt and the formation of autonomous fugitive communities that could serve as beacons of hope to others. Ruth Wilson Gilmore defined this paradigm as a species of indirect murder qua racism: "the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."[41] The production of premature death through land and water enclosure was never an arbitrary or practical consequence of slavery and capitalism; instead, it was the engine of slavery and capitalism, forged like steel into its very essence. In each chapter, *Waters of Liberation* will illuminate the relationship between the production of premature death, the politics of food and water, and the preemptive prevention of the preconditions for Black insurgency. I term this paradigm "hydroracism."

As Mike Davis showed us over two decades ago with famines in colonial India, Brazil, and China, among other places, there was nothing natural about the occurrence of environmental catastrophes either. The preconditions, processes, and outcomes of hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and droughts were always man-made and artificially produced.[42] Whites and non-whites may have felt the effects of these events upon their physical bodies more-or-less equally. But on the level of the social, these events impacted people disproportionately, in accordance with race, class, and gendered power differentials. In turn, in a socially stratified, capitalist society like Jamaica, natural catastrophes impacted sugar planters by harming crop yields and destroying human and non-human

[41] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

[42] Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts, El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso Books, 2000).

chattel property. But the modus operandi of planters was to redirect the raw, unmitigated violence of natural forces away from themselves and onto the weak, the poor, the racialized and colonized. Empire and capital, by historical necessity, harnessed the primordial energy of nature not only for productive purposes, but to prevent the possibility of would-be usurpers from rising to an equal or superior status. White enslavers didn't just allow hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans in the Anglo-Atlantic world to perish from want of food and water. They also willed it by design, in strict accordance with the moral and martial codes of slaveholding.

The temporality of hurricanes, earthquakes, and flooding possessed their own historical peculiarities. The temporality of their phenomenal action was fast, unfolding and dissipating within hours or days, though the destruction they wrought might take much longer to recover from. By contrast, something like the progressive poisoning of the air with smog and soot or of the soil and water with pesticides, moved along a slower, sinister, and insidious, temporality. The deleterious effects of this kind of slow-moving, attritional, accretional environmental violence manifested far into the future, potentially crossing natural, national, and ecological boundaries. All the while, the first victims of this violence—the vulnerable poor—are ignored until the process affects the rich and imperils capitalism's bottom line.[43]

In a meteorological register, then, drought was the quintessential mechanism of slow violence in slave societies like Jamaica.[44] Based on their estimations, Stuart Schwartz and Matthew

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[43] See Robert Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[44] See Douglas W. Gamble, Donovan Campbell Theodore L. Allen, David Barker, Scott Curtis, Duncan McGregor & Jeff Popke, "Climate Change, Drought, and Jamaica Agriculture: Local Knowledge and the Climate Record," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 100, Number 4, (2010), 883-84; 886-87; 890. There is no universally accepted definition of drought; many definitions conceptualize drought as a mixture of meteorological, hydrological, agricultural, and socioeconomic variables over time. For thinking about drought in its meteorological context, I follow the lead of Douglas W. Gamble, et al, who use quantitative analyses to understand droughts during the twentieth century on local and inter-regional scales, with the ways in which local farmers respond and make meaning of the effects and erratic temporalities of weather at the center. Their approach is amenable to posing new questions about historical contingency at multiple scales: (1) farmers have long rejected planning that coheres with the old sugar-based two primary wet/rainy cycles model in Jamaica (May, early season; September-October, late season), and now plant and gamble for an

Mulcahy suggest that droughts may have destroyed more sugar and non-sugar crops, as well as human lives, than all other natural disasters combined.[45] However, given the hyperlocal variability of the duration, extensity, and magnitude of a drought event, the causal mechanisms are so riddled through with other causal factors—human over-usage of water supplies, over-farming, soil erosion—that it is difficult to isolate when and where they begin and end. The same principle applies to the drought-mediated death of human and non-human animal life, as disease, the contraction of habitats, and competition with other organisms. *Waters of Liberation* does not treat this as a weakness inherent in the concept of drought, but rather an indication of its secret analytical strength. By forcing us to think expansively about time and space qua path-dependence and context, the notion of drought demands that we factor *who in Jamaica was most responsible for the artificial production of endemic food and water scarcity* into our calculus of historical continuity and change.

Recent scholars working in the vein of Black ecologies have shown us that people of African descent could strike back and do something about the slow violence wrought upon them from

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unpredictable April-June wet period, and an August-November primary growing season. (2) scholars must begin to move beyond tracing mere magnitude and duration to include the timing and sequencing of events (dry weather or contraction of water supplies are political-natural by default) and thus farmers' pragmatic responses as to *when* to plant or harvest different crops early or late, in accordance with both economic demand as well as practicality; (3) the two new ranges of wet season, in the historical sequence, are not static and have become longer or shorter in duration or not arrived at all. For information on the relationship between karst landscapes, which covers around two-thirds of Jamaica, drought, and water supplies, see M.J. Day, "Natural and Anthropogenic Hazards in the Karst of Jamaica," *Geological Society of London, Special Publications* 279 (2007), 173-184. For studies on challenges to water risk management among traditional farmers in Jamaica due to climate change, see Sarah Buckland and Donovan Campbell, "Agro-Climate Services and Drought Risk Management in Jamaica: A Case study of Farming Communities in Clarendon Parish," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 43 (2022), 43-61; and Donovan Campbell, David Barker, and Duncan McGregor, "Dealing with Drought: Small Farmers and Environmental Hazards in Southern St. Elizabeth, Jamaica," *Applied Geography* 31 (2011), 146-158.

[45] Stuart B. Schwartz and Matthew Mulcahy, "Natural Disasters in the Caribbean to 1850," in *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean,* edited by Philip Morgan, John McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 36, 189, 216-17, 219-21. For the relationship between extreme weather events, the eruption of major sociopolitical and economic events, and shifts in imperial governance in Spanish Cuba and the Atlantic world, see Sherry Johnson, *Climate and Catastrophe in Cuba and the Atlantic World in the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

above. Kevin Dawson, for example, has painstakingly documented the myriad ways in which Black people were experts of water spaces throughout the Atlantic world. They could swim and fish in places where whites would drown and starve amidst aquatic bounty. They mastered riparian and swampy landscapes to procure food and seclude themselves away from those who meant them harm. Their numbers included skilled canoe makers, operators, and navigators capable of traveling incredible distances, while returning home safely. Across generations, they transmitted knowledge of how, when, and where to use water spaces and locate water supplies to their descendants.[46] When we wed Black ecologies with a careful consideration of what scholars like Jean Besson have taught about collective subaltern political organization, familial ties to recaptured land, and the selective reappropriation of the organs of the state, we are newly empowered to map the water-based activities of Black Jamaicans within a matrices of power that are typically reduced to economic, legal, and political variables.[47] Mimi Sheller's recent work on the role of mobility practices and women in the history of water sovereignty in modern-day Haiti invites scholars to pose similar questions about the relationship between ecological vulnerability, urbanization, and water politics in other Caribbean islands at different points in time.[48]

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[46] Kevin Dawson, *Undercurrents of Power: Aquatic Culture in the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2018). For leading studies that speak to the intersection between the history of water and the history of hydrological forms of environmental racism, see also Mark Hauser, *Mapping Water in Dominica: Enslavement and Environment under Colonialism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021); Sharika Crawford, *The Last Turtlemen of the Caribbean: Waterscapes of Labor, Conservation, and Boundary Making* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021); J.T. Roane, "Black Ecologies, Subaquatic Life, and the Jim Crow Enclosure of the Tidewater," *Journal of Rural Studies* 94 (August 2022), 227-38.

[47] See Jean Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture Building in Jamaica* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 6, 11-15, 19-22, 144, 151, 186, 214.

[48] See Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (New York: Verso Books, 2018); and Mimi Sheller, *Island Futures: Caribbean Survival in the Anthropocene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), especially Chapter 2 and Chapter 5.

Waters of Liberation builds upon the insights of past historical works to tell a story of water politics that unifies the eras of slavery and freedom in a single analytical narrative. Our story must begin with the lived experiences and ecocultural meaning-making practices of the enslaved. In the first act, we explore the shape and contours of the environmental predicaments of racial slavery in Jamaica. Chapters 1 and 2 use the insurrectionist conspiracies of 1823 and 1824 as a vehicle to illustrate the ecocultural and ritual contexts and processes through which individual and collective struggles for food, water, and most importantly, *free time*, unfolded. By setting African and Jamaican histories of war, spirituality, and diplomacy in the same analytical framework, we gain insights into how and why enslaved Jamaicans adapted notions of customary law to *live in practice* like free people did in Africa. The enslaved flexed the threat of armed rebellion to establish networks of mutual aid, fugitivity, trust, and solidarity in ways that constantly traversed and utilized the cultural and natural landscapes and waterscapes of Jamaica.[49] The appeal to custom concerning food, water, and time distribution took place within the same continuum of claims-making over the liberty conduct funerary rites and to bequeath land to future generations, as Vincent Brown has demonstrated. In these contexts, customary law reigned supreme over the colonial law of slavery.[50] I show how *hyperlocal* violations of customary law by specific slaveowners inspired the enslaved to employ armed rebellion as a means of forcing a renegotiation of terms. Demands for the unconditional, universal abolition of slavery emerged organically out of conflicts and alliances that congaled on this scale of the hyperlocal, rather than vice versa.

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[49] See also Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap Press, 2021), 233. Slave war to enforce custom represented a potent form of what Brown calls the "counterterrorism by the enslaved."

[50] Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden*: *Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 91-93, 113, 122-23.

Appreciating the agency of the enslaved in shaping structures of negotiation and alliance between unequal parties brings the inversion of formal law over customary law after Emancipation into stark relief. In the second act, we ruminate upon the polyvalent outcomes of environmental enclosure for both planters and free Black Jamaicans. Chapter 3 examines how Jamaica's planter classes exploited the shift in legal regimes to enclose land and water resources behind legal abstractions, physical fences and walls, and the colonial courts. The penalty for transgressing these boundaries was debt bondage, financial sabotage, and incarceration—the faces of what I regard as forms of re-enslavement. Chapter 4 then illuminates the concurrent development of irrigation, carceral, and immigration fixes as co-constitutive elements of environmental enclosure.

Initially, the affliction of droughts in the 1840s decisively aided planters in this project. But Chapter 4 also stresses that droughts and environmental enclosure in post-Emancipation Jamaica produced unintended, unexpected effects. The emancipated discovered ways to organize collectively and to exploit the droughts after the deleterious effects of below average rainfall spiraled back against the planter class. To secure and defend their lands and water, they adopted modalities of semi-nomadism to migrate and shift political ecological niches as seasonal circumstances changed. A variant of a "counter-plantation system represent[ing] a kind of internal sovereignty" emerged among Black Jamaicans who cultivated both sugar and non-sugar commodities, with the aim of preventing the return of European models of slavery or other forms of labor exploitation.[51] The post-Emancipation order of enclosure provided fruitful conditions to redevelop vernacular knowledges created to survive everyday life in slavery to the dilemmas of Black freedom and the

[51] Jean Casimir, "On the Origins of the Counter-Plantation System," in The *Haiti Reader: History, Culture, Politics,* edited by Laurent Dubois, Kaiama Glover, Nadeve Menard, Millery Polyne, and Chantalle Verna (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 61, 66.

potential for re-enslavement under debt bondage.[52] Rather than creating rootless proletarians, the artificial restriction of land and water access by the planters after Emancipation established propitious conditions for independent Black agriculturists to spread and propagate.

The idea of semi-nomadism overlaps with, but is distinct from, the idea of a "Maroon nation," of the quality that John Henry Gonzalez describes in the post-revolutionary context of Haiti. When Black elites sought to re-create the plantation order of slavery, this nation-within-a-nation found common cause in a politics of "unauthorized landholding and the avoidance of formal commerce and taxation."[53] As Casimir notes, the experience of both enslavement on plantations and ten years of war in Haiti helped transform "the original ethnic cultures…into a single oppressed culture…[which] was common to…insurgent agricultural workers."[54] But freedom and solidarity in Jamaica did not manifest themselves in the same way. Black agricultural communities were composed of both independent farmers and workers who worked for the plantations when they needed or chose to. Thousands of Black people still lived in lowland spaces in relatively close proximity to the plantations. What Black Jamaicans held in common was the desire to be able to move as the day and seasons dictated, to shift modalities of production and income generation, and to steal or destroy whites' and non-whites' property in accordance with the demands of custom and

[52] Ibid, 62.

[53] John Henry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 8-9, 13, 15-16. As Gonzalez argues, it was not that maroon made the Haitian Revolution, but that the Haitian Revolution made maroons. In turn, the fall of the plantation order did not create small farmers in Haiti. Instead, small farmers helped bring down the plantation system. Haiti's history of successive civil wars in the nineteenth century were byproducts of the fight to bring down the plantations and slavery-era labor regimes for good.

[54] Casmir, "Origins," 65.

vernacular justice. Black communities cooperated to address hyperlocal concrete interests, rather than through appeals to a shared racial or class identity per se.

Nevertheless, wide-scale collective actions could and did develop in response to environmental enclosure, which is the subject of Chapter 5. It inspects the environmental and political economic context through which tollgates emerged in the wild parish of Westmoreland during the 1850s. Like other technologies of spatial regulation, the tollgates were byproducts of the planters' failures to stop the growth of semi-autonomous Black communities. No longer able to make profit as capitalists through *production*, the planters increasingly tried to profit through the logic of the landlord: the *extraction* of value from persons who were actually producing things: the free Black population. Tollgates disproportionately harmed both cultivators and water gatherers at the same time, creating a convergence of urban, suburban, and rural interests. In 1859, impacted men and women formed themselves into brigades to purify the tollgates by force from the earth. When people were arrested for it, an army that Frank Cundall numbered at potentially 2,000 people swarmed Sav-la-Mar to ensure those at trial were not punished harshly. This force represented the largest Black army since the Baptist War of 1831. These events underscore that the historically grounded use of war to enforce customary law and serve diplomatic ends was alive and well following the abolition of slavery.

The third act unveils the concatenation of ecological devastation and environmental enclosure in the 1870s and 1880s. In Chapter 6, I use the story of the family responsible for the importation of the small Indian mongoose in 1872 as a vehicle to analyze the devastating, disproportionate ecological consequences this event had on the fabric of the subaltern political economy. Ultimately, the mongoose's reign of terror from the 1870s to the early twentieth century harmed the exercise of Black semi-nomadic practices and boosted the profit-generating capacities of

white planters simultaneously. Planters did not intend for the mongoose to hurt Black farmers; but when evidence quickly appeared that this was happening, they sat back and reaped the rewards.

When the environmental catastrophes struck Jamaica in the 1880s, Black farmers could no longer hold out against these intertwined ecological pressures. The mongoose succeeded in pushing Black farmers from the agricultural frontiers where prisons, police, fences, tollgates, and war failed. U.S. plantation interests and the British colonial state swooped into the power vacuum opened by the mongoose's attacks against Black communities, swiftly enclosing the backlands to deter future Black settlement. The mongoose provided not only a cautionary tale to the introduction of non-native species to foreign climes, but also evidence that environmental mechanisms were needed to curtail the exercise and expansion of Black freedom-making through independent agriculture.

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Marcus Garvey's enslaved grandparents and his free-born parents couldn't have flourished and defended their livelihoods in the first place without figuring out how and where they obtained their daily water and food. The experience of enslaved and free Black Jamaicans is impossible to understand without wrestling with the history of ecological social struggles, from above and from below, over water and food. Ruminating upon the politics of food and water amidst the protracted environmental crisis embedded in slavery and freedom as such offers opportunities to rethink the extent to which radical possibilities for Black flourishing opened and closed in nineteenth-century Jamaica. As *Waters of Liberation* makes clear, the story of hydrological and meteorological change shows that the negation of the viability of independent Black agriculturists was not inevitable, but a contingent outcome of conjoined environmental, political, and economic factors. White planters were never destined to win this war over ecology and nature. Their power was never written in stone, but in the sand.

Waters of Liberation shows that phenomena associated with the contradictions of global climate change—cycles of extreme drought and flooding, climatic volatility, the gross contraction of biodiversity, artificially-produced endemic food and water scarcity—are nothing new for Black Jamaicans. The study of the environmental past may yet provide crucial intellectual resources for Black Jamaicans today to grasp their own freedom struggles for food and water sovereignty along a longer span of time that reaches back centuries. Their ancestors creatively dealt with these issues every single day of their lives. They still have much to teach us about what freedom can and cannot mean in a world cursed by racism, capitalism, and war.

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Chapter 1

Jack's Ascent: West African Culture and Ritual Life in Enslaved Jamaica, ca. 1800

One night between May and June of 1823, Jack and his friend Grog made "an oath upon blood that they would never work again" under the yoke of the enslavers and the humiliating, backbreaking toils of the sugar cane.[1] The violation of this oath by choice or coercion would cause their stomachs to swell and burst in three days' time.[2]

In the early hours of the next morning, Jack and Grog marched to the steps of the house of Thomas Murray, the proprietor of Mount Bernard and Paradise estate in the parish of St. Mary. They wanted to confront Murray before he signaled for the slaves to muster, like a division off to war, with the tolling of bells or the crack of a whip.[3]

When Murray appeared, they notified him of their unbreakable blood oath and awaited his response.

Issuing ultimatums in such ways to state-sanctioned authority figures was a risky play. Slaveowners regularly threatened and enacted physical violence upon those who they perceived as

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[1] Testimony of Mr. Thomas Murray, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Papers Relating to the Manumission, Government, and Population of Slaves in the West Indies, 1822-24*, 105.

[2] Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, Volume 2, Book IV,* 4th edition, (London: John Stockdale, 1807), 67. These oaths could entail the consumption of "Human blood, and earth taken from the grave of some near relation, are mixed with water, and given to the party to be sworn, who is compelled to drink the mixture, with a horrid imprecation, that it may cause the belly to burst, and the bones to rot, if the truth be not spoken. This test is frequently administered to their wives, on the suspicion of infidelity, and the resemblance which it bears to the trial of jealousy by the *bitter water* described in the book of Numbers (chap v.) is a curious and striking circumstance."

[3] James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: James Phillips, 1784), 69. "The discipline of a sugar plantation is as exact as that of a regiment: at four o'clock in the morning the plantation bell rings to call the slaves into the field. Their work is to manure, dig, and hoe, plow the ground, to plant, weed, and cut the cane, to bring it to the mill, to have the juice expressed, and boiled into sugar. About nine o'clock they have half an hour for breakfast, which they take in the field. They continue work until around 11, then they are set loose to fix fences, in the mountains, and fallow or waste grounds, natural grasses, and weeds for the horses and cattle."

defying their will. Making examples of people like Jack and Grog was an ordinary component of slave governance.[4] Like ship captains, slaveowners relied upon physical violence and rituals of debasement—whipping, sexualized torture, solitary confinement—to maintain what they imagined as "good order and discipline," even when it resulted in the death of the enslaved target. The practice of "severe" acts of punishment and retribution were credited with preventing rebellion, whereas "cruel" violence was sure to lead to mutiny.[5] Based on the observations of Benjamin MacMahon, an itinerant white bookkeeper, the planters of St. Mary's had a reputation for responding to declining crop yields with extreme outbursts of violence. "Should anything happen to go wrong on the estate," MacMahon wrote, "this was sure to be avenged upon the head people in a ten-fold degree."[6] Thus, most enslaved people here practiced acts of resistance—malingering feigning illness, theft, setting stray animals loose—through secretive means that were calculated to avoid detection.

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[4] For arguments about the centrality of technologies of violence to "capitalism," particularly related to the "pushing system," and the scientific rationalization of slave death in the U.S. antebellum South, see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 112, 117-18. For arguments that situate the development of slavery and capitalism in political economic, class, and racial contradictions, see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10, 86-87.

[5] My deployment of the idea of "severe" vs. "cruel" punishment as a way to conceptualize the "limits" of violence is based on Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008). Contemporary ship captains and bosses saw violence as a necessary element of maintaining good order and discipline among the sailors, as well as the enslaved. "Severe" violence, taking the form of physical beatings and torture, and death in the case of mutiny, furthered good order and discipline. "Cruel" violence, by contrast, instigated the preconditions and eruption of revolt. In my conceptual schema, the enslaved always placed some kind of speed limit on the slaveowners' violence by running away, destroying property, suicide, murder, and rebellion if that violence exceeded tolerable boundaries.

[6] Benjamin McMahon, *Jamaica Plantership: Eighteen Years Employed in the Planting Line In That Island* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1839), 169.

The incorporation of rites associated with "Obeah" into their protest heightened the danger of violent retribution.[7] In the aftermath of Tacky's Revolt in 1760, planters formally criminalized Obeah in the attempt to prevent its practitioners from conducting the blood oaths through which rebel conspirators bound themselves to one another. These oaths formed the preconditions for any war.[8]

But it was also a cunning strategy. Jack and Grog did not threaten Murray with violent retribution, nor did they insist upon manumission. Instead, they argued that any further labor on their part would be unilaterally oriented toward achieving their own interests and objectives. If Murray denied this claim and sent Jack and Grog back to the fields, he effectively became a murderer. Upon their death, enslaved people throughout the region would share knowledge about Murray's asocial transgression of ritual taboos. Despite their status as slaves, Jack and Grog forced Murray into a no-win situation.

Drawing on court documents, government records, diaries, and contemporary and modern printed sources, this chapter explores how enslaved Africans sought to skew negotiations with slaveowners over the underlying terms of their enslavement, in both expected and surprising ways. It uses Jack's life as an analytical vehicle with which to reimagine how enslaved Africans understood the ambivalent relationship between freedom, slavery, and slaveownership by appeal to the binding force and primacy of customary law, ritual, and reciprocity among unequal parties. I argue that the violation of ritually-protected customary agreements, rather than the endemic nature of slaveowner

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[7] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population*, 109. "For his sentence he [Jack] did not blame white man…he knew that his doctoring was what buckra called obeah. Buckra had their own fashion; in Guinea, negro could doctor."

[8] Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 106, 213.

violence, encouraged individual and collective acts of resistance—from running away to the planning of full-scale revolt. These negotiations unfolded along an alternative set of power relations in which the supernatural and the spiritual assumed priority. As we shall see, Jack, like many other enslaved people, tolerated the predicament of enslavement in Jamaica so long as the enslavers redistributed the "wealth" generated out of war, slavery, and death to their dependents. The enslaved expected and demanded the expansion of free time, income-earning opportunities, and social prestige in return for their labor. Slaveowners, like all rulers and sovereigns, contravened upon this agreement at their own peril. In December 1823, the eruption of rebel conspiracies in the areas surrounding Thomas Murray's plantations would remind the planter classes of this truth.

To grasp how Jack navigated the hellscape of enslavement in Jamaica, our journey must begin with a speculative reconstruction of his life and world as a *free* man in Africa.

Sketching Jack's Origins

The specifics of Jack's past in Africa will forever remain a mystery. He entered the historical record after witnesses testified against him in court for aiding and abetting rebellion in St. George's parish in December 1823. As a byproduct of duress, evidence drawn from his subsequent confession must be approached carefully. These archival fragments nevertheless offer two crucial clues to serve as bases for plausible speculation about Jack's origins in Africa. By pushing our analysis of these clues to their theoretical breaking point, Jack's life can serve as a vessel for understanding how and why enslaved people in general adapted preexisting ideas of cross-cultural exchange, negotiation, and freedom and enslavement to navigate Jamaica on his own terms.

First, Jack claimed he was born and raised in an undefined location of the "Guinea coast."[9] This could have referred to any place spanning the dense forest- and lagoon-belts of West Africa, from the Senegambia to the Bight of Biafra. Between 1790 and 1807, 235,314 enslaved Africans were deported to Jamaica, and the four regions which composed the majority of these people came from the Bight of Biafra (99032 persons, 42.1%), West Central Africa (63208 persons; 26.9%), the Gold Coast (35,991 persons; 15.2%), and the Bight of Benin (9576 persons; 4.7%).[10] In terms of crude probability, and assuming that European slavers were keen to differentiate slaves from the Senegambia and West Central Africa, Jack most likely stemmed from the Gold Coast or the Bight of

[9] "Notes taken by the Bench, at the Trial of Jack and Prince at a General Slave Court, St. George's," April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population*, 105. Jean Baptiste Corberand, a high-ranking rebel conspirator turned King's evidence, stated that "Jack said, having come from Guinea coast, he knew how to do with every sort of obeah bush."

[10] Transatlantic Slave Database, https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database. We might slightly tilt our interpretation toward the latter possibility due to drastic escalation of the scale and scope of the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra after 1770, as well as the relative decline of the Gold Coast as a slave exporter. Between 1761 and 1770, only 2575 Africans were deported from the Bight of Biafra to Jamaica; between 1771 and 1780, that number had grown by a factor of 12, to 31284 Africans. From 1800 to 1807, slaves from the Bight of Biafra numbered 138174 persons, or 40.7% of the total for that span of time. See also Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47. Most enslaved people trafficked into the Atlantic Trade outranked the trans-Saharan trade only after 1600. Between 1600 and 1700, 1348000 were deported into the Atlantic, while 900000 deported into the trans-Saharan trade. The 1700s represented a demographically catastrophic shift, as 6090000 were deported to the Americas, 1300000 were funneled into the Red Sea, Sahara, and East African trade networks. Bight of Biafra had the largest British dominance, 85% of slave ships were British. Annual exports rose from an average of just over 1,000 in the first decade of the century, reaching 3,000-3,500 per year in the 1720s and 1730s. The number of slaves being exported tripled to almost 10,000 per year in the 1740s and 1750s, rising to 15,000 per year in the 1760s, and peaking at 17,500 per year in the 1780s.

Biafra.[11] In turn, as a coastal dweller, I presume that Jack had inhabited a zone at least within thirty to fifty miles of the coast.[12]

Logically, Jack must have been enslaved in Africa and deported to Jamaica sometime before the ban on British transatlantic slave trading in 1807. As Paul Lovejoy has demonstrated, most enslaved men and women in the Americas arrived between fourteen and thirty years old; Jack was therefore probably born between 1777 and the early 1790s and enslaved as a young adult of fighting and farming age.[13] By the time of Jack's trial in 1824, he may have been over forty-five years old, rendering him an elder among slavery's survivors in Jamaica. Bryan Edwards wrote that enslaved people held their elders in "high veneration…prefix[ing] to their names the appellation of Parent, [such] as *Ta* Quaco and *Ma* Quesheba." They also demanded that such persons be removed from the most high-intensity labors of sugar and coffee cultivation.[14] Thomas Murray's deployment of

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[11] I also postulate that European slavers tended to distinguish West Central Africa from other West African departure zones because of differences of seasonal ship flows based on the North and South Atlantic wind streams. This comes with the caveat that enslaved people from one region were regularly transported to other regions of the West African littoral before their final journey to the Americas. On the one hand, "Jack" was often used as an anglicization of the name "Quak" or "Quaco," an Akan name for the day of the week, which could indicate an origin on the Gold Coast. On the other hand, we might imagine, by negative inference, Jack's origins in the Bight of Biafra because contemporaries in Jamaica failed to comment on Jack's Akan or "Coromantee" identity during his trial for rebellion, when jurists and planters historically sought out—even invented—ethnic bases to understand the how rebel conspiracies arose in the first place. They had done so consistently in Tacky's War (1760-63), the Hanover Plot (1776), and the Coromantee-Igbo plot (1816).

[12] I am basing my reasoning on the estimated distance between the coast and the central trading centers and royal capitals of the interior mega-states states of Asante, Dahomey, and Oyo.

[13] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 64. See also Audra A. Diptee, "'A Great Many Boys and Girls': Igbo Youth in the British Slave Trade, 1700-1808," in *Igbo in the Atlantic World: African Origins and Diasporic Destinations,* edited by Toyin Folola and Raphael Chijoke Njoku (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 112. Diptee highlights how most of the children brought from Africa to the Americas were trafficked through Igbo ports. Children were not commonly traded at other ports on the West African littoral.

[14] Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, Volume 2*, 76-77. "The labour required of the men is seldom any thing more than to guard the provision grounds; and the women are chiefly employed in attending the children, in nursing the sick, or in other avocations; but their high veneration in which old age is held by the Negroes in general, and this I

Jack as a common fieldhand in the 1823 therefore represented a flagrant transgression of this expectation for not just Jack, but the broader enslaved community.

Second, in Africa, Jack had been trained and initiated as a doctor, herbalist, and diviner, what I will term a "ritualist-priest."[15] He brought this (super)natural knowledge of healing and harming to bear on his later experiences in Jamaica.[16] As we shall discover below, Jack's fame spread widely among both enslaved communities and white planters in St. George's and St. Mary's parish because he knew from his memories in Africa "what to do [with] every sort of bush" growing naturally around every ordinary slave village of Jamaica.[17] To the uninitiated, these plants were hiding in plain sight.

Irrespective of Jack's enslaved status in Jamaica, his knowledge of African spiritual practices thus marked him off as a person who had received education through the explicit sanction of elders

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consider as one of the few pleasing traits in their character. … Neither is the regard thus displayed towards the aged, confined to outward ceremonies and terms of respect alone. It is founded on an active principle of native benevolence."

[15] Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders, "On the Materiality of Black Atlantic Rituals," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic,* edited by Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 7. Ritualist-priests were commonly divided into two classes. The first, worked "the manipulation and combination of the physical and chemical properties of organic and inorganic forms—rock, plant, animal, water, manufactured objects, and so on." This was done "in order to cause transformative results, such as healing, longevity, or protection." The second category, perhaps more connected to the oracles, were rites of passage performed as transitions—such as the Middle Passage and deportation. For Ogundiran and Saunders, "ritual as the form of material relations that appeals to, appropriates, and manipulates the energies of forces within and beyond physical laws."

[16] For key works in the ordinary and extraordinary lives ritualist-priests led in the Atlantic world, see James Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Luis Nicolas Pares and Roger Sansi, editors, *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011); Joao Reis, *Divining Slavery and Freedom: The Story of Domingos Sodré, an African Priest in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[17] "Notes Taken by the Bench, at the Trial of Jack and Prince at a General Slave Court, St. George's, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 106. The plant matter Jack used in his spiritual practices grew "plentifully in gardens" found in slave villages throughout Jamaica. For ritual knowledge of using herbs and medicines to survive in the forest and bush among Maroon communities in Jamaica, see Kenneth Bilby, *True Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 130-32.

and members of the political-oracular elite. Jack was not an ordinary free trader, laborer, or soldier, but a person occupying a position of social-spiritual prestige. In many African polities, these individuals were not to be enslaved for the purpose of deportation to the Americas but ransomed or retained for domestic enslavement, under the authority of rulers and political oracles as a kind of living sacrifice to the gods.[18] To acquire the arts of generation and destruction without such approval broke social taboo and invited immediate enslavement and sale to the Europeans. His status as a ritualist-priest in Africa also intimates that Jack originated from the Bight of Biafra. In contrast to the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin, where slaves marked for sale to the Europeans were captured through large-scale interstate war, on the Bight of Biafra, deportable human property was drawn from a wider set of "free" subjects—farmers, young male and female civilians, and healers and diviners—people like Jack.[19]

Jack's abilities as a working-class ritualist-priest overlapped with the second class of ritualist-priests found in every African society: the political oracles. Tied to a particular ruling-class lineage, these persons served African sovereigns by advising them in matters of war, diplomacy, and the conduct of necessary ritual sacrifices and festivals for the various deities which governed the seasons, the rains, and the flow of rivers and lakes. The distinction between the sovereign and the oracle was porous and historically contingent, as rulers were apt to aver their authority was rooted in their immediate connection with a given deity.

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[18] Raphael Chijoke Njoku, "Becoming African Igbo Slaves and Social Reordering in the Nineteenth-Century Niger Delta," in *Igbo in the Atlantic World: African Origins and Diasporic Destinations,* edited by Toyin Folola and Raphael Chijoke Njoku (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 105, 128-29.

[19] John N. Oriji, *Political Organization in Nigeria Since the Late Stone Age: A History of the Igbo People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 88, 109. At the beginning of the slave trade mostly cult slaves (*Osu*) and poor and less privileged persons (*Ogbeye*) were enslaved and deported. According to Oriji, the scale of firearms use attending the unrestricted importation of massive amounts of firearms into the Igbo lands by the British, between 1750 and 1807, is indicated by the fact that 49,130,368 pounds of gunpowder were imported during the same period.

War served as the primary vector of enslavement and deportation along trans-Saharan and transatlantic slave trade routes.[20] To be free was to ensure that the polity could move throughout space in the conduct of trade and defend itself from foreign incursions, slave raids, and famine. To be defeated in war was to undergo the ritual of being immolated or being enslaved and either retained for domestic servitude or deported to the Americas.[21] While women and children were favored for retention, adult men captured in war posed security risks for rebellion, making them valuable candidates for sale to the Europeans.[22] Whether they stayed in Africa for a time or were deported immediately, conquerors and traders valorized the enslaved by alienating them from their

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[20] John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 128. See also Sandra T. Barnes and Paula Ben-Amos, "Ogun, the Empire Builder," in *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 47-8. The Benin Empire expanded both southward and northward, toward the Igala and Igbirra of the northern savannas, linking it to the southern terminus of Trans-Saharan trade on the lower Niger. Its expansion was stimulated by the slave trade and control over these trade circuits. the expansion, and later fissuring, of the Benin empire had produced major population movements affecting the Kwale, Igbo, Isoko, and Ijo peoples of the coastal belt. See also Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery,* 80-81 On the Gold Coast, after emergence of Asante, Denkyira and Akyem formed an alliance against Asante and Akwamu. Denkyira was destroyed in 1701, and the remainder vied for control over the gold and slave trade. Akyem then defeated Akwamu in 1730, further narrowing the field of competitors. Asante used its growing power to conquer Bono-Mansu to the north, and then invading the trans-Volta; slaves drawn from these regions powered firearms and credit to defeat Akyem in 1742, By mid-century, Akan wars had devastated the region, accounting for most, if not all, of the 350,000 slaves exported during that time. Exports remained constant at this level for the next fifty years, punctuated by warfare against the Fante Confederacy in the 1780s and 1790s.

[21] Thornton, *Warfare*, 51-52; 70. Men were infrequently and only cautiously retained if they had preexisting links in the area. Akyem, for example, in 1730, had been fighting a long war with Akwamu. But rather than following the precedent of killing and deporting the enslaved, they instead retained the conquered people, attempting to make them subjects. Five years later, the policy appeared successful, but only because Akwamu's leaders were extremely unpopular at the time. The much more common strategy was to deny an opponent's ability to replenish their forces by "eating the country"—selling off as many people as possible. The war continued against the lingering elements of the Akwamu; in 1734, Akyem "all but exterminated" the country, leaving only about 500 families to live as refugees. Thus, a two-pronged strategy emerged: (1) "eat the country" by razing everything to the ground, while enslaving and selling the remainder; and (2) uptake runaways and refugees as free dependents or slaves guaranteed a modicum of protection from captivity *and* deportation**.** In the Senegambia, internal power struggles and civil wars left areas like Fooni and Kombo entirely depopulated of young adult men, women, and children. Local kings on both banks of the river frequently enslaved their own people as internal dissidents, as well as competitors.

[22] Ibid, 135. As Thornton describes, in the Kingdom of Dahomey, "Once when English factor Robert Norris refused to buy some slaves as they were too old, the king ordered them killed. When Norris suggested that they could be spared to work boiling salt he replied that doing this would "set a bad example," and "keeping people in the country who might hold seditious language: that his was a peculiar government, and that these strangers might prejudice his people against it, and infect them with sentiments incompatible with it."

homelands and transporting them to distant lands, where they knew no one and where their past rituals and deities held little sway.[23] The penetration and proliferation of European material cultures, guns and gunpowder, rum, and credit throughout the coastal and interior states and statelets of Africa after 1600, if not before, ensnared African polities in an unavoidable dilemma: (1) take advantage of the trade of human and non-human commodities to the Europeans to acquire enough prestige and money to purchase allies and fund the army; or, (2) in rejecting relations with the Europeans, risk a competitor making the deal anyway.[24]

To maintain sufficient flows of money and food to defend their realms, coastal trading networks forged contingent relations with Europeans and undertook arduous, but lucrative, slave raiding expeditions against weak neighbors and foreign peoples of the interior, who were themselves displaced by war. In turn, interior mega-states, such as Asante, Oyo, Benin, and Dahomey, increasingly relied upon male and female African slave labor to work on plantations in the production of subsistence and export crops (e.g., palm oil), selling a portion to other Africans or the Europeans to generate revenue and meet debt obligations. Save maroon communities, African states and statelets thus maintained their independence by waging calculated offensive wars against vulnerable neighbors and distant polities to obtain, and regulate the traffic of, both domestic and deportable slaves. Indeed, from the standpoint of an African ruler, one's free subjects and one's neighbors were certain to perceive the inability to prosecute offensive actions against allies, tributary

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[23] For a concise survey of major trends and turning points in the gender, age, and geographical dynamics of the slave trade over time, see especially Patrick Manning, "Slavery and Slave Trade in West Africa, 1450-1930," in *Themes in West Africa's History,* edited by Emmanuel Akyeampong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[24] For more on the dilemma posed by the "guns-slave" or "guns-credit" cycle, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113-25, 305. For the rise of the African "fiscal-military state," see Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021), 16, 296-333.

states, and even Europeans, in retribution for insults or the non-payment of debts, as signs of the underlying weakness of the society. Such instances provided potent occasions for internal dissidents and external competitors to replace existing sovereigns and establish new lineages of rule.

The Ritual Landscape of Freedom and War in West Africa

Ritualist-priests like Jack played pivotal roles in maintaining the readiness of African polities—their social and spiritual health—to defend themselves from war. These persons helped govern free and enslaved populations at the local village level by healing wounds, preparing funerals, and overseeing the proper rituals and festivals were accomplished at phases of the agricultural and political calendar. In trials for petty crime, as well as more serious transgressions of social taboo, ritualist-priests performed the oaths to separate guilty from innocent. Due to their scarcity, they were known to travel extensively serving the (super)natural needs of polities surrounding their home villages and capital cities. They did so armed to the teeth, often flanked with a retinue of appointed guards, to fight off state- and non-state sanctioned bandits scouring the countryside for vulnerable targets to kidnap, enslave, and sell to European slavers.[25]

People like Jack were also indispensable in organized warfare. His kind the responsibility of preparing combatants materially for battle. Jack would have concocted and applied poison for the tips of arrows and spears, and he manufactured concoctions designed to protect soldiers from gunshot wounds. (Their power to counter traditional African stabbing, projectile, and clubbing

[25] See also Joseph Hawkins, *A History of a Voyage off the Coast of Africa* (Philadelphia, Ustick, 1797), 79-84. In order for Hawkins to proceed into the interior zones of the Rio Pongo region, his Africa trade partners appointed a number of armed African guides to help Hawkins avoid confrontations with unaligned roving bands of slavers. The abandoned towns and villages Hawkins observed on his journey functioned as security outposts from which to surveil and confuse incoming slave raiders as to the actual location of inhabited villages.

weapons was more limited).[26] The same kind of blood oaths to solidify loyalty and solidarity that Jack would perform in Jamaica were undoubtedly first applied in Africa to soldiers fighting to stay free. Jack might even have had direct experience in combat. By the late eighteenth century, slaving wars had depopulated wide regions of West Africa, and men of fighting age were in high demand. Free male subjects were increasingly conscripted into armies as enslaved or temporary regular soldiers, doubly draining villages in conflict zones of adult men needed for community self-defense against raiders and kidnappers.[27]

But the creation of wealth through slaving war and death was a fickle tool. If the rulers who sought to harness this power were incautious, the violence would boomerang back against them and their free subjects. Hence, enslaver polities forged new relations with "evil" deities who were powerful enough to guard them against the wielders of other "evil" powers. The ambivalent basis of African freedom through the enslavement of other Africans required powerful supernatural beings to translate the destruction of life into the creation of wealth, prestige, and power. But in doing so, sovereigns became inextricably bound, by customary and supernatural dictate, to ensure the riches emerging out of slavery were redistributed at a minimally sufficient level to the free subjects of the realm. This principle applied to rulers of both noble and non-noble blood historically composed of the commoner classes, some of whom had accumulated vast wealth and *de facto* sovereignty through trade warfare and trade links with the Europeans. For instance, leaders of coastal trading network like the Fante Confederacy of the Gold Coast and the Aro Confederacy of the Bight of Biafra turned to people trained and initiated as ritualist-priests to enforce their rule through the binding

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[26] Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa*, 44-45.

[27] Barnes and Ben-Amos, "Ogun, The Empire Builder," in *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New,* edited by Sandra T. Barnes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 44.

force of secret rituals. Ritualist-priests performed blood oaths between contractual partners and taught select apprentices how to identify themselves to peers with occult handshakes, phrases, and gestures performed in specific sequences. The Diola of Senegal governed by keeping their altar hidden from the broader public, while offering the oracular authorities large sacrifices in money, goods, and animals for redistribution throughout the realm.[28]

As the missionary John Clarke observed in 1840, in areas inhabited by the Kru, sailors ascribed their safety at sea on journeys lasting several years aboard European ships to the work of "Kuh, the evil spirit", also known as the "Grand Debelli."[29] Kuh's home was "under a great rock a little way up the River Cavally [Cavalla River]," embosomed by a patchwork of fishing and trading villages. He prowled the subterranean world below, waiting to be called upon through the offer of goods like clothing and amulets (labeled "fetishes" and "gris-gris" in contemporary European discourse) as ritual sacrifices.[30] "Good" spirits were powerless against Kuh, and only Kuh "can ward off evil and procure for them the blessings they desire": the oxen, sheep, goats, guns, gunpowder, rum, and money required to purchase wives and concubines who could never be sold again.[31] After

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[28] Robert M. Baum, "Secrecy, Shrines, and Memory: Diola Oral Traditions and the Slave Trade in Senegal," in Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby, editors, *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139-156.

[29] John Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," Personal Diary, December 12, 1840, D/CJL/1, ANG. "I had a short conversation about the folly of the fetish but was met by the never failing argument, 'It be me country fash. White man hab him fash, so black man hab him fash too.' They are ever ready to sell the fetish if enough is offered to enable them to procure a new one."

[30] John Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," Personal Diary, November 10, 1840, D/CJL/1, ANG. Clarke claimed that such amulets took the form of intricate chains of iron of "native workmanship," whose value was no less than three dollars or two fathoms of cloth.

[31] John Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," Personal Diary, October 31, 1840, D/CJL/1, ANG. Several African sailors were on board Clarke's vessel as normal shiphands. One Fante/Akan person served as a steward. One Kongo boy was the cabin boy. Two Krumen were also aboard the ship. Clarke spoke to the Krumen about their idea of God: "Kuh, the evil spirit to whose care their father's committed them before they left the Grain Coast. They say that under a great rock a little way up the River Cavally Kuh may always be found. They say in broken English 'Grand Debelli' live below the ground, but when we want him, him can hear me, we take him present of cloth; and s'pose one

they ritually surrendered all of their wages to the sovereign upon arriving back home, the maintenance of Kuh's favor required the sovereign to hand back a portion of the offering to the returning sailor. The latter then gave portions of the bounty to family and friends and kept the rest. In disquieting ways, for slaving war to be conducted over time, it had to serve the welfare and strength of the greater public.

Africans like Jack wrestled with the possibility that the European Christian god played a crucial role as an external actor in these failures. Those effects were inseparable from the catastrophic slaving wars that erupted against socially dislocated people as soon as the rains returned. Christian missionaries had instigated the conversion of huge empires like the Benin kingdom under Oba Esigie (1504-40), the Kongo Kingdom under King Afonso I (1456-1542), and Ndongo and Matamba under Queen Njinga (1583-1663), by boosting the attraction of the Christian god in two ways. First, they initially required conversion as a necessary step in trading slaves and guns. In the case of Oba Esigie, his high priest of Olokun, god of the sea, in the port town Ughoton converted to Christianity in the course of conducting diplomacy with Portuguese slavers, while John Affonso, the attache of the Portuguese King, provided the firearms.[32]

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man hab boy go sea; him carry something to please Kuh; den him say we want you to bring back safe me boys—Grand Debilli will do it; and bout two years ago, dat boy will come back safe again.' They said a rich man bought plenty of women but a poor man had but one. This was because of the mark below, when it came to how people were owed power back in exchange for labor. Clarke interrogated them, how the Grand Debelli needed things like a coat or a shirt as sacrifice. One of them quickly replied, 'Yes him do need coat all same as we.'" See also Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," Personal Diary, December 2, 1840, D/CJL/1, ANG. "The Krumen informed me that 'all man he boy until him can buy one wife; den him try to get more; and when him get plenty den him rich and be gentleman." The price of a wife is usually they say 4 oxen, 2 sheep, 4 goats, 2 guns, one barrel of powder, and four fathoms of cloth. Captain White says the price for one bullock is half a barrel of powder, a gun, 2 fathoms of cloth, a handkerchief, a pot, and a cutlass. Or Five gallons rum will buy a bullock. When wives are purchased, they fall into a class of subservience that is like slavery but they could be formally either never-enslaved, manumitted, or enslaved. But these persons could never be sold again."

[32] Oriji, *Political Organization*, 90-91. By contrast, the coastal Fanti people of the Gold Coast were immediately armed by the Portuguese without having to convert due to the need of Africans to help defend the forts at Elmina and lucrative gold trade to European vessels.

Second, Christian missionary-diplomats regaled Africans of stories of how their deity invested its Kings and traders with the ability to harness the raw forces controlling the ebbs and currents of freshwater, saltwater, and wind, as well as to inflict drought, plague, and earthquakes.[33] The Christian god was also an enslaver God—who, as an arch-Creator and Annihilator, unlike African gods like "Yancompoong," took an activist role in meddling in human affairs.[34] Through his prophet Joshua, he commanded the chosen people to enslave alien usurpers of the formerly enslaved Israelites as "hewers of wood, and drawers of water, unto all the Congregation, and for the

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[33] Deuteronomy 8:15. "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought forth water out of the rock of flint." Deuteronomy 28:48. "The Lord will afflict you with wasting disease, fever, inflammation, burning heat, drought, blight, and mildew; these will pursue you until you perish. … [God will] satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." Haggai 1:11. Before the Temple is rebuilt in 530 BC, the book of Haggai describes God's displeasure with his people, announcing that God "called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands." Matthew 27:51-54. "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'" See also Matthew 28:1-4, in regards to the earthquake that occurred during Jesus' resurrection. "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."

[34] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Culture, Products, Laws, and Government, Volume 2* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 378-79. I postulate that many enslaved Africans in Jamaica knew the Enslaver God of the Europeans as a powerful, malevolent, and most importantly, *racist,* being. Edward Long, preferring to see white supremacy in these ideas, could not see the implicit critique enslaved people leveled at this God. Black Jamaicans believed this Creator God was distant and unconcerned with daily affairs, yet this God was "partial to the Whites…[and] takes pleasure in afflicting the Blacks with a thousand evils." This God provided Black people with "nothing but showers, without which the earth would not afford them provisions." Long modified the story by writing that God, of his own accord, ordered Black people to accept gold as a favor, and whites to accept "the knowledge of arts and sciences. … To punish their avarice, it was decreed that they should ever be slaves to the white men." On the Gold Coast, however, another end of the story obtained, one stressing historical contingency and one-ness rather than divine division and divine whiteness. In African tellings of this myth, white and Black people lived together in Africa, at first. The Supreme Creator God (Yancoompong) created a group of whites and a group of blacks. He gave them two calabashes and instructed them to choose. Black people chose first. The calabash was filled with iron and gold, with which they made amulets, weapons, and tools for farming. The whites got the other one. It was filled with paper and writing. Worthless by itself, God then taught them how to read and write upon it. Then he took them to the seashore and taught them how to build ships. Then, they sailed away. When Europeans arrived in Africa in the fifteenth century, it was, in effect, like they were returning home after a long sojourn abroad.

Altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose," rather than murdering them outright.[35] It is essential not to omit from our analysis the attending Biblical passages which determined that the enslaved were forever "cursed, and there shall none of you bee freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood, and drawers of water, for the house of my God."[36] To be a true sovereign, one must enslave others and turn them toward productive ends as menial labor. The real abstraction of perpetual bondage was a function of the debt principle, just as much as the chattel principle.[37]

The exchange of ideas and culture was, however, always bidirectional. Indeed, Africans rapidly *Africanized* Europeans by the early sixteenth century, associating the latter with the flow of waterways as a vector of the foreign trade of human and non-human commodities. The introduction of novel technologies, such as paper and writing, textile production, and firearms and cannon, precipitated a relatively rapid incorporation of Europeans into royal courts of Africans; by 1493, nobles of the Benin Kingdom could don masks representing Europeans at ritual gatherings with the sovereign. Adornment with new ivory carvings, bronze sculptures, and goods either transported or produced by Europeans served as evidence of an African sovereign's global reach and prestige. Africans readily recognized the structural affinity of their maritime and riparian material cultures

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[35] Joshua 9:27. Joshua 9:26 stipulated that "And so he did unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not." See also James Ramsay, *An Essay*, 19, 165-66. For Ramsay, historically, this paradigm of servitude and mastery rang true in all societies. Ramsay argued that European history took a different course because mass Christianization finally stopped the Gothic and Viking practice of enslavement.

[36] Joshua 9:23.

[37] For debates on conceptualizing the distinction between slavery and freedom as rupture and natal alienation, see Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For thinking slavery as a form of "institutional marginalization" in a continuum with other forms of labor obligation, see Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, editors, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, Wis., 1977). For an approach that treats slavery as both rupture and continuum along the axis of debt, see Paul Lovejoy and Toyin Falola, editors, *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa* (Lagos: Africa World Press, 2003).

with those of the Europeans. Their amulets objects, and figures bestowed the protective forces of amphibious and aquatic spirits (i.e., the crocodile) protected them while traversing the rivers and lagoons and conducting trade and warfare. Europeans adorned their ships, bodies, and objects with images of dragons, griffons, centaurs, and mermaids to accomplish the same feat, but at an even greater scale.[38] As Portuguese—and later, French, Dutch, English, and Danish—sail-powered ships rode the winds across vast territories at semi-regular times of the year, European monarchs appeared as knowledgeable adepts in the ways of Olokun, just like African rulers and political oracles.[39] For example, in the early eighteenth century, Thomas Astley watched free Africans of Bissagos Island, near present-day Guinea-Bissau, sacrifice a rooster while aboard a European ship. "The People of his country," Astley remarked, "looked on the whites as the Gods of the Sea." Again, European maritime technology was at the heart of this belief. "The mast was a divinity that made the Ship walk," Astley remarked, while "the Pump was a Miracle, since it could make Water rise up, whose natural property was to descend."[40]

The Africanization of Europeans influenced the violence of sacrifices to the deities governing the occurrence and transitions of hydrological and meteorological cycles. The need for fair, predictable seasonal rainfall to allow for large crop harvests, as well as the replenishment of

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[38] Henry Drewal, "Mami Wata: Arts for African Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas," *African Arts* (Summer 2008), 66. Drewal importantly notes that around the same time that Christopher Columbus spotted mermaids near the coast of Saint Domingue, in 1493, an African Sapi sculptor on Sherbo island off the coast of Sierra Leone was busy sculpting a mermaid statue for a client. This artist immediately "Africanized" the figure by placing two crocodiles beneath her feet, as symbols for preexisting water spirits in Africa. For a monograph length account about the figure of Mami Wata, see Henry Drewal, *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

[39] Ibid, 66.

[40] Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels: Consisting of the Most Esteemed Relations which Have Been Hitherto Published in Any Language, Comprehending Everything Remarkable in Its Kind in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, Volume 2* (London: Printed for Thomas Astley, 1745), 104-05.

rivers and lakes, became even more decisive to African polities struggling to maintain its defensive and offensive capabilities. The principle blame for signs of deterioration would fall upon the oracles and the political elite. This task was daunting. The consequences of failure were social displacement, migration, and enslavement. Multi-year drought cycles throughout West Africa between the 1640s and the middle of the eighteenth century for example, were experienced most acutely in the meteorologically precarious Sahel belt and the arid fringes of the Kongo cultural zone. Droughts and war ruined the economic power and supernatural prestige of local sovereigns and their political oracles. Their enslaved and free populations were compelled to flee into dense forests and steep mountains, areas which had already been depopulated by slave raiding and inter-state warfare between the imperial mega-states. When the weather returned to normal, these populations were unable to hold out against the siege tactics and wars of attrition of well-provisioned regular armies.[41]

In the Asante mega-state of the Gold Coast, the imperative of sustaining a regime of probability skewed in favor of bounty rather than destruction was reflected in the escalation of the scale and scope of violent ritual sacrifices to the deities governing the river Dah. Thomas Bowdich observed how the oracles and King traveled regularly in a party to consult with the deity of the river in secluded upstream zones which commoners were prohibited from seeing. The element of the ritual the public did see was the drowning of persons found guilty of violating taboo in the river as punishment for "a crime of magnitude."[42] At other key moments of the year for trade, war, and crop cultivation, Bowdich observed a mixture of over hundred convicted persons and slaves sacrificed at

[41] Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery,* 29, 71-72, 96; Joseph C. Miller, "The Significance of Drought, Disease, and Famine in the Agriculturally Marginal Zones of West-Central Africa," *Journal of African History* 23, no. 1 (1982), 17-61; Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 139-40, 176, 222.

[42] Thomas Edward Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee, with a Descriptive Account of That Kingdom* (London, Griffith & Farran, 1873), 256.

the river.[43] In the coastal town of Bantama, the blood of slaves flowing from a throat wound was gathered into a large brass pan, along with decaying animal and vegetable matter. The concoction was then poured into holes in the soil so that the yams would grow next season.

This economically irrational practice of immolating scarce labor resources in places like Dahomey, Kasenje, and Asante produced political and cultural capital for the sovereign. Counter-intuitively, a sovereign who negated value in mass sacrifices communicated to the public that that sovereign could do so precisely because their resources and favor of the gods were boundless. Other weaker candidates for rule could simply not afford to immolate labor in the ways that the mighty could achieve without threat to their lineage. Generation bred destruction and destruction bred generation.[44]

The influence of Christian notions of a Supreme deity also influenced the supernatural and judicial landscape of the Bight of Biafra. Chukwu, the head of the Igbo pantheon, ceased his non-interventionist policy in the daily affairs of worshippers and began demanding sacrifices be made directly to him and his oracles, subverting the previous roles of the earth-goddess (*Ala*), other lesser gods, and the village councils (*Amala*). The Aro trade network proclaimed themselves Chokwu's agents, expanding his powers to include preventing or afflicting taboo breakers with blight, pestilence, and infertility. The oracle at the coastal capital of Arochokwu assumed the status of supreme court and arbitrator in disputes over land, trade, and succession. Those brought before the

[43] Ibid, 256.

[44] Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 10-12.

oracle and judged guilty were immediately enslaved and funneled down a hidden road to Europeans slave ships hungry for fresh human cargo.[45]

Jack's Arrival in Jamaica, ca. 1807

Sometime before 1807, Jack arrived in Jamaica. 10% to 20% of his shipmates did not survive the journey.[46] Jack forged lifelong bonds with those who managed to walk on two feet away from the slave ship, irrespective of their previous status as countrymen or foreigners.[47]

We cannot know if Jack had the resources to steer the probability of who would purchase him, but most enslaved people deported to Jamaica were fated to be sold to a large-scale sugar or coffee planter. In 1800, nine of every ten people in Jamaica were enslaved. This far exceeded that of the U.S. (33%), Brazil (30%), and Cuba (50%).[48] The typical enslaved person belonged to units of more than 150 and one-quarter of the enslaved population lived on plantations of more than 250.[49] Most enslaved people brought from Africa were intended as field hands. More than half of the

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[45] Oriji, *Political Organization,* 112.

[46] "The Middle Passage," PBS.org, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html. It is important to remember that mortality rates changed over time, with new technologies of scientifically prolonging life on slave ships long enough for disembarkation to take place. On transformations following the British ban on their nationals engaging in the African slave trade, see Manuel Barcia, *The Yellow Demon of Fever: Fighting Disease in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

[47] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, Volume 2,* 73. "We find that the Negroes in general are strongly attached to their countrymen, but above all, to such of their companions as came in the same ship with them from Africa. This is a striking circumstance: the term *shipmate* is understood among them as signifying a relationship of the most endearing nature; perhaps as recalling the time when sufferers were cut off together from their common country and kindred, and awakening reciprocal sympathy, from the remembrance of mutual affliction.

[48] Barry Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2005), 3.

[49] Ibid, 4.

enslaved population lived on sugar estates.[50] British consumption equaled that of Europe combined, and Jamaica supplied more sugar than all islands than at any period prior to 1755.[51] In 1807, there were 323 sugar estates and 922 other settlements, primarily for coffee, cocoa, cattle, and other commodities. 80,000 head of cattle competed for space for Black people to grow food, as guinea grass, the principal fodder for livestock, occupied large swaths of arid backlands unsuitable for industrialized monocultural techniques.[52]

New arrivals—"saltwater slaves"—were often paired with enslaved people who had survived "seasonsing" and who spoke their mother tongue and had firsthand knowledge of one's homeland. Through a shared appeal to the ritualized humiliation of the slave ship, these groups created new families, "adopt[ing] one of their young country-folks in the room of children they had lost by death or had been deprived of in Africa." By doing so, surrogate parents could claim social prestige and gain material advantages from their surrogated sons and daughters as they took husbands, wives, and concubines and expanded networks of mutual obligation and interdependence. It also served as a vehicle for re-creating African cultural zones across various scales of space, from the village to the neighborhood and beyond.[53]

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[50] Ibid, 10.

[51] William Fox and William Bell Crafton, *An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum* (Philadelphia: D. Lawrence, 1792), 5.

[52] Robert Renny, *A History of Jamaica with Observations on the Climate, Scenery, Trade, Productions, Negroes, Slave Trade, Diseases of Europeans, Customs, Manners, and Dispositions of the Inhabitants* (London: J. Cawthorn, 1807), 89.

[53] Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, Volume 2,* 119. "The strangers too were best pleased with this arrangement, and ever afterwards considered themselves as the adopted children of those by whom they were thus protected, calling them parents, and venerating them as such; and I never knew an instance of the violation of a trust thus solicited and bestowed."

Saltwater slaves needed every support of mutual aid networks to survive the first weeks, months, and years of the sugar plantation. Sugar monoculture was a death machine whose engine and lubrication were provided by the blood and sweat of the enslaved. As Richard Sheridan and Trevor Burnard have demonstrated, the loss of food and water rations or access to the provision grounds was especially costly when the average enslaved person during peak planting and harvesting cycles worked eighteen-hour workdays and received less than 2,000 calories and only sixty-nine grams of protein per day.[54] Mortality rates likely hovered between 3% to 5% per year.[55] In the eighteenth century, at least one-fourth to one-third of imported slaves died within three to four years.[56] Epidemic and endemic disease, malnutrition, daily beatings, whippings, and general terrorism surely contributed to the death toll.[57] Slaveowners were known to hire enslaved hitmen to terminate and dispose of intractable troublemakers quietly, in ways that would mirror death by misadventure.[58]

But Jack initially avoided the brunt of the catastrophic fate that awaited most chronically malnourished field hands on the sugar, coffee, and cattle plantations. Either by chance or by appeal

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[54] Trevor Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 96; Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the West Indies, 1680-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 215-217.

[55] Burnard, *Age of Revolution*, 91-92. See also William Fox and William Bell Crafton, *An Address,* 8. Contemporary slavery reformers recognized that slave mortality was rooted in more than sheer violence. Slaves experienced lives constantly "sinking under the three endemic diseases of our islands, hunger, torture, and extreme labour."

[56] Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves,* 133; 188. Of the over 860,000 African slaves who arrived in the colony from 1655 to 1807, only 330,000 remained by Emancipation.

[57] See also Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Barry Higman, *Plantation Jamaica, 1750-1850: Capital and Control in a Colonial Economy* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2005).

[58] James Ramsay, *An Essay*, 63-64. Ramsay claimed that there were "men among us" who directed watchmen, "as they call it, to *hide* them, that is to *kill*, and bury them. And accordingly, every now and then, some poor wretch is missed, and some lacerated carcass is discovered."

to his past knowledge of how to negotiate with ruling-class elites in higher positions of power, Jack was purchased by Mr. Gordon, a small-scale slaveowner, and educated as a carpenter—as skilled labor.[59] Perhaps his advanced age, his inexperience with plantation monoculture, and evidence of his herbal and medical knowledge marked him off as an extraordinary African who could make money for Mr. Gordon beyond the sugar fields. For at least the next twelve years, Jack worked on Gordon's small landholdings. Gordon may have also rented Jack out as part of a jobbing gang to planters who needed labor as the season or task (especially cane hole digging) dictated. The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807 increased the need for neighboring planters to pool their resources together in order to have enough labor to achieve any cultivation at all.[60]

Meanwhile, Jack managed to acquire his own set of metal tools for wood- and metal-working.[61] These objects were culturally significant as prestige objects that differentiated enslaved people from one another on the basis of class. Carpenters possessed ritually guarded knowledge as agents of creation and destruction. They built, repaired, and demolished homes and infrastructure; and they learned how to break and reassemble locking mechanisms and construct secret compartments to containers, barrels, and walls.

These skills and objects bristled with spiritual meaning. Carpenters and blacksmiths shared knowledge about how to work metal, a capacity associated with the powers of Ogun, the god of war

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[59] The exact location of Mr. Gordon's home or estate is not listed in the archival sources, nor is his first name known.

[60] Hall Pringle, *The Rise and Fall of Sugar Planters of Jamaica, with Remarks on Their Agricultural Management and on the Labour Question in That Island* (Trubner and Co., London, 1869), 11-12.

[61] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Population, and Government,* 109.

and iron.[62] People throughout the West African littoral traveled and shared ideas about the Ogun symbolic complex as a way of understanding the distinction between civilization and barbarism (in the technical sense of a society without a state). Iron working encapsulated the movement of a society from hunter-gathering to civilization and empire.[63] Weapons production was a vital element of not only the formation of mega-states and agriculture, but also the historical militarization of civilian populations which participated, according to circumstance, in defensive and offensive wars. Ogun himself was vicious and fierce, but, as a metaphor for civilization and conquest, responsible for society's most important innovations, he was also just and fair. If appeased, he was tolerant and protective, especially of the poor and dispossessed. His symbol was the mudfish, which represented "the ability to transcend different realms since the fish is believed to swim in the water and walk on land" when the river waters rose in the rainy season.[64] The ascription of amphibious nature to Ogun intersected with the mythic portrayal of Europeans as having been born in eons past from the thick muds and swamps of the African riverways and lagoons.[65]

Iron workers in Dahomey, for example, were explicitly tied to the ruling regime and worked at the behest of the king.[66] They were called to perform annual sacrificial rituals to Gu (the

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[62] Candice Goucher, "Rituals of Iron in the Black Atlantic World," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic,* edited by Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 111.

[63] Barnes and Ben-Amos, "Ogun, The Empire Builder," 39.

[64] Goucher, "Rituals of Iron in the Black Atlantic World," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic*, 111. Among the Basari people, the construction of a new blast furnace for iron smelters and blacksmiths was also tied to the river rites and the seasonal change. Upon completion, a mudfish meal and pounded yam is brought and consumed.

[65] Drewal, "Mami Wata," 68.

[66] Barnes and Ben-Amos, "Ogun, The Empire Builder," 48.

equivalent of Ogun), through the intercession of Gu oracles. In the 1870s, J.A. Skertchly recorded blacksmiths making daily sacrifices to Gu, in the form of water and corn-flour porridge.[67] Political oracles and working-class ritualist-priests in Benin shared a close relationship with Ogun. They provided war charms, defensive tools, and medicines to soldiers, while Ogun filled those soldiers with the fury and bravery to kill and be killed.[68] They also channeled Ogun directly by affixing miniature representations of blacksmithing tools were commonly to the tips of iron staffs. This combination protected the priest as they traveled and accompanied soldiers to battle. On the top of the staff was a bird, representing the priest. Beneath the bird was depictions of hoes, swords, and other iron implements.[69]

Moreover, like doctor-healers, blacksmiths were notorious travelers. Given their transferrable skills, they easily settled elsewhere when signs of state collapse appeared imminent; in some societies, blacksmiths were also protected from becoming prisoners-of-war or being killed. Carpenters like Jack in Jamaica also had opportunities to claim a greater liberty of movement than ordinary fieldhands, as they went from estate to estate repairing fences, aqueducts, the sugar works, and buildings. To do so, he would have carried a ticket which, like any other "fetish" object, immunized him from harassment by lawful authorities for one month at a time as he plied his arts to paying customers.[70]

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[67] J.A. Skertchly, *Dahomey As It Is; Being A Narrative of Eight Months in that Country* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), 387-89.

[68] Bolanie Awe, "Notes on Oriki and Warfare in Yorubaland," in *Yoruba Oral Tradition*, edited by W. Abimbola (Ife: Department of African Languages and Literatures, 1975), 278.

[69] Barnes and Ben-Amos, "Ogun, The Empire Builder," 48.

[70] Bryan Edwards, "Appendix to Book IV," *History, Civil and Commercial, Volume 2,* 162.

On his free time at night or on Sunday, he probably sold his free labor on the market, earning streams of income that field slaves could rarely hope to achieve through licit means.[71] At his trial in 1823, Jack fondly recalled how he had been able to regularly improve his protein, liquid, and vitamin uptake, through the acquisition of "a fowl, a pig, a door mouth, [and] a cocoa head."[72]

In surprising ways, Jack's negotiations with Mr. Gordon along the axis of custom opened spaces for him to reclaim and re-create some of the rights and privileges he had had as a free subject in Africa. The fact that his ritually guarded skills and knowledge grew after enslavement contextualizes Jack's decision to stomach the predicament of slavery. If he could not be free in the law, he would be free in practice—and for twelve years, that was enough. After all, most of his shipmates condemned season after season on the sugar plantation were already dead. Regardless of whether Jack perceived Gordon as a legitimate or illegitimate master, Jack had found a slaveowner who acknowledged the unwritten rules of custom: the requirement to share the bounty and wealth generated out of slavery with his dependents, regardless their enslaved or free status. Gordon demanded labor-power, time, and outward displays of loyalty and obligation, but refrained from supervening on Jack's interior world—his identity—by forcing him to adopt, for example, the moral codes and rituals of Christianity.[73]

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[71] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Population, and Government,* 109. "Since Mr. Gordon his first owner died he had had too much bad usage—bad usage had driven him to this crime [rebellion]. … [Since being sold, he] had never since his [Mr. Gordon's] death known what it was to have a fowl, a pig, a door mouth, a cocoa head."

[72] Ibid, 109. See also Edward Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 400. Long claimed that "Many of the Negroes in this island, the tradesmen, and such as are usually called House Negroes, live as well, or perhaps much better, in point of meat and drink, than the poorer class of people do in England."

[73] See also James Ramsay, *An Essay,* 169. For instance, James Ramsay had once "hired the services of an elderly, sensible man," likely a free person of color, to see if a white man could get by with wage-labor, rather than slave labor. The elderly man worked for a few weeks, but quit after Ramsay insisted that he attend church with him. "He plainly said, he did not love such things," Ramsay wrote, because "he, a negroe, had nothing to do with the prayers of white people.

The Reversal of Fortune, 1820-1823

The precarious customary relationship Jack had built with Mr. Gordon was eliminated in 1819, when Mr. Gordon died. Whatever hope he may have entertained about the prospect of staying at his current residence was quickly dashed when Jack and four other slaves were sold off to cover Gordon's unpaid debts. Jack lost the home he had struggled to create since his arrival in Jamaica.

Tens of thousands of enslaved people endured similar fates. Between 1808 and 1820, 14,156 enslaved people were removed from their surrogate homelands and families so that slaveowners and their beneficiaries could resolve debts. It is therefore possible that, out of a population of 316,132 in 1823, around 4.4% of the Black population had experienced a second re-enslavement and deportation cycle.[74] These victims lost access to their homes, crops, freshwater, funeral plots, and allies—all of the things that made the predicament of slavery worth surviving.[75] Furthermore, the steady introduction of additional labor forces into the "market" helped bolster the domestic slave trade within Jamaica; the total proceeds of these sales was approximately £1,078,924.[76] Slaveowners resisted documenting the sales of slaves to meet debts, so the numbers were likely greater.[77] The

[74] For tabular data, see John Keane to William Huskisson, Parliamentary Papers [1827], *Return from the Provost Marshall of Jamaica, of the Number of Slaves Sold Under Execution for Debt, in Each Year, since 1st January 1808,* 2-5.

[75] James Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (London: John Snow, 1843), 158-59. "The little huts in which they resided, lowly though they were, yet being of their own erecting, the rural spots which they had cultivated around them, and the trees by which they were embosomed, planted by their own hands, and beneath the shade of which they had so often rested from their toils, and especially the circumstance that these spots were hallowed by the tombs of their friends and kindred, would naturally beget attachments of a most powerful, and almost superstitious, character. But from these spots, thus hallowed by affection, thus endeared by all the feelings which constitute home . . . they were likely to be torn away . . . at the caprice of their master, or in execution for his debts— sold to the highest bidder." See also Robert Renny, *History of Jamaica with Observations,* 109. "In many instances, [the law to treat slaves as chattels in probate]" broke up families, "for ever removed from those estates where they were born and reared, are torn from their homes, and cruelly severed from parents, brothers, wives, and children."

[76] John Keane to William Huskisson, Parliamentary Papers [1827], *Slaves Sold Under Execution for Debt*, 2-5.

[77] William Wilberforce, Parliamentary Papers [1823], *Commons Sitting of Thursday, May 15, 1823.*

large-scale slaveowner Simon Taylor noted that his peers commonly considered registers of slave population, the number of manumitted persons, and births and deaths, as "their private property…[which they] are not obliged by any law to divulge."[78] By doing so, they avoided taxation and state oversight into the qualities of their management and governance.

After slaveowners died, the promises they had made to the enslaved, either in writing or in speech, entered a period of renegotiation. The Jamaican Assembly and jurists permitted manumission as a private and customary practice, like inheritance.[79] In our context, the state intervened only insofar as a slaveowner was, according to unspoken rules, proscribed from manumitting slaves in lieu of debt repayment and from manumitting hundreds of slaves at a time, which would have represented a clear and present danger for internal security. Manumission promises served contradictory and ambivalent ends in Jamaica. On the one hand, it kept slaves compliant in their prime working years. If they survived to old age, the promise could be satisfied or reneged upon after most of the profit was already extracted from the enslaved person.[80] On the other hand, th;.e presence of a small fraction of manumitted men and women in everyday life helped bolster internal security, offering slaves the potential—almost always unreachable—of achieving freedom. Manumission was chained to African practices, too. In the coastal Igbo cultural zone, the sovereign bestowed freedom upon the slaves as a gift in exchange for loyal service.[81]

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[78] Simon Taylor to the Earl of Balcarres, February, 19 1800, Parliamentary Papers [1801], *Correspondence on the Slave Trade, 1797-1800, Jamaica,* 18.

[79] Christine Walker, *Jamaica Ladies: Female Slaveholders and the Creation of Britain's Atlantic Empire* (Chapel Hell: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 256.

[80] Ibid, 262-63.

[81] Njoku, "Becoming African Igbo Slaves," 128-29.

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It was not a white, male, large-scale landowner who purchased Jack, but a free woman of color, Jennet Johnston Lyons. From what can be inferred from the limited documentary record, Lyons was a small-scale slaveowner living in an unnamed urban area of St. George's parish.[82] By the eighteenth century, white and free women of color throughout the Atlantic world acted as a class of slaveholders which Christine Walker designates "the handmaidens of empire," who "wielded novel and significant legal, social, economic, and cultural authority, which they enacted inside and outside the household."[83] Slaveholding women inherited enslaved women and children through the death of husbands or family members or they purchased them outright from male traders and sailors. Walker argues that women like Lyons had to remain diligent about "cultivating and performing free status in ways that white women did not," due to their precarious situation as a manumitted person who could, in theory, be returned to a state of slavery.[84]

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[82] Testimony of Mr. Robert Harrison, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 105. The total number of enslaved people that were under her command is unknown, but she owned at least one additional enslaved man, John Ivy, who helped apprehend Jack in January 1824 to face trial as a rebel conspirator. However, textual evidence suggests that Ivy was not rented out for sugar labor, and instead had negotiated a customary relationship with Lyons in which he remained as her domestic worker throughout the year.

[83] Walker, *Jamaica Ladies*, 5. 9. For more on gender and slavery in the African Atlantic World, see Judith A. Byfield, LaRay Denzer, and Anthea Morrison, eds., *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland* (Bloomington, Ind., 2010); and Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, eds., Women and Slavery, II, The Modern Atlantic (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Diana Paton, *No Bond But the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[84] Walker, *Jamaica Ladies*, 13.

But Lyons acquired Jack, an older man by 1819, to work as a common slave.[85] She began her rule by humiliating Jack, ritualistically stripping him of his expensive and irreplaceable carpentry tools. She then banned him from practicing this trade for the remainder of his life. Jack's justification to public authorities for moving with relative liberty about his world ceased to exist. While the sugar crops were out of season, Lyons forced Jack to work as a domestic worker in tasks we can imagine included fetching water, cleaning up refuse, and cooking, slotting Jack into a starkly different gendered division of labor than he was used to as a carpenter. During planting, harvesting, and manufacturing cycles, Lyons rented Jack out to Thomas Murray as a common field hand on the estates of Paradise and Mount Bernard, each large-scale sugar plantations with over 200 enslaved people.[86]

Everything Jack had worked for to secure a safer, healthier life since arriving in Jamaica had evaporated. He may have now been nearly forty years of age, and he was a knowledgeable ritualist-priest and carpenter. Mr. Gordon had known the rules of the customary order, redistributing the wealth generated by slavery in minimally sufficient amounts for Jack to tolerate the alienation of his time and labor-power as a slave. So long as that custom held firm, Jack would bide his time and suffer the indignity of bondage. Without regard to custom, Lyons and Murray, however, now rendered Jack vulnerable to premature death via the diseases, crippling work, and starvation regimes of the sugar plantation.

Over the next three years, Jack challenged his situation by absconding himself from labor, taking flight for days, and sometimes weeks, at a time. He became, as Murray claimed, "a notorious

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[85] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 109.

[86] Testimony of Mr. Thomas Murray, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 105.

runaway."[87] But each time, Jack apparently returned of his own accord, stomached his punishment, and continued work until the next time he ran away. Why did he return at all, given the clear evidence that Lyons and Murray were unlikely to reverse their decision to abuse Jack?

The documentary record provides little insights into what Jack did to survive and how avoided detection during his sojourns in St. Mary and St. George. Coffee plantations dotted the hills, while sugar estates dominated the narrow valleys closer to the coast. But vast stretches of territory on the ridges looking down upon the rivers were unsuitable for industrial monoculture due to elevation, temperature, soil type, and the lack of roads. Enslaved hunters and cultivators of subsistence crops for consumption and sale were the primary users of these spaces; Europeans were unable to travel to these areas without Black guides. The preponderance of areas inaccessible to anyone but Black people, coupled with the propensity of a "great plenty of water" for drinking and farming, Edward Long asserted, had rendered the parish "frequently disturbed with the insurrections of the Negroe slaves belonging to it."[88]

Yet, the lack of dense population was both godsend and curse. Food supplies would have to come in the form of fish, wildlife, and naturally growing fruits. If he discovered a provision ground and took food to survive, he risked raising the ire of their enslaved cultivators, who would invariably demand that their respective slaveowners defend their plots from bandits by dictate of custom. Jack likely went cold and hungry many days and nights. Even when other areas were afflicted by drought and dry conditions, rains were copious in the elevated portions of St. Mary's and St. George's for

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[87] Ibid, 105. See also Testimony of Bannatyne, December 19, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 41. Another slave rebel, Charles Brown of Frontier estate in St. Mary's Parish, had been a cooper and head driver until he was demoted in position following incarceration for petty theft against William Kelly, his captor. The reduction in status angered Brown, who later cast his lot with rebels of St. Mary's Parish.

[88] Long, *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 75.

much of the year. Temperatures could plummet low enough that "few if any of the houses are unfurnished with a chimney."[89] During times of heavy rainfall, Jack had to hold in place and wait for them to stop to continue his journey across the rocky and treacherous terrain. In drier periods when waterholes evaporated, we can imagine Jack following the example of the wild hogs hunted by Maroons, which climbed rocks to drink water from Wild Pines, a species of orchid.[90] (The Trelawny Maroons also copied the wild hogs to get water during the Second Maroon War of 1795).[91] The experience of freedom in this way comingled with starvation and thirst. Desperate runaways like Jack were known to cross through the mountains, making way for St. Ann's Bay to re-sell themselves back into slavery to Spanish traders. They did so on the condition that they be taken to Cuba and manumitted after an agreed upon span of time.[92]

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[89] Ibid, 75.

[90] Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Harper Collins E-Books, 2008 [1938]), 34. "He [the Maroon] can go a long time without food but he must have water. And so if the dogs keep after him he has no time to hunt water. When there is little rain and the waterholes are dried up, he will climb the rocks and drink the water from Wild Pines (a species of orchid). But it takes time for him to find these plants."

[91] Thomas Southey, *Chronological History of the West Indies, Volume 2* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827), 103.

[92] Long, *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 85-86. "The town of St. Anne carried on some trade for mules and cattle with Cuba Spaniards, who run over in one night's time in very small vessels, and not seldom in open boats. This peddling intercourse has been productive of a very signal mischief, which has chiefly affected this parish. The Negroes here, either perceiving the facility of this passage, or (which is most probable) inveigled by the flattering assurances of these strolling Spanish traders, who for the greater part are a thievish race, have taken every opportunity to desert in canoes, and withdraw to Cuba, in hopes of obtaining their freedom: so that several hundreds have, within a few years past, decamped from this and other parts of the North side, to the great loss of the planters. These Spaniards, upon many occasions, have lain under suspicion…even taken them away by force." In the past, they would be baptized into Roman Catholicism and then protected under the auspices of the immorality of returning true Christians to the Protestants. "Such is the pretext by which these rogues, under the cobweb veil of their religion, detain the property of British subjects." Those who fled or were kidnapped had to labor in slavery producing tobacco, breeding poultry and hogs, and making cigars, hats, and other goods, "It may be urged, that our Negroes, having once tasted the sweets of so easy a life, and fraught with the most pernicious superstitions (For example, 'that it is meritorious to kill heretics') would be useless, if not dangerous, if they were restored again to the island."

Without a ticket for travel, Jack slowly mapped out and maneuvered throughout the built environment furtively. Like other fugitives, he probably set up a network of small camps, sleeping by day and traveling at night.[93] Jack adapted the skills he had learned of warfare in Africa to deal with the challenges of avoiding detection and capture. Indeed, as Edward Long unwittingly revealed, the same skills of warfare and tracking enemies and wild hogs in the forest "by the turn of a dried leaf, the position of a small twig, and other insignificant marks, which a European would overlook" clued Jack on what *not* to do as he moved throughout the fugitive landscape.[94] During those weeks and months of flight, Jack learned to interact cautiously with (1) spaces where planter-power was centralized and concentrated, such as the valley sugar estates and the hill coffee plantations; and (2) the "haunts and artifices" known only to other Black people, especially Black and Maroon slave catchers. Fugitives used this calculus to determine "which way they would steer their course, if they pursued themselves."[95] Jack likely applied mixed plant matter and mud upon his body to shield his scent from hounds and slave hunters, staying relatively close to the rivers in order to wade and swim to a new location in case that defense failed.[96]

But fugitive runaways could never truly last more than a few days or weeks in the wilderness alone, without some degree of human contact. Everyone needed to keep old friends and make new

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[93] My interpellation of space through the prism of centers-of-gravity/borderlands/hinterlands throughout this dissertation is derived from Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 72-156.

[94] Long, *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 408. See also Kenneth Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), for descriptions about how, in Maroon culture, Maroons equated the hunting of runaway slaves to wild hogs as a sign of appreciation and respect for their enemies' strength. Both were certain to put up vicious resistance to their capture, and both were able to maim and kill Maroons, unlike weaker forms of life.

[95] Long, *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 408.

[96] Kenneth Bilby, *True Born Maroons,* 136-38.

ones to obtain food and to derive intelligence on the movement of unaligned slave parties and the planters. Hiding out on the borderlands of Thomas Murray's plantations, Jack could have sought aid from his Grog, trading goods, medicines, and foodstuffs available only in the forests and bush. In turn, Jack could have procured additional allies by offering to serve as the latter's spy and smuggler of commodities and news, especially reports of ship and troop movements and rebel plans for war.[97] In addition, at some point between 1819 and 1823, Jack also supposedly managed to marry an enslaved woman on an unknown estate in the neighborhood of Buff Bay.[98] If true, he had done so *without* money and property in the form of provision grounds, hogs, and sheep to serve as the bride price. Perhaps his past life as a ritualist-priest from Africa and his ability to cure illnesses among the enslaved played a role in boosting his cultural capital.

Nevertheless, Jack ended up returning to Murray and Lyons. Seasonal volatility and the collapse of food access during the rainy season probably influenced his decision. Perhaps Jack was simply biding his time carefully, accumulating knowledge and resource depots throughout the region for the most propitious time to escape from Murray and Lyons, forever. But he also returned because, in the aftermath of his third enslavement, he created a new social world based on custom and mutual aid among other Black people that was worth conserving.

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[97] For accounts of how goods, people, and news traveled throughout the fugitive borderlands and hinterlands of slave societies, see also Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2018).

[98] Testimony of Mr. Robert Harrison, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population*, 105. We can infer from the documentary evidence that he married someone during these years because after the insurrectionary conspiracies of December 1823 were unearthed by colonial authorities, Jack tried to seek refuge with his wife. She refused him any aid.

Jack's Escape

Jack and Grog took flight into the bush after Thomas Murray refused to renegotiate in May or June of 1823. They separated from one another soon thereafter. Jack was alone. He struggled for the next six months to survive in the forested borderlands and hinterlands of the riverways. To do so, he tapped the network of allies he built over a three-year period and drew upon that which the enslavers could never rob from him: the (super)natural knowledge he acquired as a ritualist-priest in Africa. He evaded arrest and made a new living by providing his supernatural services not only to enslaved communities, but to the planter classes, throughout the region.

One such place was Mullet Hall, a coffee plantation with a population of around eighty enslaved people, nestled in the steep hills above the mouth of the Buff Bay River. A man only identified as "M." in the documentary sources, either an enslaved or free(d) person of color, required Jack to resolve a personal vendetta. M.'s wife had run off with Charles, an enslaved youth, abandoning all of their possessions and family members. Unable to coax her to return, M. contracted Jack through monetary payment to destroy Charles through ritual means. Jack agreed to the proposal and received Charles's personal items, such as his pair of braces, his hair, and his clothing, all of which were required for Jack to afflict Charles with ruin across space. Instead of performing the death rituals, however, Jack informed M.'s wife and Charles of M.'s plot and begged them not to inform M. of his deception. They did so anyway. Jack once again took off into the forests.[99]

Apparently, his prestige was not harmed by such events. Jack rapidly found a new benefactor in Paul Lamothe Carrier, a so-called "refugee" of the Battle of Cap Francais in 1793 and the

[99] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 108-09.

proprietor of Silver Hill, a neighboring coffee plantation.[100] Carrier hired Jack to heal two women, Antoinette and Suckey, who, despite medical attention by local white and Black doctors, could not recover from their illnesses. We can infer that not only was Carrier troubled by his loss of property; he was also under pressure by enslaved people to rectify the situation because illnesses that failed to kill or abate were readily interpreted as evidence for the working of evil spirits. The situation had clearly degenerated enough for Carrier to ignore Jack's status as an undocumented traveler and a fugitive runaway.[101] Carrier's enlistment of Jack enhanced the latter's social standing as a person capable of manipulating and persuading other powerful ritualist-priests to submit to African notions of obligation and trust among unequal parties.

After Jack healed the two women, Carrier paid him his due wages and did not hinder his return back to secluded camps in the forested borderlands. The news of his healing powers then spread to another coffee plantation, Lovely Grove, the property of Mr. Lafitte. Like Carrier, Lafitte contracted Jack to heal the sore arms of an African-born woman.[102] In the process, he even took on a young man named Prince from Silver Hill as an apprentice.[103]

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[100] Ibid, 108-09. See also "Silver Hill," *Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery,* https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/1600. Silver Hill held 68 enslaved people in bondage at the time of the indemnity payment, for which Paul Lamothe Carrier, the resident proprietor, received £1421 on April 11, 1836.

[101] Long, *The History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 381. Edward Long and other contemporaries held ritualist-priests like Jack in low regard. "[T]he Negroes generally apply them at random, without any regard to the particular symptoms of the disease; concerning which, or the operation of their *materia medica,* they have formed no theory."

[102] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population*, 109.

[103] "Indictment: The King v. Jack and Prince," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population*, 102.

As Jack traveled from estate to estate, he learned that enslaved people throughout the region had determined they would also not endure the dry season of 1824 in abject slavery. Since at least early 1823, "They have taken it into their heads that the King (over the Water as they call George the 4th) has made them free," Alexander Innes noted. "But…Buckra as they term the White Men won't grant them their liberty."[104] This notion that the enslaved had received unconditional freedom worried enslavers not only because it was, from their perspective, untrue, but also because the former's anger was actually based in the claim that whites were consciously preventing the implementation of the laws of the sovereign, from whom all power flowed.

As we will recount in further detail in the next chapter, for many enslaved people, calls for unconditional freedom were rooted in efforts to enshrine custom as the King's formal law. Venus, an enslaved woman at Silver Hill estate, proclaimed that new laws had also been passed guaranteeing the enslaved received Fridays and Saturdays off, in addition to Sunday.[105] This would also entail reductions in the quantum of labor, as "Negroes were only to pick two bushels of coffee instead of three bushels."[106] But if Carrier and his ilk refused to refused their lawful orders, she and her comrades were to arm themselves with "mortar stick[s] to help kill the white people."[107]

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[104] Alexander Innes, "December 30, 1823," *Journal of Alexander Innes of Loanhead,* National Library of Scotland, MS 17956, https://geo.nls.uk/maps/innes/index.html

[105] Testimony of Venus, January 20, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 110. See also Testimony of Jean Baptiste Corberand, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 103. Henry Olivier, who would later become a leader in the rebel army, also seconded this claim, telling the people that "the King had given them Friday and Saturday, and they must have it, or they would take it by strong."

[106] Testimony of Venus, January 20, 1824, *Parliamentary Papers* [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 110.

[107] Testimony of Adele, January 20, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 111.

The example of revolutionary war in Haiti and in Europe (through the Napoleonic wars) had taught Venus that any successful rebellion would have to countenance mass death among the rebel army as a matter of military necessity. "Though he [Carrier] might kill [half of us]," Venus claimed, "half would live to take the country."[108] This association of total war with heightened chances of victory was widespread. Jean Baptiste Corberand, who was to supply the rebel army with guns, ammunition, and gunpowder procured from his contacts in Kingston, advanced a theoretically rich argument to enslaved people at the neighboring estate of Balcarres, claiming:

> [T]he reason why English negroes never succeeded in their revolt was because they had not the same heart as French negroes; when the French negroes fought they did not mind being killed; they were killed plenty, and killed plenty of buckras; those that died, went, those that lived, lived to see the good; and English Negroes must do the same.[109]

We will describe the decisive importance of Fridays and Saturdays to enslaved social health and wellbeing in the next chapter. For now, it is sufficient to note that hundreds if not thousands of enslaved communities already enjoyed one or both of these days off per customary agreement. And those communities in the northern parishes, where the rainy seasons had remained consistent and fair, were becoming increasingly incensed that planters were intruding upon these arrangements, in addition to suspending privileges to hold social dances and gatherings which ritually marked phases of the season. It was this violation of custom that spurred the ultimate decision for hundreds of people to use armed struggle as a negotiating tactic to reclaim their rights; claims that King had already ordered their freedom emerged organically out of these struggles.

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[108] Ibid, 111.

[109] Testimony of Jean Baptiste Corberand, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 103.

By late September 1823, the rebel effort shifted from mere discourse to meeting logistical imperatives for war. The timing of the rebellion was determined to arrive on the night of Christmas, a common trend in slave rebellions due to expanded food resources and liberty of movement that was available during the "Saturnalia."[110] The first intended target was Mr. Learmond, the old bookkeeper who had recently replaced the overseer of Lovely Grove. Following Learmond, they would proceed to Mr. Guilleau, Lamothe's overseer at Silver Hill. After exterminating the whites, they would follow the course of the Buff Bay River and capture key roads and paths in the immediate neighborhood, "whether white, brown, or black, free or slave, who would not join." Like the Haitian Revolution, rebel leaders would, however, "receive into their party whites or browns, if they gave assistance."[111] Only after securing this first territory would they proceed down the river, toward the northern coasts and the sugar plantations.[112] The blowing of shells and the lighting of signal fires would instigate simultaneous uprisings at Mullett Hall, Silver Hill, and surrounding plantations.

The rebels had no hope of achieving this mission without Jack and Prince. Between October 4 and mid-December, rebel leaders on Balcarres estate contracted them at several points to perform the necessary ritual oaths to their armed forces months prior to the planned insurrection. Jack began the rituals by killing a fowl and boiling it without salt. Then, he removed the animal matter and "took the water and rubbed the faces of every one…telling them it would turn the white men's eyes,

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[110] See also Robert Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 1987).

[111] "Notes Taken by the Bench, at the Trial of Jack and Prince at a General Slave Court, St. George's, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 106.

[112] Testimony of Charles Mack, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 104.

[so] that they would not know anything about their musterings."[113] This was followed up by the consumption of "rum, blood, and gunpowder," as well as dirt "taken up from a place showing the print of a white man's foot."[114] Jack and Prince also mixed plants around the slave village, smearing it on soldiers to safeguard them from the bullets of the whites, as Jack stressed that, "in his country…if anyone fired a gun at him he would catch a ball in his hand without it hurting him."[115] After receiving his oath, Henry Oliver, a rebel commander, "stomped his food and said, 'By God you must all stand to the battle,' and all answered 'Yes.'"[116] John Smith, who held the rank of "Major," added "that they must [now] all have one heart, one tongue, one desire" if their war was to succeed[117]

Jack stressed that anyone who broke the oath would die like a common thief in three days' time. By doing so, members resolidified bonds of loyalty and belonging among one another and incorporated new recruits. Jack followed up these rituals with emplacing defensive Obeah objects such as "a small coffin of hair seized from white men in the King's road" at juncture points to the village. "When the white people rode by they would fall and break their necks."[118]

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[113] Testimony of Jean Baptiste Corberand, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 103. These rituals "would strengthen them, and deaden the white people when they came up to them, so that they could do them no harm."

[114] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 109.

[115] Testimony of Jean Baptiste Corberand, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 104.

[116] Ibid, 103.

[117] Ibid, 104.

[118] Ibid, 104.

By early December, like the political oracles in Africa who legitimated the rule of persons with and without noble blood, Jack oversaw the rites that elevated James Thompson to the position of the new King. Thompson rode through the village on a donkey to a cheering crowd, followed by the sharing of food and drink and the playing of the fifes and drums in his house and yard, which was filled with over one hundred people. His first official proclamation as King was the granting of all persons Fridays and Saturdays off.[119]

Later that day, Thompson called on Jack for counsel over the probability of their victory. Jack placed four wooden figures resembling babies on the ground. When they stood upright instead of falling over, it indicated a strong chance of success. "[The rebels], like these children," Jack stated, "would stand soon on their feet."[120]

Conclusion

The rebel military commander Henry Oliver was captured harboring runaway recruits and possessing firearms sometime around December 20, days before the rebels had planned to meet and finalize plans for their assault on Christmas. Jean Baptiste Corberand turned state's evidence soon thereafter. Colonial soldiers arrived in the area and slowly identified and rounded up the rebel conspirators, based on the testimony of enslaved combatants and non-combatants.

Jack had spent years in the forests and bush of the region, and he knew it well. He expertly managed to evade colonial authorities for several months, much longer than other rebels had managed to achieve. When food supplies ran low and when Jack saw no general uprising occur, he

[119] Ibid, 103.

[120] Ibid, 104.

decided it was time to surrender. John Ivy, the head slave of Jennet Lyons, apprehended Jack immediately upon his return to Swift Bay.[121]

At his trial in April 1824, Jack admitted to practicing Obeah throughout the neighborhood as healer, oath-giver, and fortification-builder. "[My] doctoring was what buckra called obeah," Jack emphasized, and "Buckra had their own fashion; [but] in Guinea, negro could doctor."[122] In addition to tying his actions to the notion of healing and medicine, Jack attempted to steer the inquiry toward the true reason behind his troubles: the bad treatment from Lyons and Murray—their violation of his sense of self, identity, and social prestige *beyond* the law of slavery and freedom in Jamaica.

His comrades in arms planned and organized rebellion for the same reasons. In exchange for their servitude, they demanded that local slaveowners extend Fridays and Saturdays to every enslaved person in the region when the crops were out of season. Enslaved people used this free time to farm, procure food and water, and socialize with one another. The refusal of slaveowners in the parishes of St. Mary and St. George to concede this point was interpreted as akin to a death sentence. Calls for full-scale war emerged out of this violation of custom. Slave revolt was itself a negotiating tactic, serving not just military but diplomatic ends.

Jack was found guilty and condemned to die on April 8, 1824. An earthquake then rattled Buff Bay. The shock was felt as far as Kingston.[123]

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[121] Testimony of Mr. Robert Harrison, April 7, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 105. Before returning to the Swift River, Jack had tried to seek aid from his wife, who demanded he turn himself over to authorities or else she would drag him herself to Buff Bay to stand trial.

[122] "Confession of Jack, Before Me, This 8th Day of April 1824," Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 109.

[123] Henry de la Beche, "April 8, 1824," Personal Diary, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, United Kingdom (hereafter NMW).

Henry de la Beche, an absentee proprietor of Halse Hall in the southern parish of Vere, reported on Jack's trial at Buff Bay. De la Beche had come back to Jamaica in December 1823 to salvage his dying sugar estate—the principal source of his income—which had been suffering under the throes of drought since 1822. Like many of his peers, he feared that the potential of a general uprising among the Black population of the northern parishes remained an imminent possibility. "It is said that if the [rebellion] had been pushed that almost every negro upon Balcarres property might have been hanged," de la Beche lamented in his diary, "as also a vast number upon the adjoining estates."[124]

De la Beche had been right to worry. Before Jack was found guilty, he warned Thomas Murray that the rebellion had just begun. Enslaved communities in the neighborhood Balcarres still possessed guns hidden throughout the landscape, waiting for the next propitious moment to strike.

In the next chapter, we will explore how the rebel conspiracies in the parishes of St. Mary's and St. George's in December 1823 were part of a broader constellation of slave revolt which stretched throughout the Great River watershed to the west, on the boundary between the parishes of Hanover and St. James. Here, local planters had also encroached upon established covenants guaranteeing free time off in excess of Sundays. But in the drought-stricken south, the enslaved were not emboldened by the example of those in the north to rebel. In both cases, whether the customary

[124] Henry de la Beche, "April 7, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. "The celebrated Obeah Jack, one of the principal ring leaders in the late projected rebellion at Buff Bay, was tried today at the latter, and found guilty, though continually stopped and desired not to criminate himself, he was always doing so. By the evidence it appeared that they mustered regularly with plaintain stocks instead of muskets, so that if seen no arms should be found in their possession. In order to learn them to fire together with a few knotches were made in the stock, and a stick drawn over them at the word of command made noise, sufficient to shew whether they all did it at the same time or not. It would appear that they procured their real arms through some person connected with St. Domingo. Their plan was to have commenced the thing at Balcarres property and have proceeded down Buff Bay, murdering every person, no consequence what their colour might have been, that did not join them, and afterwards to have formed a junction with the discontented in St. Mary's Parish. Obeah Jack rubbed them over with some bush and told them that they were then 'strong against buckra.' He also administered the great 'swear,' at the same time giving them a mixture of human blood, gunpowder, and rum to drink."

order either held firm or collapsed was inextricably linked to the respective success or failure of planters to share more and more resources in response to flux in geopolitical and environmental conditions.

Chapter 2

Water Worlds of the Enslaved: Customary Law and Wars of Self-Defense in the Great River Watershed, ca. 1823

> I say, broder, you can't go yet.
> When de morning star rise, den we put you in a hole.
> Den you go in a Africa, you see Fetish dere.
> You shall nyam goat dere, wid all your family.
> Buccra can't come dere; say, dem rascal, why you no work?
> Buccra can't catch duppy, no, no.[1]
>
> - A Jamaican Funerary Dirge, as reported by Michael Scott, 1833

Why did enslaved Jamaicans in the nineteenth century agitate for rebellion against their white overlords? It is difficult if not impossible to determine the ultimate intent of slave rebels. Contemporaries translated the evidence enslaved people arrested, tried, or were compelled to share in the colonial courts by reducing the aims of rebels to a common refrain: they wanted to burn and destroy the houses and the cane fields and then murder the whites and their non-white allies indiscriminately.[2] The rebels would conquer as much territory as possible, even going so far as "to take the country to themselves."[3] It is easier to glean *what* rebels may have wanted to achieve as concrete war aims than *why* they ultimately took up arms.

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[1] Michael Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1833), 143.

[2] This basic pattern is reflected in multiple depositions taken in the colonial courts. See Testimony of William Sterling and James Sterling, December 16, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Papers Relating to the Manumission, Government, and Population of Slaves in the West Indies, 1822-24,* 38; Testimony of Ned, December 19, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 41.

[3] See also Testimony of Mary, December 19, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 41; Testimony of Ned, December 19, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 42. At

To understand the cultural and political context through which rebellions occurred, we must rely upon the writings, opinions, and misperceptions of white paranoiacs who saw insurgency lurking within every shadow of the colony. In this context, we are used to pointing to the brutality of slavery and abstract ideas of "freedom" as causes for war. Still, this doesn't get us back to the root of the conceptual problem. We are left with two options. On the one hand, it is the abstract idea of "freedom." On the other hand, it is the gravedigger hypothesis. The slave regime violence bred counter-violence.

This chapter addresses this conundrum of determining slave rebels' motivations by using the insurrectionist conspiracies of 1823 and 1824 in the Great River watershed as a vehicle to pose new questions about what *freedom* concretely meant to the enslaved in their everyday lives. Some of the enslaved were motivated to use war as a means of furthering the unconditional, universal abolition of slavery throughout Jamaica. But many others waged war against the whites because of *hyperlocal* concerns that were semi-autonomous from the political goal of achieving the unqualified, unconditional, universal abolition of slavery. As I argue, enslaved rebels attempted to wage war in 1823 and 1824 because local planters violated customary rules and expectations concerning the distribution of free time off from plantation labor. This left less time to procure food and water, as well as rest and recover from the violence exacted upon the enslaved during the working week. A critical mass of enslaved people experienced those broken promises simultaneously, in common with one another, raising popular support for insurrection. Situating the history and culture of slavery and freedom in both Africa and Jamaica offers suggestive clues for understanding the revolts

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Frontier Estate, St. Mary's Parish, "They [the rebels] said they would set fire to Frontier Trash-house, and kill all white people, and then come to the bay and rise upon the gentlemen and kill them, and take the bay to themselves."

of 1823 as an act of self-defense designed to force a fundamental renegotiation of the terms of enslavement.

The enslaved were not willing to die and kill for abstractions. By reckoning with the ways in which the enslaved related to the riparian landscape as if they were legally free, the revolts of 1823 illustrate the lengths and limits to which the enslaved were and were not willing to tolerate the mortal predicaments that they faced in a slave society like Jamaica. As we will explore in this chapter, *how* enslaved people used, traveled across, and mobilized around the river illuminates *what* they ultimately perceived was at stake in their struggle. Lingering on the relationship between access to water spaces, the development of networks of mutual aid, and place of ritual in Black social life offers new insights into *why* the enslaved were willing to risk sacrificing everything they had worked to achieve in their lives. Their limited victories to steal back freedom for themselves over time may seem modest and tiny to us in the present day. But for the enslaved, the customary rights they and their ancestors had fought for generations to achieve were worth the weight of the world.

The Gendered Riparian Landscape

On a Sunday in late November 1823, the bridge spanning the Great River, near its mouth to the bay, bristled with Black life.[4]

Like most freshwater rivers in Jamaica, small groups of Black women throughout the day would have gathered at this juncture of the King's Road connecting the parishes of Hanover and St. James. Black women had a special relationship with the river. When women weren't saddled with work as fieldhands and drivers, they assumed the onerous burden of washing clothes, cooking, and

[4] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 28, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 71.

midwifery. Multiple times per day, they also gathered water in calabashes and pails to bring back to their homes in the slave village or to the sugar fields and coffee hills.[5] Men relied on women (and children) to undertake the labor of fetching it for them. So did the honored dead, whose funerary rites demanded that water be left in a bathing bowl and calabashes near the corpse, as mourners danced, drummed, and sang.[6]

Women often performed the task of fetching water alone. Trips at night were laden with supernatural danger. "Duppies"—mischievous spirits of the dead—plied the darkness for victims to inflict illness and premature death upon. In St. Thomas in the East, Zora Neale Hurston witnessed one such woman foaming at the mouth and exhibiting epileptic-like symptoms after returning home from gathering water.[7] Hurston's informants said that they needed two stones procured from the local river to cure her of the duppy's curse. The duppy never harmed humans by their own accord. Instead, "it is [always] a rude person who set duppies on folks."[8]

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[5] Lucille Malthurin Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844,* edited by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006), 203-04. Based on a survey of nine estates, out of 163 women engaged in miscellaneous tasks, 15 were washerwomen, 8 were cooks, 18 were field cooks, 7 were midwives, and 10 were water-carriers. Women in the field still had to wash clothes, cook, and carry water for their individual households. Furthermore, especially during harvests and manufacturing cycles, these women were taken away from their primary positions and sent to the fields. See also James Robertson, "Giving Directions in Spanish Town, Jamaica: Comprehending a Tropical Landscape," *Journal of Urban History* 35, No. 5 (May 2009), 721. As Robertson describes in the context of Spanish Town: "The landmarks used by the largest group of townspeople [of Spanish Town] are among the hardest to recover. The enslaved African and, later, the free African Jamaican residents had their own residential yards, their itineraries were oriented towards the river side, where laundry was washed, horses watered, and water jars filled every morning." These kinds of everyday relations with the river must have been universally shared among Black Jamaicans throughout the colony.

[6] Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Harper Collins E-Books, 2008 [1938]), 53, 56.

[7] Ibid, 46-47, 50. To keep the duppy trapped in its grave, water must be poured upon the funeral grounds and food like white fowl and rice left at the ready. As her informants noted, "the duppy…is the most powerful part of any man. Everybody has evil in them, and when a man is alive, the heart and the brain controls him and he will not abandon himself to many evil things. But when the duppy leaves the body, it no longer has anything to restraint it and it will do more terrible things than any man ever dreamed of. It is not good for a duppy to stay among living folk."

[8] Ibid, 45.

All Black Jamaicans had no choice but to know exactly where, when, and how they were going to find water. Every person carried their own water gourd sourced from the calabash tree [*Crescentia Cujete*]. Choosing a gourd while it still hung from the tree was a symbolically meaningful act; one's gourd was as personal as one's name. Black people believed that driving one or more nails into the bough maximized the size and carrying capacity of the mature gourd.[9] The use of calabashes for water storage differentiated African from European. Archaeological evidence from Thetford, St. Ann's Bay, and Juan de Bolas suggests that whites refrained from using calabashes except to supplement imported ceramics. If they carried any water with them at all as they traveled daily, they used devices other than calabashes.[10]

Women seized precious moments at the river to socialize and share stories, rumors, and the latest news. As suggested by court transcripts, in the Great River watershed, women's conversations may have included an incendiary idea that had gone viral that year: the King of England had commanded that all the slaves were to be freed in 1824. The only thing standing in the way of the King's command was the planters, who acted in open defiance against the true sovereign.[11]

Riparian sites like the Great River were also important for women-centric rituals marking the cyclical movement of life and death. Childbirth was one such occasion. For example, Edward Long recorded that, right before pregnant women entered labor, they were expected to walk "to the sea

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[9] Alfred Leader, *Jamaica with a Kodak* (Bristol: John Wright & Co., 1907), 179. "The native workman may often be seen carrying one of these [water gourds], which contains his supply of water for that day."

[10] Gregory D. Cook and Amy Rubenstein-Gottschamer, "Maritime Connections in a Plantation Economy Archaeological Investigations in a Plantation Economy: Archaeological Investigations of a Colonial Sloop in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica," in *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica,* edited by James A. Delle, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 109.

[11] See Testimony of Jane McDonald, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 78-79; Testimony of William Roach, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 116.

side or a river, followed by a number of little children." The children ritually sullied the expectant's mother cleanliness, "throw[ing] all manner of ordure and excrement at her in the way." After this symbolic debasement, "she is washed with great care." To disregard the ritual was to invite misery and death. "Without this cleanly ceremony," Long cautioned, "the Negroes are persuaded that either the mother, the child, or one of the parents, will die during the period of lying-in."[12] Baptism rituals practiced by the Christians took place within the same spiritual field of meaning-making around issues of generation and destruction.

These water rituals existed on a continuum with West African cultural practices concerning funerary rites. For example, John Clarke, a Baptist missionary stationed in Jamaica, had witnessed a funerary rite for a woman and her child, who had each perished during the birth, near Old and New Calibar on a trip to West Africa. The rite was conducted by canoe for coastal peoples. A group of women preceded the canoe with pots of palm oil and rice. The men followed carrying drums and other instruments. As a participant-observer, one had to demonstrate "frenetic and frantic behavior in the procession," lest one be accused of having had a role to play in this untimely death. However, the bodies were not buried; instead, they were cast onto the shore to rot in the open sun, without sand cast upon them, to return to the sea.[13]

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At different points of the day, men would show up to enjoy the river, too. Edward Long commented that men and women congregated in the midday sunshine to bathe in the warm waters

[12] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Culture, Products, Laws, and Government, Volume 2* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 380.

[13] John Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," Personal Diary, 11 December 1840, D/CJL/1, ANG.

of the rivers as often as possible.[14] Hunting, fishing, and boating by canoe appear more sharply stratified by gender as activities associated with men and masculinity. For example, Peter and Robert Bartibo, two young adults, brothers, and free people of color living and working about the bridge, sold fish, purchased vegetables, and offered canoe services to locals. For a cut of the profit, they frequently ferried people and goods to and from marketplaces as far as Montego Bay to the east and Lucea to the west.[15] On the way to Montego Bay, Mosquito Cove and the Bogue Islands were also regular haunts of the Bartibo brothers. These circular coral formations covered with tropical vegetation with a lagoon in the middle teemed with all manner of fish, crabs, and oysters.[16]

Enslaved and free canoe operators often entered into commercial agreements with white slaveowners in exchange for greater privileges and money. The Bartibo brothers, for instance, were freed in 1816 because of the work of their late father, who lived most of his life in slavery. Thomas Aikman, the overseer of Unity Hall since 1812, the closest sugar estate to the bridge spanning the Great River, had known the Bartibo clan for years. While enslaved, they had lived in the slave village

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[14] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 542. Taking caution with reasoning from the counter-factual, it is telling that Long did not mention any splitting up of men and women to wash themselves at spots of the river hidden from one another's view, in accordance with European gender norms.

[15] Testimony of Peter Bartibo, January 28, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 66. At Unity Hall, the Bartibo brothers "always brought up victuals in [their] canoe to sell for them, and landed them at Mr. Campbell's beach at Montego Bay." See also Testimony of John Parnther, December 28, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 52. See also Theodore Foulks, *Eighteen Months in Jamaica; With Recollections of the Late Rebellion*. London: Whitaker, Treacher, and Arnott, 1833), 24. See also Edward Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 149. Long noted that 78 canoemen worked the outlet of Fort Charles, Fort Augusta, Rock Fort, and the State's engineer (30 people), for a total of 78 people. They owned "Proper canoes, either for going with dispatches, or bringing provisions from Kingston Market." They brought news, goods, and information for both whites and enslaved people simultaneously. Their place was ambiguous, but they were indispensable allies in the quest for prestige and power.

[16] Leader, *A Kodak Through Jamaica,* 25. See also Henry de la Beche, "April 18, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. Henry de la Beche described his trip to Salt Island, a similar geological formation in the bay near Kingston, that provides clues about what the Bogue Islands may have looked like. It was "covered with mangrove and other trees," with a lagoon in the middle of the land. Oysters clung to the mangrove roots bursting into the water. Crabs clicked and clacked above among the roots above the water.

of Unity Hall. After being manumitted, some of the family moved to a hut at distance from Unity Hall, between Sandy Bay and the Great River. Aikman hired the father for £20 a year to provide his household with fish.[17]

The Bartibo brothers' father died around Christmas of 1822, and his sons took up his business. They rapidly acquired a poor reputation with Aikman, whose watchman caught them stealing sugar canes from a field "by the river side, where their canoe passed daily." Against Aikman's orders, they also used the river to sneak into the slave village of Unity Hall, their former home, three to four times per week. Aikman punished those caught harboring them. He had even placed one of the brothers twice in his private lock-up in 1822 for violating his edict (Aikman couldn't recall whether it was Peter or Robert in court documents).[18]

Some local Black elders had also soured on the Bartibo brothers. Their own mother, who still lived at Unity Hall, averred that Robert had burned down her house with her and his siblings still inside. She claimed in court in 1823 that Robert "said he wanted to burn the old rat out, [with] the young ones." Robert stood upon a nearby hill, casting stones upon his mother as she fled the blaze.[19] Then, in the autumn of 1823, the Bartibo brothers ran afoul of John Cunningham, a senior watchman at Unity Hall. He had given them a hog to fatten but discovered they were allowing the

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[17] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 71; Testimony of George Kathrens, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 62; Testimony of Peter Bartibo, January 28, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 65; Testimony of John Parnther, December 28, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 52. Parnther had also contracted the father of the Bartibo brothers for several years to procure fish for his household.

[18] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 62.

[19] Testimony of George Kathrens, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 62-63.

hog to stray onto the property of a white man, who had threatened to shoot it. Incensed, Cunningham approached the Bartibo brothers at the bridge and demanded his hog be returned. Cunningham received the hog but refused to pay the nine dollars they had previously agreed upon.[20] Robert Bartibo was enraged. If Cunningham "did not pay him for the hog," he warned, "he would get payment out of John Cunningham for it somehow or other."[21]

* * *

The users of the Great River's waters might have counted themselves lucky. The Great River was perennial, fed by streams and aquifers from the mountain rains. Its flow and volume were large enough that people could not ford it by foot or horseback; a ferry was needed to cross to the other side. The Great River was also navigable by boats and canoes at least three to four miles upriver from the sea. Makeshift rafts made from available logs and twine collected from vegetation could travel much farther inland. These vessels facilitated the transport of food, news, and people deep into the interior of Hanover and St. James parish.[22]

Many enslaved water users of the southern coastline of St. Elizabeth, Vere, and St. Andrew to the east, in the drought zone, enjoyed no such luxuries. As Henry de la Beche reported in his diary, the area had been locked in the throes of drought since 1822. An absentee proprietor, he had returned to Jamaica in December 1823 to get a handle on the declining profits being generated by Halse Hall, which was situated on the eastern banks of the Rio Minho River in the upper portion of Vere. The financial straits of Halse Hall imperiled the money he had relied on since childhood to

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[20] Testimony of Adam Webb, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 74, 79.

[21] Testimony of Sampson, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 75.

[22] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 212.

fund his education, military career, and geological pursuits. We can imagine his dismay upon seeing the Rio Minho, whose waters had been reduced to tiny pools collecting in the hollows of the rocks above the cracked riverbed. The sugar canes of Halse Hall and Parnassus, the neighboring estate across the river to the west, were grown right up to the banks of the river, potentially to absorb what water remained beneath the surface of the dry riverbed.[23] The other cane pieces of Halse Hall had become "brownish green" due to the drought."[24] At sporadic points of the day, the roads must have been congested, because "in several places cattle [were] obliged to be driven some miles for water."[25]

Unsurprisingly, water resource provisioning in the region had been in a protracted state of crisis. By late April 1824, the wells of de la Beche's neighbors had run dry; only Halse Hall maintained its water supply.[26] On April 27, de la Beche left Halse Hall to follow the course of the Rio Minho. He "met a girl with a pail on her head at one of the little pools in the river course." He must have spoken with her, as he learned that she had come "there from the Cross to get water, the distance seven miles."[27] This enslaved woman was therefore walking a minimum of fourteen miles round trip (a four- to five-hour journey at twenty minutes per mile) to scour the Rio Minho's

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[23] Henry de la Beche, "January 6-12," Personal Diary, NMW. When it rained in "the mountains with great fury," the banks of the Rio Minho swelled. The floodwaters "caused great mischief by overflowing the lowlands."

[24] Henry de la Beche, "April 27, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[25] Henry de la Beche, "April 8, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[26] Henry de la Beche, "April 27, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. "Rain set in a little after 1 P.M., the first that has fallen at Halse Hall for a long time. The country was in consequence of a long drought quite brown except the canes which were browning green. Most of the wells in the neighbourhood quite dry. Ours fortunately did not fail. Many persons greatly distressed for water."

[27] Henry de la Beche, "April 27, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. See also Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 3,* viii. "It may possible happen, that, in consequence of long drought, the rivers may become almost emptied of their waters; the reservoirs may fail; the leafy clothing of the woods may be parched, arid, and juiceless, and animals be empoisoned I some degree by the septic fluid which involves them."

stagnant pools for water to bring home. She would have done so without the certainty of finding any water at all, making the trip a total loss of energy and time, the most precious commodities for the poor and marginalized. The only consolation prize to this perilous journey of gathering water was a brief respite from hearing and feeling the crack of the whip on the backs of the enslaved as they toiled in the sugar fields.

This situation suggests two things about water supplies in this region of the drought zone. First, wells were probably the primary sources for the enslaved to access drinking water. Unlike naturally-occurring riparian sites like the Great River, slaveowners firmly regulated spatial access to the wells. Second, it appears that de la Beche was under no pressure to share his water resources with neighboring planters or their enslaved populations. Both factors impelled the girl from the Cross to travel so long to find water.

The situation was just as dire in the Milk River basin, on the eastern fringes of Vere parish.[28] The low volume and flow of the water under normal conditions rendered it vulnerable to the shock of drought. "For nearly two years," de la Beche reported, its waters had totally evaporated, "a circumstance never remembered before that time."[29] Slaveowners along the Milk River who relied on water mills for sugar manufacturing had to rapidly transition to the use of cattle mills, forcing additional physical toils upon the enslaved who had to bring these emergency capacities online while still attending to their daily obligations.[30] Heavily indebted planters anxious about meeting their

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[28] Henry De la Beche, "January 17, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. The Milk River, as De la Beche described, was "an inconsiderable stream to within two miles of its mouth, when it suddenly expands and becomes navigable. Thus, the decline of water volume upstream may have impacted canoe and raft traffic on the two-mile navigable portion of the river.

[29] Henry de la Beche, "February 13, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[30] Henry de la Beche, "February 13, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. See also Benjamin McMahon, *Jamaica Plantership: Eighteen Years Employed in the Planting Line In That Island* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1839), 67. As Benjamin MacMahon

financial obligations to creditors had to tread cautiously.[31] Push the enslaved and the cattle too hard, and the slaveowner would have to take on more debt to purchase new chattel property. Push the enslaved and the cattle too lightly, and the slaveowner would not yield enough profit to meet their current obligations. The enslaved suffered disproportionately in either case.

The Binding Force of Custom

As every Sunday was a market day, hundreds of men and women from estates throughout the region flitted across the bridge across the Great River on their way home or to Montego Bay. Thomas Aikman, the overseer of Unity Hall, claimed in court that he had frequently passed by the bridge on Sunday mornings in the autumn and winter of 1823.[32] On those occasions, he had seen a hundred or more Black people assembled at the bridge, which piqued his suspicions enough to mention the episodes to Mr. Watt and John Morrison, the overseer of Spring Garden, Aikman's east-facing neighbor. But Aikman never questioned or disturbed the crowd. For him, it was just another ordinary market day.[33]

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witnessed at Russell Hall estate in the 1820s, even the water mills were functioning, planters only allowed "a few hours in the middle of the day (Sunday) to procure their provisions for the following week."

[31] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 12.

[32] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 60-61.

[33] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 24, 1824, *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 71. "[Aikman] mentioned to Mr. Watt that he had seen meetings of upwards of a hundred negroes on the bridge on a Sunday morning, dare say he has told other persons the same; he meant negroes passing with provisions to market; considers the negroes were going to market to barter and change their provisions; never mentioned it in consequence of what he heard of the proceedings going on at Unity Hall." See also Testimony of John Morrison, January 24, 1824, *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 73. "Mr. Aikman, in conversation with him, said he had seen frequently meetings of negroes on the bridge, but not more than was common, and thought nothing of it; never heard any thing against the Unity Hall negroes more than other negroes on other estates."

Sunday was the only universal time in which enslaved communities got a short break from the grinding violence of plantation work. Starvation, dehydration, physical and sexual torture, disease, and depression killed between three to five percent of enslaved people per year. Sundays thus provided indispensable time to rest and plan food rationing schedules for the rest of the week.[34] As Edward Long noted, the day was "[n]ever borrowed from them but in some very particular emergency." In this case, the enslaved expected to be "either paid for it, as may be agreed upon, or allowed an equal portion of time on some other day."[35]

Slaveowners distributed small plots of rocky, nutrient-poor land for the enslaved to cultivate for food (i.e., "the provision grounds") during their time off on Sundays. This strategy was designed not only to outsource the burden of survival on the enslaved, but also to invest as many people in the status quo. In doing so, slaveowners tacitly agreed to protect slave-owned property (e.g., vegetable foods, tools, pigs, poultry, clothes, furniture, money) from outsiders. Bryan Edwards exemplified this principle. "Let the Negroes be attached to the land," Edwards argued, "and fold with it."[36] He imagined a kind of slavery in the future where the enslaved would live like European serfs, where the separation of families through sale would be reserved only for the most severe

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[34] See also Mark Hauser, *The Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economies in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2008), 13, 36, 51-54, 64-70, 129, 198. The marketplaces and market day possessed cultural valances as a site and time of Black lawlessness, drunkenness, and seditious language. Slaveowners begrudgingly tolerated market day because of the need for the enslaved to obtain their own food supplies.

[35] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 491, 493. Long complained that the enslaved only spent part of Sunday tending to their grounds; the rest was "uselessly dissipated in idleness and lounging, or (what is worse) in riot, drunkenness, and wickedness."

[36] Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, Volume 2,* 4th edition (London: John Stockdale, 1807), 142.

crimes. He erroneously convinced himself that such policies "produc[ed] a happy coalition of interests between the master and the slave."[37]

Edward Long and Bryan Edwards wanted to make their readers think that Jamaica's slaveowners were beneficent dictators. As Jean Casimir has argued in the context of Haiti, planters "tried to appropriate the world of African village societies," exploiting imagined pasts, "to reduce it to silence and to annihilate it" as a historical product of the host slave society.[38] To survive with their minds and spirits intact, "They had to find ways to separate what they were from what the plantation compound demanded from them."[39]

But the cession of Sundays by the enslavers to the enslaved proves without a doubt that the enslaved laid claim over the day as a matter enshrined and protected by force of customary law. As William Sewell noted, these agreements were "devised by word of mouth" and functioned like "the more elaborate documents of the wealthy."[40] Vincent Brown has carefully demonstrated that the inviolability of these agreements over land equally applied to funerary rites and the transfer of

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[37] Ibid, 124. "The practice which prevails in Jamaica of giving the Negroes lands to cultivate, from the produce of which they are expected to maintain themselves…is universally allowed to be judicious and beneficial." See also Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 499. "If, for example, Negroes were made *glebio adscriptii,* affixed to the soil, and soil liably to pass with it; it is evident, they still might pass in descent, or payment of contracts or in sale. … [If] Negroes were liable to be sold collectively…would the bond or simple contract creditor be put into any worse situation than a mortgagee, who has at present identically the same remedy?"

[38] Jean Casimir, "On the Origins of the Counter-Plantation System," in The *Haiti Reader: History, Culture, Politics,* edited by Laurent Dubois, Kaiama Glover, Nadeve Menard, Millery Polyne, and Chantalle Verna (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 61.

[39] Casimir, "Origins," 62.

[40] William Grant Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour in the British West Indies* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1861), 179.

deceased slaves' property to enslaved heirs.[41] Slaveowners invited retribution upon themselves, in the form of theft, murder, and rebellion, if they reneged on their promises. The enslaved used the threat and actuality of political violence to inscribe limits upon, and thus shape, the decisions of slaveowners.

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Little did Thomas Aikman realize that, since September, elders and field workers from Unity Hall, Spring Garden, and numerous other estates that trafficked across the Great River were, in fact, planning to destroy Aikman and the whites by force of arms come Christmas.

If anyone in the crowd had been discussing seditious ideas or coordinating plans for rebellion, I argue that they chose to amass at the bridge for a reason: *it was the perfect place to hide in plain sight, during the daytime, in the swirl and bustle of Sundays.*[42] In almost every other context, such large groups of Black men and women were *never* permitted to amass in one place *without the permission of the slaveowners*.

Aikman would learn in late December that the people he had entrusted and invested with positions of power in the plantation hierarchy of Unity Hall had also assumed key leadership roles in the struggle to eliminate him.

Bestowing such formal powers to select enslaved people was a vexed gamble that every slaveowner had to make. In exchange for loyalty, slaveowners typically offered material privileges to

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[41] See Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Power and Death in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 120-26, 248-51.

[42] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 61. As Aikman later recalled, the enslaved also communicated through singing songs during work in African languages that he did not understand. Testimony of Charles Shapre, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 76. Peter Bartibo told Charles Sharpe that the enslaved at Unity Hall had been talking about the prospect of war since May 1823, "and that they even sung [about] it in the field."

these figures of authority, such as additional food rations, farmland, access to donkeys and mules, and increased autonomy of movement. This strategy was designed install class distinctions among the general enslaved population, while investing slave leaders in the maintenance of security. Aikman followed this tradition. Mary Ann Reid, an enslaved woman of color, was Aikman's head housekeeper. She slept in the main house and returned sporadically to the slave village about a half mile away from Aikman, where she had her own house, next to the free school.[43] Robert Galloway, the enslaved head driver of Unity Hall, was permitted to command several enslaved people as if they were his slaves.[44] Galloway's dependents also assumed positions of power. For instance, Adam Webb, an enslaved man of color under Galloway's command, had served as Aikman's bookkeeper since 1819. In return, he received extra meat rations, rice, and flour.[45] Webb leveraged his position to obtain firearms for hunting teal.[46] From Aikman's perspective, Galloway was trustworthy because, on the surface, he maintained social and spatial distance from the enslaved, "keep[ing] no company

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[43] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 28, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 70.

[44] Testimony of Robert Galloway, December 21, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 47. Galloway's pseudo-slaveholding can be deduced from the following: "A woman belonging to Galloway said, if they give we free who is to work; a man from Friendship answered, they will hire us; a negro belonging to Galloway said, if they make we free do they think we are going to live in these small houses, that they would have larger, if they lived they hoped yet to live in their master's great house."

[45] Testimony of Adam Webb, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 74.

[46] Testimony of Robert Bartibo, December 21, 1823. Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 47. See also Testimony of Robert Bartibo, December 24, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 50. At the neighboring estate of Blue Hole, John Stewart had a gun for killing pigeons and Edward Brown for killing stray hogs.

with the negroes…neither by night nor day; he keeps himself separate, even at Christmas."[47] By contrast, Philip Haughton, the second driver, was much closer to the enslaved, talking often with them in the field and sharing leisure time together.[48] As a result, Haughton received less benefits for his service.

As we touched upon in the last chapter, by the 1820s, planters increasingly held out the carrot of manumission as a reward to trusted slaves. Based on calculations derived from extant sources, I estimate that at least 6,700 enslaved people were manumitted between 1808 and 1822.[49] The limited expansion of manumissions in Jamaica was an attempt by the planters to apply the Cuban and Brazilian model of conserving the slave order in the age of revolution. It was also a mechanism to bolster the finances of the technically bankrupt Jamaican state with hard money (there were more "Island Notes" in circulation for the payment of taxes than the state could actually redeem).[50] Manumission was expensive for the enslaved. The stamp for freedom documents alone cost £10. In addition, a state-imposed fine ranging from zero to £300 or more was imposed upon each manumitted person.[51] It is safe to assume that most slaveowners expected the enslaved to

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[47] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 60.

[48] Ibid, 61.

[49] "A Return of all Manumissions Effected by Purchase, Bequest, or Otherwise, since 1st January 1808; Distinguishing each Year, and the Sex of the Persons manumitted, together with a statement of the amount of the Tax or Fine imposed on each manumission," Parliamentary Papers [1823], *Further Papers and Returns Pursuant to Address, Relating to the Slave Population of Jamaica, St. Christopher's, and the Bahamas,* 8-117. Manumissions surged in 1809 to 1,520 people, two years after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade to the British colonies. Manumissions then declined significantly to a couple hundred per year until 1817, when manumissions rose to around 895, averaging ~550 per year until 1822.

[50] "Votes of the Assembly of Jamaica, 14 December 1848," Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Copies or Extracts of all Correspondence with the Governors of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Mauritius,* 143.

[51] "A Return of all Manumissions," Parliamentary Papers [1823], *Further Papers and Returns,* 8-117.

accrue most, if not all, of those moneys to pay for their freedom. The cost of the manumission stamp alone funneled at least £69000 into the colonial treasury.

In exchange for these "gifts," slaveowners like Thomas Aikman and other slaveowners expected to be informed of any thieves and conspirators lurking in the shadows of the plantation. Historically, intelligence gathered in this way was the only means by which slaveowners could ever hope to suppress a rebellion *before* it erupted and spiraled out of control.

But at Unity Hall, Mary Ann Reid (along with John Cunningham) used her greater access to wealth and free movement to share her bounty with friends and allies among the general slave population. And because of this, her good name echoed throughout the Great River watershed.

The dances she held two to three times per year on Saturday nights, with the sanction of Aikman, were one reason for her high reputation. Enslaved people throughout the Great River watershed were known to travel throughout the night to enjoy the feasts of yams, plantains, rum and water, and stewed and boiled hog for but a few hours before leaving in the early morning hours to make it back home or to the provision grounds in time for market day.[52] On some occasions, Reid didn't even charge her visitors for the expensive food.[53] The dances were a vital opportunity for the enslaved to *supplement* their calorie, protein, and lipid deficient diets and thus to *prolong* life. But we should never forget that the dances were also a potent reminder of what was lost when the hunger, thirst, and effects of chronic malnutrition eventually set back in.

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[52] Testimony of Sue, Christened Susan Simmons, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 75; Testimony of Barsheba, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 75; Testimony of Martha Hodges, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population*, 75.

[53] Testimony of William Jarrett, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 73. "The dance at Mary Ann Reid's was only for amusement; saw fresh pork at table; Mary Ann Reid killed a pig that day, it was on the table, one part was stewed and one part boiled; did not ask him to pay; Mary Ann Reid did not invite him."

I suggest that a more crucial reason behind Reid's fame was the annual Yam Custom held in her home at Unity Hall near the end of September each year. It was a customary right Reid had claimed since at least 1813.[54] She was not alone in hosting the ritual. As John Morrison noted, "it is annual custom to make merry at yams time; estates take different times, with their overseer's leave, to have the dances."[55]

Like the scheduled slave dances, enslaved people from afar traveled to Reid's house over the course of the day to eat yams, converse, and socialize. In the context of nutrition and mutual aid, the Yam Custom wasn't much different than other festivals. No Yam custom was complete without feasting.[56] But I don't think the gathering was *really* about the feasting.

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[54] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 24, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 71. "The negroes eat their new yams about the 27th September, and they came and asked him at shell-blow to eat their new yams; they afterwards altered the day to Saturday. It has been the custom of Unity Hall negroes to eat their new yams every year, and to have their friends on that occasion; he had lived upwards of eleven years at Unity Hall, and very near ten years overseer; did not see any unusual number of negroes meet there. There are two hundred and thirty-two negroes on the estate; he has some bad characters, as runaways, one or two."

[55] Testimony of John Morrison, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 77.

[56] Testimony of Jane McDonald, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 74. McDonald was labeled a "mulatto" woman in court documents. She had been in England for eight years and was offered her freedom to stay in England, but she refused because her family and Adam Webb, her son, were all in Jamaica. She "recollect[ed] John Cunningham's dance at the yams season last year [1823]; he asked her to make some bread for him, and she made three loaves; he said he was going to have a few friends to see him, and wanted to give them a good breakfast; said to him there is a brown girl named Sarah Christie who could go down and make him some coffee, that he might give his friends a good breakfast. … always customary at Unity Hall to have their friends at new yams season; Adam Webb is her son; he killed a pig to sell in the yams time, and sold the whole; he made a john canoe for Christmas." See also Testimony of Bessy Bartibo the younger, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 72. Bessy Bartibo said in court that she "Was at John Cunningham's house at yams season last year, went there Saturday night before dusk, and did not leave it till the morning; no bad words at all passed there." Testimony of Bessy Bartibo the Elder, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 71. She claimed she "Goes to Unity Hall sometimes, does not stay there entirely, her husband lives there and she has a ground there; remembers the time John Cunningham had the dance at yams season last year; all eat yams the same time; there was a dance at night at John Cunningham's house, but did not hear of any more; the Guinea negroes played their gombah too, and danced."

Resonating with West African cultural precedent, the Yam Custom in Jamaica probably served a more important *political* and *ritual* function for those who had congregated at Unity Hall. For example, in the Asante Kingdom, all the sovereign's princes, vassals, and priests were expected to travel to Kumase, the royal capital, to pay tribute and reassert oaths of loyalty to the sovereign during the Yam Custom. Yams were planted after the ending of the gold mining season in February and March and harvested between July and September.[57] Those rituals provided an opportunity for the political elites to affirm existing alliances and to determine who among the sovereign's friends might be thinking about joining a sworn enemy or remaining neutral in a conflict, with the design to take the throne. In addition, on the coastal Fante lands of the Gold Coast, politico-religious leaders chose the date each year, typically between August and September, resonating with practices at Unity Hall. To eat the *new* plantings of yams before the festival was taboo and a justification for death or enslavement.[58]

Enslaved people who came from other regions also brought their own ideas about the Yam Custom. In the Bight of Biafra, especially the Igbo lands, yams were the basis of important religious cults, and the Yam Custom took on even greater meaning among the people. Rather than concentrating the population in one place and one time to participate in the festivities, Yam customs were first held throughout the minor villages and then transitioned to capital city of the sovereign. The young ate the yam first, the elders last, and finally, the King. The Yam Spirit (the male side was named *Ajoku*, the female side *Njoku*) presided over these yam rituals conducted by their priests and

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[57] Kwasi Konadu, *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31, 58, 89.

[58] See also D.G. Coursey and Cecilia K. Coursey, "The New Yam Festivals of West Africa," *Anthropos* 66, no. 3-4 (1971), 448-51. The Yam custom was not universal on the Gold Coast. The Ga people did not cultivate yams, so there was no yam custom. But many of its meanings were integrated into other analogous rituals, such as the washing of stools in sea water and the sprinkling of the blood of sacrificed rams included yams brought from the interior. These yams were pounded together with eggs (*etoh*) and placed on the stools as sacrifices.

priestesses. This deity governed the initiation of children into expert yam cultivators, a rite-of-passage anyone had to undertake to achieve nobility and, therefore, legitimacy as a potential sovereign ruler.

The Yam Spirit was second only to the Earth Mother (*Ala*), the highest deity in the Igbo pantheon. *Ala* presided over moments of human birth and death, as well as the harvest and the barren field. It was a serious offence to eat *any* yams before the appointed time. Yams trafficked from beyond the realm had to be ritually purified before consumption. The political purposes of the Yam custom to test alliances among neighbors in the Igbo cultural zone reverberated with practices in Asante. But in the case of the former, political oracles conjoined the yam rituals with annual rites to cast out hidden evil spirits which caused poor health, infertility, and economic dislocation among members of the polity.[59]

The cultural valences of the Yam Custom in Africa offer clues about how enslaved communities re-created themselves as *free polities* in the Great River watershed. First, Mary Ann Reid appears as the only woman documented as holding the Yam custom. In this way, Reid symbolically embodied *Ala* to members of the community who retained and communicated knowledge and historical memories of Igbo culture. Reid's grand redistribution of food marked the beginning of the yam cultivation season, not its end. This makes sense in Jamaica, as October was the traditional expected time for the onset of the wet seasons.

Second, as we noted above, Reid counted among several other people who oversaw the Yam Custom. This practice correlated with the political landscape of Igbo lands in West Africa, where sovereignty was decentralized and shared among a tapestry of autonomous communities. By

[59] Ibid, 457-58. See also Raphael Chijoke Njoku, *West African Masking Traditions and Diaspora Masquerade Carnivals: History, Memory, and Transnationalism* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 122-23.

contrast, the Akan/Asante pattern of the Yam custom was to hold a single event in a single location, reflecting the development of centralized imperial state-cores on the Gold Coast. Third, the fact that so many people came to Unity Hall suggests not only the high regard and prestige Reid attracted among the broader community, but also the possibility that Unity Hall functioned as a central node in the cultural milieu of the Great River watershed. After all, Unity Hall's propitious proximity to the mouth of the Great River meaning onto the estate as a junction, crossroads, and interface between parishes and between the tellurian, the riparian, and the maritime world boosted its prestige.

Black-Only Spaces of Sociality and the Dark Logics of Reciprocity

Slave dances and the Yam Custom reveal an additional clue about why the enslaved, rebel and non-rebel alike, felt safe gathering at the river. They were not just hiding in plain sight. As John Morrison noted at trial, it was customary "for the negroes on the different estates to have merriment," so long as "the driver, or some other negro in whom confidence can be placed" formally requested permission. In that case, Morrison stressed that he was expected to "never interfere, except when there is a quarrel."[60]

Thus, I argue that the enslaved also relied on their knowledge that, like slave funerals, slave dances, and the Yam Custom, the river was a *Black-only space of sociality*—a place where, as Gregory Childs has argued in the context of secrecy and sedition in eighteenth-century Brazil, Black people could talk about things that only Black people understood and cared about.[61] The river was a space

[60] Testimony of John Morrison, January 24, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 72.

[61] See Gregory L. Childs, "Scenes of Sedition: Publics, Politics, and Freedom in Late Eighteenth-Century Bahia, Brazil," PhD Dissertation (New York University, 2012); and Gregory L. Childs, "Secret and Spectral: Torture and Secrecy in the Archives of Slave Conspiracies," *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (2015), 35-57.

where people of Africa descent could engage in conversation, political debate, and the exchange of ideas, without the absolute reference point being the predicament of slavery or the omnipresence of white supremacy. In Jamaica, whites' presence in these spaces was by invitation only.

Common funerary rites among the enslaved encapsulated this principle. For example, in the early nineteenth century, Michael Scott visited a sugar estate positioned along the coastline. Scott heard that a funeral was planned for a Black head cooper who had died that morning. Scott begged the overseer to grant him permission to attend the ritual. The overseer steadfastly refused the request. "No white person ever broke in on these orgies," he told Scott. "[T]he negroes were very averse to their doing so." Indeed, neither the overseer nor any other white man or woman on the estate "had ever been present on such an occasion."[62] At Spring Garden in 1823, John Morrison affirmed he adhered to the same practice. So long as the overseer (himself) had given permission, per custom, Morrison "afford[ed] opportunity for their friends to attend [slave dances]." He "never interferes but in case of quarrel."[63]

Scott violated custom and snuck down to the slave funeral at midnight. He climbed a tree and waited in the darkness. He heard drumming, singing, and chanting in "strong bass voice[s]" among the women and men. Around twenty women formed a circle around the dearly departed, while four men played the gombay and a long Igbo drum. A fifth man sat behind the performers, blowing a conch in rhythmic intervals. Three calabashes of pork, yams, and rum were set aside. This food may have been for the participants to feast upon exclusively in thanksgiving and sorrow. The

[62] Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log,* 142.

[63] Testimony of John Morrison, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 77.

food was also probably intended to appease the duppy of the dead cooper on the foods he had cherished in his life.[64]

Scott got caught, not by the enslaved, but by "four white seamen…all armed…[and] part of the crew of [a] smuggling schooner" anchored in the sea. These whites had "a depot amongst the negro houses" from which to move and hide stolen cargo.[65] The enslaved had obviously granted them permission to use the slave village for such purposes, in return for a cut of the bounty. The white seamen must have been keen to maintain this alliance. They were not about to allow Scott to ruin their good reputation as respecters of custom. They detained Scott and marched him at gun point past the slave houses and the overseers' house and onto a small boat.[66]

The ability to regulate whites' access to Black ritual spaces was rooted in practices of gift-giving and reciprocity. For instance, the enslaved at Halse Hall had been working de la Beche ever since his arrival. They knew the theatrical arts of performing duty and obligation to the slaveowners well. Between January 7 and January 12, de la Beche wrote in his journal that "The negroes have been forcing presents of fowls, Pine apples, oranges, mangos, shaddocks, forbidden fruits, &c. upon me." Slaveowners may have seen such events as evidence of Black peoples' abjection before the face of authority. To the enslaved, however, de la Beche was expected to receive the gifts. "The mischief is that I should highly offend them if I refused any thing," de la Beche complained, "so I must be content to be stuffed."[67]

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[64] Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log,* 142.

[65] Ibid, 144.

[66] Ibid, 145-46.

[67] Henry de la Beche, "January 7-12, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

And the enslaved expected to receive gifts in return. De la Beche's acquisition of the "Crawle…[a] very seasonal place for provision grounds" on the top of the Mocho Mountains," may have satisfied their demand. This location was hydrologically significant because as the lowlands were baked by drought, "A great quantity of rain falls at the Crawle…which did not descend to the lowlands."[68] The Crawle was an old area of provision grounds cultivation that had been abandoned; the enslaved would have recognized prior human activity in the landscape of bush, fruit trees, and patches of new growth embedded within the dense forests. On January 13, 1824, Henry de la Beche sent "40 persons to clear ground in order to establish provisions for the negroes."[69] The enslaved of Halse Hall did this work not as individuals but as a collective force. They would bring these fallow lands back online and lay customary claims to its food and waters, by right of first conquest. On this land, they would cultivate food to consume, sell, and share as they willed, during a time in which the megadrought promised no signs of abatement.

Thomas Thistlewood, the infamous slaveowning rapist and torturer of the enslaved, incarnated the twisted and perverse logic of the dark gift at its extremes. In 1751, at Vineyard Pen in Westmoreland, Thistlewood raped Marina, an enslaved woman, multiple times between June 23 and July 6. In exchange, Thistlewood gave her new furniture, a bed, sugar, 4 bottles of rum, some beef, and 18 pints of corn, "to treat the Negroes, and especially her shipmates withal at her housewarming." At the festivities, the enslaved invited Thistlewood into the dancehall, where everyone drank, sang songs, and "danced Congo."[70] On July 7, his last day at Vineyard Pen,

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[68] Henry de la Beche, "January 6, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[69] Henry de la Beche, "January 13, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[70] Thomas Thistlewood, "June 6, 1751," Personal Diary, quoted in Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1989), 14.

Thistlewood added to Marina's gifts: thread, old caps, two old handkerchiefs, a white shirt, 2 pairs of old trousers, a basked, a cassava roaster, wild cinnamon, wax light, a bend, a little stool, a cupboard which he hung for her, a chest for storing property, a barrel for corn, a barrel of beef brine with beef, potatoes, three bottles of rum, sugar and butter." On his way out, he raped Marina one last time. He provided her with another bottle of rum and a water pail.[71] Thistlewood committed heinous acts of sexual violence against Marina. He left himself exposed during sex or sleep to her retribution, perhaps in the form of poison and blunt force. By indulging in the practice of gift giving, Thistlewood hoped to maximize the probability he would not be harmed by the women he raped. It was never foolproof, of course. The same liberties he gave as gifts could easily be turned against him.

Thomas Aikman was likewise bound to the dark logic of reciprocity. Had Thomas Aikman chosen to transgress the expectation of free movement on market day, word would have spread quickly of his crime. Indeed, from the perspective of people of African descent, Aikman, like all enslavers, was expected to *share* portions of the ill-begotten wealth he obtained through slavery and slave death with his dependents, in accordance with their station and age. This meant Aikman had to refrain from interrupting the enslaved at the bridge spanning the Great River during their free time.

These principles were predicated on African precedent. For example, during the Yam custom in Asante and Dahomey, the sovereign and his dependent chiefs sacrificed scores of convicts and slaves, collecting their blood into brass pans to pour into holes from which the new yam had been taken. The cost of agricultural bounty and security for the broader free community

[71] Thomas Thistlewood, "July 6-7, 1751," Personal Diary, quoted in Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery,* 18.

was the blood and death of the unfree.[72] This ritual reflected the brutal realities of the slave trade, by which freedom for one collectivity of Africans was conserved through the enslavement and deportation of others to the Americas. By immolating rather than selling slaves and convicts, the sovereign demonstrated that their power and wealth was already so great they did not need to worry squeezing maximum economic profits out of their prisoners. It illustrated the boundlessness of their power to decide on the exception. How else would the former maintain their prestige among other ruling-class elites and free subjects? How else should they appeal to the deities which governed the skies, ground, and waters, if not for these kinds of displays of terror?

In addition, acts of animal and human sacrifice were inexorably tied to the maintenance of the seasonal cycles and the continued flow of the river. In Asante, at predefined points of the year, the sovereign and his priests would descend to the river Dal, the most sacred waters of Kumasi, to drown convicts and slaves as offerings to the gods governing the element of water, the liquid precondition for food crops, human populations, and the defense of the city against siege warfare. Concomitant with the sacrifices, the royal stools were bathed and ritually purified in the river's waters.[73]

A similar ritual obtained in Jamaica, where the sugar estates along the rivers converted African death into sugar and profit. At the expected end of the dry seasons and during drought conditions, a group of the enslaved, flanked by a white figure of authority, commonly traveled to the fountainhead at the origin of their local river. An enslaved spiritual practitioner would then descend to the riverbed and sacrifice a cow, allowing its blood to spill upon the floor as a gift to the

[72] D.G. Coursey and Cecilia K. Coursey, "The New Yam Festivals of West Africa," *Anthropos* 66, no. 3-4 (1971), 450.

[73] Ibid, 450.

supernatural beings, who governed the flow of Jamaica's rivers and the fall of rain.[74] Mami Wata, a hybrid, usually feminine, presenting water spirit that combined European, African, and Hindu iconography, was one such figure. She possesses a mermaid-like figure with the hindquarters of a fish or serpent, accompanied by a large snake coiled around her arms, symbolizing her divinity. Her existence was tied to transnational flows of capital, material culture, and slaves across the West African littoral and the Americas. Mami Wata was the giver of agricultural bounty, fertility, and money capital, for which she demanded significant sacrifices, including humans. In the Vodu pantheon of Ghana, Togo, and Benin, children protected by Mami Wata before and after their birth could manifest elements of the water spirit's personality under certain conditions.[75]

This close linkage between human polities, supernatural beings, and water courses extended throughout West Africa. For example, as Kwasi Konadu has illustrated, in Akan cosmology, particular lineages and sovereigns were not distinguished by their connection to a given piece of land but rivers and freshwater resources. Akan polities invariably tied themselves to *abasom* (spiritual agencies) of rivers, lagoons, and lakes rather than to land- or forest-based manifestations of the *abasom*. Africans of the Gold Coast who traced the lineage to the free peoples of Denkyira founded their capital of Abankeseese at the confluence of seven streams that were home to distinct *abasom*.[76]

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[74] Joseph J. Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica* (New York: The Dial Press, 1934), 173. See also John Thornton, "Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500-1700," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora,* edited by Linda M. Heywood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 87. Thornton documents how Christian power was associated with the cessation of drought in the Kongo cultural zone. This association was compelling enough to convert rulers and sovereigns. In 1632, for example, the ruler of Quionzo converted after a European erected a cross in his lands, which brought rain to an area that was stricken by multi-year drought.

[75] Judy Rosenthal, "Vodu Angels of History: Ghana, Togo, Benin," in *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World,* edited by Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 164-5.

[76] Konadu, *The Akan Diaspora,* 41-43.

Riverways were the nexus through which African peoples removed from their homelands reconnected with another in death. "Wherever there was water," Konadu argues, "there was the possibility of returning…home, though rituals were concurrently done at graveyards for those who passed away in foreign lands."[77] It stands to reason that this idea could have obtained for riparian landscapes throughout Jamaica, including the Great River.

The issue of whether the whites were pretending or truly believed in the potency of these rituals to produce physical effects is immaterial. The more crucial point is that the ritual was incomplete without the presence of the enslaver chief. Africans thereby slotted Europeans into distinctly African cultural-spiritual matrices of power and sovereignty. Most importantly, it trapped the enslaver in a double bind, a lose-lose situation of sorts. If the rainy seasons and the rivers failed that year, the enslaved knew who was to blame: the slaveowning planter. Drought was a sign of slaveowner weakness; the slaveowner had to redistribute powers like time off to compensate for the loss of prestige. But if the rainy seasons and the rivers maintained their normal flow that year, the slaveowner was customarily bound to ensure that their dependents had ample time and liberties to take advantage of the fair weather.

The reputation of Coromantees as cannibals in Jamaica also speaks to ideas about the relationship between destruction and creation. Rumors of this practice must have piqued Henry de la Beche's curiosity and horror because he asked non-Coromantee enslaved people whether the accusations of cannibalism were true. They responded in the affirmative. In response, De la Beche personally sought out "some Coromantee people" unattached to Halse Hall about the claim. All de la Beche said of the encounter was "They could not deny it." The truth-value of the claim of cannibalism is irrelevant. The Coromantees intuited that stories of their martial prowess and mastery

[77] Ibid, 163.

in the cultic world of war and pain would be intelligible to other Africans as rooted in the dialectics of destruction (the consumption of humans) and generation (the creation of wealth through violence). What is more significant is that the Coromantee knew exactly what to say to strike fear into de la Beche's heart and to perform their power to a white man who might transmit stories of their power to others.[78]

In West Africa, military action was authorized in response to the transgression of custom by Europeans. For instance, the Baptist missionary John Clarke traveled to the Calabar River in 1840. Upon approaching the coast, the ship Captain's small boat was launched to contact his trading partners. Numerous war canoes containing men armed with cutlasses swarmed the small boat. The Captain had previously violated the law by imprisoning an African political leader aboard the vessel due to a disputed payment of palm oil. That leader had stolen a canoe and rowed back to safety on the shore. When they saw the Captain's ship again, they unsurprisingly responded with force to reciprocate the Captain's transgressions.[79] Vengeance went in both directions. Clarke described how two slaves near the Cameroon River were attacked and killed after it was discovered that the palm oil they delivered was contaminated with seawater.[80]

However, it is essential to note that whites in slave societies like Jamaica commonly violated customary norms and expectations respecting the violent logic of reciprocity, despite the mortal

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[78] Henry de la Beche, "April 24, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[79] John Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," December 14, 1840, Personal Diary, D/CJL/1, ANG. A superior chief later ordered the lesser African authority not to be harmed, so long as he paid what he owed the Captain in palm oil.

[80] Ibid.

dangers they invited upon themselves. In the last chapter, for example, we saw how Jack responded to his reduction from carpenter to common fieldhand with successive bouts of fugitive flight. This insult encouraged him to enlist in the rebel armies of St. Mary's and St. George's parish as their political oracle.

The case of slaveowner Thomas Ludford of Mount Lebanus is also instructive in this context. In 1815, Ludford had replaced Mr. John Anderson as overseer of Mount Lebanus. He immediately revoked all past privileges the enslaved had enjoyed. He banned the distribution of new clothing. He even denied the enslaved user-rights over the mountains to plant crops. No rum or sugar had been served for two years. All the enslaved received during Ludford's tenure was white salt.[81]

Around January 1817, Cuffee, Ludford's watchman, stood accused of stealing rum and sugar from Ludford's stores in St. Jago Savanna. Ludford incarcerated Cuffee in the private lockup and inflicted regular flogging upon him for the next four months, demanding to know the identity of Cuffee's accomplices. At first, Cuffee refused. Instead, he pleaded with Ludford to understand that "what I took, I take and sell to buy victuals, as I was in a hard place, and nobody helped me."[82] He added that he had specifically purchased "a little yam, [and] yam as hungry was too much for me," implying he shared the rest of his bounty.[83] Cuffee was challenging Ludford to acknowledge that Ludford's genocidal starvation policy left him and his accomplices no choice but to take food that

[81] Testimony of Edward La Cruize Froth, June 13, 1817, Parliamentary Papers [1818], *Further Papers Relating to the Treatment of Slaves in the Colonies,* 265.

[82] Testimony of Alfred, June 13, 1817, Parliamentary Papers [1818], *Further Papers Relating to the Treatment of Slaves in the Colonies,* 265

[83] Testimony of Edward La Cruize Froth, June 13, 1817, Parliamentary Papers [1818], *Further Papers Relating to the Treatment of Slaves in the Colonies,* 265.

was previously owed to them by the force of custom. Cuffee was not motivated by personal, individualistic gain; after he filled his belly, he redistributed food to needy friends.

The solitary confinement and interrogation and torture sessions eventually broke Cuffee. He admitted that he and two others belonging to Mr. Howell had helped pull off the heist.[84] Ludford appeared satisfied, and he finally released Cuffee.

Two weeks after Easter that year, however, Ludford ordered Cuffee to be incarcerated, but offered no rationale. Cuffee presented himself to Ludford to face punishment. Ludford ordered him to stand at attention and lift his frock. Then, he shot Cuffee dead.[85]

Alfred, Cuffee's friend, witnessed the execution. He claimed in court that he immediately ran away from the scene in order to alert higher authorities of the situation. Ludford, fearful of being ensnared in court proceedings, offered two doubloons to any free or Maroon hunters to find Alfred and to bring him back to Mount Lebanus before Alfred spread word to others.[86]

Alfred alerted the authorities, and Ludford was arrested. It is unknown what final fate befell either of them. Whatever the outcome, Ludford revealed his true weakness to the enslaved. Ludford was a violent, capricious person that discarded any pretension of customary law. It made him a despised icon among the broader enslaved community. No one among the enslaved would ever help him because they expected to receive nothing at best and imminent death at worst in return.

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[84] Testimony of Robert Williams, June 12, 1817, Parliamentary Papers [1818], *Further Papers Relating to the Treatment of Slaves in the Colonies,* 263.

[85] Testimony of Alfred, June 12, 1817, Parliamentary Papers [1818], *Further Papers Relating to the Treatment of Slaves in the Colonies,* 264-265.

[86] Ibid, 265.

The Violation of Custom

Enslaved people at Unity Hall had proven remarkably successful at manipulating Aikman for over a decade. In August 1823, they held another slave dance like they had always done. So long as the enslaved kept expanding the scale and scope of their customary rights, they may have been willing to stomach the bitter pill of Aikman's rule indefinitely.

That changed after Aikman banned any further dances in the slave village around September that year.[87]

It was an unforgivable act. The loss of food, drink, rest, and sociality two or three times a year might not seem like much to us. But for the chronically malnourished, it was akin to a death sentence. And without the dances, Mary Ann Reid would not be able to share her wealth with others through ritual. Her prestige among the broader community would suffer as a result.

Aikman made an exception for the Yam Custom, which was held as scheduled on September 27, 1823.[88] This is not indicative of his kindness. It is indictive that Aikman understood that denying the Yam Custom was *certain* to bring about mass disaffection.

Mary Ann Reid, John Cunningham, and Richard Allen, the leader of the first slave gang, defied Aikman's injunction against the dances.[89] From September to late December, they continued

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[87] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 72. Aikman "stated to the magistrates that he believed he gave the negroes leave; in-August or September, to have a dance, was not certain till he looked at the estate's book. … [T]o his knowledge, [he] never gave the negroes permission to have a dance since yams time." Aikman was approached by Adam Webb with a request to hold a party. Aikman refused. He stated in court that "he has given no permission to the negroes to have a dance at the negro houses since the month of August last; the negro houses are nearly half a mile from the overseer's house; does not know of any dance in the negro houses on Saturday night week. See also Testimony of Adam Webb, December 22, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 55. At court, Webb stated he "does not think Mr. Aikman ever gave permission to the blacks to have a dance."

[88] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, January 24, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 72.

[89] Testimony of Peter Bartibo December 24, 1823, and December 25, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 50-51. At Mary Ann Reid's house, there was much discussion about Fridays and Saturdays. At

to hold large dances and feasts at their homes every two to three weeks, but in secret.[90] If Aikman would not respect their rules, Reid and her allies would no longer respect Aikman.

Luckily, past negotiations between the enslaved and Aikman yielded the relocation of the slave village from the coast to the south, behind a mountain ridge, a half mile away from Aikman's house. As Aikman testified in court, the ridge cut off Aikman's line of sight *and* the sounds emanating from the village.[91] In the past, the enslaved of Unity Hall and their visitors had to cross the Great River by the bridge and thus expose themselves to Aikman's line of sight. Archaeological evidence from other regions like St. Ann's Bay indicates that social life and gatherings in slave villages unfolded in yards where huts, homes, and tree cover blocked whites' line-of-sight.[92] The relocation of the slave village to the southern mountain range allowed visitors to access the new site of the slave village either by traversing the mountains or by crossing the Great River and hugging the guinea grass pieces and the mountains, completely avoiding the danger of passing by the overseer's house and the sugar works.

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the gatherings, Reid handed out rum and glasses per custom. Testimony of Bessy Bartibo, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 51; Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 61. Testimony of Peter Bartibo, January 28, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 65.

[90] Testimony of Richard, December 25, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 56-57. Richard was a fiddler contracted to play for multiple dances at John Cunningham's house and Mary Ann Reid's house over these months. The dances were "kept up from seven Saturday evening till ten next morning; second time they began about seven o'clock Saturday evening, and left off just as day was dawning."

[91] Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 61. Due to the new position of the slave village. "Even if I was on watch," Aikman stated, "I could not hear one of them."

[92] Douglas V. Armstrong, "Reflections on Seville: Rediscovering the African Jamaican Settlements at Seville Plantation, St. Ann's Bay," in *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica,* edited by James A. Delle, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 83-89.

At these illegal dances, calls and plans to wage war during the Christmas holidays materialized. The political issue of free time off and full freedom was front-and-center at these dances.[93] Trelawny, an ordinary fieldhand and John Cunningham's son, "said if they did not get Friday and Saturday, and did not get free, it would be a word and a blow between them and Buckra at Christmas."[94] William Stennett, a specialist in caring for mules, admonished his brother Trelawny, that talk of Fridays and Saturdays was nonsense. "We have heard that these two or three years, and have been waiting for it," Stennett said, "and do not see it."[95] Robert Galloway, the head driver of Unity Hall, was of the belief that full freedom lay on the horizon. Once freedom came, Galloway predicted "Our master will hire we to work the canes."

Rumors of similar revocations of free time to socialize, feast, and rest emerged throughout western Jamaica. The bookkeeper of Caledonia estate in the interior of Westmoreland Parish, overheard three enslaved people complaining that their Saturdays off had been canceled. In court, the bookkeeper noted the effect of custom on getting Saturday's off, stating that "always more days are given them than the law requires," usually when the rainy seasons arrived, and the sugar crop went out of season.[96] One of the men escalated his demands, saying "they would soon have Friday

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[93] Testimony of Daniel, December 29, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 53; Testimony of Thomas Aikman, December 31, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 62.

[94] Testimony of Robert Bartibo*,* December 25, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Parliamentary Papers* [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 51.

[95] Testimony of Peter Bartibo, December 24, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 49; Testimony of Adam Webb, December 22, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 55. Webb's testimony reveals that Trelawny and William Stennett were brothers and both sons of John Cunningham.

[96] Testimony of Anonymous Bookkeeper of Caledonia Estate, St. James Parish, October 9, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824], *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 45. See also Matthew G. Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor, Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London: J. Murray, 1834), 83. Lewis described a similar doctrine at work in Westmoreland. "By law they are only allowed every other Saturday for the purpose of cultivating their grounds," Lewis

also." The third "told him to hold his tongue, for they would soon be free altogether."[97] Enslaved people began openly questioning whites about rumors of both subaltern war from below and whether the King's order for the unconditional abolition of slavery was true.[98] By early November, the enslaved even tied reports of the planters' anger toward Reverend Barrett, an advocate for abolition, to their belief that Barrett had left Jamaica on a diplomatic mission to apprise the King of the planters' failure to implement his orders.[99]

Battle plans were also probably debated at the dances. Rebels then transmitted and discussed the plans with others in small groups and in secret. S.W. Sharpe, an enslaved man at Unity Hall, learned of the rebels' intentions by hiding behind a hut where the Bartibo brothers and two other people talked of the coming war. The rebels were set to strike either shortly before Christmas or during the holiday itself. They were still busy with recruitment and the challenge of maximizing the number of combatants ready to fight in the region, "wish[ing] to have eight or ten more estates to join them" before the first battle. Expanding the ground forces of the rebel army brought with it the potential for expanding its maritime war-making and transport capacities.[100]

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wrote. "But by giving them every alternate Saturday into the bargain, it enables them to perform their task with so much ease as almost converts it into an amusement."

[97] Ibid, 45.

[98] Ibid, 45.

[99] Testimony of William Glover, December 25, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 57.

[100] Testimony of S.W. Sharpe, December 19, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 46.

Enslaved people tried for rebellion in 1823 did not reveal many details of their general war strategy. Like most slave revolts, we know the rebels at Unity Hall planned on torching the trash houses and killing as many whites on the estate as possible. Their most important target was Thomas Aikman. After victory in this first battle, the enslaved intended to seize Aikman's house to function as their headquarters.[101] We can push plausible speculation further. For instance, the emphasis on securing seven to eight allies from throughout the region suggests that the forces of Unity Hall did not intend to attack surrounding estates one-by-one. Instead, rebel detachments composed of locals on the estate were responsible for conquering their own territory, until the region was conquered. These coterminous assaults would not only confuse colonial soldiers and militiamen deployed to suppress the rebels; they would also dare colonial military commanders to split their forces and spread them too thin, creating opportunities for rapid ambushes. The rebels would then scavenge the dead for supplies and retreat. Aikman's house close to the coast, however, was vulnerable to bombardment by warships and attacks by marines. Perhaps the rebels of Unity Hall planned on relocating their command center in the mountains to the south. Based on the plans of rebels at Frontier estate, St. Mary's Parish, in December 1823, and Argyle estate in the upper reaches of the Great River in Hanover Parish in June 1824, the rebels may have also planned to move the war upriver, killing any enemy units they encountered. Seizing control over the Great River would link the coasts and the mountainous interiors of the parish as a network of politically decentralized sites under a common military banner.[102]

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[101] Ibid, 46.

[102] Testimony of Ned, December 19, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 42.

By December, the enslaved of the region became bolder in their open defiance of white rule while moving through public spaces. For example, between thirty to forty enslaved people passed by the home of Mrs. Hayward, a white woman living eight miles from Montego Bay on the way to Montpelier. She heard someone shout "that the white people were seeking their rights, and that the negroes would do the same, and that they, like Bonaparte, were able and strong enough to get them." One voice repeated these words, followed by "a chorus of a song in which all appeared to join."[103]

Still, rebel conspirators remained divided over the final military objectives for the war. Around December 3, a huge gathering of over 150 people congealed in the slave village of Unity Hall. Drivers, pen-keepers, domestic workers, and ordinary fieldhands came from Spring Garden, Unity Hall, Friendship, Chatham, Round Hill, Blue Hole, Bamboo, Welcome, and Haddington estates, among others, to attend the festivities. The crowds in John Cunningham's house overflowed into Mary Ann Reid's house and the footpath. Toasts were made to the health and well-being of William Wilberforce.[104] Some leaders discussed immediate, unqualified freedom. But others sought something slightly different. The head and second driver of Spring Garden, for instance, said "that if they did not get Friday and Saturday, *or else their freedom,* that they would rise at Christmas.[105] I argue that this is an important distinction. A portion of the rebels were, in fact, attempting to use war as a

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[103] Testimony of John Parnther, December 21, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 48.

[104] Testimony of Robert Bartibo, December 21, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 47. "They drank their toast, 'here is your health, Mr. Wilberforce,'—this was the main word with them—and hurra'd; and every time his name was mentioned they hurra'd.

[105] Ibid, 47.

means of forcing negotiations. If the planters surrendered Fridays and Saturdays, some the rebel army might consider calling off their war.

The planned revolt for Christmas never took off. The Bartibo brothers, the two free canoemen in conflict with John Cunningham over a hog, turned King's evidence a week before Christmas. When John Reid of Round Hill learned of their betrayal, he beat Peter Bartibo in front of his fellow rebel conspirators. Later, during court proceedings, Reid charged and assaulted Peter Bartibo again for giving evidence against him.[106]

The Bartibo brothers turned against people who had extended kindness, group belonging, insider information, and mutual aid to them. They violated the implicit covenants that governed Black-only spaces of sociality. They were, of course, caught in a precarious situation, facing torture and execution should they safeguard their secrets. Perhaps they no longer were willing to die in a war that had little chance of success. Perhaps, as free people, they had little to gain but much to lose by bonding themselves in oath and deed to the rebel effort of armed self-defense. By aiding Aikman in suppressing the revolts, they might rectify their poor reputations and thereby safeguard their freedom and wealth as canoemen. Indeed, given their dismissal and return to court on multiple occasions, it seems they received amnesty for their service to the state.[107]

Several of the rebellion's leaders escaped the death penalty. Trelawny was sentenced to transportation, but the Governor commuted his sentence to three months imprisonment because of "his infirmities," which were not defined in the documents. William Kerr of Spring Garden, as well

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[106] Testimony of S. Vaughan, December 29, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 49; Testimony of Robert Bartibo, December 24, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 50.

[107] Testimony of S. Vaughan, December 29, 1823, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 49.

as Philip Haughton of Unity Hall, were also sentenced to transportation, but had their sentences commuted to one month hard labor.[108] John Cunningham was sentenced to six months in the workhouse and received 39 lashes upon entering and leaving the prison; Robert Galloway and his son William Stennett served three months and one month hard labor, respectively, and each received the same corporal punishment as Cunningham. Mary Ann Reid avoided the lash, but she received four months in the workhouse.[109]

A cutting question remains: Why did Aikman choose to violate custom and therefore risk rebellion against him and his kind? Aikman must have known about the rumors circulating in Jamaica about imminent freedom on the horizon. An admixture of misplaced trust and idiotic complacency is the easiest explanation. Maybe it was a play for power, to renegotiate the terms of slaveownership and African enslavement.

Paying attention to the environmental context of sugar cultivation provides some fuel for speculation. Recall the ongoing megadrought since 1822 in the sugar lowlands of the south. By late 1823, the sugar planted during the vernal season and autumnal seasons would have either been harvested or due for harvest. But, by this point, the weather would have negatively impacted sugar crop yields. Arriving ships still needed to fill their holds with product and they would be willing to take whatever they could find to meet demand. But the seasons had proven fair in the north. Aikman may have desired to exploit the shortage by forcing the enslaved to continue sugar cultivation and harvesting, especially with respect to the young sugar crops that could be taken off early. Aikman may have been blinded by fantasies of cornering the market, custom be damned.

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[108] William Bullock to Samuel Vaughan, February 9, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 82.

[109] Samuel Vaughan, Thomas Gray, and David Boyd, "The King Against William Kerr, et al.," January 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 81.

Stuart Schwartz and Matthew Mulcahy have recently argued that droughts made popular unrest and revolt more likely in Caribbean slave societies. Unlike hurricanes and earthquakes, droughts "not only generated steadily increasing suffering, but also provided ample time for planning [rebellions]. … Drought and the privation that accompanied it appear to have generated active resistance among enslaved people."[110] The case of Jamaica in 1823 offers nuance to this claim. Designs for rebellion coalesced among enslaved people *not* afflicted by drought. Mary Ann Reid and other rebel leaders had been sharing nutritious food with one another for months before the revolts planned for Christmas, 1823. This sustenance and the creation of logistical chains of support were exactly what soldiers needed not only to fight in battle, but to maintain the war effort over time. By contrast, in the south, southern slaveowners couldn't violate the custom of free time without endangering the lives of a critical mass of enslaved people. Drought conditions encouraged enslavers to grant more, not less, free time to locate food and water resources, outsourcing the responsibility of survival onto the enslaved, as was common practice. Moreover, environmental conditions rendered enslaved communities of the south incapable of accumulating the bare minimum of food and water required for supplying an army. For people in the drought zone, it was better to resist the violation of custom by running away and laying low as fugitives in the hills than by waging total war against a well-nourished enemy with soldiers teetering on the brink of starvation and dehydration.

[110] Stuart B. Schwartz and Matthew Mulcahy, "Natural Disasters in the Caribbean to 1850," in Philip D. Morgan, John Robert McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz, eds., *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 224-25.

Coda: John Clarke's War, 1824

On Saturday, June 4, 1824, John Clarke directed his comrades at Argyle estate, approximately 10 miles up the course of the Great River in the interior of Hanover parish, that their war had begun.

It was the expected end of the sugar harvesting cycle. But John Malcolm, the attorney and proprietor of Argyle, still had canes to take off, "the crop being long." Clarke's forces were angered by the transgression of custom. However, in return for giving up their Sunday, Clarke "made [a] bargain to take Saturday" the next week.[111]

Malcolm followed through with his promise.

On the next Saturday, however, Malcolm "turned us out," Robert Johnson claimed, "which he never did before." The enslaved of Argyle estate lost half of their Saturday because of it.[112] Malcolm claimed that his only purpose for doing so "was to ascertain whether they were all on the estate, and had not wandered about on the Friday night."[113] But by robbing those crucial hours on Saturday, there wasn't enough time for the enslaved to access the provision grounds and make it to the marketplaces in time to sell their goods and get some deserved rest.[114]

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[111] Testimony of Robert Johnson, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 118.

[112] Ibid, 118.

[113] Testimony of John Malcolm, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 119.

[114] Testimony of Robert Johnson, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 118.

Clarke and the rebels decided they would never show up for Saturday work again. Instead, they would go straight to their provision grounds, without asking for Malcolm's permission.[115] They were prepared to take up arms in order to show Malcolm they meant business.[116]

According to King George, an enslaved man at Argyle estate, this plan had been in the making since Christmas 1823. Perhaps Clarke and his forces had intended to link up with the rebels of Unity Hall.[117] If not for the latter's capture by colonial forces, the combined rebel army would have had a fighting chance to conquer the entire Great River watershed.

Like the Bartibo brothers, William Roach, an enslaved youth and trusted accomplice among the rebels, betrayed the rebel's plans to John Malcolm on June 9. Malcolm sent word to the militia to muster immediately at Argyle for imminent battle. Roach admitted his deception to other enslaved people at Argyle who were disconnected with the war plans. John Clarke and Robert Chambers quickly heard of Roach's treachery, and they wanted Roach found and destroyed.[118]

On June 13, John Clarke and the rebels heard a conch blow, signaling that the colonial soldiers were coming, so they took preemptive action. The previous day, they had buried food

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[115] Ibid*,* 118; Testimony of William Roach, July 17, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 120.

[116] Testimony of William Roach, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 116; Testimony of John Malcolm, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 115.

[117] Testimony of King George, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 118.

[118] Testimony of William Roach, August 20, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 116. It appears they, at least initially, kept Roach's identity secret from the rest of the enslaved population not involved in the war effort. Roach was in fear for his safety. Even the cook said "if she was a man, and knew who [had told Malcolm], she would directly take his life.

beneath their homes, fully expecting the authorities to search them, steal whatever they could carry, and then burn their homes to the ground.

The rebels collected as many stabbing weapons and firearms as possible before fleeing to their headquarters: a cave in the neighboring pastureland. One had to climb up vines to get to the tiny mouth above; the rebels could easily watch and drop stones upon colonial soldiers attempting to breach the cave. Clarke stationed a constant watch responsible for "let[ting] them know when trustee or busha appeared." This watchman was thus crucial for signaling to rebel forces down below that their base had been compromised.[119] John Clarke knew that the "buckras won't come" there, due to the difficulty of accessing it without exposure to rebel attacks from above.[120]

These kinds of caves were commonly found throughout Jamaica. Carved out of limestone rich hills and the karst landscapes, they served as sites of significance for Taino/Arawak indigenous peoples, fugitive runaway slaves, and rebels.[121] All caves offered seclusion and safety; many of them carved out of ground water source over millennia also gifted occupants a constant supply of drinking water. Before and after European contact, Taino cosmology represented the subterranean world of the water caves (*xaweye*) as passages to the underworld, one of three domains of reality, the other two being the sky world and the land world of living people. Powerful deities (*zemi*) inhabited the abyss, ensuring that waters continued to flow during dry seasons and drought. Unsurprisingly,

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[119] Testimony of Mary Wylie, July 16, 1824, and August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 125, 127; Testimony of King George, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 119.

[120] Testimony of Robert Johnson, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 118. John Clarke talked to Johnson and his other comrades that the cave was safe because the difficulty of accessing it meant that the "buckras won't come."

[121] For archaeological evidence connecting water caves and Taino village life, see also Alice Samson and Jago Cooper, "History on Mona Island: Long-Term Human and Landscape Dynamics of an 'Uninhabited' Island," *New West Indian Guide* 89 (2015), 30-60.

the Taino buried their honored dead within the caverns. But the Taino never saw them as permanent spaces to live in. That was until European colonizers forced them to take permanent refuge in the nexus between the living and the dead. With plenty of water but no food, they perished.[122] The bones, cave drawings, and material artifacts of Taino and African refugees and warriors thus intermingled in the dark caverns.[123] John Clarke and the rebels knew they were never truly alone in their cave.

On the night of June 14, they managed to burn a few cane-trash houses at Alexandria estate, Argyle's neighbor.[124] Their plan was to lure the whites into a concentrated space by setting specific sites in the cane fields ablaze.[125] Then, the rebels would kill their enemies and take their guns. With

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[122] William F. Keegan and Lisabeth A. Carlson, *Talking Taino: Caribbean Natural History from a Native Perspective* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), 94-96.

[123] See also Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 42. The cave six miles of Spanish town was a site of fishing and for the bones strewn about. "There runs a tradition among the Negroes, that a white person many years ago collected a vast pile and consumed it to ashes." But these caves were also, confirmed by later analysis, to have been made by the Indians "as a sort of catacombs, or offuaries, for their dead." Long disparaged this idea, because it was just as likely the bones of runaway slaves and Maroons. But this is beside the point. The water caves were sacred because the Indians *had* used them for their royals and their most honored dead. The end of their civilization occurred there. See also James Hume to John Clarke, August 18, 1851, D/HUM/2, ANG. In the mountains overlooking Jericho, St. John in the Vale, James Hume told of "a great many caves…[where] many runaway slaves hid…and soon died." What was most significant about these caves was their inaccessibility and their high elevation. Hume could not access them without exposing his horses to "great danger…so narrow is the space between them." See also Kofi E. Agorsah, "Archaeology of Maroon Settlements in Jamaica," *Maroon Heritage: Archaeological, Ethnographic, and Historical Perspectives,* edited by Kofi E. Agorsah (Kingston: University of the West Indies Canoe Press, 1994), 180-81. The water caves were associated with Taino and runaway fugitive slaves existing for a time on the margins. The Taino lived on tin memories of the Maroons, who had intermixed with populations and subsisted through such water caves.

[124] Testimony of John Malcolm, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 115; Testimony of Alexander Campbell, Proprietor of Copse Estate and Colonel of the Western Interior Regiment of Militia, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 116; Testimony of William S. Grignon, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 117.

[125] Testimony of William Roach, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 116.

those weapons, they would be able to travel up and down the river, killing all those who refused to join them or, we might imagine, to remain neutral, as consistent with African diplomacy.[126]

But the colonial soldiers were a no-show to the conflagration. John Clarke then spent the early morning hours reprovisioning the army, contracting Frances Hughes to boil victuals, which he brought up to the cave for his comrades.[127]

That night, the rebels killed seven horses and three mules belonging to Malcolm.[128] John Miller said that killing the horses would enable the rebels to capture John Malcolm and his wife much easier. William Wright cut out the tongue of Bucephalus, likely a prized horse of Malcolm's, so the dead animal's spirit could not tell the whites who had killed its body.[129] Bucephalus's desecrated corpse would "make their master see they made an example of him."[130]

The rebels' next intended target was the plantain walks of the enslavers. John Miller was determined to take as many plantains as possible for the rebel army. "What they could not cut," Miller stressed, "they must destroy." "When hunger caught buckra, it would kill them sooner than any thing else."[131] Thus, if the rebels couldn't have free time to get food and water, everyone—

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[126] Ibid, 116.

[127] Testimony of Mary Willey/Wyley, July 16, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 127.

[128] Testimony of John Malcolm, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 115.

[129] Testimony of King George, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 118.

[130] Testimony of William Daws, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 119.

[131] Ibid, 119.

combatants and non-combatants alike—must perish from famine. For Miller, total war required the potential destruction of non-combatants.

By June 16, Malcolm and a contingent of militiamen pinned John Clarke down in a thicket near the grazing grounds.

Malcolm called out to Clarke that it was time to surrender.

Clarke refused. He "made violent resistance" against the soldiers as they gradually closed their distance.[132]

Clarke waited until he was within the soldiers' and John Malcolm's field of vision. Then, he raised his knife to his own throat and cut. He bled out in front of Malcolm. Ben Reynolds and John Miller, two other rebel commanders, followed suit.[133] Later, in court, Malcolm wept as he recounted the scene of Clarke's death.[134]

After the suicide of the rebel leaders, the remaining rebels were unable to coordinate their attacks and make it back to the cave headquarters safely. Most of them surrendered in the next days, unable to face "the terror occasioned by the troops being in the woods."[135]

During the court trials held that August, Malcolm and state officials littered the surviving rebels with incessant questions, demanding to know the reasons why they agitated for rebellion. The

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[132] Testimony of John Malcolm, August 30, 1824, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 115. Testimony of Alexander Campbell, Proprietor of Copse Estate and Colonel of the Western Interior Regiment of Militia, Parliamentary Papers [1824] *Manumission, Government, and Population,* 116.

[133] Ibid, 115.

[134] Ibid, 115. "Was present when John Clarke was taken and put an end to himself, (here Mr. Malcolm was much affected, and shed tears); did not see him from the thicket make a blow at any man, but he made violent resistance; the only instrument he had was a knife, with which he cut his throat."

[135] Ibid, 116.

rebels remained silent and impenitent. When "asked if they had anything to say to their masters," they simply answered, "'No.'" Indeed, as Malcolm remarked, "they seemed to laugh at it."[136] They respected the oaths they had made to one another as fellow warriors. They owed nothing to the whites.

Conclusion

Seven years after the rebellions at Unity Hall and Argyle estate were crushed, Samuel Sharpe would lead a massive force of tens of thousands against the enslavers in western Jamaica, in what would become known as the Baptist War of 1831. It began in St. James and—unsurprisingly—spread rapidly throughout the Great River watershed. The insurrectionary conspirators of 1823 and 1824 not only prefigured, but established the political preconditions for, this war.

In 1834, metropolitan elites decided that if Britain could not control the slave trade or control the enslaved, then slavery must be abolished. For four more years, Black Jamaican endured the quasi-slavery of the apprenticeship period. But, come August 1, 1838, two years earlier than anticipated, the apprenticeship was to end in the unconditional freedom of every enslaved person in Jamaica.

By conjoining African and Jamaican histories, this chapter has supplied ways of thinking about the causes of these wars as embedded in the hyperlocal concerns and customary expectations of the enslaved. To the greatest extent possible, the enslaved demanded that they be allowed to practice and perfect their lives as if they were free. The political objects of their wars reflect their perceptions that they were not receiving what they were owed, in accordance with their station. The gravedigger hypothesis where violence breeds violence is only one half of the story. The brutality of

[136] Ibid, 116.

slavery set the preconditions and the stakes for conflict, but it did not "cause" war. When planters like Thomas Aikman and John Malcolm violated their promises to the enslaved in the same timeframe, critical masses of disaffected people rose in a collective struggle to wage a war of self-defense to force a renegotiation of the terms of the continued enslavement. This is why rebellious conspiracies emerged in 1823 and 1824. The place of the Great River and the riparian landscape in the everyday lives of the enslaved testifies to the co-operation of environmental, cultural, and martial Black imaginaries. The sites used to plan war—the bridge, the river, the slave dances—were also what was at stake in war.

In the next chapter, we will see how free Black Jamaicans dealt with the destabilization of the relationship between customary and formal law after Emancipation. This new field of conflict was defined by the former slaveowners' attempts to enclose Jamaica's land and freshwater resources from those who had laid and enforced claims to them for generations. The whites knew from historical experience that the withholding and distribution of land and water access was their first and last trump card to play in the game of anti-Black punitive governance. A series of multi-year droughts in the 1840s would aid them in this project.

Chapter 3

Banishment or Re-Enslavement? The Foundations of Environmental Enclosure in Free Jamaica

On August 1, 1838, six thousand adults and two thousand youth of African descent thronged into the torrid, sticky central square of Spanish Town. Thirteen companies of Her Majesty's troops mustered for the occasion, stacked in orderly rows at the steps of King's House, the Governor's mansion.[1] Save during the throes of mass slave revolt and the Saturday and Sunday markets in Kingston, this many non-white people had never amassed themselves in one particular place and time, much less the capital city—precisely where generation after generation of their enslavers, with the magic words "martial law," condemned scores of Black fugitive rebels to death since 1665.

On any other day, the soldiers would have rained a hailstorm of iron balls upon this motley mob of Black insurrectionists. But on this glorious day, the formerly enslaved gathered to celebrate the dawn of a new world in which they would forever live "under the same Laws as other freemen, whether white, black, or coloured."[2] After centuries of racial slavery, final Emancipation in the British empire was nigh.

Bursts of ebullient laughter and frenzied conversation between friends and strangers comingled with hushed silences and somber reflections upon the travails of the past and the

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[1] "Emancipation, 1st August 1838," http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/images/emancip.htm; "Abolition of Slavery in Jamaica," Royal Museums Greenwich, https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-254942.

[2] Walter Augustus Feurtado, *The Jubilee Reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria in Jamaica: Being A Complete Account of the Principal and Important Events Which Occurred in Jamaica During the Fifty Years Reign of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, from the Year 1837, to the Year 1887, and Also a Full and Complete Account of the Jubilee Rejoicings in Jamaica in 1887* (Kingston: W.A. Feurtado, 1890), 8.

magnificent history of Black futures to come. They joined together to praise their ancestors for helping them arrive at this juncture. The spirits of their ancestors smiled and sighed in relief.

Soon enough, Governor Lionel Smith arrived by horse-drawn carriage, rounding the cheering crowd at its margins before meandering on foot up the steps of the King's house. Here, he recited the Emancipation Act and proclaimed that henceforth August 1 would be celebrated every year, with "the same reverence and respect which is observed and due to the Sabbath."[3]

Under cerulean cloudless sky and a blissful sun, sweat, triumphant *free* sweat, now ran from the brows of every Black person in Jamaica. Rum, food, water, laughter, and ideas copiously flowed at celebrations held throughout the colony. William Gibson of Falmouth, born enslaved, spent the party ruminating about what this day meant not just for Jamaica, but for the greater Atlantic world. "Let us pray," he entreated his friends, "that our brothers and sisters in other lands may be free."[4]

Yet, their hope for a better future must have been tempered by deep skepticism and caution. In 1838, Jamaica became the largest, most populous free Black country under minority white rule in the world. No one was certain how the planter classes would react to flux in the relationship between customary law and formal law. The unspoken rules of custom that previously governed inter-racial and inter-class power relations, as well as the distribution of land and water reserves, were up for grabs. Black people in 1838 looked back to the political and environmental upheavals of

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[3] "Emancipation, 1838," https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/observer-central-news/porteous-proud-to-read-freedom-proclamation_107666&template=MobileArticle. "Whereas an act has been passed by the legislator of this our island of Jamaica for terminating the present system [of] the blessing and privileges of unrestricted freedom to all classes of its inhabitants and whereas it is incumbent on all inhabitants of this our island to testify their grateful sense of his divine favour we do therefore, by and with the advice of our privy council of this our said island, direct and appoint that Wednesday, the said first day of August next, be observed in all churches and chapels as a day of general thanksgiving to almighty god for these his mercies; and of humble intercession for his continued blessing and protection on this most important occasion. And we do hereby call upon persons of all classes within this our said island to observe this said first day of August next [with] the same reverence and respect which is observed and due to the Sabbath."

[4] Tom Zoellner, "A long-forgotten holiday animates Black Lives Matter," *Washington Post,* July 31, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/07/31/long-forgotten-holiday-animates-black-lives-matter/.

the 1820s for clues about the challenges they would face in their present. As we discovered in Chapters 1 and 2, rebellions erupted throughout the northern sugar- and coffee-producing regions in 1823 and 1824 because planters had reneged on promises to surrender every Friday and Saturday of the week to local enslaved populations. Eight years later, the taking up of arms as a defensive measure against the violation of custom by planters in St. James and Hanover parishes in 1831-32 followed a similar pattern.[5] In contrast, a megadrought stretching from 1821 to May 1824 in the southern sugar valleys and cattle pens deterred the planters from transgressing upon enslaved peoples' free time. Drought conditions may have helped instigate an expansion of Black-led subsistence agriculture and water-provisioning activities. The extension of customary powers to the enslaved acted to militate against the prospect of mass revolt.

Now that Black people were nominal "free subjects" of the British crown, what would become of the customary order of labor, land, and water distribution? How would relations with the hybrid political and natural environment change or not change because of Emancipation? What kinds of new battlefields and battlefronts, new terrific and terrifying conflicts, might befall the emancipated, who still inhabited the fugitive pockmarks, craters, and haunted ecotones of the old world? How might the planters of tomorrow yet attempt to control, or otherwise dispose of, Black lives deemed not just worthless, but barriers to future progress?

[5] See also Parliamentary Papers [1832], *Copy of the Report of a Committee of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, appointed to inquire into the Cause of, and Injury Sustained by, the recent Rebellion in that Colony; together with the examinations on Oath, Confessions and other Documents annexed to that Report,* 3-4. The rebellions and counterinsurgency operations of the colonial state of 1823-24 were centered in the parishes of St. Mary's, St. George's, St. James, and Hanover. I posit that the memory of what spurred the enslaved toward revolt—the violation of customary rules that missionaries and reformers would seek to codify from above, through "amelioration" policies—survived. The demand of full freedom by Christmas 1831 by rebel leaders and soldiers involved in the "Baptist War" of 1831 (which included Methodists, Moravians, and non-Christians) emerged out of the unrealized expectation that their customary rights and privileges had not been enshrined in law.

This chapter explores how Jamaica's planter classes engineered novel forms of artificially produced natural resource scarcity to rebind and to expel free Black workers from their homelands on the plantations, as circumstances dictated. Immediate contestation over the meaning of Emancipation vis-à-vis environmental enclosure, especially of freshwater reserves, established structural trends, processes, and pressures that continued to shape Black social life in Jamaica over the rest of the nineteenth century. I contend that the transformation of formal and customary law led to the rapid emergence of two novel state-sanctioned mechanisms of anti-Black punitive governance: (1) the "banishment" of rebellious Black workers from their former homelands; and (2) the "re-enslavement" of Black workers for months or years at a time under labor and debt obligations to the planter. Successive multi-year droughts during the 1840s then enhanced the ability for planters in areas lacking natural water sources to skew formal and customary agreements to their advantage. The deleterious effects of meteorological drought on Black subsistence farming and water-provisioning capabilities deterred Black migration away from the estates. This compensated for the harm those droughts dealt to the sugar and coffee crops. Planters who enforced a monopoly on water supplies took advantage of free Black people in arid zones to immobilize and dispose of tenants and laborers at will. The political and economic factors influencing collective Black negotiation and contestation with planters and landlords were inextricably conjoined with volatile environmental factors subject to human influence.

The First Rites of Banishment

Between five and six A.M. on August 2, 1838, a proprietor who remained anonymous and unnamed in the extant evidence, stood calmly in front of the great house of a plantation located in the Mocho Mountains of Clarendon parish. Per usual, he struck the great bell and cracked his whip to alert his former slaves that the sugar fields were awake, anxiously awaiting their hoes and hands.

But no one showed up. Not a handful of Black people. Not the old-timers. Not the women. Not the impressionable youth. Not one person. It was like that all week.[6]

We can imagine how this proprietor's teeth gnashed in vengeful fury as he muttered curse after curse upon this infernal holiday. He may have interpreted his former slaves' conscious, collective, and coordinated withdrawal of labor as an assault against his notion of the moral economy of debt and mastery. As I described in Chapter 1, slaveowners believed that holding African persons in slavery was not just a sovereign right guaranteed by the Christian god. Based on the story of Joshua, *enslaving* "aliens" who had been defeated in war, rather than simply *exterminating* them, was also understood as a divine commandment from above. The equivalence that white planters, colonial officials, and missionaries inscribed between bondage and Blackness in the times of slavery continued to influence their idea of racial stigma and differentiation after Emancipation. In their perverse logic, free Black people still owed sovereign authorities for the right to exist. When collective labor strikes disrupted crop planting and harvesting cycles, planters viewed such resistance as a violation of this debt principle—akin to a riotous mutiny, an insurrection in microcosm.

Existential questions must have flooded this proprietor's mind. The glut in the global sugar markets had already sent sugar prices into freefall; indeed, it was only a matter of time before Jamaica's planters paid the same export/import duties as those in other British colonies and foreign territories.[7] How would he outcompete foreign planters in Cuba, Brazil, and the United States who

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[6] W.E. Barrett to C.H. Darling, January 18, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued. (In Continuation of the Papers Presented to Parliament 14 March 1839, no. 107,* 11. Barrett did not name the proprietor, perhaps because he hoped to avoid impugning the reputation of a fellow white man publicly to colonial authorities.

[7] The equalization of sugar import/export taxes (e.g., 1846 Sugar Duties Act) from both British and foreign colonies formally negated the reduced duties paid by Jamaican planters. In conjunction with the abolition of slavery, they lost their privileged position in the British, as well as global, sugar markets, a position that would never return. In 1854, 50% added import taxes on Jamaican sugar and rum into Great Britain.

mobilized African slaves during critical periods of the agricultural cycle, at any time of their choosing?[8] Would he be forced to sell whatever sugar he might still salvage from this catastrophe to the lowest bidder, taking loans at exorbitant interest rates make up for the existing debts he could not hope to pay?[9] Furthermore, save the great megadrought between 1820 and 1824, the dry/wet cycles of the past years had remained favorable and relatively predictable. What if the weather was poor in 1839 *and* Black labor became even scarcer? What if the seasons proved favorable for an even greater number of Black people to live exclusively on their food crops and the money earned by selling the surplus to other?

This proprietor considered his options. Either he needed to get these recalcitrant Black people living on his land to work or he had to replace them. In addition, if the old or new workers accepted his terms, he needed to invent some way of compelling them to remain for months at a time. And if undesirable Black workers rejected him and refused to vacate the premises, he needed to invent some way of compelling them to leave, without exposing his life and property to the fists, blades, and fire of Black strikers.

Anticipating pockets of chaos and anarchy, Governor Lionel Smith requested that all proprietors exercise extreme caution when charging rents, treating workers cruelly, or evicting Black communities from their homes too soon after August 1. A mass exodus of thousands of

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[8] Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (Second Edition. London: Chapman & Hall, 1860), 107.

[9] See also Richard Hildreth, *The Ruin of Jamaica* (American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), 5. As Hildreth argued, the structure of credit and debt in the British empire led to chronic planter indebtedness because it was not feasible to organize capitalist production in relation to "unpredictable" events, such as "[a] hurricane, a negro revolt, or a maroon inroad…[and] sometimes a drought." When sugar production ran short, "a debt was contracted, which, frequently growing larger and larger, was finally secured by mortgage, with the condition to ship all the sugars in the merchant's vessels, and consigned to his house." Following bankruptcy, the creditor foreclosed the mortgage, and "sooner or later most of the old estates passed into the hands of the few great English mercantile houses, known as the West India interest."

unemployed, landless, penniless Black people from the estates would propel vagrants and soon-to-be-criminals into the highways, towns, and hills. The state historically limited the sovereign capacity of slaveowners to manumit large contingents of enslaved captives for the same reason.[10] Hasty punitive actions could also unwittingly encourage the eruption of local riots, whose violence could spill out and infect neighboring estates and towns. From the perspective of the state, these contingencies represented an unconscionable threat to public order and military security.[11] After all, the plantocracy was still tending their wounds from the flames of the Baptist War of 1831. In the span of a few weeks, rebel armies had set fire to over a hundred properties, resulting in at least £1,154,589 in damage to property and £161,659 in additional costs for funding the armed forces.[12]

Thus, under the auspices of helping the free Black population to become socially productive and respectable subjects in colonial society—and to contain the scale and scope of both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence after Emancipation—the Governor had requested a moratorium on all notices to quit lands and the collection of rents until, at the very earliest, November 1, 1838.[13]

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[10] William Alers Ankley, *Letters to Joseph Sturge in Answer to his Statements relating to the Arcadia Estate in Jamaica, in the Journal of his Visit to the West Indies* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1838), 5. Joseph Sturge noted how he had "inquired of well-informed persons, recently arrived from Jamaica, if they had ever heard of a single instance of an entire liberation on any sugar estate in the island, and they have answered that they never had."

[11] Feurtado, *The Jubilee Reign,* 9. Governor Smith had announced publicly that, after August 1, 1838, "Idle persons who will not take employment, but go wandering about the country, will be taken up as vagrants, and punished in the same manner as they are in England."

[12] Parliamentary Papers [1832], *Copy of the Report of a Committee of the House of Assembly of Jamaica, appointed to inquire into the Cause of, and Injury Sustained by, the recent Rebellion in that Colony; together with the examinations on Oath, Confessions and other Documents annexed to that Report,* 4.

[13] Feurtado. *The Jubilee Reign,* 9. Governor Smith commanded free Black people to continue obligating their labor to the estate and to pay proprietors rents for the lands they previously enjoyed for "free." "Remember that in freedom you will have to depend on your own exertions for your livelihood, and to maintain and bring up your families. You will work for such wages as you can agree upon your employers. … Where you can agree and continue happy with your old masters I strongly recommend you to remain on those properties on which you have been born, and where your parents were buried. But you must not mistake, in supposing that your present houses, gardens, and provision grounds are your own

Like many of his peers, the proprietor, however, treated the request as just that. It was never a binding legal order.[14] In fact, the Governor's lack of a clear legal prohibition acted as a kind of blank check to govern the Black population as the planters chose. Former slaveowners, in a technical sense, could no longer use the law of slavery to justify the use of pure physical violence against Black people to immobilize them for work to one estate and one master, in perpetuity. But they already knew that there were practical limits to their violence. Historically, the application of too much force against the enslaved tended to encourage, never discourage, them to run away or execute reciprocal reprisals taking the form of murder and property destruction up to conspiracy and full-scale revolt. Slaveowners and the enslaved participated, albeit unequally, in the construction of a customary legal regime in which the enslaved peacefully obligated labor to the estate, so long as they were permitted to keep certain articles of property and money and were granted plots of land to farm on their own account and to pass on to their kin and kith upon death.

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property, they belong to the proprietors of the estates, and you will have to pay rent for them in money or labour according as you and your employers can agree together."

[14] See also Chapter 31, "An Act Supplementary to the Act for the Abolition of Slavery," Section 10, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the First Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: G.P.O, 1903), 123. There was a legal precedent for the rent/eviction moratorium from the period of Apprenticeship period which the Governor refused to supply with the full force of the law. Though broken constantly, apprenticeship laws stipulated that proprietors were to wait at least three months to eject manumitted apprentices from their homes and grounds, after which time "every such person shall be deemed and considered a trespasser, and it shall and may be lawful…to eject such offender from such land, dwelling, or building, and inflict some punishment, not exceeding ten pounds, or imprisonment, not exceeding thirty days." See also Parliamentary Papers [1839], Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State by the Agent for the Island of Jamaica, Relative to the State of that Island,* 13. In some instances, proprietors saw it in their best interest to refrain charging rents until November 1, 1838. However, to continue the moratorium, Black workers had to continue reflexively to labor for the estate; transgressions of that customary agreement resulted in rent charges and evictions. In Manchester, Carpenter Mountain's District, for example, rents were not charged until people refused to work or "behave[d] very improperly." See also "An Act to Abrogate the Apprenticeship of Praedial Labourers in the Island of *St. Vincent* and its Dependencies," Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to West Indies, Part II: The Windward Islands' Government*, 115. In St. Vincent, colonial authorities issued specific legal guidance precluding the eviction of anyone before August 1, 1839, so long as they were "willing to continue to perform [sugar] work…for stipulated wages," and did not take part in "insubordinate, quarrelsome, or riotous behavior…[and] drunkenness, theft, trespass, or other gross delinquency."

The co-operation of formal and customary law still obtained after Emancipation. No changes had been made in the actual legal code respecting the rights, duties, and powers of free Black liberal citizen-subjects save those governing murder, master-worker relations, and landlord-tenant relations. The negation of *property-in-persons* by itself was incapable of producing qualitative shifts in formal power relations between slave and master, and slave and state. The transition from slavery to freedom merely followed preexisting protocols governing manumission, quantitatively scaled up to apply to every enslaved person.[15] This foreshortening of the meaning of Black freedom created spaces formally governed by civil and statutory law in which the absolute will of the planter over their private property *qua* "land" reigned supreme, as if the planter was sovereign. The planter thus maintained an unquestionable right to *property-in-things*. The use or consumption of this property by unauthorized persons demanded restitution for the owner and criminal persecution. Emancipation liberated the planter class to withhold or dispense user-privileges over land and water resources, including the fixed infrastructure of the estate (its roads, animals, carts), with the aid of the state's law enforcement capacities. Though *property-in-persons* was no longer a legally enforceable status, customary and formal law clearly recognized *rights-in-persons,* as stipulated by the making and breaking of contractual oaths and debt obligations.[16]

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[15]Ankley, *Letters to Joseph Sturge*, 5. Abolitionist Baptist missionaries saw the lack of significant legal change as an indicator of planters' sabotage of freedom. Though legal change alone could never solve class and racial antagonisms, the lack of any significant changes in the legal code vis-à-vis Black subjectivity as a formal citizen-subject allowed for planters to fill the legal void with their own set of prescriptions and proscriptions regarding the use and possession of private property. That is, general Emancipation did not qualitatively redefine power relations because it simply scaled up an older form of manumission to apply to the Black masses. As Joseph Sturge argued, this model was insufficient and inadequate for the abolition of slavery. "Neither the instance of Antigua, nor of the emancipation of a few non-praedials in the towns of Jamaica, or even unattached praedials elsewhere, furnishes, as it appears to me, a precedent applicable to the case."

[16] For the debate about understanding African slavery along a continuum of free/unfree labor ("rights-in-persons") or as a war/market-mediated rupture between free and unfree labor ("property-in-persons"), see also Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, "Introduction: African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1977), 3-80; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*

The same formal and customary legal regimes that ostensibly guaranteed Black freedom could just as well produce Black tenants and workers to treat no different than ordinary slaves. So long as any given planter acted under the auspices of safeguarding their private property and maintaining good order and discipline within their territory, the state would not interfere. As it had been in the times of slavery, physical violence was therefore authorized to regulate the Black population so long as it did not incite riot and insurrection by remaining "severe" but not "cruel."[17]

By the second week of August, the proprietor devised a cunning plan for counterattack.

During the week, he observed truant Black workers secretly traveling to the water tank which had served the humans and animals of the plantation. They were merely carrying on with traditional practice, as this was the only ready freshwater source for miles. The rest of the water tanks were either behind the fences of neighbors or located miles away in the oft-dry river valleys of Clarendon and Vere.[18]

So, the proprietor locked up the taps. When a party of Black people returned expecting to fetch water, he approached them, sternly "refused them water," and "immediately gave them notices

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(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[17] See also Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

[18] Ankley. *Letters to Joseph Sturge,* 16. There is a dearth of documentary evidence of other instances in which the enclosure of water supplies precipitated an expulsion. As we discuss below, we can reasonably speculate that it was a cornerstone of planter strategy. Water resources were enclosed by planters during the era of slavery to delimit and restrict slaves' ability not just to sustain themselves in a state of bare life, but to thrive and proliferate, *sans* external mediation. At Arcadia estate, on the drought-prone northern coast of Trelawny parish in the 1830s, for example, William Ankley reported that he lived on a plot "about seven acres, in an important part of the estate, planted with trees, and containing the principal pond of water for the use of the cattle. So great is its importance, that it is surrounded by a stone wall, five feet high, and in dry seasons a watchman is usually set to guard it from encroachment. When this pond fails, the cattle are obliged to be driven several miles off to water."

to quit" the property.[19] No delay, no discussion, no negotiation.[20] A substantial number of these Black workers departed the estate soon thereafter. The proprietor did not resort to sheer force to expel Black strikers from his land; instead, he simply weaponized his water monopoly to achieve a political end. By doing so, our proprietor outlined an efficient, modern, seemingly "non-violent" model for dispensing exemplary punishment, as well as potential rewards, upon Black workers who questioned his labor and water-use policies.

It is unknown where this Black community went, and what they did to survive. But we do know that the crops they had previously planted on their land by customary right were now legally the private property of the proprietor. To harvest them now was tantamount to "trespassing" and "theft." Anyone who "squatted" the property would have had to avoid detection while making daily treks to water sources located miles away. Or pray for perfect rains to fill their calabashes on command, a most improbable scenario in the dry season.[21]

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[19] W.E. Barrett to Hall Pringle, Four Paths, Clarendon, January 18, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued*, 11. Admittedly, this is one of the few instances I have identified in the extant documentary record where the withholding of water resources was a tactic in Black labor control and a mechanism of producing evictions. That lack, however, should not lead scholars to assume that it was rare or exceptional. The power of proprietors to withhold or dispense freshwater resources was, in my view, so quotidian and common as to not warrant mention; I proceed as if it was, *inter alia,* integrated into negotiations between workers/masters and tenants/landlords. The provision of water to African slaves and apprentices was also described in legal code. See also Chapter 31, "An Act Supplementary to the Act for the Abolition of Slavery," Section 5, *Jamaica: Perpetual Laws* (JamaicaL 1837-38), 121. Even as recently as March 24, 1838, "Every employer or manager…shall, for every such body of apprenticed labourers, provide such a sufficiency of cooks and water carriers, to aid such apprentices, and to supply their wants and necessities while in the field, as was provided in a state of slavery." Section 49 of the same law specified that female apprentices suckling children get "cooks, water carriers, and nurses" when engaged in field labor of any kind.

[20] See also Testimony of R. Chamberlaine, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued*, 13, 15. In St. Thomas in the East, for example, a "great number of summonses issued for rent during the running of the first three months of freedom. … The 1st of August came and...the planters offered the terms they [negroes] had previously resolved on, and they were in most cases declined. 'Notices to quit' were served on the labourers in all directions; in many instances on the whole population of a plantation indiscriminately, and in some instances previously to being afforded an opportunity of accepting or rejecting the proffered terms."

[21] Thomas Harvey and William Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866: A Narrative Tour Through the Island, with Remarks on Its Social, Education and Industrial Condition* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1867), 2.

So, they fled together, carrying whatever tools and artifacts of their past life their backs, heads, and hands could muster. Banished from their ancestral homelands, they confronted a disquieting dilemma. They could identify an employer—a former slaveowner—willing to offer fair terms of employment and tenancy, one with land to rent and a steady, consistent supply of freshwater. Or they could take their chances in the sparsely populated forests, hills, and swamps of the colony, where access to drinking water was never guaranteed.

Strikers and Scabs—The Roots of the Eviction-Migration Cycle

Labor strikes for better wages, lower rents, and unfettered access to unused land rapidly proliferated throughout the colony. Black peoples' demands were simple and reasonable. They refused to degrade their bodies daily in labor for the planter at his beckon call for months or years on end. If they chose to work, they would do so for 2 to 4 shillings per task, not the insulting average rate of 1 shilling or less per day. They were loath to pay rent on homes and plots; if they chose to pay, it would be for one rent charge per household—a demand to be dealt with as a collective unit.[22] To the greatest degree possible, women were to be removed from plantation labors so they could focus on water gathering, the marketing of goods, and managing the finances and domesticated animals of the household.[23] They affirmed their right to bury and celebrate their honored dead however and wherever they pleased. Sometimes, all they wanted was a set of decent

[22] Testimony of Charles Thompson, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Copy or Extracts from any further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State*, 11. Thompson stated that "Ruinate at present from trespass and want of labourers; no one is at work at present, all hands having struck for 3s. 4d. per day."

[23] Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2000), 148; Jean Besson, "Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women," in *Women and Change in the Caribbean, a Pan-Caribbean perspective,* ed. Janet Momsen, 15-37. (London: James Currey, 1993), 22, 27.

clothes.[24] On occasion, striking workers symbolically destroyed fractions of the planter's sugar crops to evince their collective strength in ways that would circulate stories of their prestige and power to the broader public.[25]

In terms of sugar production, many planters were left with crops that rotted in the soil without Black labor. Bitter complaints about the deleterious consequences of Emancipation to the sugar industry, and therefore white rule, resonated across Jamaica's western and southern sugar- and coffee-producing belt.[26] Black strikers kept winning victory after victory in battles which unfolded on the planters' home turf.[27]

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[24] G.M. Lawson to Governor Lionel Smith, May 20, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Copies or Extracts of Further Communications transmitted to the Marquees of Normandy by the Agent of Jamaica, on the 13th day of June and the 12th day of July, relative to the Agricultural State of that Colony. 27 August 1839*, 7. One Black worker on strike at Porto Bello estate for better clothes, among other privileges, added that "that the time would soon come when [the proprietor] and the other buckras would walk the roads with their bundles under their arms, while he and the other blacks would be riding their horses."

[25] J.V. Purrier, "Report," January 26, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839]*, Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State,* 5. For instance, In Lucea in January 1839, 46 properties out of 50 in JV Purrier's district reported "'strikes,' in order to enforce an exorbitant rate of wages," as well as "the destruction of canes by the labourers…[which] exceeds anything that can be imagined!"

[26] J.R. Grosett to C.H. Darling, Parliamentary Papers [1839]*, Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State by the Agent for the Island of Jamaica, Relative to the State of that Island,* 12. "In consequence of the extreme negligence of herdsmen, a general disinclination on their part to attend the stock, the destruction of canes throughout the parish has been immense." See also "The Committee appointed at the Public Meeting held at the Court House, Buff Bay, St. George's, on the 6th February 1839," Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Copies or Extracts of Further Communications Transmitted to the Marquees of Normandy by the Agent of Jamaica, on the 13th day of June and the 12th day of July, relative to the Agricultural State of that Colony.* "The crop has been injured to the extent of 30 acres, principally plants 1st and 2d ratoons, on account of the negligence of the watchmen and herdsmen. The above 30 acres have been entirely destroyed by the stock, and not a single cane remaining, besides 23 acres seriously injured, half eaten down."

[27] Parliamentary Papers [1839]*, Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State,* 3-4, 6. My claims here are based on my survey of extant evidence from Jamaica as a whole. The cases are too numerous to list here. As a telling example: On January 1, 1839, in Lucea, 2143 Black workers, 1/5 to 1/6 of whom were women, were still attached to the estates, down from 4253 Black workers, 1/2 of whom where women, on August 1, 1838. Of those workers, task-work instead of work by the day, obligating an average of six hours per task. 1,214 of those workers were "known to have been 'sitting down' under a passive refusal to do any sort of work, or to remove from the properties, since the day of their emancipation. … [They] are withholding their rents; and are to this hour retaining their houses and grounds illegally, and in defiance of all right of property whatsoever. … [The] managers were firmly convinced that, under the existing administration of the law, no such demands would be enforced; while out of the 18 on which the demand was made, one case alone succeeded."

To deter collective acts of resistance, the planter class flexed its state-sanctioned capacity to banish striking workers from their homelands. Reports abounded throughout the colony describing Black communities evicted *en masse* by summary dictate. Planters invaded the old slave villages to purge them of trespassers and to make way for replacements. They did things like knock Black people around with blunt weapons or kick them down flights of stairs, irrespective of gender or age. They handcuffed men, women, and children together, "as in the worst times of slavery, for a period of ten hours" to await trial for refusing to abide by his expulsion order. They smashed up Black peoples' accumulated furniture and household goods and stole or killed their domesticated animals. They stationed armed gangs to block farmers from reaching their provision grounds. And they released throngs of hungry cattle and livestock against the same.[28] This strategic destruction of the enemy's logistical supply chains of food and water—their capacity to reproduce over time—mirrored conventional wars of attrition.

Thousands of Black people witnessed the bounty of their past toils legally looted. Crops and goods that functioned as vessels for subaltern capital investment vanished. Everything would have to be rebuilt from scratch. Marriages and holiday celebrations would be postponed indefinitely. The dead would not receive the funerary rites befitting their dignity and social standing. Following mass expulsion events, Reverend William Barret observed "the roads leading to several markets…literally thronged with human beings" carrying "the produce of their grounds, ripe and unripe."[29] Black refugees—usually labeled as "vagrants" in the documentary sources—roved the city streets and

[28] W.E. Barrett to Hall Pringle, January 18, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued*, 11-13. For many planters, such action was infinitely preferable to the monetary and time costs of undertaking and awaiting the outcome of litigation in the formal courts.

[29] Ibid, 13.

public roads and hidden paths of the countryside searching for new work and new homes. 1838 was a catastrophe for capital: *Black peoples' capital.*

The collective experience of shared misfortune helped spur the formation of mobile solidarities in which neighborhoods fled their ancestral homelands together, as units. At Spur Tree in Manchester, for example, thirty Black workers were denied wages and land by their former enslaver. In response, they "formed themselves into an itinerant gang, and went through Mile Gully looking for work."[30] At the time, guinea grass, pimento, and coffee cultivation dominated the political economy of the region. Small plots of land (0.5-1.5 acres) were reputedly being sold and rented rather liberally to former enslaved people of the plantation, likely a pragmatic move by the proprietor to retain a favored portion of the labor force for seasonal work.[31] But the gang found no viable employment or tenancy opportunities at Mile Gully. They wearily travelled onward to neighboring Petersfield and found work for an indeterminate amount of time.[32]

During slavery, small- and large-scale slaveowners had organized and rented out gangs like these to sugar planters, depending on the season. Free Black people reappropriated this form to meet the challenge of expulsion and migration. If Emancipation did nothing else, it opened

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[30] Letter from J.W. Grant, January 9, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued*, 5.

[31] Barry Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1988), 195. As Higman notes, "The location and layout of the subdivision suggests that it was designed to retain the labour force, in an area of northern Manchester which had great potential for peasant development, and at the end of the 1850s rents were still being collected from labourers. In part, these arrangements probably reflected the seasonal labour demands of coffee and pimento within a diversified land use pattern."

[32] "Petersfield," *Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery*, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/1839. Not much extant documentary evidence is available for Petersfield in Manchester Parish. There were 74 enslaved people connected to the estate close to the time of Emancipation, suggesting it had a diversified commercial output in commodities other than sugar. See also Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued*, 5. Oldbury was a relatively large sugar estate of 900 acres containing an enslaved population of 147 in 1832. After August 1, 1838, "A large number of late apprentices [simply] left the property…to endeavour to find a better employer."

opportunities for Black communities to flee collectively from the territory of one planter for another—the reactivation of a strategy of mobility from Africa historically adapted to prevent one's enslavement, sale, and deportation across the Atlantic.

But over the next months, the mere act of searching beyond the estate's boundaries for better paid work under a kinder employer—one who acted fairly and paid wages on time during plentiful as well as down periods of the market—frequently resulted in summary ejectment from their homes, even if rents had been paid.[33] Soon enough, proprietors began to insert stipulations in their rental contracts prohibiting tenants from working for another employer if the former owed any debt, down to the pence, to their respective employer/landlord.[34] So much for "free labor."

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To salvage their cash-crop cultivation and to limit the danger of mass Black vagrancy, planters reabsorbed contingents of Black workers, not only from neighboring plantations, but also distant lands. Planters quickly learned that they could compensate for weaknesses in their bargaining positions vis-à-vis Black strikers by pitting local and migrant Black communities against each

[33] W.E. Barrett to Hall Pringle, January 18, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica-Continued*, 11. "I know for a fact that on the 1st of August, the proprietor of another place called up the people and told them that he should have no occasion for the services of any who intended to go to Four Paths chapel on that day; and I have seen an old African woman, for years the faithful slave of that property, dismissed because she dared to come to chapel against her master's wishes. And since that period, when several of the people of that same master were giving some labour to the London Missionary Society, in making a lime-kiln, the constable was sent to observe who they were, to take their names, and they were immediately served with notices to quit, because, if they worked for parson, the parson must find them houses and grounds."

[34] See "An Act to Facilitate the Recovery of Small Debts," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in Third Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: Cathcart & Sherlock, 1840), 12-18; See Law 7 of 1847, "An Act to Prevent Indebted Persons Quitting the Island, To Sanction the Proceedings of Judges and Justices in Cases of Crimes, Breach of the Peace, and Forcible Entry and Detainer, To Enable Parochial Officers to Discharge Their Duty, and to Enforce Payment of Rent, During the Existence of Martial Law," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in Eleventh Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Spanish Town: William J. Pearson, 1848), 9-11; and Law 8 of 1847, "An Act for the Summary Disposal of Certain Petty Thefts," in the *Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Eleventh Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria,* 11-12.

another. One side defended their homeland. The other side sought to create a new homeland. Both sides were ensnared in a no-win situation.

The case of Flamstead, a 380-acre coffee plantation nestled in the Port Royal mountains, exemplified this tactic in action. Reverend Charles Fyfe, the proprietor, knew that his former slaves would resist any radical changes to customs concerning free access to the estates' infrastructure. In the past, Philip Stewart, the old headman, and a large group of other Black farmers had pooled their resources together to purchase a cart, with which they hauled subsistence crops and export articles to and from the port towns of Kingston, Port Royal, Buff Bay, and Port Morant, each within one to two days march from Flamstead. In exchange for a share of the profit, Fyfe lent out his mules and donkeys to Stewart for traversing the rocky, hilly terrain. In 1832, there were only 47 enslaved people attached to the land, and population density in the area remained low.[35] Substantial portions of land could be settled without coming into conflict with other planters or Black farming communities. Finally, Flamstead's water tanks and its large pond, clearly marked on contemporary maps, were likely the primary sources of freshwater in the neighborhood.[36]

Sometime around November, Fyfe served his old headman Philip Stewart and eleven Black men under his leadership notices to appear in court. Fyfe accused them of collectively organizing to withhold the five unpaid days of labor he expected in lieu of the payment of rent. This was akin to a labor strike. Stewart and his allies offered to cancel the debt by paying double the amount owed.

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[35] "Flamstead," *Center for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery*, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/2965. The estate's name in 1804 had been Dehany's, and it was changed soon thereafter. In 1810-11, 115 enslaved people lived on the estate. In the next four years, their number dropped to less than 53 by 1815. 29 Females and 16 males were listed in the register in 1817, but no additional information on gender disparity is provided after that date. A £425 10s. 4d. indemnity payment in return for the loss of property in enslaved persons was issued in equal amounts to William Knight Dehany, Eliza Whitehorne Dehany, and Reverend John James Scott.

[36] "Maps of Jamaica by James Robertson, 1804," National Library of Scotland, https://maps.nls.uk/jamaica/index.html

Fyfe initially agreed to these terms but later decided that the offending actors must be expelled from the property. Instead of hiring mercenaries or locking up the water tanks, he secretly arranged for another group of migrant Black workers to come and take over Stewart's village, precisely when he knew that Stewart and the others would be gone for several hours—when they went to the port towns to buy and sell goods.[37]

Upon returning from the market, Stewart discovered strange people from afar had moved into his home. When he pressed Fyfe for an explanation, he learned that Fyfe agreed to pay a large group of new workers two shillings and eight pence per day, nearly triple the average daily rate of one shilling. The new workers gained exclusive access to the "assistance of the asses" in carrying the estates' coffee and the workers' goods to the nearby markets.[38] In turn, the land and water supplies of Flamstead were free for the new workers to use, so long as they offered labor on demand.

Without food, homes, water, and wage-earning jobs, Stewart and his allies were left with no choice but to leave the plantation. Fyfe's offer of high wages to Black people without ancestral claims to the land was designed not only to ruin Stewart's business interests, but also to humiliate him and impugn his reputation.

Nevertheless, Black communities sometimes successfully defended their villages from new migrant workers. In November 1838 at Constant Spring Estate in St. Andrew parish, for example, Peter Dundas offered employment on the 4000-acre estate to a band of migrants for two shillings and one pence per day, double the average rate, and he demanded that every Black person on strike

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[37] "Complaint of the Flamstead Labourers v. Rev. C. Fyfe, Proprietor; Cases Tried at the Petit Sessions, Roden Vale, Port Royal, Friday, 1 February 1839." Parliamentary Papers [1840] *Papers Relative to the West Indies, Part I (4*), 29.

[38] Ibid, 29. See also Parliamentary Papers [1839]*, Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State*, 11. On one occasion, the magistrate Mr. Lambert told authorities that a body of "Negroes…to demand 2s. 1d. per day" or else go on strike. Colonial authorities deemed that "Mr. Lambert's improper interference that prevents the people working on the estate. It took 24*l.* to make 2 hogsheads of sugar, principally by strangers."

vacate the premises immediately or return to work at the usual rate of pay. The estate boasted a direct connection by road to Kingston six miles distant, a pond providing drinking water for its cattle and workers, and constant water by the Wag River to the north, for powering its watermill and waterwheels.[39] Those on strike, however, "threatened" to beat the migrant workers, "so that they left off" and did not return. Dundas entreated the state to deploy police officers to stabilize the situation and "get the people punished who caused them to leave."[40] But he was unsuccessful.

The outcome of this battle is unknown. The strike may have brought Dundas to terms, representing a victory for Black people in the struggle to solidify and extend their control over the customary order of both labor guarantees and natural resource distribution. Throughout the surrounding neighborhoods, Dundas's claims for power and prestige were thus weakened. He had proven himself incapable of removing the strikers by his own action or by appeal to the state. But in the process, Dundas attempted to engineer conflict between two Black communities, pitting them against one another for access to jobs, homes, and natural resources. The strikers would have realized that their victory, while crucial, was temporary. Another group of migrant workers would inevitably appear. Threats to their security and well-being unfolded along both a vertical and a horizontal axis.

The contours of the eviction-migration cycle elucidated above highlight crucial changes in the fabric of everyday life after Emancipation. The expulsion of one group from their home

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[39] Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed*, 147. "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the estate used both cattle-mills and watermills. The waterwheel was sold to Worthy Park in the 1860s and by 1880 Constant Spring was totally dependent on steam. … [By the 1860s] Constant Spring then had a total area of almost 4,000 acres…but only 200 acres were in cane, producing 200 hogsheads. In 1861 the estate £193 'from tenants for provision grounds.'"

[40] Extract from a Letter of Justice of the Peace, Peter Dundas, Manager of Constant Spring Estate, October 30th, 1838, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I. Circular Instructions. Jamaica.--British Guiana,* Volume 35, 17.

precipitated their migration and imminent conflict with another group fighting against their own expulsion, *ad nauseum,* in an endless spiral. The alliances which coalesced and dissolved on this battlefield contributed to a larger process of ethnogenesis taking place among the Black masses. People identified with one another by faithfully hanging together as a collective, never as mere individuals. They did so as male-centric gangs, as villages put on the defensive by planters and potential usurpers, and as communities that traveled as one and left no one behind.

Rent Scams and the Specter of Perpetual Debt

Both native and migrant Black collectivities who negotiated tenancy and labor agreements with planters like Dundas were nevertheless rendered vulnerable to the predicament of "re-enslavement" under debt. Old and new workers were equally capable of striking or abandoning the estate during critical phases of the sugar planting cycle in the wet seasons (April-June; October-December) and the harvest and manufacturing cycle in the dry seasons (January-April; June-August). Planters scrambled to devise new mechanisms for binding Black people to one land and one master for months or years at a time. To do so, they required the colonial juridical apparatus to aid their efforts in enforcing not only formal contract law, but, more importantly, customary law. This shift heralded the rise of a new class of proprietor which combined the jurisdictional discretion of employer and landlord into one. Their goal was to transform as many free Black Jamaicans as possible into perpetual tenants who could only escape the debt by working it off, stealing, or running away to become fugitives.

Rent scams which saddled workers with monetary debt served as the means to this end. Let us examine a quotidian rent contract, under which thousands of Black people lived their first months and years in freedom. It stipulated that:

> Notice is hereby given to the Tenants on Marshall's Pen Plantation, that after the first day of November, the occupier of each house will be charged 1 s. 8d. per week for rent, and 1s. 8d.

> per week will be charged to each person above 12 years of age, fit to labour, resident on the plantation, for use of provision lands. No new lands are to be taken in cultivation by the labourers unless previously specially agreed for as to quantity. Pasturage for each head of homed cattle 1s. 3d. per week, and all hogs allowed to run at large to be destroyed. Given under my hand, this 31st day of October 1838. (signed) Dn. Robertson, Attorney.[41]

The rent was a considerable one shilling and eight pence for every person over twelve years of age and thereby "fit to labour," due at the end of each week. These payments robbed the Black population of their monetary medium of coin, which they relied upon for daily commerce and the resolution of debts contracted with each other. Moreover, the uptake of coin would render the estate solvent, as well as facilitate the payment of workers on demand, crucial in a world of chronically specie poor planters frequently unable to pay the conventional premium charged for purchasing coin.[42] In turn, the planter would practice a kind of proto-"trickle-down economics" in which the coin flowed from the employer to the worker and back up again, along a vertical axis.[43] During slavery, it had not been in the slaveowners' interest to hoard too much coin from the subaltern political economy, lest they invite island-wide famine and revolt. In the era of freedom, however, the legal looting and withholding of coin by planters would jam up its circulation in the

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[41] Thomas McCornock to C.H. Darling, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Jamaica. Copies or Extracts of Further Communications Transmitted to the Marquess of Normanby by the Agent of Jamaica, on the 13th Day of June and the 12th Day of July, Relative to the Agricultural State of that Colony*, 17. For the process of plaintiffs bringing suits against debtors in court, see Chapter 26, "An Act Relating to Landlords and Tenants," Section 9, 10, and 14, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the First Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: G.P.O, 1903, 71-74.

[42] Reverend W.E. Barrett to Hall Pringle, January 18, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.) Jamaica-Continued*, 15. "Silver coin, which previously bore a premium of three to four per cent., fell to one per cent., and subsequently to no premium at all, from its extensive circulation by the peasantry to provide themselves with the wants and comforts of the Christmas season."

[43] Mark W. Hauser, *The Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economies in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2008), 194-195. The involvement of the courts in litigation also absorbed coin from Black peoples' pockets in the form of fees and penalties.

subaltern political economy along a horizontal axis, encouraging local food supply shortages and the inability of subalterns to invest capital and make good on debts contracted with one another.[44]

Land use protocols were included in the rent contract. Black tenants now were expected to pay one shilling and three pence per week for using the estates' infrastructure, including its roads and pasturage. Hogs kept almost exclusively by the Black population would be executed with impunity if "allowed to run at large," in contradistinction with African-Creole husbandry norms. Although the theoretical charge for using the estate's roads, water tanks, and ponds was not enumerated in the contract, we can assume that it was treated as a component of "land." Indeed, witness accounts from 1865 suggest water access was *de facto* included in standard labor and tenancy arrangements after Emancipation. As Thomas Harvey and William Brewin noted, an overseer they had visited paid his workers in hard money one week, but charged "a second week's labor without pay, in return for being allowed access to the pond for water."[45]

The scam began with the perceived failure of Black tenants to pay rent in money or labor form on time. If Black tenants failed to pay the rent and pasturage fees on time, planters and the colonial courts would hold them liable for an unauthorized appropriation of the estates' resources. Planters sued people in arrears in the colonial courts, charging them with either a civil infraction

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[44] Ibid, 194-95. What monetary scholars have termed "the big problem of small change" was both a structural condition and a trigger for protest, riot, and subaltern self-defense operations in Jamaica and throughout the Anglo-Caribbean. As Brett Hauser has argued, the nature of the informal/subaltern political economy allowed Black people to keep coin circulating within and between one another. In the absence of expulsion, this reality signaled another opportunity for chronically indebted, specie poor, planters to exploit labor and extract value. See also "Appendix to the Montserrat Blue Book for 1849," Parliamentary Papers [1850], *The Reports Made for the Year 1849 to the Secretary of State having the Department of the Colonies: In Continuation of the Reports Annually Made by the Governors of the British Colonies, with a View to Exhibit Generally the Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the Year 1849,* 56. Instead of paying wages in coin according to its nominal value and the value of labor (one shilling per day), planters in Anglo-Caribbean colonies were known to issue "payment" with "articles…their employer chooses to give them, at any price he pleases to charge them."

[45] Harvey and Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866*, 39

(*damage* to the landlord's interests by way of deprivation) or a statutory offense (*trespassing* and *theft*).[46] Absolving the debt required remuneration in money form (i.e., coin), in kind (i.e., labor and commodities), and, at the extreme, incarceration. It was up to the judge and the aggrieved planter which form restitution would take. According to the principle of equity and opportunity cost, plaintiffs could demand restitution more than the original amount owed.[47] Debt was cumulative, and the planters could demand the full sum far into the future.

The Black population at large understood the symbolic meaning of this humiliation clearly. Black tenants from Kingsland and Hopeland estates said it best in 1839 when they went on strike. They complained to a magistrate that their protest was motivated by the landlord's attempt to "'drive them' into the system of giving two or three days' labour in each week during the year for their houses and grounds." They understood the hidden intention of the policy was to "perpetuate

[46] See also T. W. Jackson to His Excellency Sir Lionel Smith, Bart. W. H. Bell. Spanish Town, February 28, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I. Circular Instructions,* 13. It should not be forgotten that Black workers could occasionally delude and trick the rentier through a concatenation of legal and extra-legal means: "If, however, he establishes the charge, and the labourer convicted as a trespasser is ejected…the person ejected may return to the same property under such a plea as 'this is not my ground from which I was ejected yesterday, it is my brother's, and he pays rent for it:' The overseer again has recourse to the magistrate, and requires the man to be exiled from the property, where his family live as tenants and are willing to succour him, in order effectually to eject him from a house or ground which the planter cannot point out."

[47] Parliamentary Papers [1839]*, Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State*, 4. In the Lucea region, "On 26 properties, no rents whatever had been demanded, but on 20, there have been such demands; 15 of them have required rents, varying from 5s. down to 1s. 8d. a week, conditional that some portion of the labourers' services should be rendered to the property; or from 7s. 6d. down to 3s. 4d. without any conditional service; three properties have made demand for rent, it appears, unconditional, of 3s. 4d. per week for their labourers' houses and grounds. … [A] fair average of rents demanded may be taken from the whole body of the returns at 3s. 4d. per week, equal to two days' labour, either conditional or unconditional." For comparison, at Sarkemount and Spring Bank Plantations, "Every person above the age of 13 [was] charged for his ground 1s. 8d. per week."

slavery."[48] Sympathetic white contemporaries agreed that the nature of tenancy and debt proved that *de facto* slavery was alive and well in Jamaica.[49]

Thousands of other Black people negotiated tenancy agreements "under the table," without drafting a formal contract. To maintain sugar production, some planters, as well as Christian missionaries, accepted smaller amounts of money, or no money at all, in exchange for labor obligations and unfettered access to the estates' land, water, and fodder.[50] Many middling- and lower-class Black people perceived these customary agreements as propitious opportunities for capital investment within the subaltern political economy.[51] The wages and rents they saved from the

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[48] Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.) Jamaica-Continued,* 6. The magistrate stated how the debt of rent and labor could be indefinitely extended, "for if from accident, from illness, or any other unavoidable cause, one of them happened to be absent for a day, aye, perhaps for air hour, he could be cited before two local justices, under the Act 5 Wm. 4, cap. 2, and severely punished." See also Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, Part I (2), Jamaica, Continued, 15 March 1839,* 5. At Wilderness and Huntly estates, an unnamed attorney offered to suspend the rent for his workers, changed his mind, and served Robert Mitchell a notice to pay £34 13s. 4d. per annum for himself. His wife and daughter were charged the same rate, totaling nearly £104.

[49] Reverend W.E. Barrett to Hall Pringle, January 18, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.) Jamaica-Continued*, 14. "[T]he exorbitant rents demanded of the labourers, [are] not from a conviction that they bear any proportion to the value of the tenements occupied, but as a measure of punishment for not immediately assenting to arrangements proposed. … [This is] totally inconsistent with the new position of the peasantry, and at variance with the policy of the nation and Government that decreed the abolition of slavery." See also Hall Pringle to CH Darling, Lime Savannah, January 26, 1839. Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.) Jamaica-Continued*, 9. Hall Pringle quickly recognized this fact: "To suppose that the negro could forget the long list of wrongs endured in the dark times of slavery, or the series of petty oppressions, insults, and calumnies heaped upon him during the apprenticeship, would be to suppose him more or less than a human being. But granting that these could have been forgotten, and that the negro was prepared to enter upon the new system with a new state of feeling, the planter was not, but in every case that has come to my knowledge, was not only disposed, but determined, to engraft the usages and the manners of slavery upon the infant liberties of these peoples."

[50] See also Parliamentary Papers [1839]*, Jamaica. Copy or Extracts from any Further Communication made to Her Majesty's Secretary of State*, 8. On Golden Vale Estate, John Marston reported that "no rent [was] demanded at all. … The cane-field were all clean last year; they are now very foul." Of 300 good labourers, only 1/3 worked. 100 hogsheads were lost because of the failure to take off the crop in time. However, "no notices to quit have been served." On Whitehall estate, John Edmund McKenzie charged 3s. 4d. per week in rent, but no one ever "paid a single shilling." See also George Blyth to H.W. Plummer, August 19, 1840, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 156. George Blyth of Montego Bay reported that workers on his estates "laboured at the rate of 1*s.* sterling per day, on condition of occupying their houses and grounds rent-free."

[51] Edward Dacres Baynes to C.H. Darling, February 4, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.) Jamaica-Continued*, 5. For example, on Mount Pleasant Estate, "the people on the Monday after the 1st of August, although the manager stated that he had no employment for them, went to the fields and worked, although

hands of the planters would facilitate the rental or purchase of larger plots to farm. The inclusion of pasturage and road access in the customary agreement allowed members of the community in possession of carts, mules, and donkeys to share transport costs with that community. This strategy of informal tenancy was most likely to produce semi-stable land tenure where Black Jamaicans maintained familiar and intimate relations with the families of their former enslavers.[52]

In crucial respects, however, these arrangements were a trap. Proprietors, despite their promises and outward displays of fairness, "decline[d] charging rent for the grounds occupied by the negroes…[to] retain in their own hands the power of summary Ejectment."[53] If paperwork was doctored to make it appear that an agreement had been made in the past and presented to the court, customary tenants were labeled squatters and immediately found guilty. Indeed, in September 1839,

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they did not know whether they were to receive any or what remuneration. They subsequently entered into an arrangement to pick the crop for 4d. per barrel, and to clean at the rate of 10 d. per 100 trees, on condition that no rent was to be charged. This is the reason why no rent was paid when I last saw them. The coffee was in some places so scarce, that an able man took three days to pick a barrel. The compensation for their labour has not been regularly paid. They have sometimes had considerable sums owing to them, which it was not in the power of the manager to settle for want of means. On Saturday last, they sent to the manager to beg that he would give them the coffee to clean by the acre, and measure out the number of acres which each person chose to undertake to clean. I believe it has since been done for them."

[52] For more about the "creole colonization" thesis of planters like Edward Long and Bryan Edwards, see Trevor Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 56-57. Contemporaries interpreted these mutually beneficial, harmonious, hierarchical relations of "black" old-timers and the manumitted "coloured" proprietors, tradesmen, and professional classes with their former masters and benefactors through the prism of loyalty, which I examine in fuller detail in subsequent chapters. The contours of these durable yet fragile bonds of loyalty that could obtain among the members of one estate and one master crystallized during moments of crisis in which one multi-racial alliance took up arms against another multi-racial alliance over land disputes, taxation, theft, and animal trespassing. The next chapter will examine in fuller detail how persons usually classified together as members of the "Black peasantry" after Emancipation should be analytically differentiated into (1) groups of Black farmers allied with the planters; and (2) groups of Black farmers allied with one another *because* of their mutual antagonistic orientation toward the planters.

[53] "Precinct of St. Catherine, January 1839," Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica,* 4. See also William Ramsey and E. Barnes to Sir Lionel Smith, 6 Feb 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. Part I.—(2.), Jamaica*, 20. "It consists with our own knowledge, that in nine cases out of ten…it [making an agreement without written contract] is solely for the purpose of being enabled to eject the labourer at pleasure, and that the parties who suffer the gratuitous occupation of the ground take good care to demand a high rent for the houses inhabited by their peasantry."

T.W. Jackson reported that Black people who had been told they were living rent-free were "summoned before the magistrates upon a demand for 60 weeks' rent."[54]

To conserve their customary rights and privileges, Black communities surrendered their capacity to engage labor strikes as a negotiating tactic. If a proprietor took them to court, it would be his word against theirs. In a congenitally anti-Black racist society, Black plaintiffs and defendants knew they had slim chances of achieving victory against white planters when the solvency of a Black person was in question.

By the early 1840s, legislators attempted to resolve these issues by separating tenancy and labor agreements into discrete classes of contractual obligations. In practice, however, planters continued to enclose and regulate movement through space according to the debt principle, whether they stemmed from the question of rents or labor. For instance, Black workers in 1860 described the widespread practice of withholding their wages "if one day out of five is short" as "the 'Planters Law.'"[55] While planters enjoyed the sanction of the state in enforcing customary debts in such ways, Black workers could not appeal to the courts to obtain their pay for labor they had already rendered during the workweek. Moreover, in November 1863, the overseer of Silver Grove in Westmoreland parish was angry that tenants living around Mount Peto owed him back rent. To take revenge, the former locked up a road cutting through his estate to force the latter to march several additional miles on the way to and from the market, although "the road…has long been considered public."[56]

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[54] T.W. Jackson to J.W. Higginson, September 15, 1840, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the West Indies. 1841. Part II. Jamaica*, 168.

[55] John Clarke to Edward Hume, February 22, 1860, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

[56] John Clarke to Edward Hume, November 2, 1863, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

The Secret of the Drought

Widespread Black labor strikes continued throughout the years of 1839 and 1840, striking terror into the hearts and minds of Jamaica's ruling classes. Resistance movements helped push sugar production to a historical low point, as production had dropped from 69,613 hogsheads of sugar in 1838 to 36,660 in 1840. By 1841, planters throughout the colony believed that the labor crisis had reached an inauspicious turning point. The colony had been blessed with dry and wet seasons in 1839 and 1840 most favorable for sugar cultivation. Rather than risk expulsion, many Black communities kept lending their labor and time to the production of sugar, coffee, and other minor export articles. But planters fretted about how the fair seasons enabled thousands of Black people to flee into the interior hinterlands and suburban borderlands to live in seclusion. As Black-led subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry activities on the frontiers boomed, fewer Black people were willing to work for the planters before or after the harvesting cycle, during which they customarily received ten percent or more of the collected crops.[57]

Then the gods and nature dealt the inhabitants of Jamaica an environmental wild card. Protracted and spatially extensive droughts ransacked the southern and northern coastal belts of Jamaica in 1839, 1841, 1842, 1843, 1845, 1846, 1847, and 1848.[58] Planters in the southern and

[57] Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the West Indies, 1680-1834*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 133; 188.

[58] For evidence of drought conditions during these years, see George Marrett to J.M. Higginson, September 22, 1840, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, 1841, Part II. Jamaica*, 144. From 1839 to 1840, in Rio Bueno, Trelawny, "the cultivation of the cane-field, during its progress, appeared to have been more regularly carried on than formerly; but. unfortunately a drought of several months' duration has destroyed the good effects which might otherwise have resulted from this, and the prospect of the next year's crop is unfavourable." In Buff Bay, from March to July 1839, "The rivers and springs which supplied the mills with water were dried up, and the young canes planted for next year's crop have been much injured." See D. Robertson, Custos of St. Elizabeth to Captain Higginson, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the West Indies,1841, Part II. Jamaica*, 143. Rain did not fall in the vernal wet season from April to July, resulting in "little fall plant [being] put in, the spring-plant being entirely destroyed, and on many estates no canes were left to replant the fields." For claims about drought conditions from 1840 to 1844, see "On the Weather of the Past Year, But Particularly with Reference to the Late Drought," *The Jamaica Almanack* (1841), 214-219; Charles C. Bravo to Robert Bruce, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Return to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 15 June 1846;--for, "Papers, in continuation of those presented last year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) relating to the labouring population of the*

western drought belt were nonplussed. Even if they happened to command hundreds of Black tenants and workers, crops marked for consumption and export wilted and perished from overexposure to solar radiation. In Vere, one of the most water-poor sugar parishes of the south, contemporary observers estimated that one crop out of three was lost by drought.[59] Those years saw verdant sugar fields and pastures turn into parched, rusty brown hellscapes more often, for longer durations of time, and across spaces once thought drought resistant.[60] Ponds evaporated, and the bleached bones of cattle that perished from want of fodder and water became fixtures of every traveler's account of a trip through the dry zone.[61] The first decade of freedom in Jamaica unfolded

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British colonies."—(West Indies and Mauritius.) Part I. State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius, 11. For 1845 to 1850, see the data tables compiled by John Bigelow, *Jamaica in 1850, or the Effects of Sixteen Years of Freedom on a Slave Colony* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1851), 202-203; Earl of Elgin to Lord Stanley, 2 September 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies*, 1. For drought in the late 1840s and early 1850s, see James Hume, Personal Diary, March 29, 1854, April 12, 1854, and April 18, 1854, D/HUME/1, ANG.

[59] Earl of Elgin to W.E. Gladstone, May 6, 1846, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *The Reports Made for the Year 1846 to the Secretary of State having the Department of the Colonies: In Continuation of the Reports Annually Made by the Governors of the British Colonies, with a View to Exhibit Generally the Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, and of the United States of the Ionian Islands. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the Year 1846,* 19.

[60] Bigelow, *Jamaica in* 1850, 202-203; Earl of Elgin to W.E. Gladstone, May 6, 1846, Parliamentary Papers [1846] *Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions,* 19. In May 1846, when the rains fell on time by the end of 1845, the Earl of Elgin correlated a decline in imports by 1/6 to "the favourable season, which both enhanced the productiveness of the estates, and rendered the peasantry more independent of foreign supplies. … [B]ut there is now much reason to fear that a drought which has prevailed without intermission for several months has done irreparable damage to the sugar crop."

[61] Peter Samuels, *The Wesleyan-Methodist Missions, In Jamaica and Honduras, Delineated* (London: Partridge, Oakey, 1850), 297-98. Samuels observed during travel how "the pastures were covered with the whitened bones of the cattle which had died from want of pasture and water." Philip Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), 79, 151, 187, 325-27. "To have a permanent supply of clear, pure water is a very important advantage in a climate, where, during the long droughts, unmitigated by a single shower, the pastures become burned up, and the cattle languish for want of grass as well as water. … At such periods, in many cases, the only resource is a filthy pond, whence the water has to be fetched several miles." At Kepp estate in St. Elizabeth, "these mountain estates there are no streams; and the resource of the inhabitants is to dig large ponds in the hollows, into which the rain-water collects in the wet season. Owing to the long continued drought, these ponds were now very low, some dry, and others reduced to a small space of water in the centre of a large area of parched and cracking mud." For more descriptions of the landscape in drought, see Charles Rampini, *Letters from Jamaica: The Land of Streams and Woods* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1873), 159; and Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies. With a continuation*

through successive months and years of deficient annual rainfall. Contemporaries such as Thomas McGeachy, the Crown Surveyor of Surrey County, believed the temporal duration and spatial extent of these drought events as historically unprecedented in the history of the colony, and a contingency necessitating the development of publicly funded irrigation companies.[62]

The effects of prolonged drought over one or several years influenced local environmental conditions far into the future. For one, drought conditions subsequently negatively impacted the next crop cycle. Young plants failed to thrive, becoming more vulnerable to destruction by voracious insects and disease. Uncertainty over whether the rains would return at all prompted many to temporarily withdraw from cultivation in the respective area and, if circumstances permitted, to seek out better climatic conditions elsewhere in the colony. The flow and volume of "natural" waterways were also critically affected. The flow and volume of countless seasonal streams and rivers steadily decreased, year after year, until only calcified rocks and tiny pools of water remained; witnesses also described rivers once regarded as perennial and constant disappearing for months, perhaps years, at a time.[63] Sugar estates upriver stressed the flow and volume of watercourses by funneling whatever water survived the drought to themselves, sapping supplies from those downriver. As the rivers slowed to a trickle, waterwheels stopped turning, cane fields dependent on

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to the present time. 5th. ed., 1743-1800 5 ed. Vol. 1. (London, Printed by T. Miller, for G. and W.B. Whittaker, 1819), 245-46.

[62] Edward McGeachy, *Irrigation in the West Indies, Being a Simple Plan By Which They May be Perpetrated as Valuable and Productive Sugar Colonies* (Kingston: Printed by the Author, 1846), 25-26.

[63] Sydney Olivier, *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts*, March 1, 1929, 408; Alexander Graham, "Technology, Slavery, and the Falmouth Water Company of Jamaica, 1799-1805," *Slavery and Abolition*, 39, 2 (2018), 321.

irrigation withered, sugar purification and rum manufacturing operations ground to a standstill, and local Black populations became reliant upon the planters' water tanks and wells.[64]

Rampant deforestation throughout the southern sugar valleys of Vere and lower Clarendon and the cattle grazing savannas of St. Catherine and St. Andrew rendered the soil less capable of absorbing both extreme and average rainfall when it returned.[65] The karst landscapes of the interior highlands allowed for a rapid percolation of water to underground aquifers. Hours of slow rain, followed by hours of dryness and then more hours of slow rain, were what recharged underground aquifers and "natural" water courses. But heavy downpours in the central interior mountains (relatively immune to drought conditions) or drought-stricken lowlands resulted in intense mudslides and flash flooding, which propelled tons of topsoil, sediment, trees, dead animals, and dead people down toward the public roads and the coasts.[66] Insignificant streams and dry riverbeds rapidly transformed into raging torrents.

Women disproportionately suffered the mortal tolls of these deluge events. Whereas Black people generally preferred to remain in place during heavy rainfall, women, as the principal marketers of produce, gathering water, and rearing children, enjoyed no such luxury. It was not uncommon for them to be swept away by the floodwaters while traveling from the home to water

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[64] For an example of this process, see Henry De la Beche, "February 13, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[65] Simultaneously, the progressive denudation of fauna increased the rate by which water evaporated from the ground. It also decreased the amount of water vapor, expelled by the stomata of leaves at night, that rose to the clouds to fall as rain at another place on the island.

[66] See also Stuart B. Schwartz and Matthew Mulcahy, "Natural Disasters in the Caribbean to 1850," in *Sea and Land: An Environmental History of the Caribbean,* edited by Philip Morgan, John McNeill, Matthew Mulcahy, and Stuart B. Schwartz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 226-27. See also James Hume to John Clarke, September 5, 1859, D/HUM/2, ANG. For example, weeks of constant rain in the interior mountains of St. Catherine's parish propelled rocks, trees, and refuse across the main road running through Bog Walk, effectively blocking all traffic on the main road connecting Spanish Town with the north side of Jamaica.

gathering locations and to the marketplaces. This contingency was enshrined in popular songs, such as "Dry River" and "I Come to See Jennie."[67] As an of example of quotidian daily life, in April 1854, flashfloods along the course of the Rio Cobre prevented a mother belonging to Reverend Hume's church from returning home from the local market. When the waters receded, she returned home to find one of her children had disappeared in her absence. "The little child…took the path to the river unseen," her older son lamented, "and fell into the stream and was drowned."[68]

Without crops to tend and hard money to pay Black labor, drought-stricken planters tried to adapt to the new political ecological landscape. Those with access to easy credit pursued technological innovations to solve the problem: steam power, drainage tech, deeper oxen-drawn ploughing techniques, and aqueduct renovation. These estates came to dominate sugar production, which eventually pushed the raw production and manufacture of sugar and rum ever closer pre-1838 levels.[69] Those without sufficient credit simply left their already nutrient-deprived, exhausted sugar fields to lie fallow in ruinate. This way, after three to five years, when more propitious seasons and labor situations returned, the vegetation growing on that land could be burnt to restore soil fertility for another round of canes. Virgin soil still covered by woods, swamp, and bush were enclosed and conserved under the auspices of future sugar cultivation. In the meantime, as plantations already

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[67] Walter Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story: Annancy Stories, Digging Sings, Ring Tunes, and Dancing Tunes*, (London: Folklore Society, 1907), xxviii, 100; Martha Beckwith, *Jamaican Folklore* (New York: The American Folk-Lore Society, 1928), 45. The lyrics of Dry River read as follows: "You no give me one wacky you can't pass/You no give me one wacky you can't pass/You no give me one wacky you can't pass/Dry River will come an' take you way'/Draw me nearer/Draw me near, Dry River will come an' take you away." The lyrics of I Some to See Jennie read as follows: "I come to see Jennie/I come to see Jennie/And where is she now?/She's gone to the river/She's gone to the river/She's gone to the river/And cannot be seen."

[68] James Hume to John Clarke, April 29, 1854, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[69] Barry Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), 10-16.

occupied nearly every stretch of arable land in the traditional western and southern sugar producing parishes, planters extracted additional income by renting homes, pasturage, and back lands to workers and small-scale farmers who could be evicted with relative ease.

While sugar and coffee were becoming harder to grow profitably due to below average rainfall and labor scarcity, commodity prices on the international markets went into freefall. In the slave societies of Cuba and Brazil, the collateralized values of enslaved people served to compensate for not only declining commodity prices, but also "short" crops due to drought.[70] By contrast, in Jamaica, many sugar estates maintained this respective legal status but, in practice, reverted old crop fields into cattle grazing pens.[71] On the one hand, this flexible form of land use intersected with ongoing trends among planters who were turning to a more diversified non-sugar cash-crop portfolio (pimento, logwood, subsistence crops for the local market, fruit, etc.). These commodities had the benefit of producing income without the need for rain to fall at specific points of crop cycles. On the other hand, rather than grow sugar or coffee exclusively, plantations produced fodder (i.e., guinea grass), dug ponds, built fences, and constructed water reservoirs not only to support

[70] Trollope, *The West Indies,* 107. "A plentiful crop in Cuba may in any year bring sugar to a price which will give no return whatever to the Jamaican grower. A spare crop in Jamaica itself will have the same result; and there are many causes for spare crops; drought, for instance, and floods, and abounding rats, and want of capital to renew and manure the plants. At present the trade will only give in good years a fair profit to those who have purchased their land almost for nothing. A trade that cannot stand many misfortunes can hardly exist prosperously."

[71] Barry Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739-1912* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1998), 9, 66. Barry Higman's study of Montpelier estate exemplifies this transition. In 1832, for example, Old Montpelier reverted to a cattle pen, supplying to New Montpelier and Shettlewood draft animals for work. New Montpelier carried on sugar production for another 23 years by absorbing new sugar workers to replace former slaves pushed from the land, at which time the entire property reverted to a grazing pen. Throughout the 1840s, Shettlewood floated the losses of the surrounding sugar estates, compensating for unprofitable years. But without the sugar estate, the pens collapsed simultaneously, due to the symbiotic relationship, several other estates in the Great River valley met the same fate, all of which were part of the great fabric of war in the region: Cambridge, Ducketts Spring, and Greenwich to the south, and Haddington, Welcome, Bamboo, and Hopewell lower down, on the Hanover side of the Great River.

themselves but also to sell to needy Black communities raising animals in money or in kind.[72] The required quantum of labor inputs for the everyday maintenance of the land decreased, keeping competition for wage-labor positions high, further depressing the average price of labor.

Cattle themselves became more, not less, vital to planters without access to steam power during dry seasons. They provided a vital supplementary or temporary motive force to haul produce to the ports and to turn the mills. They could be exported and sold as motive-power or slaughtered and sold for food during times of both plenty and famine. And they provided manure for fertilizing worn out, nutrient deprived land on estates in the valleys and alluvial plains.[73]

Subsequent chapters will parse out how droughts from the 1840s to the 1880s not only exacerbated and crystallized preexisting patterns of artificial land and water scarcity, but also established new patterns. For now, two things are important to note. First, if a planter went bankrupt or otherwise abandoned an estate/pen, opportunities for tenancy and "squatting" on the back lands may have increased, but legal opportunities for Black workers and small-scale settlers to purchase or rent land remained poor. Instead, international mercantile houses or other large-scale resident planters acquired legal title and simply became the new employers and landlords. The reduction of sugar estates and from 670 in 1834 to 530 by 1847, encompassing an area of 168,032 acres, may have opened the possibility for Black communities to negotiate with alternative agents, but it did not necessarily facilitate the expansion of the Black "peasantry" nor the emergence of

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[72] Verene Shepherd, "Alternative Husbandry: Slaves and Free Labourers on Livestock Farms in Jamaica in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Wages of Slavery: From Chattel Slavery to Wage Labour in Africa, the Caribbean, and England,* edited by Michael Twaddle (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1993), 50-52, 59-60.

[73] Barry Higman, "The Internal Economy of Jamaican Pens, 1760–1890," *Social and Economic Studies* 38, no. 1 (March 1989), 62.

regimes of stable and legal land tenure.[74] The same basic principle applied to the abandonment of 465 coffee plantations with an area of 188,400 acres by 1847, concentrated in the rain shadows of mountains of St. Andrew's and Manchester. But the unsuitability of these lands for sugar cultivation due to topography, elevation, and climate discouraged planters from undertaking costly endeavors to locate squatters, indebted tenants, and tax evaders.[75]

Second, the large amounts of land still planted in canes or otherwise converted into pasturage left less space available for local *human* food production. As Barry Higman has demonstrated, some Black small-scale settlers were able to enter the cattle husbandry industry after 1838. However, large-scale resident planters continued to dominate the industry and to monopolize the lands set aside for its support.[76] This created situations in which groups of human beings might starve and dehydrate to death faster than domesticated animals, particularly during droughts, subaltern credit squeezes, and Black insurgency panics. This fact was not lost on Black communities forced to subsist upon thatch-heart and corn seeds, while their neighbors' bodies and cattle grew fat while under the always precarious protection of powerful planters.[77]

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[74] Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica*, 11; Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1991), 132.

[75] Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed,* 13, 159-91.

[76] Higman, "The Internal Economy," 69. "Before mechanization and chemical fertilizers industrialized agricultural systems, animals played a major role in supplying traction, manure, milk, meat and leather. In the case of Jamaica, the market for livestock was central to the internal (plantation) trade of the island. Smallholders increased their share of this market after emancipation, but it was dominated by large-scale producers both before and after 1838." Eisner argued that due to emancipation, sugar estates demanded draft cattle to replace slave labor, but Higman contends there is no direct or indirect evidence to make such a claim. But he confirms that pens expand partly because pen-keepers turned toward "the exploitation of logwood, pimento, and other commodities found on their properties."

[77] "Petition from Lower Pedro Plains Peasantry to House of Assembly," Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 61. I am extrapolating the claim above based on evidence from the Pedro Plains in 1865, where 2,000 people suffering from multi-year drought conditions were forced to subsist "upon thatch-heart and seeds usually the food of the lower animals." While they starved to death, "brown" settlers to the north, allies of the powerful planter and politician John Salmon Jr., maintained access to water sources, grazing grounds, and cattle, mules, and donkeys to slaughter for emergency rations throughout the drought years. See also Keithlyn Smith and Fernando C. Smith, *To Shoot*

In the maelstrom, southern planters discovered a hidden secret of the drought. For they held a final trump card: their formal monopoly on the principal reserves of freshwater resources, stored in their ponds, the water tanks, springs, streams, and rivers.[78] These reserves were, of course, finite. Nevertheless, the ability for planters to withstand months rather than days or weeks during drought conditions showed them that it was during long droughts that Black people could be hurt easiest—precisely when food and water supplies outside the planters' immediate control would be at their perigee. Droughts, though they ostensibly harmed everyone across class and race, disproportionately impacted the poorest, most marginalized Black communities. They killed subsistence crops and small animal stock. They saddled women and children with the labor of fetching water many miles and hours from home.[79] And they encouraged ruined farmers to return to the plantation as tenants and wage laborers. "The drought has settled the question in dispute respecting the negroes'

Hard Labour: The Life and Times of Samuel Smith an Antiguan Working Man, 1877-1982 (Scarborough, Ontario: Edan's Publishers, 1986), 89. Evidence from drought-stricken Antigua encapsulates the ways in which Black people understood that, after Emancipation, to the whites, Black life was less valuable than cattle: "Them have more feeling for the cattle and them than them have for nega people. In truth and fact, the bakkra never joke with the proper care and treatment of the animals. They lay down some very strict rules to protect them that every ploughman have to obey to the prosper. If six cattle was yoked this morning, another six should be yoked this afternoon. The set that start work from Monday, done work by Wednesday. The other set will take place from Thursday to Saturday. No animal must be yoked if hurt or sick. … If you whale any of them, the magistrate wouldn't even want to see you. The nega man would never escape jail. Nega man would have to find himself behind that plough even if sick."

[78] G. Arnaboldi, *The Tourist's Guide to the Chief Towns and Villages of the Island of Jamaica: To Which are Appended Several Scientific Synopses and Other Valuable Information Connected with the Natural History of the Island* (Kingston: R.J. Decordova, 1852), 6. In St. Ann's, for instance, "the pen-keepers are obliged to rely on their ponds to water their cattle; and in districts of Manchester, tanks contain the chief, and sometimes only supply."

[79] Samuels, *The Wesleyan-Methodist Missions,* 297-98; Harvey and Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866,* 2. In October 1865, Harvey and Brewin observed that the drought that year compelled "every family, except the few amply supplied with water tanks…to send daily five, ten, or even more miles for water. The provision grounds ceased to yield their produce, cattle perished, and employment on the estates became greatly restricted."

provision grounds," Hall Pringle averred in 1841, "by rendering them unworthy of quarrelling about."[80]

Indeed, planters were delighted to find that, by 1850, the coastal sugar-producing plains and grazing savannas of Jamaica more closely approximated the environmental situations of the drought-prone, extensively deforested, relatively tiny colonies of Antigua and Barbados. Historical experience had shown that almost the entirety of the Black population of those colonies had no choice but to remain on the old estates after Emancipation, due to the lack of arable interior land for subsistence agriculture and freshwater sources not already claimed and policed by the planter class. By hindering the ability to engage in medium-scale farming on provision grounds an acre or larger in size, the droughts bolstered the efforts of planters like H.W. Plummer to reduce "the quantity of land occupied by them [Black farmers] to the size only of a garden about their houses."[81]

Samuel Smith's first-hand account of life as a lower-class Black tenant-worker trapped on the sugar estates in drought-prone Antigua offers crucial insights into how Black people throughout the Anglo-Caribbean suffered under novel water restriction regimes. Smith drew conceptual distinctions between fast-and slow-acting forms of meteorological catastrophe. On the one hand, hurricane events represented a spectacular violent clap of nature that decimated crops, property, and human life over a concentrated, yet relatively short, period of time. On the other hand, droughts represented the accretional, attritional, and cumulative violence of nature. Drought effects were diffuse and spatially variable, unfolding over longer spans of time; and droughts impacted both

[80] Hall Pringle to C.T. Metcalfe, January 1, 1841, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, 1841, Part II. Jamaica*, 252.

[81] H.W. Plummer to J.M. Higginson, August 31, 1840, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, 1841, Part II. Jamaica*, 152.

freshwater resources and food crop cultivation simultaneously.[82] His experience of hunger and starvation on the sugar estate convinced him that drought events were a more significant determining component of daily life, occurring in greater frequency "than hurricanes of gale force winds" ever did.[83]

Planters in arid zones used the production of artificial freshwater scarcity as an indispensable tool of anti-Black punitive governance. They twisted dry conditions to their advantage in labor negotiations, "us[ing] the drought as an excuse," Smith argued, "to cut the wages." In turn, they actively criminalized free access to freshwater resources, drawing upon carceral paradigms inherited from the slave plantation. As Smith witnessed,

> "Many of our people serve time in the jail house or get licks for using the bakkra's food *or water. Even during the dry weather we could not use the pond water without permission*. Life was indeed sheer misery. … Joe Martin, a cousin of mine from Freeman's Ville, was charge for *stealing a bucket of water* from Old Pond at North Sound Estate. *That same year, we face a severe drought and water for the village was plenty scarce.* … [Joe] negotiated with the planter and accepted [a] whipping instead at North Sound."[84]

In this case, Joe Martin was left with few options but to "steal" water. The extreme violence local planters meted out for taking such small quantities of water for personal use illustrates the risk that Black people assumed if they became dependent on planter-controlled water reserves. Rather than suffer court proceedings—and thus potential incarceration—Martin offered the labor of being

[82] See also Douglas Gamble, "Neglected Climatic Hazards of the Caribbean: Overview and Prospects in a Warmer Climate," *Geography Compass* 8, No. 4 (2014), 222, 227-29, 230-31. Historical geographers and climate scientists working on drought and climate change in the Caribbean contend that drought events in the Caribbean have historically tended to affect islands across a wider area than hurricane hazards. A critical period of the year that affects rainfall for the next seasons is what is known as the "mid-summer drought." Gamble suggests that reduced amounts of precipitation in June and July in the northwestern Caribbean can cause an increase in the magnitude and duration of the mid-summer drought.

[83] Smith and Smith, *To Shoot Hard Labour,* 58.

[84] Ibid, 58-59. Emphasis added.

whipped by the proprietor of North Sound Estate to absolve his debt. The formalization of water crimes thus enhanced the unilateral customary power of planters to maim and torture free Black people, without the need to involve the agents of the colonial judiciary.

Over time, the enclosure of freshwater sites also took place under the auspices of environmental sustainability. For instance, the use of rivers and ponds for freshwater, fishing, and bathing was proscribed unless one held legal title over both sides of the water—a situation typically limited to large-scale private proprietors and public managers of Crown lands. Planters could use perceived transgressions as reasons to demand debt prepayment in money and labor, to begin eviction procedures, or to involve the court. Ordinary Black small-scale settlers assumed extreme risks every time they planted crops or constructed water reservoirs on rented land in the vicinity of the river. According to the same principle, it was also made illegal to create new reservoirs of freshwater by rechanneling streams running along the roads and rivers or by constructing ponds.[85]

These laws intended to deter Black small-scale settlers from establishing large villages and towns in the hinterland, far beyond the spaces in which planters typically mediated land sales and rental contracts. Of course, in practice, these water laws were nearly impossible to enforce without rural police and hired guards in the early post-Emancipation period. If anything, they had the opposite effect: criminalization only encouraged those same settlers to invent ways of surreptitiously and safely accessing and creating their own water supply networks. These water laws did, however, provide a clear theoretical-juridical precedent for the actual enclosure of all extant freshwater resources under either private or public authority. Legislation passed in the 1850s and 1860s designating the powers of public water companies, for example, singled out the Black population as targets for enforcement. These laws proscribed activities performed almost exclusively by ordinary

[85] "Wrongs of the Black Population of Jamaica," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* Volume 11 (June 3, 1840), 116.

Black people: "bathing," "washing any dog," "washing or cleaning any clothes, cloths, wool or leather skins," and the "draining of any sink, gutter, sewer or drain" from any river, pond, or reservoir marked out for the water company.[86]

Of course, whites of good will and reputation could have shared their water with Black neighbors for free. But if women in dry parishes of the southern sugar and cattle belt like Vere and St. Elizabeth were forced to travel five to fifteen miles daily for water during drought conditions, as Henry de la Beche documented in his personal diary in 1824, instances of planters' sharing water were probably rare.[87] During the driest and direst seasons, planters commonly charged Black people money for water access, or they shut off the taps altogether.[88]

Conclusion

In the first years after Emancipation, a confluence of political and environmental factors introduced critical changes in the relationship between formal and customary legal regimes, and with it, the structure of everyday Black social life. The mechanism of banishment was one such novelty.

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[86] See Law 18, "An Act For Supplying the City of Kingston and Liguanea with Good and Wholesome Water from the Hope River, and For Other Purposes," Section 33 and 34, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Fifth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Jamaica: Unnamed Publisher, 1842), 38; Chapter 36, "An Act to Repeal Certain Acts Relating to the Kingston and Liguanea Water Works Company, and to Re-Enact the Same with Amendments," Section 43, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Twenty-Second Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: S.M. Samuels, 1859), 1241.

[87] Henry de la Beche, "April 27, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW. "Rain set in a little after 1 P.M., the first that has fallen at Halse Hall for a long time. The country was in consequence of long drought quite brown except the canes which were brownish green. Most of the wells in the neighbourhood quite dry. Ours fortunately did not fail. Many persons greatly distressed for water. Met a girl with a pail on her head at one of the little pools in the river course, who came there from the Cross to get water, the distance seven miles."

[88] Edgar Mayhew Bacon and Eugene Murray Aaron. *The New Jamaica: Describing the Island, Explaining its Conditions of Life and Growth and Discovering its Mercantile Relations and Potential Importance* (New York: Wallbridge & Co., 1890), 187. The evangelist Dr. Johnson of Brown's Town reportedly offered his water tanks to all "in time of drought and the supply free to all who ask, while others are selling water." He used this power to fashion a political clique. "We will not say that he is beloved by all; but a great many men would be proud of his personal following." See also "Wrongs of the Black Population of Jamaica," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Volume 11 (June 3, 1840), 116.

Waves of evictions led to the appearance of hitherto historically unprecedented forms of collective migration in Jamaica. The former slaveholding classes used the threat and actuality of summary eviction to break and tame strikers, as well as the migrant workers who replaced them. Black communities were pitted against one another in a struggle to obtain stable access to land and water. When a group with ancestral ties to the land tried to defend their homes, jobs, and vital access to the infrastructure of an estate, they were forced to fight against people who were probably victims of some form of banishment. Another novelty was the invention of perpetual debt, which established a formal and customary legal basis from which planters could govern free Black people as if they were still enslaved. Thousands of Black people spent their first months and years of freedom bound to the plantation in a state analogous to slavery.

The counter-vailing effects of the droughts which struck Jamaica in the 1840s highlights both the weaknesses and the hidden strengths of the new planter-landlord class. Though droughts ruined many members of this class, those who survived to gamble another year attempted to adapt to the drier times in ways designed to heighten, never reduce, their utilization, surveillance, and unilateral disposal of segments of the Black population. The gravitational effect of the planter-landlord water monopoly was felt most intensely in water-poor areas close to the coast and the oldest areas of sugar cultivation concentrated in western Jamaica, which decreased the further one got to sparsely populated, wilder, and unmapped areas of settlement far from established towns.

As we shall investigate in the next chapter, Black people throughout Jamaica had also discovered a secret of the droughts. After 1838, planters weakened by declining rainfall and crop yields were, in practice, incapable of physically or judicially preventing the flight of a Black community from the plantation. Their challenge was to survive long enough for the rains to return. The development of semi-nomadic modalities of settlement, mobility and income generation among free Black communities gave rise to a new era of Black flourishing, despite the droughts and the

forces of environmental enclosure. Meanwhile, whites tried to counteract this flourishing and resolve their environmental dilemmas by transforming Jamaica's built environment through direct and indirect means. The interplay of ecological social struggles from above and below transformed the ways in which vertical and horizontal axes of conflict manifested themselves in everyday Black social life.

Chapter 4

Nomadic Freedom: Water, Mobility and Ecological Social Struggle in a Desiccating World

Sugar and coffee crop yields plummeted during the droughts of 1839 and 1840 in Jamaica. The richest resident attorneys and absentee landowners, who remained in the good graces of West India creditors, greeted this contingency with either complacency or applause. Their sacrifice of profit served a higher political purpose: smashing the collective bargaining power of Black workers to go on strike. "The Negroes fancy they can now force wages," John Salmon averred. "I say let the canes rot." To forestall further resistance, planters needed to do two things simultaneously: (1) "take away all their provision grounds, giving them only garden ground" to grow food; and (2) "establish markets in different places and let the brown settlers supply the yams."[1]

Salmon's sentiments encapsulated the anti-Black *Zeitgeis*t of the era, as planters struggled to stay afloat and conserve white rule *without* slavery.

But when the droughts kept coming, the gift of meteorological volatility became a curse. Contemporary correspondence and published accounts of Jamaica from 1840 to 1850 were littered with complaints of deficient rainfall producing short sugar crops and failed re-plantings in multiple regions of Jamaica, save the rainy marshlands and mountains of Westmoreland.[2] A growing set of planters, weakened by debt, coin shortages, soil exhaustion, and Black labor resistance, suspended or

[1] John Salmon to T.H. Dickinson, January 14, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1839], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, Part I. Circular Instructions, Jamaica—British Guiana*, 52.

[2] "Jamaica: Condition of the Labouring Population," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 5, no. 5 (May 1857), 103. See also George Willis to Colonel Robert Bruce, November 26, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Returns relating to Labouring Population in British Colonies; Orders in Council respecting Supply of Labour in Colonies. Part I. State of Labouring Population in W. Indies and Mauritius; Part II. Immigration of Labourers; Part III. Stipendiary Magistrates; Laws of Masters and Servants; Courts of Appeal; Tariffs*, 52. For example, in 1845, sugar estates on the plains of St. David suffered massive losses, despite the application of hand irrigation and the replanting of the crops.

completely abandoned cash crop cultivation. The decline of crop yields correlated with a crash in sugar prices on the international market in 1846, when Great Britain ended its special relationship with Jamaica vis-à-vis the low rate of taxation on its sugars. Britain was now open ground for competition between sugars produced by slave and free labor.[3] By 1848, sugar prices had reached their lowest level since 1750.[4]

As the magistrate Richard Hill claimed, sugar plantations close to the seaboard were the first casualties of this process.[5] The trend of collapse then spread to middling sugar estates in the wet interior valleys and to coffee plantations in the elevated mountain ranges of St. Andrew, St. John in

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[3] Messrs Smith, Thompson, and Girod to John S. Pakington, June 3, 1852, Parliamentary Papers [1852-53], *Despatches on Condition of Sugar-Growing Colonies*, *Part II: Jamaica,* 306. By 1848, perfect equalization is delayed until 1854, but it will take full effect then. See also Keith McClelland, "Redefining the West India interest: Politics and the Legacies of Slave-ownership," in Catherine Hall, Nicolas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 127, 143. In essence, the 1846 Sugar Duties Act reduced the differential on all sugars, admitting foreign sugars at only a modestly higher duty, without respect to whether it was grown from enslaved or free labor.

[4] Barry Higman, *Montpelier, Jamaica: A Plantation Community in Slavery and Freedom, 1739-1912* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1998), 51. See also Alexander G. Fyfe to Hugh W. Austin, January 24, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854]*, Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 18. By 1854, in Edward McGeachy's arid district of St. David's parish, only four estates out of eleven in 1846 maintained production, employing 300 people for four to five days per week, as opposed to the 5500 persons for five and a half days per week just eight years prior.

[5] Richard Hill to Robert Bruce, 23 December 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Papers, In Continuation of Those Presented Last Year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) Relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies. Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius*, 44. See also *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 9* (Kingston: Office of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, 1905), 8. In coastal regions, cocoanut trees grew in the sandy, permeable soil; during droughts, their leaves and crops were reputed to shrink by one-half to two-thirds, indicating its need for copious water. See also Charles Lake to Hugh W. Austin, January 10, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 13. It is important to note that plantations had already been falling apart by the 1770s due to high indebtedness and declining crop yields vis-à-vis labor inputs. In Portland Parish, there were only four sugar estates left partially operational in 1854, as compared to 24 in 1836. By 1846, there were only eleven in operation. Seventeen sugar estates went out of cultivation entirely uninjured by the British sugar duties." See also W.F. Bell to Colonel Bruce, St. Dorothy, November 22, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Returns relating to Labouring Population in British Colonies; Orders in Council respecting Supply of Labour in Colonies. Part I. State of Labouring Population in W. Indies and Mauritius; Part II. Immigration of Labourers; Part III. Stipendiary Magistrates; Laws of Masters and Servants; Courts of Appeal; Tariffs*, 50. For example, in St. Dorothy's parish, only ten sugar estates were left functioning by 1845. W.F. Bell estimated that deficient rainfall in 1844 and 1845 would result in only 300 or 400 tons of sugar for next year's crop, as opposed to the 1000 to 1200 tons expected when the rains fell consistently and on time Mountain springs continued to provide the estates with drinking water, but they lacked the volume and speed to irrigate the land. Crops and animal fodder were entirely dependent on the vicissitudes of the rains.

the Vale, Clarendon, St. Thomas in the East, and Portland. Planters in these regions confronted the same difficulties as those on the coast. Like the lowlands, the extension of drought effects into spaces between 1500 to 4500 feet above sea level negatively upland crop yields, particularly coffee, whose beans were ruined before and during the blossoming period by low rainfall.[6] Less yields also hurt the ability for planters of the interiors to pay the minimum double wages demanded by Black workers to haul the produce by foot, oxen-driven cart, and canoes to the ports and wharves tens of miles away.[7]

By the failure of the vernal rains in 1846, Governor Grey's fears for Jamaica's future reached a tipping point. The planters were crippled by the scarcity of rain and Black labor, "making the outlay of cultivation a *dead loss*."[8] Even the most cautious scientific, spendthrift planter had become

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[6] John Candler, May 27, 1850, Diary, reprinted in John Candler, "A Good Friend in Our Midst, 1850," *Jamaican Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (March 1959), 25. In 1850, Candler met William Kirkland, who had lived since 1810 about six miles from Morant Bay, in the mountains. The latter had, since Emancipation, been dealing with the failure of the steady supply of water to the waterwheel, which led to Kirkland producing only one-tenth of what he had made before Emancipation, around 400 hogsheads per year. See also Report by Doctor Milroy to the Colonial Office on Cholera Epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51, 7-9, 14. In 1850 only 8.5 inches of rain at Newcastle Barracks, elevated at 3,500 to 4,500 feet above Kingston and usually wet much of the year; even less fell in the southern flatbottomed plains of Vere, St. Elizabeth, and the Liguanea plains. Then, in 1851, the vernal rains set in late and continued unabated for months. Along the northern mountain ridges and coastline, no rain fell at all that year until September or October. The vernal rains fell copiously, "not so much from occasional immense falls of rain, [bus] from the frequent recurrence of showers. The Guinea Grasses grew "five or six feet" in height rapidly, but were then "attacked with blight, and speedily changed from a lively green to a reddish brown colour." See also Barry Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed*, 6-7. The coastal plains usually received less than 50 inches per year, while interior areas in the western and central mountain belts received fifty to one hundred inches.

[7] Richard Hill to Robert Bruce, December 23, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Papers, In Continuation of Those Presented Last Year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) Relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies. Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius*, 44-45. See also John Candler, *West Indies: Extracts from the Journal of John Candler, Whilst Traveling in Jamaica* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1840), 8. While traveling through the rural environs of Kingston in 1839, John Candler remarked that dealing in transport, river, and ditch-digging work was paid 2 shillings per day, double the rate of field hands.

[8] "Section XX: Agriculture," Parliamentary Papers [1850], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica. In Continuation of the Papers Presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Command, May 10, 1849*, 100. Emphasis added.

"a perpetual gambler."[9] More and more white planters could no longer reliably plan out the rotation of new plantings and ratoons years in advance. Loans became harder to procure and to pay down. New planters were deterred from entering the market to replace those who had abandoned cultivation, in a vicious feedback loop.[10]

This chapter explores how Black Jamaicans adapted to environmental conditions by developing flexible practices of migration and settlement after Emancipation. They used this power to take advantage of the droughts of the 1840s to expand their farms and communities on the borderlands and hinterlands of the plantations. I argue that Black semi-nomadism emerged in response to the ongoing pressures of environmental enclosure from above. To variable degrees of success, Black Jamaicans integrated mobility and evasion into their defensive strategies and offensive tactics to protect their homes and farms from incursions by both white and non-white thieves. Black Jamaicans reasserted the primacy of customary law in the form of the right to be left alone to govern, police, and punish their communities, on their own terms. The planter class experimented with water infrastructure projects, indentured non-white migration, and incarceration to counteract the spread of semi-autonomous Black communities. What comes into stark relief is that the planters pursued such policies out of weakness, not strength. The crucial period of the 1840s established long-term pressures that bubble to the surface from the 1850s to the 1890s.

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[9] Ibid, 100.

[10] See also Barry Higman, *Plantation Jamaica: Command and Control 1750-1850* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2005), 111-12. When sufficiently irrigated, manured, and weeded, ratoon pieces were known to produce small crops for up to twenty years.

The Rains of Heaven

The droughts of the early 1840s deterred free Black Jamaican fieldhands from settling the agricultural frontiers.[11] Food cultivation under such conditions was laden with risk. One gambled that the vernal and autumnal rains would arrive on time. The rent of land by the month or even the year was also precarious. Black tenants might bring a crop or two to fruition but had little recourse should the landlord decide for any arbitrary reason to revoke the contract. Indeed, in 1844, Richard Hill reported that the lack of subsistence cultivation in those years caused local food crises throughout the colony. Large quantities of costly imported food were needed to compensate for the shortfall.[12]

Even if seasonal cyclical shifts fell within conventional expectations, dry seasons helped produce labor glut twice a year. Black men and women anticipated that they would have to take to the roads, seeking out temporary wage labor opportunities to make ends meet. Yet, so long as the rains had fallen sufficiently over the prior year, planters required Creole workers to deforest, plant

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[11] Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 183.

[12] Richard Hill to Robert Bruce, December 23, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Papers, In Continuation of Those Presented Last Year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) Relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies. Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius*, 43. See also "Correspondence," *The Non-Slaveholder, Volume 1,* (December 28, 1853), 17. the first Black workers and tenants to flee their ancestral lands on the plantations had accumulated some appreciable of savings and social status. Although whites kept the majority of land, those who supported the formation of free villages and farms sold anywhere from a half-acre to ten or fifteen acres at a time. The latter exchange was often conducted through debt arrangements, with a white person serving as the creditor, to be paid off over the course of several years. See also Augustin Cochin, *The Results of Emancipation,* Translated by Mary Booth (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Company, 1863), 335. Augustin Cochin estimated that 150 to 200 free villages emerged on lands reclaimed by the estates, consisting of 10,000 heads of families that had constructed more than 3,000 cabins. These new settlers contributed heavily to the construction of new schools and chapels. One must resist the notion that the free villages were, at least initially, open to any Black person for settlement. The first wave of post-Emancipation was class-stratified, insofar as a given collectivity had to possess the economic and political means to migrate during protracted climatic volatility. This was achieved by either (1) independent agriculture; or (2) steady, stable, continuous work on a plantation, where wages were paid weekly, on time. The initial settlers of the free villages were largely composed of enslaved and freed people of color who were established members of Christian churches and/or skilled laborers (carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, etc.). See also Jean Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture Building in Jamaica* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 104-07.

new canes, weed crops, tend the cattle, and harvest mature canes. Seasonal migrants' hopes for finding work were not completely in vain.

The affliction of drought exacerbated the pressures of ordinary dry seasons. As Benjamin Milliard, John Wallace, and Francis Beckford observed in St. Ann's Parish, droughts guaranteed "an excess of labor, but an inability to obtain employment."[13] Black men and women who had their attempts at subsistence agriculture stymied by the droughts were the first to flood to the sugar valleys in search of income. But both bankrupt and solvent planters had little reason to employ the Black masses when there weren't enough commodities to valorize through their labor-power, while still realizing a profit.

For those (un)lucky enough to work the fields for wages during a drought, they could expect average wages of nine pence or less per day. Wages could fluctuate wildly from region to region; in general, they probably declined over time. For example, in 1850, John Candler claimed that the wages of praedial labor were roughly half of what they were as in 1840.[14] Richard Hill said that even when average rainfall amounts stabilized in the early 1850s, sugar prices had, by that point, crashed so low that surviving planters couldn't truly take advantage of the fairer seasons. The return of the rains was too late. The damage had already been done.[15]

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[13] Petition of Benjamin Millard, John Wallace, Francis Beckford, &c., "Freeholders, Labourers, and Others in the Eastern Portion of the Parish of Saint Anne and Neighboring Part of St. Mary's, Jamaica," Parliamentary Papers [1848], *Fifty-Fourth Report of the Select Committee,* 591-92.

[14] John Candler, April 23, 1850, Personal Diary, reprinted in John Candler, "A Good Friend in Our Midst, 1850," *Jamaican Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (March 1959), 6, 20. During drought conditions beginning in May 1850 in Candler's neighborhood, "The laborers in the lower parts of Clarendon are only moderately well off, owing to the dry season which has made work scarce and wages low."

[15] Richard Hill to Hugh W. Austin, January 23, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 24.

A years-long drought in Hill's neighborhood ended with the return of the vernal rains in May 1845. The event provided Hill with a simple, key insight concerning the new relationship between rainfall and the availability of *free* Black labor. For it was only after the long drought ended that ordinary fieldhands truly began to abandon their former stations en masse. Hence, food crops produced by Black farmers on their own account saturated the markets at the end of 1845. The purchase of imported food rapidly declined.[16]

Edward McGeachy, the Crown Surveyor of Surrey County, channeled Hill's insights. For him, the tendency of Black workers to come and go as they pleased from plantation labor was not explainable by racist tropes of laziness, lack of discipline, or rebelliousness. Nor were short and dead sugar and coffee crops the real crux of the planters' dilemma. Instead, the quantity of available Black workers was inextricably tied to ebb and flow of the rainy seasons. After a long dry spell and the rains set in, rich, middling, and poor Black Jamaicans had no time to waste. As McGeachy remarked, ordinary fieldhands on plantations and independent Black farmers alike had their "own little propert[ies] to attend to, which has equally suffered from the same cause [drought]. … [M]oney to almost any extent, at such seasons, will not purchase his labour."[17] Ordinary fieldhands demanded

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[16] Richard Hill to Robert Bruce, December 23, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Papers, In Continuation of Those Presented Last Year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) Relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies. Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius*, 43. For Hill, the abandonment of financially precarious estates and shifting patterns of rainfall "point out the true cause of a deficiency of labour, where[as] every contingency with the planter is favourable for continuing the active pursuits of industry." See also Alexander G. Fyfe to Hugh W. Austin, January 24, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 18. Alexander Fyfe claimed that Black farmers were "averse to settling in those districts" at the highest elevations where the best coffee grounds stood. He does not explain why this was the case. For the significance of the midsummer drought phenomenon in Jamaica's meteorological cycles, see Theodore L. Allen, Scott Curtis, and Douglas W. Gamble, "The Midsummer Dry Spell's Impact on Vegetation in Jamaica," *Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology* 49, no. 7 (July 2010), 1590-95.

[17] Edward McGeachy, *Irrigation in the West Indies, Being a Simple Plan By Which They May be Perpetrated as Valuable and Productive Sugar Colonies* (Kingston: Printed by the Author, 1846), 26. See also "Inhabitants of Sturge Town and Its Vicinity, in the Parish of St. Ann, in the Island of Jamaica," June 15 and June 16, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1848], *Appendix to the Fifty-Fourth report, On Public Petitions,* 594; and "Petition of George Robert Johnson, Jacob Lyons, H.A. Whitelock, et al.," February, 24-25, 1848, *Appendix to the Fifteenth Report, On Public Petitions*, 181. Planters in St. Ann's parish also claimed that no temporary increases of wages could attract Black labor after the dry season ended. See also W.A. Bell to Hugh W. Austin, January 1, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 28. "Though many work on the same property and no other, still not continuously, as they all take a certain time,

that the planters allow for extra time off from plantation work, especially on Fridays and sometimes Mondays, to tend to their own provision grounds.[18]

The rapid flight of labor after the rains set in was paralleled only by the August and Christmas holidays. After Emancipation, Black Jamaicans took leave from work for several weeks, not days, at a time. In Annotto Bay, for instance, Henry Westmoreland complained how "the Creole population" regularly absented themselves from August 1 to August 26. As "the month of August [is] the best in the year for sugar-making" due to the dry season, Westmoreland predicted "much injury and loss…if these canes be not taken off before the middle of October"—right when the autumnal rains were expected to set in. He had experienced a mass withdrawal of Black workers "usually eager to work the cane" since the autumnal rainy season of 1848. By 1850, sugar crops in Westmoreland were lost due to "want of labour to clean them, choked with grass." Weeds grew prolifically in both dry and wet seasons.[19] Clearing the land of the weeds with bills and sharp

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a week or two at a time, to replant or otherwise attend to an acre or half of an acre of land usually at some distance from the property on which they work, and unfortunately, this happens in rainy seasons, the time when they are most wanted for the cultivation of the staples or other produce supplied by the planter."

[18] *Defensive Organization of Jamaica: Report Compiled in Compliance with the Letter from the Colonial Office, for the Use of the Intelligence Branch of the War Office* (July 1877), CO/884/3, KEW, 38.

[19] McGeachy, *Irrigation in the West Indies*, 26. The rapid flight of labor after the rains set in was paralleled only by the August and Christmas holidays. After Emancipation, Black Jamaicans took leave from work for several weeks, not days, at a time. Henry Westmoreland to Thomas F. Pilgrim, August 27, 1849, Parliamentary Papers [1849] *Return to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 9 February 1849;--for, "copies or extracts of all correspondence with the governors of Jamaica. Trinidad, and Mauritius, since the date of the last laid before Parliament, relating to the general condition and government of these colonies," (Part I.—Jamaica),* 42. By contrast, the parishes of Westmoreland, Hanover, St. James, Trelawny, and St. Ann's had not suffered the same mass withdrawal of Black workers. See also Testimony of William Hosack, August 27, 1849, Parliamentary Papers [1849] *Return to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons,* 42. In Annotto Bay, for instance, Henry Westmoreland complained how "the Creole population" regularly absented themselves from August 1 to August 26. As "the month of August [is] the best in the year for sugar-making" due to the dry season, Westmoreland predicted "much injury and loss…if these canes be not taken off before the middle of October"—right when the autumnal rains were expected to set in. He had experienced a mass withdrawal of Black workers "usually eager to work the cane" since the autumnal rainy season of 1848. Peter Marsden, *An Account of the Island of Jamaica, With Reflections on the Treatment, Occupation, and Provisions of the Slaves* (Newcastle: S. Hodgson, 1788), 31. By 1850, sugar crops in Westmoreland were lost due to "want of labour to clean them, choked with grass," which proliferated when the rain fell after a dry spell. Clearing

cutlasses was labor intensive and a significant variable overhead cost of production, whose payoff wouldn't arrive until a year or more into the future, at the time of sale.[20]

Meanwhile, hinterland Black communities of the mountainous interiors adapted to drought in the lowlands by specializing in subsistence crop cultivation for sale to lowland Black populations. Yams, plantains, breadfruit, cocoas, and arrowroot made their way to the nearest port town by foot, donkey, and mule-driven carts.[21] Food supplies also moved along the coastlines by canoe traffic to other port towns, where higglers and cart-operators collected and transported the goods to the rural areas. Food produced in Portland parish, for example, provided nourishment to workers of the interiors of St. John in the Vale and the coasts of Trelawny, where extensive subsistence crop cultivation was difficult due to high population density and infertile soils of the limestone hills.[22]

This traffic of food and export crops, as Charles Lake described in the Falmouth region, was intimately tied to maritime circuits of transport. Many Black farmers in this region typically owned the canoes that carried their produce along the coasts.[23] These farmers often moved goods

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the land of the weeds with bills and sharp cutlasses was labor intensive and a significant variable overhead cost of production, whose payoff wouldn't arrive until a year or more into the future, at the time of sale.

[20] Marsden, *An Account of the Island,* 31. Clearing the land of the weeds with bills and sharp cutlasses was labor intensive and a significant variable overhead cost of production, whose payoff wouldn't arrive until a year or more into the future, at the time of sale.

[21] *Defensive Organization of Jamaica,* CO/884/3, KEW, 38.

[22] Governor Henry Barkly to the Duke of Newcastle, May 26, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 45-46. "The real secret of its [St. John in the Vale's] superiority as a sugar-growing district arises, strange to say, in the inferiority of its soil for the production of yams, cassava, cocoas, &c., the labourers being chiefly dependent, not on their own grounds, but on money wages, to lay out provisions in the purchase of provisions imported from Portland and elsewhere into the Falmouth market."

[23] Charles Lake to Hugh W. Austin, January 10, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 14. "A very large number of them are owners of freehold properties, on which they are comfortably located. They also own a large number of horses, hogs, and other livestock. They trade extensively in the native products of the parish, which they cultivate in such abundance, that boats are constantly conveying cargoes of yams, cocoas, and

collectively and traveled in groups to maximize everyone's profits. Richard Hill discussed how after all the wares had been sold, bands of farmers stayed in the area, "associat[ing] themselves in small jobbing gangs" to perform task and day work. The ability for the unit to work together easily was crucial for completing assigned tasks with the least input of time and the maximum payout. This was beneficial for planters because a team that worked well together ended up costing less money on the margins. Such situations also allowed the jobbing gang to continue or abandon work collectively, as they saw fit. They "[took] home the wages they earn for work in these voyages" for reinvestment in their households and farming operations. According to Hill, these migrant workers did "not so much underbid the resident labourers as keep their prices regulated against the effect of the combinations of the large villages."[24] Collective solidarity among workers instead occurred between members of the jobbing gang, "who all side with one another, practicis[ing] every unfair advantage" in negotiations.[25] The power of the jobbing gang was rooted in its mobility and its unity.

Black communities of the mountainscape also adapted to droughts by focusing on export-oriented cultivation (e.g., coffee, pimento, ginger, logwood), rather than traditional subsistence crops. The cultivation of these secondary commodities on the borderlands and hinterlands of abandoned plantations in St. Ann's, Manchester, and St. Elizabeth's parish injected significant

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plantains to port of Falmouth in the parish of Trelawny, where they are scarce and in great demand. The vessels employed in this traffic are almost exclusively their own property."

[24] Richard Hill to Robert Bruce, December 23, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Papers, In Continuation of Those Presented Last Year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) Relating to the Labouring Population of the British Colonies. Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius*, 45.

[25] Anthony Davis to Hugh W. Austin, December 31, 1853, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 33.

amounts of coin and capital into the subaltern political economy of food distribution, as they were sold to storekeepers in town or directly to ships anchored off the coast.[26]

But the perceived overreliance of export-driven Black farmers on imported food annoyed the whites. Mr. Ricketts suggested that the planters as a class needed to do more to get independent Black farmers to focus on supplying food for themselves and the markets throughout the entire year. Ricketts blamed non-subsistence cultivators for the seasonal inflation of prices of cornmeal and flour at the markets, which created a constant drain of specie from his neighborhood. This forced planters to pay hefty premiums for coin from the merchants to pay wages on time.[27] Furthermore, the profits generated by export agriculture as opposed to food production made Black farmers complacent and overconfident in their ability to hold out "against those evil days when the rains of heaven will be withheld, and their provision-grounds will fail them."[28]

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[26] W.A. Bell to Hugh W. Austin, January 1, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 27. In St. Dorothy, there was a limited amount of coffee picked by the Black peasantry, "to whom it does not belong, owing to absenteeism and non-cultivation; it grows on small properties that once supported an overseer and headman, now left entirely unprotected. Charles Lake to Hugh W. Austin, January 10, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 13-14. Black coffee farmers in Portland parish brought coffee once a week to the port. Black farmers of both subsistence and secondary export crops squeezed every opportunity to erode the competitive edge of the planter classes in these sectors.

[27] Earl of Elgin to Lord Stanley, September 2, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies*, 1. See also Marsden, *An Account of the Island,* 19. "In the dry seasons, they subsist primarily on flour, herrings, Guinea corn, and maize." See also *Defensive Organization of Jamaica,* CO/4/883, KEW, 16. Food scarcity occurred during periods of heavy rain; military officials warned that soldiers could not rely on the Kingston market during the wet seasons for vegetable foods.

[28] Earl of Elgin to Lord Stanley, September 2, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Part I: State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies,* 2. See also John Stewart, *An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 22-31-32. During the American Revolution, "The poor negroes were compelled to feed on the wild yam (a bitter and unwholesome root) and other wretched vegetables."

The Strategic Defense

The experience of the 1840s retaught Black Jamaicans how to exploit the weakness of *sedentary and immobile* planters suffering from drought by adopting the practice of semi-nomadism. Black Jamaicans keenly watched shifts in cyclical rainfall periods and moved as the seasonal circumstances changed, no matter when they began or how long they lasted. This freedom of movement was itself a form of defense. Mobility allowed for tens of thousands of free Black Jamaicans to construct spaces in which the friction-of-distance militated against whites' abilities to invalidate legal titles or to evict people in these spaces. Some of them decided to do so on the borderlands of the old order. Others fled to areas where population remained sparse and where topographical, meteorological, and hydrological extremes historically rendered plantation monoculture impractical: the savannas and hills of the rain shadow and the steep mountains of the deluge-zone.[29]

Under precarious circumstances apt to rapid reversal, marginalized Black farmers ingeniously towed the line to secure degrees of quasi-stable land tenure long enough to plant, harvest, consume, and sell their crops. But that was always only one half of the equation. Like in times of slavery, to maximize their chances for survival, Black Jamaicans had to be able to move and back and forth safely from home, plot, marketplace, and, when necessary for income, the plantation. This involved the investment of energy, time, and labor into safeguarding their capacity to determine, to the greatest extent possible, how and when one not only occupied, but also traversed, space over time.

Leaving one's place of refuge was the only way to procure food and water, as well as to make money. As Reverend Horace Scotland noted, even the most industrious Black farmers could never truly "be watching their field constantly" for the most ubiquitous, banal threat to their existence:

[29] George Cumper, "Population Movements in Jamaica," *Social and Economic Studies* 5, no. 3 (1956), 266-68.

organized thieves, both amateurs and professionals.[30] The longer one stayed at home, the longer the subsistence crops were exposed to attack. Reflexively, traveling to work, the marketplaces, and the provision grounds left one's property vulnerable to depredation. Cunning would-be thieves could then simply lie in wait, conducting surveillance from the shadows and the bush, under the cover of darkness. After mapping out the target's diurnal and weekly traffic patterns, cunning would-be thieves identified the most auspicious time to conduct an assault and get away with it undetected.[31] Observing cyclical shifts between the dry and wet seasons provided thieves with intelligence of what their marks were working on and when they would return. Thieves learned when their assaults would inflict the greatest dietary and financial harm: during dry seasons and drought conditions. Simple highway robbery was also not unheard of. For example, in January 1848, at Above Rocks, a man and his two daughters were coming down from the mountains with horses and provisions for sale in Spanish Town. The hill upon which his house stood was still in sight when a gunshot rang

[30] Testimony of Horace Scotland, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica,* 51.

[31] See Chapter 43, "An Act for Registering Fire-Arms, and for Other Purposes," Section 13, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in Third Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: Cathcart & Sherlock, 1840), 115. "Whereas trespasses upon property, by idle and mischievous persons, have recently become frequent, and have in many cases been attended by acts of violence and intimidation…Be it therefore enacted, That if any person whatsoever shall, with fire-arms, cutlasses, or dogs, commit any trespass…for the purpose of hunting, shooting, or otherwise, such person shall…forfeit and pay such sum of money, not exceeding five pounds…or be committed to the house of correction not exceeding fourteen days." See Chapter 18, "An Act to Prevent Trespasses Upon Property," Section 1, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Eighth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Jamaica: Unnamed Publisher, 1845), 30-32. "Whereas trespasses upon property are of frequent occurrence in this island, and are often committed by persons under the pretence of fishing, torching, hunting, or shooting, to the great damage and danger of buildings, cane-pieces, and fences." These persons were known to "[pass] along any private road, through any lands or premises of any proprietor…with lighted torches during the night, without the consent of the proprietor." See also Chapter 41, "An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Laws Relating to Highways, Not Being Turnpikes," Section 61, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Fourteenth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Spanish Town: William J. Pearson, 1851), 347. This law banned walking along any road with a "lighted pipe, cigar, fire-stick, or torch, on or about any road or path, through any estate, works, buildings, cane pieces, or cultivated lands…under pretence, or for the purpose of crabbing, or fishing." These kinds of liminal spaces were the same frequented by black farmers who moved back and forth between their homes and secluded plots.

out, hitting the man in his shoulder. "No traces of the assassin have yet to be found," James Hume lamented.[32]

Black farmers refused to undertake any agricultural or market operations without first maximizing the defensive grid around their homes and provision grounds with not only physical, but supernatural, barriers. Rather than relying upon fencing made of wire and wood, they took advantage of the flora and topography of the natural landscape. For example, the shrubbery, thorns, and spines of "pinguin fences" [*bromelia pinguine*], which grew naturally around the bush and trees, blocked snooping humans and stray animals and occluded vision.[33] Human intervention could easily direct the path of their growth, and the fruits of the plant provided emergency sources of water.

Plots cleared within forested spaces maintained dense patches of various trees around its borders as a physical barrier. Smaller clusters of trees on the fringes of plots, especially logwood, could be cut, used, and sold in the markets, without automatically negating the shielding functions of the forest that remained.[34] Within their plots, they intercropped yams with wild sugar cane—poor

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[32] James Hume to John Clarke, January 24, 1848, and February 4, 1848, D/HUM/2, ANG. "Intelligence of a crime committed at the Above Rocks reached us – A man on his way to Spanish Town through a deep pass between the mountains a few miles from us was waylaid and shot at. The contents of the gun lodged in his shoulder. Two little girls were with him driving a horse with provisions. He managed to reach a house a short distance of about ¾ of a mile off and he now lies in a hopeless state."

[33] Legislative Council Meeting, Oct 7, 1847," Parliamentary Papers [1848] *The Reports Made for the Year 1848 to the Secretary of State having the Department of the Colonies: In Continuation of the Reports Annually Made by the Governors of the British Colonies, with a View to Exhibit Generally the Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, and of the United States of the Ionian Islands. Transmitted with the Blue Books for the Year 1848,* 132. "Mr. Finnlay…[sought information] as to repairing the Penguine fence round the grass piece, to prevent trespass from goats in the neighborhood."

[34] S.R. Ricketts to Colonel Bruce, November 26, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Return to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 15 June 1846;--for, "Papers, in continuation of those presented last year (Sessional Paper, No. 642, of 1845) relating to the Labouring population of the British colonies."—(West Indies and Mauritius.) Part I. State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius,* 57-58. See also Chapter 41, "Laws Relating to Highways, Not Being Turnpikes," Section 52 and 53, *Fourteenth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria,* 343. "That in case any person shall cut down any tree on land not occupied by him, so that it shall fall into any highway, river, or stream, unless by the order and consent of the occupant…shall forfeit, to such occupant, the sum of one pound for every tree so felled, and pay the expence incurred for removing the same."

for eating and worthless to sell—to confuse the enemy of the yams' whereabouts.[35] The "Bitter Bessie," [*Dioscorea polygonoides*], a wild yam, was unfit for food and was also sometimes planted around the edges of cultivations to confuse or discourage praedial thieves.[36]

Black farmers supplemented these barriers with physical weapons designed to maim and kill. Within the plot itself, it was not uncommon for farmers to set foot traps with poisoned spikes and spring guns at key locations known only by themselves and their trusted associates. Several black communities also accumulated caches of blunt and stabbing weapons, as well as firearms and gunpowder, below the ground or in special huts behind the bush, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. One yam farmer and tenant named Nielson in the Port Royal mountains had been robbed blind for seven months, so he stood watch over his grounds with a loaded musket. When the thief approached near midnight, Nielson blasted him; the thief crawled to the Police Station at Guava Ridge and bled out. Still, government officials observed these situations cautiously.[37] Historically, panics over Black arms' buildups during protracted periods of political agitation (i.e., the revolts of 1824, 1831, 1848, 1859, and 1865) served as justifications to position white and non-white agents on the borderlands on choice lands along the northern coastline and the western half of Jamaica, for the purposes of intelligence gathering and observation of the enemy.[38]

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[35] John Rashford, "Roots and Fruits, Social Class, and Intercropping in Jamaica," PhD Dissertation (The City University of New York, 1984), 465.

[36] J.H. Parry, "Salt Fish and Ackee: An Historical Sketch of the Introduction of Food Crops into Jamaica," *Caribbean Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (December 1962), 33.

[37] "Packet Summary," *The Colonial Standard and Jamaica Despatch,* January 24, 1870, PHL/2/31, MAR. See also Messrs Cradwick and Barclay to the Governor, October 9, 1920, CO/137/742, KEW, 267. In 1920, it was still illegal technically to shoot trespassers and suspected thieves on sight; Cradwick and Barclay recommended that all food cultivators be armed and permitted to shoot those who encroached upon their land with salt, rather than bullets.

[38] Numerous instances testify to varying scales of firearms possession after Emancipation. See D. Robertson to Captain Darling, July 19, 1839, Parliamentary Papers [1840], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, Part I. Jamaica,* 44. "From the conduct of the negroes on Fonthill and the neighbouring estates that they contemplated a rising on the 1st August, more

Spiritual weapons stationed around the plot provided a first and last line of defense. To ward off evil natural and supernatural forces, farmers commonly buried or hung suspended Obeah vials and bottles filled with eggshells, various liquids, nails, and teeth at access points to the plot. Above access points to the plot often stood "Cloth written in a strange language," warning would-be trespassers of retribution in response to unauthorized entry.[39] Within Black villages, Obeah practitioners used ritual incantations and judicial proceedings to force public confessions out of the purported thief, lest the offender's stomach swell and burst.[40] Supernatural powers mediated how Black people enforced social obligations and norms of reciprocity in the material world.

Black and white farmers alike relied upon Obeah powers to defend themselves from depredation—despite the formal illegality of Obeah and its cultural associations with poisoner's arts and oath-making rituals which preceded insurrections. "'Dressing a garden means setting Obeah for the thieves,'" a planter friend of Hesketh Bell argued in the 1890s. Despite the planter's worry that the local authorities would hear of his illegal employment of an Obeah man, he nevertheless hired

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particularly as they had supplied themselves with fire-arms, of which there were a great number in the negro town, both of that estate and all the others in that vicinity. … "A Maroon, named William Peart, has been visiting and holding meetings in the negro towns," in order to gather intelligence for colonial authorities regarding the rumors. For panic over gun trafficking in 1848, see Testimony of William Foss and Thomas Armstrong, in "Extracts of Despatches which may have been received from Governor Sir Charles Grey, and can be made Public without Danger or Detriment to Public Service," Parliamentary Papers [1848], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 13-14. Testimony of Archdeacon Rowe, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Laid before Royal Commission on Jamaica Disturbances by Governor Eyre*, 51, 171, 646. In October 1865, as war raged in St. Thomas-in-the-East, Archdeacon Rowe claimed that he "firmly believed—in fact, I heard—that 300 or 400 sharpened lances had been found in another part of the [Darliston] mountains, and that the person in whose possession those lances were had been taken down to Black River and examined by the authorities there, and that they had let him go again." Reports of "Negroes" in the Darliston Mountains, St. Elizabeth, around 1865, bluntly refused to be sworn as special constables and illegally, they began to drill with "a large number of old muskets and fire-arms recently repaired by them."

[39] Martha Beckwith, *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1929), 127.

[40] Among many examples, see "An Obeah Practitioner at Work, Trinidad, 1836," in Richard Bridgens, *West India Scenery: With Illustrations of Negro Character, the Process of Making, Sugar, &c. from Sketches Taken during a Voyage to, and Residence of Seven Years in, the Island of Trinidad.* London, Robert Jennings & Co., 1836), plate 21.

"Mokombo," who offered to "go set strong strong Obeah for dem … tiefing all your plantain." Mokombo prepared a selection of "small and large medicine bottles, each filled with some mysterious liquid." He "tied one of the vials to a bunch of fruit and then began muttering a sort of incantation." When the thieves returned to steal the plantains, upon touching these amulets, their stomachs would swell and burst as if the ritual had been completed in public within the village. If this failed, Mokombo committed to summoning "a large number of most ferocious criboes…[which] the blacks hold…in the greatest dread."[41]

All these technologies were options of last resort. Seclusion and secrecy remained the greatest defense. The story of Adam Smith exemplifies this principle. In 1865, he was a head rural constable of New Market, on the border of St. Elizabeth and Westmoreland.[42] He was around 35 years of age.[43] He was the child of a woman who was enslaved under John Salmon.[44] He was well-respected by the whites. As a rural constable, he was only employed part-time, paid by the day, rather than per year. Part of his official duties included keeping the peace and order at the market. He derived the rest of his income from small-scale planting and from running a store on his own account.

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[41] Hesketh J. Bell, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889), 2-5.

[42] Testimony of Samuel Charles Stone, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission on Origin, Nature and Circumstances of Disturbances in Island of Jamaica. Part I. Report; Part II. Minutes of Evidence, Appendix*, 560.

[43] Ibid, 562.

[44] Testimony of John Salmon, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 615.

His other job was running a store on his own account. He had dealings with Samuel Stone, a major merchant at New Market.[45] According to Dr. McCatty, Smith was also a minor planter.[46]

Apparently, Smith had made some local enemies over a debt of over £100 contracted through multiple parties of the neighborhood.

Second, Smith had a reputation for strictness in his dealings with not only civilians, but also the constables under his command. Third, in June 1865, he had informed Salmon of political discontent and talk of rebellion around Darliston and the surrounding hills. He had attended multiple meetings to gather intelligence in the area for John Salmon, Thomas Wheatle, and the state, "writ[ing] down everything he heard said." He also attended a meeting at a Baptist chapel at Hewitt's View near Middle Quarter, Saint Elizbeth. Based on his accounts, there were large numbers of people from as far as Hanover and St. James who were to swarm down the road connecting Darliston, Bluefields, and New Savanna with Black River and St. Elizbeth, the ultimate target come August 1.[47]

But Smith's real identity had been compromised. "Now I come over to you I know that my life is in danger," Smith told Salmon, "but I won't stop at that." Smith pressed on as Salmon's dutiful spy.[48]

Word of Smith's treachery likely spread quickly. Samuel Charles Stone noted that Smith was already on watch by local shopkeepers and Black farmers because they had given him 100*l.* to

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[45] Testimony of Samuel Charles Stone, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 560.

[46] Testimony of A.G. McCatty, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 666.

[47] Testimony of John Salmon, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 615.

[48] Ibid*,* 615.

purchase provisions. He had not completed the task, nor returned the money. His true boss, John Salmon, had also acquired a reputation as an arch-embezzler and profiteer of state funds through the pursuit of public works projects, particularly prisons. Rumor was Salmon was planning on building a prison in the hills of St. Elizabeth. A man unknown to Salmon approached him one day in 1865, saying "You carried up [the mountain] a whole parcel of shackles, you are going to put that on the negroes, you are building a house that is to be the prison."[49]

Reports of large political gatherings, firearms accumulation, and the drilling of potential soldiers in December 1865 terrified lowland whites. They feared that places like Darliston would become staging grounds for the Black peasantry to train and plan before making their way to the streets of Savanna-la-Mar in riot and revolt, as had occurred in October 1865 in Morant Bay. Wheatle thus

Thomas Wheatle sent Smith and "certain people from Black River" up the hill to Darliston in December 1865.

A few days later, Mr. Manly from New Market had given Smith "30*l.* or 60*l.*, as he wanted it to buy produce for him, and that he came and settled up what money he had out, and he asked for 30*l.*" Manly gave him 10*l.,* and Smith left the store.[50] Smith died three hours after he took the money.[51]

Doctor McCatty's autopsy indicated foul play: Smith had been poisoned by arsenic. At trial, Samuel Stone also claimed that Smith had been poisoned. This event potentially overlapped with

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[49] Ibid, 615.

[50] Testimony of Samuel Charles Stone, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 560.

[51] Ibid, 560.

Smith's prior visit to Darliston. McCatty argued that the presence of arsenic in the viscera suggested that Smith had to have been given, according to McCatty, in one single dose, in excess of what was needed to kill. The issue was that the kind of arsenic used to kill Smith was not sold anywhere in St. Elizabeth, and McCatty knew of few places where it could be found.[52]

The Tactical Offense

Free Black people were loath to permit wanton acts of destruction to their property or their material interests to go uninvestigated. Such insults, which imperiled bare survival itself, would not go unpunished.

When a person decided to inflict damage clandestinely on a target, they often used skill and solidarity to avoid the involvement of judicial authorities. For example, Black workers living together on the sugar estates had the reputation of keeping quiet about thefts against their employers. "One labourer will seldom or ever inform against another," William Bell claimed, "and if called on, gives his evidence often very unwillingly." Black communities also had the reputation for mediating and resolving conflicts between included members; thieves caught red-handed could induce the potential plaintiff "to accept moderate compensation, if accompanied by kind words," as restitution for the offence.[53]

After Emancipation, the exception proved cases in which an aggrieved party held "some private reasons" for demanding retribution against a particular person. "When one of the peasantry

[52] Testimony of A.G. McCatty, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 666. McCatty argued that the presence of arsenic in the viscera suggested that Smith had to have been given, according to McCatty, in one single dose, in excess of what was needed to kill. The issue was that the kind of arsenic used to kill Smith was not sold anywhere in St. Elizabeth, and McCatty knew of few places where it could be found.

[53] Charles Royes to Austin, April 18, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica,* 137.

robs another," Bell noted, "the evidence is much more easily obtained." That same principle applied to "cases of assault."[54] Indeed, Mr. Shaw, Inspector of Prisons in 1865, claimed that this class refused to "suffer the least trespass or liberty to be taken with anything of his; the smallest theft is at once reported to the rural constable." Theft from within the community tested the durability of friends and family relations. As Shaw added, "there is a boy now in the penitentiary for sixty days for stealing two potatoes from his own brother."[55]

We must reimagine that the practice of theft could fulfill higher political purposes. Black farmers could use theft as a tool to maintain secrecy and seclusion. Black farmers used the threat and actuality of property destruction to create, exploit, and reproduce zones of state fracture and planter weakness. The goal here was never to accumulate enough strength over time to smash state-power in wars of annihilation and attrition. Rather, by slowing down the extension of the state's allies into the rural borderlands and hinterlands in a manner governed by non-centralized subaltern authorities, Black farmers hoped to establish a relatively stable political and ecological equilibrium in the rural hinterlands and borderlands by slowing down the extension of state-power, through non-centralized modes of organization.

Contemporaries reported that drought events in conjunction with spikes in theft cyclically caused the Black peasantry to suspend agriculture temporarily until conditions improved. In Benjamin Vickers' neighborhood of Westmoreland, for example, many people gave up the cultivation of provisions in 1864 and 1865, not only because of the droughts, but also because "they were robbed and destroyed before they came to maturity. … [I]n some districts they abandoned the

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[54] W.A. Bell to Hugh William Austin, Parliamentary Papers [1842], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, 1841-42 (Jamaica, Barbados*), 28.

[55] H.B. Shaw to Austin, April 20, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 130.

cultivation of provisions because they were not permitted to reap them."[56] Black people "dare not plant anything in the neighborhood of houses or settlements," as William Bancroft Espeut argued. This compelled Black farmers to move further and further into the forests so that their plots would remain secret.[57] Espeut's view was rooted in racist tropes that Black people were predisposed to steal. Nevertheless, the imagined and actual danger of assault exerted spatial effects on the landscape and Black Jamaicans' relations with the environment. Farmers avoided growing certain kinds of herbaceous crops that grew above ground and had economic value as export commodities.[58]

Of course, the same courts and legal codes functioned as anti-black racist institutional pillars for the unequal, hierarchical distributions of wealth, power, and resources that white planters demanded from the colony. Black women and men experienced the effects of theft disproportionately as defendants during, and prisoners after, criminal or civil cases waged by white plaintiffs. But subaltern actors clearly understood the function of the law as a concrete vehicle through which whites, browns, and blacks inflicted juridical forms of injury upon one another. Court litigation functioned as a kind of social theater to the broader public, whereby the best conjurers and sorcerers appealed to written words and unspoken accords to extract money, goods, and time from one another. By arguing about the meaning of unpaid debt, damage, and destruction in the public presence of others, black litigants and witnesses performed and fashioned new knowledge about gender inequality, racial difference, the importance of public reputation, and the

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[56] Testimony of Benjamin Vickers, March 1, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 612.

[57] William Bancroft Espeut, *On the Timbers of Jamaica* (Kingston: George Henderson & Co., 1881), 13. "I know that I cannot reap 25 per cent of sweet potatoes, when I plant them, and that the larceny of sugar canes, cocoanuts and fruit, is simply frightful." See also *Defensive Organization of Jamaica,* CO/884/3, KEW, 36.

[58] John Rashford, "Roots and Fruits, Social Class, and Intercropping in Jamaica," PhD Dissertation (The City University of New York, 1984), 459.

tricks of defending and negating a claim over an article of property within a judicial context. The courts were mechanisms to wage spiritual warfare against one's adversaries, not a means of obtaining justice per se.[59]

Evidence exists suggesting that Black communities created their own courts to deal with conflict between their members and neighboring communities. "Obeah courts" to determine the guilt of thieves and other Obeah practitioners stemmed back to Africa and the days of slavery. William Miller, Justice of the Peace for St. Thomas in the East, claimed that by 1862, "they hold courts of their own in the interior districts of Manchioneal, and punished offenses by way of money fine."[60] Black communities also invested their own members with law enforcement powers that approximated the official colonial court structure. For example, Miller discovered a summons signed by "John J. Lamont, J.P," who was an ordinary field laborer on Serge Island estate. [61] Lamont was not just pretending or approximating a real Justice of the Peace; he *was* the Justice of the Peace, and his position as an unskilled fieldhand played no bearing on reducing the status and prestige attached to his role as an enforcer of customary law. Black communities were dealing with theft, both within and between those communities, on their own terms, without recourse to the colonial courts.

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[59] Charles Royes to Hugh Austin, April 18, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 137. In fact, many liberal law-and-order minded metropolitan contemporaries actively supported expanding black workers' access to the courts to pursue claims made specifically against one another. As Charles Royes, Custos of St. Ann's parish from 1853 to 1865, noted, "the cases are chiefly between the people themselves, for abusive language, trivial assaults, trespasses, and so on; but there have only been, in that length of time, three cases of disputes between employer and employed." The paltry "four Petty Courts in the parish" were simply insufficient to hear the cases of over 40,000 people. Royes added that, "They frequently come to me in their quarrels, and say that they have not got the means to prosecute when they have been ill-used; and if, upon inquiry, I found that they had been seriously assaulted, I have given them the money to pay for the warrant, or ordered it to be sent out. … I may state that I have an extended knowledge of labourers, because I employ from 1,000 to 1,200 a day, and I pay in wages from 10,000*l.* to 12,000*l.* a year."

[60] Testimony of William Miller, March 14, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 920. A village named Huntley, in the Blue Mountain Valley was known to have had similar court systems in place.

[61] Ibid, 920.

As an actor's category, theft invoked unique ideas and beliefs about the nature of secrecy and intimacy, vengeance, and reversal. The discovery of a purported theft was accompanied by a fundamental uncertainty among victims and witnesses as to whether an act of destruction had been inflicted upon a person only because that person initially insulted and angered the thief. The escape of the thief only deepened this uncertainty. Indeed, how could one be sure that a person or persons had been at work in the first place? Malevolent spiritual beings and Obeah practitioners, who often took material form and traveled as domesticated or wild animals, may have been responsible for the act. The fear of asymmetrical reprisal by thieves in communion with supernatural forces often impelled ordinary people to suffer their losses silently and resist reporting thefts to colonial authorities.[62]

Yet, some thieves consciously left evidence behind as messages to their victims. The practice of ritually desecrating others' domesticated animals served as a kind of calling-card. This was accomplished by cutting out the tongues of cattle, mules, or horses, "and [then] filling the mouth with leaves, to leave it to die in the most fearful agony." The ritual served an additional purpose: preventing an Obeah man from extracting testimony from the witnessing animal about the true identity of the culprits.[63]

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[62] This was a popular sentiment throughout the period, though the story from the perspective of power relationships and dynamics between and within subaltern communities was more complex and was definitely not the product of race and blackness, as ruling-class elites believed. See William Bancroft Espeut, *On the Timbers of Jamaica* (Kingston: George Henderson & Co., 1881), 13; "A vast deal of crime, which although known to exist, is now never divulged, except from motives of revenge." Alexander Fyfe to HW Austin, January 24, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 20. Testimony of H.J. Kimble, Unspecified date in 1881, CO 137/501, KEW, 609. "Fears of Obeah and other forms of revenge, by which many are deferred from reporting and prosecuting offenders." Testimony of Mrs. East, Unspecified date in 1881, CO/137/501, KEW, 631. To combat thieves, Mrs. East, "Suggests use of man traps and Spring Guns. Lower orders fear Obeah too much to aid."

[63] Testimony of Richard Hill, June 29, 1848, in "Extracts of Despatches which may have been received from Governor Sir Charles Grey, and can be made Public without Danger or Detriment to Publilc Service," Parliamentary Papers [1848], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 13. In 1848, as part of the sequence which led to colonial officials deploying ships and police to the west for a show of force to potential insurgents, "the tongues of the cattle have repeatedly been cut out at Alexandria estate." Charles Rampini, *Letters from Jamaica: The Land of Streams and Woods* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1873), 78. In 1873, Charles Rampini claimed, "It is no uncommon thing for a

In addition, Obeah men were not the only subaltern actors engaged in this field of spiritual warfare. In 1839, 1840, 1849, 1852, and sporadically from 1861 to 1865, their counterparts, Myal practitioners, invaded Black-cultivated farms to destroy, not to steal for consumption or sale, other black farmers' crops under the auspices of rooting out Obeah objects from the soil, and therefore the community at large.[64]

Some radical fractions of Myal practitioners distinguished themselves from Obeah practitioners by advancing a peculiar argument to the broader Black population about the causes of meteorological volatility that had afflicted Jamaica since Emancipation. It was a sign of a deeper illness that struck at the roots of Jamaican society: the colonization of rural space by the privileged, well-connected few at the expense of the poor, marginalized Black masses. Myal practitioners did not arbitrarily choose random victims to harass. What state-power coded as "theft" was, in fact, a purificatory campaign to assault the livelihoods of non-white persons who benefited from their close links with the agents of the old slave order.[65] Under the direction of planters, Obeah objects might be placed in an area to secure fair rains when surrounded by areas stricken by drought or blight. Conversely, unearthed Obeah objects revealed how some peoples' crops thrived suspiciously in areas without rain.

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man who has a grudge against another to catch his mule or his horse, and after cutting out its tongue and filling the mouth with leaves, to leave it to die in the most fearful agony."

[64] J.H. Buchner, *The Moravians in Jamaica. History of the Mission of the United Brethren's Church to the Negroes in the Island of Jamaica from the Year 1754 to 1854* (London: Longman & Company, 1854), 141.

[65] Testimony of Thomas Kennedy Wheatle, Chief Inspector in St. Elizabeth, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 600. Wheatle claimed that the Revivalists in his district during the 1860s had destroyed the grounds and plots of all brown and black small settlers who they caught sowing crops. See also Testimony of Mr. Gibb, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 511. Gibb wrote that, "As it is they frequently come and say, 'Massa, I went to my ground, and they [Myal practitioners] have pulled up all the cassava and corn.'"

Such anti-Obeah campaigns could involve direct assaults against the suspected offending Obeah practitioner and their family. In Westmoreland parish in June 1857, a group of nineteen men and three women held Richard Crawford, his wife, his eldest son Downer, and two children hostage until Downer removed an Obeah-enchanted fowl's head that he buried in a neighbors' yard. Downer's act had supposedly impacted the crops of farmers for a radius of four to five miles. "They gave Downer a terrible beating," Crawford recounted, but Downer refused to relent. State authorities intervened and arrested and tried the suspected assailants for riot. But they refused to prosecute Downer for Obeah. To do so would have offered tacit encouragement of African "superstitions," as well as riotous, lawless behavior.[66] But by protecting Downer, the state implicitly bolstered his reputation as a powerful ritualist. The wider neighborhood would have interpreted this protection as a state-sanctioned form of Obeah acting to prevent the community from bringing Downer to their version of justice.

On another occasion in 1860, 28 people were sentenced to long prison terms for assaulting an Obeahman and his accomplices. Richard Bethell reported that whites debated over the need to lessen the punishments, given the effect of the trials in instigating popular protest in the streets surrounding the courthouse. The judge decided that the original sentences must stand. "The character and tendencies of a Negro population," Bethell said, led the judge "to think an example of severity was required."[67]

[66] Regina vs. Little et. al., March 4, 1858, CO/137/350, KEW, 33-36.

[67] See also Richard Bethell to Mr. Atherton, Duke of Newcastle, December 3, 1860, CO/137/352, KEW.

The Irrigation Fix

"Millions of tuns of the finest fresh water now run waste into the sea," McGeachy lamented in 1846, "whilst we are suffering ruin from drought." The sight kindled his dreams of an alternative hydrological future for Jamaica. He realized that for the planters as a class to grow and thrive again, they needed to create ways of removing the rain as a variable in crop production and Black labor availability altogether. Wide-scale irrigation projects held the inchoate potential to transform a technologically backwards, decrepit, and capital-poor Jamaica into a resurrected haven for the exploitation of non-white labor.[68] In McGeachy's pipe dreams, this source was ideally *Africans*, because they "are at once at home in their arrival on the West Indies, and not unfrequently meet many of their old countrymen."[69]

McGeachy thought that perennial rivers would serve as the primary source of water for irrigation schemes. Sometime in the early 1840s, he had devised an extensive irrigation plan for the Rio Cobre with his friend the Hon. William Shand, one of the wealthiest well-connected sugar planters and attorneys in Jamaica. After Shand died in 1845, the project fell apart.[70] Despite the failure, the experience taught McGeachy how he might irrigate a drought-prone region like the Kingston area. Water would be taken from the Ferry River, drawn up in elevation by steam power, windmills, and dams, to flow by action of gravity into canals and gutters as the water passed through the arid, waterless plains of Liguanea on its way to Kingston and the sea. As the irrigation system

[68] McGeachy, *Irrigation in the West Indies,* 47.

[69] Ibid, 20. The second better option over Coolies in McGeachy's opinion was Chinese indentured labor, because their agriculturists had practical knowledges of irrigation and manuring that were firmly integrated into traditional farming.

[70] Ibid, 48.

was built up, new waters could be funneled into spaces that received little to no rainfall and that had never been cultivated, owing to their distance from existing riverways.[71]

The water that made it to Kingston were not for inhabitants to drink. Instead, they were to serve as the liquid medium for a new sewer system in which filth, detritus, and human waste would be shunted and collected to the leeward (western) side of the city.[72] From here, these organic materials would be broken down into liquid manure that could be easily ferried back upland by roads and the railroad.[73] Estates in places like St. John in the Vale and upper Clarendon that were suffering from protracted soil exhaustion, rather than droughts, would thus be saved from destruction.[74] The purification of the cityscape of disease-causing agents was a superadded benefit of the program. The blame was laid upon Black Jamaicans as the primary agents of urban pollution. In Port Royal, for example, Commodore Dowding complained that "the streets are unmetalled and form a filthy morass whenever rain falls. There is only one small latrine provided for 1500 people, and the inhabitants are compelled to use the streets in consequence."[75] J.W. Fisher also blamed Black Jamaicans for the sanitary conditions of Port Royal, remarking that "a strong fecal

[71] Ibid, 47-49.

[72] Ibid, 43.

[73] Ibid, 41-43.

[74] Ibid, 34, 38.

[75] "Supply of Water to Plum Point Lighthouse and Public Buildings at Port Royal," October 23, 1896, D.W. 458, ADM/116/479, KEW.

odour…pervades the city streets in the early mornings…due in great measure to the filthy habits of the inhabitants in depositing their excrement in the streets, or yards opening on to the streets."[76]

Finally, new roads and towns specifically for Black workers bonded by contract to the local sugar estates would follow alongside the new irrigation canals.[77] By using water to solve the dilemmas of not only stunted crops, but also the restoration of worn-out sugar fields, McGeachy hoped that the potential for profit within a few years would encourage fellow planters to fund expensive water infrastructure projects that, on the surface, provided little immediate benefits, given the costs of construction and maintenance.

In December 1848, nine large-scale proprietors—absentees, mercantile representatives, and resident attorneys and overseers—on the arid plains of Vere and St. Dorothy's parish attempted to make Edward McGeachy's pipe dreams a reality. They sought state-backing and public financing to pursue an "irrigation fix" to the dilemma of drought and Black labor resistance. It was the first and largest scheme of its kind after Emancipation. This admittedly small number of planters combining for such purposes was still a rare novelty in Jamaica, and it is the earliest instance I have located thus far in the documentary record. The rumored passage of a £500,000 relief act for the West Indies in 1848 spurred the cadre to action. They quickly petitioned the imperial government for a portion of those funds to act as seed money to contract an engineer to determine the viability of using local rivers or "other sources of supply in the neighborhood" (typically referring to swamps, fens, and lagoons) for the project. In the petition, they emphasized that their location in "'dry weather' parts…where severe droughts frequently occur" warranted such expenditure as a public emergency,

[76] J.W. Fisher to Commodore Herbert Dowding, December 10, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW.

[77] McGeachy, *Irrigation in the West Indies,* 40.

instead of a matter solely within the domain of private interests.[78] After all, contemporaries, like actuaries in the present, regarded drought as an "act of God," an event beyond human control and design. The planters of Vere and St. Dorothy had already reduced wages to three pence per day during drought conditions in 1847 (wage rates were modestly raised to six pence per day by 1850).[79]

By ensuring the livelihoods of whites in one of the oldest sugar-producing parishes, which benefited from easy access to the sea, wharves, and fisheries., government officials would discourage and deter Black settlers from buying, renting, and squatting upon such militarily and economically significant regions. So long as the government approved of the surveyor's plans, the planters assured Governor Grey they would raise the capital for a loan to build the canals, pipes, and reservoirs.[80]

Regretfully, Governor Grey informed Henry Goulburn that the imperial government had denied the request. We can summarize their motives in two points. First, if £100,000 was insufficient to bring a waterworks online, there was little reason to suspect such a project would ever become operational. After all, the example of the Kingston Water Company illustrated the

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[78] Henry Goulburn, Richard Godson, Richard Godson the Younger, Joseph B. Yates, Joseph Brooks Yates & Co., Will Cresce, Joseph B. Yates, R. Bernal, Joseph Dobinson, John Mitchell, and A. Stewart Westmoreland to Earl Grey, December 14, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849] *Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 9 February 1849;--for, "Copies or Extracts of all Correspondence with the Governors of Jamaica. Trinidad, and Mauritius, since the date of the last laid before Parliament, relating to the General Condition and Government of these Colonies," (Part I.—Jamaica),* 169. See also H.H. Cousins, "The Central Sugar Factory at Morelands, Vere Estates, Ltd.," *Bulletin of the Botanical Department, Jamaica, Series 2, Volume 1* (1909-10), 53. The Salt River was known to flow even in the most extreme droughts, feeding into Spanish Town by way of the Rio Cobre. In the early twentieth century, it was hoped that this water would provide the key resources for irrigation networks in Vere. The Milk River had also run completely dry in the droughts of 1907 and 1908, denoting a need for irrigation works to extend out to the lands usually served by the Milk River.

[79] "Jamaica," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 1, no. 22 (October 1847), 147; John Candler, A Good Friend in Our Midst," May 17, 1850, *Jamaican Historical Review* 3, no. 2, 19; and Candler, "A Good Friend," June 4, 1850, 21. Candler met Richard Hill, who said that "sugar workers in Vere had adapted to low wages and drought events by "hir[ing] land in the mountains of Clarendon and subsist[ing] on the provisions they grow there."

[80] Henry Goulburn, et al. to Earl Grey, December 14, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1848] *Correspondence with Governors of Jamaica: Part I: Jamaica*, 169. See also Sydney Olivier, "Recent Developments in Jamaica: Internal and External," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts,* 64, no. 3291 (December 17, 1915), 80.

impracticality of bringing water supply companies online without slavery and reliable capital investment vessels. The infrastructure project would never make its money back, and its upfront costs would take years or even decades for investors to recoup, at interest. Second, the cadre had not convinced the government that their plans were truly in the public interest. The planter class as such benefitted little from the economic security provided by irrigation works to such a narrow range of private persons in Vere.

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Black Jamaicans treated these kinds of developmentalist projects with apprehension and skepticism. There were hidden, implicit costs embedded within every harbinger of civilization in a former slave society like Jamaica.

First, water developmentalists gave no thought to what kinds of preexisting relations Black users had with rivers like the Rio Cobre, the Rio Minho, and the Ferry River. Vital hunting and fishing grounds would be lost, as waterscapes were destroyed. The new canals would sit behind fences and other physical barriers. The beneficiaries of the new waterways would be the planters, never Black communities. Furthermore, the colonization of sparsely populated arid zones used for cattle grazing and open pastures was certain to disrupt existing routes of human and non-human animal traffic across those spaces. The drivers of Black horsekind would be forced to travel farther around the newly enclosed zones to reach water supplies.

Second, limited attempts to construct dams and canals on the Rio Cobre to bring water to Spanish Town in the 1850s ended up submerging hundreds, if not thousands, of acres under one to three feet of water, near the river's outlet to the sea. 345 acres encompassing Cumberland Pen and Salt-Pond Hill that were once used for cultivation became a large lagoon. Contemporaries could not clean the debris and sediment which accumulated in the ditches fast enough to prevent flooding, while the waves created a natural dam of sand and gravel near the ocean, further impeding the flow.

In the process, local Black Jamaicans' farms, homes, and chapels were inundated with water, enough that the missionary James Phillippo petitioned the government to compensate him and Black Jamaicans for their losses. They were unsuccessful in this endeavor.[81]

Third, Black Jamaicans reasoned that they would invariably pay the exorbitant financial costs for such projects. Future events would confirm this hypothesis. Imperial debt was the only way to procure the mass outlays of money and materials needed to construct, operate, and maintain large-scale water infrastructure projects. Private financiers provided the initial deposits in the form of stock purchases that bore interest. The only way for investors to profit and the imperial government to recoup the loan was to extract more taxes imported goods, homes, and horse-drawn carts, among others, out of the Black population. The Rio Cobre Irrigation Works finally came online in the early 1870s, for example, at the initial cost of £60,000. Only after a few short years of operation, the total amount had increased to £100,000.[82] In 1899, the debt for the Kingston Improvement and Waterworks project totaled £105,000, repayable, with interest, in 40 years, by an annuity of £3938 a year. Water rates were expensive; in 1879-80, for instance, water cost the 4400 users of the system about £3 per year.[83] Extra funds to pay the debt were funneled from funds from poor relief and roads.[84] The revenues of the Water Company in the 1900s hovered around £17,000 per year, with

[81] Testimony of Samuel Sharpe, Thomas Harrison, and James Phillippo, December 12, 1861, CO/140/161, KEW.

[82] Memorial of Inhabitants of Jamaica to Earl of Carnavon, November 20, 1876, Parliamentary Papers [1881], *Copy or Extracts of Correspondence Relating to a Memorial or Memorials received from Jamaica setting forth the Grievances which have arisen under the System of Crown Government in that Island, with the Prayer or Prayers of such Memorials, and the Number of Signatures attached thereto*, 7.

[83] *Blue Book of Jamaica, 1879-80*, CO/140/181, KEW, 222.

[84] "Jamaica, 1899-1900," Parliamentary Papers [1900], *Jamaica: Annual report for 1899-1900,* 16, 18.

expenditures for maintenance and operation around £6,100.[85] That surplus paid off investors and the rest was put toward the total debt, rather than reinvested in the expansion of the waterworks. By 1902, 67,667 writs of non-payment were issued to people delinquent on their water fees.[86] By 1906, the debt had increased to £144,067.[87]

Water fees helped motivate urban labor strikes, too. In 1895, wharfingers across the Atlas Company Line, Anchor Line Wharf, and the Royal Mail Company allied, forming a fighting force between 800 and 1000 men strong.[88] One of these strikers wrote to the editor of the *Jamaica Gleaner* to specify their demands. It was a strike, of course, for higher wages; two to three shillings per day was simply not enough to have a decent life in the city. Like past strikes, they needed more money to pay their rents and taxes. But unlike the past, the workers' grievances included the hydrological and the ritual. Their wages were insufficient to pay the waterworks bills, imperiling their daily waters for domestic uses. Many even lacked the money to procure coffins and gravediggers to give their departed friends and family the funerals they deserved. It was a grand humiliation of the living and the dead. The workers wanted "to bury them ourselves." The rites were too important for the social health of the community to trust to the meager poor funds raised by the colonial government.[89]

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[85] "Jamaica, 1905-1906," Parliamentary Papers [1906], *Jamaica: Annual report for 1905-1906*, 24.

[86] "Jamaica, 1902-1903," Parliamentary Papers [1903], *Jamaica: Annual report for 1902-1903*, 16, 86. The Vere Irrigation works were not included in these actions. The total expenditure in 1897 for this project was £24,214.

[87] Jamaica, 1905-1906," Parliamentary Papers [1906], *Jamaica: Annual report for 1905-1906*, 24.

[88] *Jamaica Advocate,* June 8, 1895, page 4, Jamaica National Library, Kingston, Jamaica (herafter JNL).

[89] *Jamaica Advocate,* June 1, 1895, page 2, JNL.

Public works projects like irrigation works were concomitant elements of an array of developmentalist and security institutions which acted against the interests of Black Jamaicans. So long as these institutions were not abolished, their costs were doomed to increase over time. A comparison of liabilities in the shape of "public" services between 1863-64 and 1873-74 is germane to this point. In the former set of years, the total expenditure of the state was £319,322. Funding for the prisons, police, and organs of the judiciary was 25.8% of the budget (£82,627); the public works, 11.1% (£35169); sanitation, 4.2% (£13441); and the public debt repayment, 18.1% (£57,857).[90] In the latter set of years, the total public expenditure had increased to £489,985. Funding for the prisons, police, and organs of the judiciary decreased to 22.1% of the budget (£108329); the public works increased to 16.5% (£80911), as did sanitation, 8.5% (£41871); and the public debt repayment decreased to 13.3% (£64975).[91]

The expansion of roadways and the creation of villages stocked with non-white agents of the planters signified the most direct threat against Black mobility and settlement practices in areas targeted for infrastructure development. Black Jamaicans had an ambivalent orientation toward the creation of new roads. To a certain extent, many agreed that roads helped facilitate traffic to and from the marketplaces and provision grounds by reducing the costs and time of transport. What Black people criticized was the historical fact that they were the ones who financed road development in a world where only roads along the sugar estates were maintained, while the

[90] Memorial of Inhabitants of Jamaica to Earl of Carnavon, November 20, 1876, Parliamentary Papers [1881], *Copy or Extracts of Correspondence,* 7.

[91] Ibid, 12.

parochial roads were left to disintegrate.[92] For example, in 1878, William Bancroft Espeut asked a man he encountered on Chepstow Road in St. Thomas in the East to come work for him. The man resisted Espeut's overtures; he would not have had to work for Espeut at all if the roads were good enough for him to move greater quantities of food and export crops. The whites' road projects ultimately robbed hard coin out of Black peoples' pockets. "Look at our roads," the man said, "what are we Black people paying taxes for? The Governor is right when he says the black people have to pay high taxes because the white men have estates. If there was no white man there would be no taxes and black man is a fool to pay taxes for white man."[93]

Black people understood the historically ambivalent meanings and consequences of road development. For one, good roads ensured that colonial soldiers and police could easily penetrate secluded rural environments. John Stewart in 1808 commented on the indispensability of roads in effective counterinsurgency and policing. "The difficulty of traversing the country during the Maroon war [of 1795]," Stewart remarked, motivated the colonial government to ramp up road construction rapidly, at the expense of the British imperial state. These roads had the important effect of "enhance[ing] the value of the lands in their neighborhood, and so encourage settlers to cultivate them."[94] Roads also enhanced the ability of state agents to interrupt populations made newly dependent on a particular road by blocking it off. To prevent and enforce quarantine during the 1850-51 cholera epidemic, for instance, police and special constables were stationed at border

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[92] See also T. Witter Jackson to Hugh W. Austin, January 31, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 30.

[93] William Bancroft Espeut to Colonial Secretary, August 26, 1878, Parliamentary Papers [1879], *Correspondence Relating to the Financial Arrangements for Indian Coolie Immigration into Jamaica,* 100-01.

[94] John Stewart, *An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 11 or 12 or 13.

points. These agents inflicted "summary punishment…on any who transgressed the order, or attempted to pass the forbidden line; they were well smoked, almost to stifling, besides being soundly thrashed."[95] And when whites' lands were adjacent to private and parochial roads, they gained the ability to enclose and regulate traffic across them with impunity. John Clarke told of an overseer at Silver Grove who locked up his gate to prevent people living in Mount Peto to cross because they owed him money. The road had hitherto always been treated per custom as a public road. Mr. Randall begged the overseer to open the gate, which he did. But immediately afterward, he "locked it up again in spite, to cause the people to go a long way round the road."[96]

This knowledge encouraged free Black people to emplace their villages at distance from the main roads. Philip Gosse described a fairly typical village near Montego Bay in 1844. The village was purposefully placed "not by the side of a high road, but retired into some secluded nook, approachable through a narrow winding path." Outsiders regularly passed by these villages without noticing evidence of their existence. Roving hogs and poultry moving about the area for food were the only clues that a village was nearby. But many of these animals, too, knew that secrecy was important to their survival. "On the sight of a stranger," Gosse remarked, the animals "scamper away…into the bush."[97]

The slow extension of physical enclosures, constructed of processed wood, stone, and metal wires, was the dark handmaiden of road construction. The erection and maintenance of fences over time reflected the lines of racial and class stratification endemic to Jamaican society. Barriers and

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[95] Testimony of Gavin Milroy, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Report by Doctor Milroy to Colonial Office, on Cholera Epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51,* 27.

[96] John Clarke to James Hume, November 2, 1863, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

[97] Philip Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica.* London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), 256.

barricades for defensive purposes were common throughout West Africa.[98] In Jamaica, fencing acquired a racial valence as a *white man's technology*. It physically demarcated the spatial contours of who identified, belonged, or acted in the name of allies, enemies, and neutral parties. Fences helped ruling-class elites fix, in written form, the dimensions of a plot and where it might conflict with a neighboring estate, animal pen, or peasant proprietor. It thereby made homes, persons, animals, carts, lands, and crops legible for more efficient taxation, distrainment, and destruction. Fencing bolstered white attempts to surveil, harass, and police their relatively secluded communities and farms, particularly when the question of legal title or tenancy was ambiguous (i.e., "squatting").

Indeed, in the few months preceding the eruption of high-intensity warfare on October 11, 1865, Black farmers in St. Elizabeth parish seized the opportunity to destroy by fire the archival documents that bore evidence of their names and holdings.[99] Becoming a fully documented income-generating landholding member of society (those who made over £6 annually as freeholders, and over £30 as leaseholders) carried with it the burden of taxation for infrastructure projects which benefited whites alone. Until the 1860s, it also entailed an assumed obligation to fund and provide unpaid labor to the local militia. By contrast, the construction of borders and boundaries in the absence of fences obscured the gaze and stymie the movement of judicial and extra-judicial goon squads.

The story of Reverend J.H. Buchner is telling in this context. Buchner tried to enlist his Black neighbors to fence their properties and to "mak[e] a road through the village, as the path was a

[98] See John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[99] Testimony of Thomas Kennedy Wheatle, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 600. In particular, after arresting suspected rebel sympathizers and planners in the mountainous areas in the environs of the Black River of St. Elizabeth in 1865, Wheatle reported that people hid property papers said to be destroyed by fire in order to render their land holdings illegible to the state.

complete bog."[100] One of his Black neighbors criticized the spurious reasoning that lay at the root of Buchner's vision: "'Suppose,' said one, 'I should make a good road along my fence, *would not other people walk upon it?*'"[101] Buchner eventually abandoned the project due to lack of public participation.

Buchner's neighbor understood the myriad dark undersides of road/fence hybrid technologies. The "bog" itself acted as a barrier to would-be intruders, shrouding unmarked routes for traffic known only to local insiders. Building a new road would involve draining its waters, removing edible wildlife from the habitat. The construction of fences along the road would then disrupt human and non-human animal movement through the area.

In turn, Buchner's neighbors also knew that erecting fences attracted all the wrong people. It tipped off thieving outsiders—colonial taxmen, debt collectors, white planters, subaltern competitors—that something valuable and scarce must lie within its borders. It actively encouraged, rather than discouraged, increased flows of human and grazing animal traffic around one's land. Security was expensive. White ruling-class elites had to pay good money for security details to police and manage fenced lands, lest the watchman exploit his advantageous position to aid and abet acts of theft. Black families, by contrast, would have had to station household members on the plot as sentries—unpaid work which cost time, labor, and energy better spent securing the home, fetching water, tending the chickens and hogs, and the like.

The fencing of one property anticipated the settlement and fencing of adjacent properties because the same sorts of people perceived it as physical evidence of good stewardship, civilization, and, above all else, security. For years, the status of legal titles in most rural areas remained

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[100] Buchner, *Moravians in Jamaica,* 126.

[101] Ibid 126. Original emphasis in footnotes.

hopelessly amorphous and underdetermined. Counterintuitively, this flux helped Black farmers and their neighbors negotiate user and access privileges to land and water through customary agreements that benefited both parties. With fences and roads, however, legal titles would be clearly identified and codified by court proceedings. The claims of freeholders, tenants, and "squatters" alike would soon be nullified in court due to mere technicalities. It was a perfectly legal form of looting.

An environmentally unsustainable flood of planters, pen-keepers, urban merchants and speculators, and other black settlers would then flood a given region, destabilizing and reconstructing circuits of traffic and transport without input from the already-existing community. Pen-keepers were an especially insidious possibility because they fenced cultivatable land for exclusive use by grazing animals, without undertaking any crop cultivation of their own. Large tracts of multi-purpose commons land would be soon replaced with acre after acre of guinea grass and white men's cattle. Surveyors and imprisoned gang laborers would eventually arrive to connect the area with the public roads and highways; and then, so would the cops, to collect on unpaid debts and to serve warrants upon "squatters." Local Black people associated these fundamental infrastructural developments with the coeval rise of costly "public" institutions of governance, all of which paid dividends at interest to investors: tollroads, the prisons, the police, the irrigation works, the water companies. They represented the different machine parts of a broader form of legalized looting by way of higher taxes and court fees, escalating the rate of coin extraction out of the subaltern political economy. Black people fronted the costs for state-sponsored "investment" in infrastructure projects explicitly designed *not* to benefit them. All it promised was the progressive dispossession of Black capital from the hands of subaltern investors.[102]

[102] The contraction of coin circulation in this way exerted an artificial inflationary pressure on the value of hard money. Less coin meant more commerce had to be conducted through creditor-debtor arrangements. And less coin meant that commodities were relatively more expensive to purchase, even if their asking price was low.

Detour: Pound Scams

Fencing and forms of legal enclosure conflicted with African cultural precedents and notions of spatial regulation through the force of both custom and colonial law. Local elders and community leaders claimed *de facto* control over the allocation and revocation of user privileges over routes of traffic. They protected and shared this land as "commons." New farmers to a region were expected to negotiate the terms of their settlement and cultivation with spiritual leaders, older settlers, squatters, and smugglers who possessed seniority. If one of those new farmers decided to seize land and unilaterally erect a fence without permission, the act implied that local political leaders lacked the quantum of force to enforce a material boundary without the use of a fence. Those leaders would not hesitate to coordinate a stealth assault against the goods, animals, and property of anyone who mocked sovereign power, authority, and legitimacy.

People also collectively purchased land on the agricultural frontiers to hold in common with one another. At Berry Hill, for instance, a group of men in 1848 had gotten together to purchase a quarter acre of land. They constructed a house on the spot of a felled mango tree, and they kept the land specifically as a shared hunting ground for each of them to use as they pleased.[103] Furthermore, planters had traditionally allowed for open pastures as a matter of entrenched custom. W.F. Bell reported that "overseers, from good nature, policy (as they imagine), carelessness or want of time, silently permit it, so long as they do not injure the canes." The continuing issue was a lack of enforcement capabilities, as "there are still localities where it is impossible to prevent it."[104]

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[103] James Hume to John Clarke, April 8, 1848, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[104] W.F. Bell to Colonel Bruce, November 22, 1845, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Returns relating to Labouring Population in British Colonies; Orders in Council respecting Supply of Labour in Colonies. Part I. State of Labouring Population in W. Indies and Mauritius; Part II. Immigration of Labourers; Part III. Stipendiary Magistrates; Laws of Masters and Servants; Courts of Appeal; Tariffs*, 50. Bell was happy, however, that "the custom of free pasture is decreasing."

Domesticated animals straying onto neighbors' lands and eating crops intended for human consumption or sale was a common complaint and cause for litigation and restitution of damages. Here, whites readily pursued actions against one another; their shared racial status was insufficient to diffuse their conflicts. The horses of James Hume strayed onto a sugar planter's land on November 20, 1847, for which Hume paid two shillings; three days later, two of the horses had trespassed again, and Hume paid another 3 shillings for the damages. Hume may have been able to afford the fine; but that amount represented a week's worth of work and rent.[105]

After Emancipation, the operation of laws regulating animal trespassing, which governed how people seized and recovered animals designated as strays, relied upon the contradiction between fenced and unfenced land.[106] These laws disproportionately targeted and harassed black farmers, despite their language of universality. To summarize, if one found stray horned cattle, or any horse, mare, gelding, colt, mule, donkey, sheep, hogs, and goats grazing within an enclosed space under cultivation or on the highways, one could take the animals to the nearest pound without obtaining previous sanction by court authorities. (Stray hogs and goats, also covered under a separate law, could be immediately killed by proprietors irrespective of whether the land was enclosed or unenclosed.)[107] An animal hunter could be paid out of the public purse at a variable rate

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[105] James Hume to John Clarke, November 20, 1847, and November 23, 1847, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[106] See Chapter 31, "An Act to Award Compensation in Cases of Trespasses by Cattle and Other Stock," Section 1-4, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Eighth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Jamaica: Unnamed Publisher, 1845), 102-03. Due to the nature of the laws against animal trespass, without a fenced property, one could claim damages by cattle or other horsekind "in any enclosed land or lands set apart for the cultivation of provisions, or of corn, or any cultivated grass or green fodder, or of canes, or of staple articles of agriculture." But it was not necessary for the plot to be cultivated at all – or one could harvest the crops and time the cattle trespass to align with the harvest. Then, the owner or user of the property could then call upon three of their neighbors to assess the damage and pursue it. It was a collective, rather than an individual, activity.

[107] See Chapter 12, "An Act to repeal an Act, entitled 'an act to prevent the injuries and depredations of hogs and goats, and for the preservation of cultivated lands' and to reenact the same with certain amendments," Sections 1-4, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Fifteenth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: S.M. Samuels, 1852), 41-42.It stipulated that "the injuries and depredations that are committed by hogs and goats, and their respective kinds, are notorious. …

structure by the pound-keeper for each animal seized after providing a written account of the incident. The owner of the animals was required to pay exorbitant, cumulative fees and fines in order to recover the animals from the pound. For example, a donkey, the main draft animal of the black peasantry, cost a minimum of 3s. 6d. per day; after just one week, the bill amounted to 24s. and 6d., more than a month of wages for a common unskilled black worker. Meanwhile, the stray animal hunter made at least 3s. 6d. for capturing and driving the donkey to the pound.[108]

The effects of these laws changed little after 1840. The intention of the law, as well as its exploitation by devious individuals, provoked long-term political problems among and between black communities on Jamaica's agricultural frontiers. Alexander Fyfe identified the fundamental qualities of the scam by 1842:

> It is a notorious fact that all parties are dissatisfied with this law, as well the owners of the stray, as the persons on whose land the stray is found; the former because he is made to pay (to the parish) an enormous penalty for an accident, the latter because he not only suffers damage by the trespass without summary compensation, but does not receive as much as will pay the person whom he may have employed to take the stray to the pound. What is the consequence? The stray, perhaps a valuable horse, is either killed or turned on the highway with wounds that render him useless for life. It has been said that the former law, giving mile money and a certain sum for damage (not equal to that which now goes to the parish,) was a premium for sending stock to the pound which were not trespassing.[109]

[T]he inconveniences that arise from the keeping of hogs, goats, and dogs, from their being allowed to go about at large," were great enough to authorize all police, constables, and proprietors of all "sugar, coffee, and pen lands" to shoot them on sight, without damages to the owner and with legal immunity from prosecution.

[108] For the most important iterations of the Pound Laws, see Chapter 37, "An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Pound Laws," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in Third Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: Cathcart & Sherlock, 1840), 97-102; Chapter 41, "An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Pound Laws," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Fourth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Spanish Town: Abraham Judah, 1841), 187-92. See also Chapter 11, "An Act to Repeal and Amend an Act, Entitled, 'An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Pound Laws," Section 24, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Fifteenth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: S.M. Samuels, 1852), 38. This law had one significant change with respect to animal trespassing and fencing, stipulating "That if any person has been called upon, according to law, to make, renew, or repair a line fence, refuse, or neglect to do so, after having been called upon, such party shall be debarred from claiming damage for trespass, and from impounding stock of such person who has so made the requisition, under a penalty of twenty shillings, to be recovered in a summary manner before two magistrates."

[109] Alexander Fyfe to J.M. Higginson, November, 23, 1841, Parliamentary Papers [1842], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, 1841-42 (Jamaica, Barbados*), 1, 48. For horse-stealing, see also John Daughtrey to Colonel Bruce, "Inspector's Report of the General Penitentiary," Parliamentary Papers [1845], *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of Her Majesty's*

Stray animals could, of their own accord, wander off the lands of Black people who did not fence off their properties. These strays ended up either in the open streets or migrated onto the lands of Black neighbors who also lacked fences. In this case, (1) the victim of animal trespassing was legally disabled from holding the owner of the stray liable monetarily for the destruction of crops; (2) the owner of the stray owed the victim nothing. Reparatory justice under such conditions therefore required extra-judicial acts of property destruction on the part of the aggrieved party. At court, in the event that a stray animal encroached into enclosed land by breaking down a fence, the proprietor was entitled to shoot said animal at will, and judges ruled automatically against the owner of the stray.

One customary exception to the rule was trespassing by cattle and horsekind. Their movement upon *cultivated* unfenced land, in contradistinction to *uncultivated* unfenced land, could sometimes prompt the courts to rule in a more holistic manner in favor of a Black plaintiff. However, given that most farmers were often unable to conclusively prove that a given plot was in fact under cultivation, the best a farmer could hope for was to recover damages for the grasses and fodder trespassed upon, and *not* the contents of the provision grounds.[110] Debate over formalizing

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Colonial Possessions, 29. "To those who addict themselves to it, horse-stealing seems to have a peculiar fascination – partly, perhaps, from a prevailing passion for horses among the country labourers, from the facility with which the crime is often accomplished here, the means of concealment and disguise, and the case with which a horse can be removed to a distance, and passed into other hands. In the absence of transportation, which would seem to be the just penalty of this offence, a long period of imprisonment will at least secure the public for the time from new depredations. When a horse-stealer is reconvicted[,] it is generally for the same crime."

[110] Testimony of Richard Hill, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica,* 106. See also Chapter 31, "An Act to Award Compensation in Cases of Trespasses by Cattle and Other Stock," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Eighth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Jamaica: Unnamed Publisher, 1845), 102-03. for stipulations regarding enclosed and unenclosed land, including the requirement for literacy and at least three "reputable" neighbors to testify on one's behalf. See also Chapter 13, "The Cattle Trespass Law, 1888," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in a Session which began on the 5th Day of April and Adjourned on the 4th Day of May, 1888* (Jamaica: Government Printing Establishment, 1888), 1-2. By the late nineteenth century, legal changes also enabled those without fencing to claim restitution by the

this rule in law remained contentious across the nineteenth century. In the end, legislators regularly shot down the idea of expanding the conditions under which the proprietors of unenclosed land could claim damages by cattle trespass.

Black tenants of fenced land also had an ace up their sleeve. As Mr. Harrison of Hordley estate complained in 1869, tenants rented lands adjacent to his own for the sole purpose of enticing his cattle to break down their fences and ransack provision grounds which had no crops growing in them. These tenants, in fact, never grew food. Their "sole purpose [was to] extort money from the adjoining proprietor on the allegation of damage." Harrison recommended the immediate alteration of the Trespass Law to force freeholders and tenants alike to enclose their lands behind "a substantial fence" that could not be destroyed so easily. The Legislative Council unanimously agreed that the new Trespass Law must compel the *tenant,* not the *owner* of the rented land or the *owner* of the stray cattle, to fence off their plots or else be disabled from seeking restitution for damages caused by both non-human and human animals. Some whites not on the Council disagreed with this policy. It was unrealistic to believe that Black farmers or white proprietors in rural areas had the means to fence off tens of acres covered in guinea grass in order to protect much smaller parcels of land behind the boundary. Moreover, tenants in precarious tenancy arrangements would never agree to fence their land out of pocket. Colonial officials decided that the best course of action was to keep the existing law but give magistrates summary jurisdiction over deciding fault.[111]

If we reimagine the calculus of a thief, we can appreciate alternative possibilities for how one might exploit the relationship between stray animals and the law of enclosure. In the first scenario,

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owner of stray cattle, with qualifications that there was no evidence of any fence tampering or invitation to enter an unenclosed property by the owner of that property.

[111] W. Murdock to Frederic Roger Bart, May 25, 1869, CO/137.445, KEW, 420-26.

let us presuppose that Agent A ("Jack") and Agent B ("John") lacked fences. Taking advantage of this framework is relatively easy to grasp: Jack or John could lure the other's animals off the property and onto the street or onto Agent C's ("Stewart") unenclosed land; Stewart might do the same to Jack and John. In either case, the animals might be seized and brought down to the pound. In the second scenario, the thieves could cause discord between neighbors and slip away undetected. Let us suppose that John has a fence. After Jack broke down that fence by hand or by enticing cattle behind the fence to trample across it, Jack could lure Stewart's animals across John's broken fence to feast on food crops. Or, just as crucially, Jack could drive John's animals onto Stewart's unfenced lands to ransack the fields, and vice versa. After the destruction was complete, Jack could still take all the stray animals to the pound for quick cash. If the thieves had a hideout for storing the strays, they might also take them down one-by-one to the pound, earning a higher payout.

To take advantage of the laws regulating animal trespassing, one had to be literate enough to give written details to the pound-keeper about where one lived and the exact times and places the strays were seized.[112] While modern scholars have pointed to this requirement as evidence that hunting strays were a middling- and upper-class activity rather than a lower-class activity because of the literacy requirements, this may have gradually changed as more people, most especially the youth, achieved some degree of literacy in schools or in prison. Indeed, prison statistics indicate literacy rates of 18% among black prisoners in 1846, which grew to 33% by 1870.[113] In any event,

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[112] J. Woolfreys to Higginson, St. Ann's, August 31, 1840, Parliamentary Papers [1841], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 177. Woolfreys thought that since "very few of the labouring class can write," they would not be the ones sending strays to the pound. In his view, white planters and educated colored and black elites disproportionately took advantage of the Pound Laws. "[B]esides the poundage allowed by law is so trifling, the labourer might earn as much working at home, instead of making a long journey to the pound." Woolfreys disregards the possibility that local or migrant black criminals could read, or that they collaborated with the former to execute the crime not for small profits but a high degree of harassment against human targets over time (i.e. multiple trips to the pound and/or legal action because for stray animals damages).

[113] Barry Higman, *The Jamaica Censuses of 1844 and 1861* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1980), 20. Higman notes from 1861 population data that 60724 Black people could read, and 50726 Black people could read and write. Estimating that 292000 persons were above age 15, this would indicate that 20.7% of the population could read and

however, the pound-keeper, if in alliance with the thieves, could have simply fabricated the appropriate documents. Other accomplices who were literate, including white planters and missionaries, could have also acted as accomplices in pound scams.

Sometimes, pound scammers probably organized by crossing class and racial boundaries, though such temporary cuts and crossings did nothing to upset the status-quo social hierarchies that produced and reproduced those boundaries. Take Richard Cresset, a notable black lower-class shop-owner in St. Ann's Parish, who publicly proclaimed his desire for the rebel armies of 1865 to arrive in his region. He had personal and political scores to settle with the habitual harassers of his community. Two individuals in particular attracted his rage: "Clement at Nightingale Grove, and Purchase…[who] are doing nothing but catching up people's horses and jack-asses."[114] But Cresset saw the problem of pound scams through racial lenses, ascribing the situation to the work of whites and browns. In retribution, he planned to "lock up my shop, make a port-hold for the muzzle of my gun to go in." He intended to kill "every white man" and "every brown man" that ventured toward his shop.

The Carceral Fix

The second entity in the developmentalist trinity was the carceral. As Black communities expanded their land holdings and the police and tax-collectors roved Jamaica, so did the prison cells swell with an ever-increasing number of free Black people.

17.3% could read and write. Hence, the literacy rate of the prison population was proportionately higher than that of the general population. See also James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) on the phenomenon of "selective literacy" as a means of preventing local peoples in non-state spaces from claiming lands and power through alliances with the state to demarcate and survey property.

[114] Testimony of Richard Cresset, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 694.

For old-school planters, racial hygienists, and reformist liberals, the specter of the black thief represented an especially intractable and pernicious species of the "black criminal," who could not be trusted with freedom. The thief, like the slave rebel of yore, signified the ever-present possibility for the existential negation of private property, and therefore white rule and the notion of civil society as such. Worse, their unchecked infiltration of everyday social life would inevitably attract both the habitually naïve and the habitually depraved, on the bases of racial identity or class position, to follow them.[115]

The former slave villages and the urban landscape were especially regarded as infamous hotspots for criminal gatherings and rebellious behavior. Unsurprisingly, they also had unsavory reputations as gateways for sexual licentiousness, gambling, drunkenness, and smuggling. These "hot-beds of vice and disease," Reverend Waddell complained, "should have been open[ed], and purified, and brought under police regulations." No appreciable change in the moral habits and racial dispositions of formerly enslaved Africans could take place without using the might of the state to sanitize the built environment of natural pollutants and criminal persons. Somehow, by escalating the scale and scope of the criminalization of Blackness, ruling-class elites envisioned the attritional, progressive termination of the rapacious Black thief, a total contradiction.[116]

But it took money, effort, and manpower to penetrate these unruly, ungovernable spaces. The people who called these "hot-beds of vice and disease" home would most certainly resist. The prison, by contrast, appeared to offer a more controlled, laboratory-like built environment with

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[115] Testimony of George Lyons, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 809. Thieves were imagined as incessantly "roam[ing] from place to place," one contemporary in 1865 claimed, for the purpose of "induc[ing] inexperienced youths to go with them…into vice and crime."

[116] Hope Masterson Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1863), 203.

which to probe and test the limits of racial transformation. Until the 1850s, when liberal movements to reform colonial prisons collapsed, this project served as a justification for modernizing colonial prisons. For instance, John Daughtrey, head Inspector of Prisons from 1841 to 1864, attempted to unite the "Philadelphia System" and the "Auburn System" of U.S. penal science in the design and operation of Kingston's General Penitentiary. Here, select prisoners would be exposed to solitary confinement as part of their reform, while the general population labored, ate, and rested by day and night in silence. In reality, the traditional role of the prison—torture and pure incapacitation—supervened upon the objective of reform. Most prisoners continued to be funneled into overcrowded prison cells as a vehicle for exemplary, collective punishment and as standard operating procedure; the appearance of silence did not represent the termination of communication; and corporal punishment by flogging, whipping, and the treadmill was reintroduced during the 1850s.

Prison statistics offer suggestive clues about the influence of incarceration and incarcerated people in wider society. Based on evidence accumulated by Diana Paton, we can estimate that approximately 25935 people were incarcerated between 1837 and 1870.[117] Assuming that (1) no

[117] Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 125. Paton's data is derived from Blue Books of Jamaica, CO/142 series, KEW, and the *Falmouth Post,* July 31, 1857. For additional statistical evidence, see John Daughtrey, "Statistical Tables of the General Penitentiary for the Year ending September 30, 1847," Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 140-147; "Return of Gaols and Houses of Correction, and of the Number of Prisoners Confined Therein, for the Year ending 1859," CO/142/73, KEW; Henry Westmoreland to Edward Cardwell, April 5, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 27-28; L.Q. Bowerbank to Hugh Austin, March 15, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 74-75; H.B. Shaw to E.G. Rushworth, "Statistical Return for the Prisons of Jamaica, for 1871-72," Parliamentary Papers [1875], *Papers Relating to the Improvement of Prison Discipline in the Colonies*, 4, 6-7, 8, 10-11, 12-14, 16-18; "Statistics of Crime," *The Handbook of Jamaica for 1881: Comprising Historical and Statistical Information; Together with Essays on Economic Plants and other Subjects Connected with the Island* (Kingston: Government Printing Establishment, 1881), 274; "Prisons and Reformatories," *The Handbook of Jamaica for 1883: Comprising Historical, Statistical, and General Information Concerning the Island* (Kingston: Government Printing Establishment, 1883), 145. Based on extant evidence, the average age of prisoners over this period of time can be estimated at between twenty and twenty-five years old. This means that men and women were dragged off to prison during their prime working and childrearing years. Many thousands of people anticipated the contingency of incarceration in preparation for deforesting, planting, weeding, and harvesting periods of the agricultural cycle.

more than 3% of these people were designated "white," (2) an average yearly rate of 25% for Black and Brown recidivism, and (3) a high death rate of 5%, approximately 15037 persons born on or after 1838 could have been alive in 1870 to discuss their tortuous journeys with their countrymen. (An unknown number of people also experienced the darkness of the "lock-up stores," owned and managed by proprietors as private jails to hold suspected thieves for a day or longer before trial, which remained in common use at least until the 1870s).[118] Formerly incarcerated persons therefore composed roughly 6.18% of the non-white population over the age of 15.[119] By comparison, as of 2021, there are 5,000,000 formerly incarcerated and 2,334,802 currently incarcerated people in the United States, around ~2.69% of the total population over the age of 15.[120]

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[118] Governor J.P. Grant to the Earl of Kimberly, December 1, 1871. Parliamentary Papers [1872], *Correspondence Regarding the Alleged Keeping of Private Lock-Ups By Magistrates in Jamaica* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1872), 1-2. In one case, a common Black worker named Phillips was accused of stealing sugar cane from the Fort Stewart estate, in the parish of St. Mary, by Mr. Hyde, the cooper. Phillips claimed civil damages for false imprisonment and won his case, receiving 10*l.* damages for one night of imprisonment. Hyde argued that this practice was commonplace: "Mr. Westmoreland has a private lock-up at Fort Stewart. He puts anyone in he likes. I kept the prisoner in the Lock-up all Sunday night." William A.G. Young to Major Prenderville, September 11, 1871, Parliamentary Papers [1872], *Private Lock-Ups*, 3. Henry Westmoreland denied that he kept a private jail, but admitted that "on one occasion, in the month of August last year, the head book-keeper, with two other parties, detected two men stealing a large quantity of cocoanuts off the property…[Due to] the late hour and the distance they would have to be sent to Annotto Bay (6 miles), I considered I was only doing my duty by having them detained on the estate until the following morning."

[119] Higman, *The Jamaica Censuses of 1844 and 1861,* 14-16; 22. There were 211,635 Black people and 31534 "coloured" people, yielding 243,169, over the age of 15. These numbers may be understated, because contemporaries did not track how many people served prison sentences less than one year and who were not counted in annual surveys. Or, they may be overstated, if I have incorrectly double-counted prisoners who served stints in prison ranging from two years to life. In any event, formerly incarcerated people in wider Jamaican society composed a significant minority set of the Black population.

[120] See also Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, "Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among Formerly Incarcerated People," *Prisonpolicyinitiative.org* (June 2018), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html#:~:text=Using%20a%20nationally%20representative%20dataset,living%20in%20the%20United%20States. (1) The mass incarceration of Black life in nineteenth-century Jamaica foreshadowed the advent of slavery by another name in the US after Reconstruction. (2) As of 2021, in the United States, there are 5,000,000 formerly incarcerated people and 2,334,802 currently incarcerated, around ~2.69% of the total population over the age of 15.

Not every instance of being hauled off to court as a defendant resulted in conviction and incarceration. Based on evidence regarding the total number of summary convictions between 1871 and 1881, the number of defendants per year averaged approximately 5986 persons. Using the same conservative formula above, it appears that, during these years, *at least 41373 people, or roughly 14.1% of the black population over the age of 15, had at least one experience as a defendant in court.*[121]

The steady escalation of incarceration and summary conviction rates indicated the emergence of novel, legal forms of anti-Black judicial harassment during the post-Emancipation period. A five- or six-shilling cost to have a single day in court may not seem like much. But it represented a minor catastrophe in a world where the average wage-labor rate of one shilling per day or less. The time and labor spent traveling to court could have been spent resting or traveling to the provision grounds. Before going to court, defendants prepared themselves and their loved ones for the potential that they would not be returning home that night. Hopefully, all their household affairs were in order.

Legislative changes in 1853 also dictated the automatic conversion of charges of common and furtive trespassing into a criminal charge of larceny, thereby escalating the rate of Black incarceration. On the surface the change may appear slight. But as Magistrate Richard Hill realized, it made any intentional or accidental damage caused to cultivated soils "not commutable by payment of the value of the article taken…but [rather] offences that must be punished undiscretionally [sic] by imprisonment and [hard] labour." Rural constables received a sum for their apprehension of people, which, Hill argued, "converted the plantation system into a means of invoking the law in the

[121] H.B. Shaw to E.G. Rushworth, "Statistical Return for the Prisons of Jamaica, for 1871-72," Parliamentary Papers [1875], *Papers Relating to the Improvement of Prison Discipline in the Colonies*, 18. Over 14,232 people were summoned or apprehended to appear before a magistrate for summary judgment or trial in 1872 alone. The number of persons summarily convicted in these cases was 5,268, or 37.01% of the total. For more general tabular data on the total number of summary convictions and convictions by the higher courts between 1871 and 1881, see "Statistics of Crime," *The Handbook of Jamaica for 1881,* 274.

favour of the employer against the labourer. The consequence is a very diligent multiplication of small offences into what are now registered as larcenies."[122]

The increasing growth in the severity of sentences for theft, among other crimes, further contributed to the upward trend. Jonathan Dalby has shown how Assize court proceedings from 1835 to 1854 mandated prison sentences for 78% of cases, whereas charging fines alone accounted for only 5% of all known cases. Over the same period, theft constituted over 1/3 of all known cases heard. Dalby's analysis, however, does not include cases beyond the Assize courts, particularly those involving summary jurisdiction. The numbers may easily have been higher.[123] For example, summary jurisdiction was enabled for cases involving the theft of a value not exceeding a mere five shillings – five days of work – which could result in a maximum of one month prison sentence in 1838. By the mid-1840s, the maximum sentence had risen to three months, with or without hard labor, while the total value subject to summary judgment had increased to 20 shillings, equal to 20 days the average rate of wage-labor. This suggests that the typical plaintiffs in these cases were Black people of the middling sort who had accumulated enough wealth to fund prosecutions and to be identified as targets for a heist.

Repeat offenders, irrespective of the nature of one's crime and the value of damages inflicted upon another person, automatically earned longer prison terms with hard labor. In court, evidence of previous convictions served as prima facie evidence that a suspected thief was guilty of a later crime. Moreover, after 1853, repeat offenders of theft, as well as those who maimed or killed domesticated animals, could technically receive a maximum of 117 lashes – a punishment previously

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[122] Testimony of Richard Hill, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Correspondence Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica,* 106.

[123] Jonathan Dalby, *Crime and Punishment in Jamaica: A Quantitative Analysis of the Assize Court Records, 1756-1856* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2000), 85-88.

reserved for Obeah practitioners, conspirators, murderers, rapists, among others.[124] The modernization of the prison entailed the modernization of statistical tracking of people who had served their prison sentences. A central registry was kept in Spanish Town after 1870 that listed every person previously convicted for any crime. People identified in these documents had to submit to regular police surveillance and checkups at any moment; they were disallowed from visiting or staying on any property without reporting the change to the police.[125]

The elevated numbers of formerly incarcerated people circulating in civil society rapidly undermined previous colonial counterinsurgency doctrines and strategy. Colonial authorities believed they could still rely on the police, regular military forces, and war ships to quell riots, revolts, and uprisings. These forces were loyal. But if insurrection spread throughout the colony, colonial authorities would have to call up the local militias and swear in special constables. This posed a distinct problem to ruling-class elites because militia service would put weapons and organizational capacities in the hands of people whose status as respectable black friend or formerly incarcerated black enemy was indeterminate. For example, in 1858, three hundred and seventy Black Jamaicans enlisted in the newly reconstituted volunteer-only militia. Steven Cave immediately entreated the Governor to disapprove of any further enlistments. Cave reasoned that "the troops so recruited are less to be relied upon and more likely in case of outbreak to make common cause with the disaffected." The recent need for Antiguan whites to request military assistance to suppress a

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[124] Dalby, *Crime and Punishment,* 82. Corporal punishments were not typically handed down by the Assize courts. Dalby identified only seven cases between 1850 to 1854. See also Chapter 22, "An Act for diminishing Expense and Delay in the Administration of Criminal Justice, in Certain Cases, and to Amend the Law, as to Witnesses, in Cases of Wilful or Malicious Injury to Property," Section 4 and 5, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Nineteenth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Kingston: S.M. Samuels, 1856), 471-73. Corporal punishments were likely more typical of lower courts and rulings by summary jurisdiction, a power granted to judicial authorities by the 1850s.

[125] Chapter 16, "A Law for the More Effectual Prevention of Crime," Section 3-5, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Year 1869-1870* (Spanish Town: Robert Osborn, 1870), 83-84.

riot served as evidence that more white troops were needed in the West Indies, not more Black soldiers taken from the Creole population.[126] The fear of Black militiamen among Jamaica's planters intersected historically with their fear of stationing too many Black soldiers of the 1st and 2nd West India Regiment in populated areas without white troops to counterbalance them. This proved a thorn in the side of Governors and military authorities of the imperial government. Governor Lionel Smith, for example, agitated for stationing Black regulars on the coasts and moving white troops into the mountainous, seemingly healthier, interior forts and Maroon towns. His plans were constantly thwarted by the planters wary of Black soldiers with access to guns, ammunition, and powder allying with Black urban dwellers.[127]

Seven years later in Jamaica, such a contingency emerged with the declaration of martial law in the parishes of St. Thomas-in-the-East and Portland parish, following the destruction of the courthouse and the prison by the rebel forces of Paul Bogle. In anticipation of further conflict in the western and central regions of the colony, hundreds of black and brown people eagerly presented themselves for militia duty. But "the worst names" were often "enrolled amongst the Volunteers," because "their names were put down [in militia rosters] without their knowledge or permission." Law enforcement and military authorities fretted over the likelihood that a significant number of professional criminals and formerly incarcerated people were hidden amongst them. Such people

[126] Steven Cave to Lord Stanley, May 20, 1858, CO/137/341, KEW. For more on the role of troops of African descent in quelling uprisings, see also Natasha Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 68, 70-72, 78.

[127] Governor Lionel Smith to Lord Glenelg, August 13, 1838, ADM/8/128, KEW; Governor Lionel Smith to Viscount Horwich, February 21, 1839, ADM/8/128, KEW. See also J.H. Berkeley to Fitzroy Somerset, April 1846, ADM/8/128, KEW. Berkeley estimated that white troops died at a rate of 10.33% per year in the lowlands of Falmouth and Lucea, as opposed to 5.5% per year for Black troops. This indicated "that the climate is never likely to be suitable for Europeans." However, military officials admitted that, in terms of political and military necessity, white troops had to remain in the lowlands.

could easily turn their weapons against the state or lead other clandestine units into insurrection. They might also turn their weapons against members of the black peasantry who wanted rightfully dreaded the indiscriminate genocidal state violence that historically erupted upon full-scale colonial (and Maroon) military occupation and martial law.[128]

Reappropriating the Prison

Black Jamaicans reappropriated the prison to serve as a locus of Black sociality and group belonging. Those "whose offences are…created by law, such as the plucking of fruit growing in open or forest land," intermixed with "criminals of a deep dye." Officials at the General Penitentiary anxiously tried to separate convicts into different wings of the prison according to the level of their crimes and length of sentences. Their efforts met with miserable failure. The site was simply too small, the prison population too large, and the practice of purposeful overcrowding as punishment too useful, to accomplish total segregation.

In the process, however, prisoners across the age, class, and gender spectrum had ample opportunities to communicate secretly. With new friends and allies, they shared knowledge and stories about areas, places, friends, and adversaries from around the colony. Prisoners thereby acquired a new spatial awareness of Jamaica and its landscapes. Black people subjected to the terror of incarceration exploited the experience of confinement in tight spaces to interact with, witness,

[128] Testimony of J.M. Gibb, February 26, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 510. Contemporaries expressed the same anxiety on other occasions. Charles Edward Grey to Earl Grey, July 22, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1848], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 20. For example, in response to rumors of mass revolt in western Jamaica in 1848, Charles E. Grey authorized doubling the police forces, stationing additional troops in the Maroon towns, and the deployment of the "*Vixen*" in Black River and Savanna-la-Mar as a show of force to any would-be rebels. He explicitly argued against "calling out the militia…the enrollment of volunteers, and the distribution of arms to partisans," as "collisions must almost inevitable have taken place, and there is no saying what extremities the mischief might have been carried."

touch, and hear one another beyond the immediate reach of authority figures, in ways unavailable to those outside of the prison.[129]

Even the prospect of forced labor could be turned into an advantage. For instance, when organized into gangs for the brutal, degrading work of road construction, pasture clearing projects, and canal maintenance, male prisoners mapped out the locations, tempos, and natural environments of the zones they traveled through, gleaning intelligence about areas they would not have otherwise had access to, without raising suspicion. Especially before 1850, prisoners often escaped during these labor details. They did so collectively, not as individuals, given their reputation for cruising the cityscape and highways as gangs smashing and stealing property in their wake.[130] Even if they did not execute an escape, prisoners on work details could make new friends and enemies along the way and trace out routes and areas for future travel, commerce, and settlement.

Some incarcerated men acquired relatively exclusive craft skills that Maroons or free coloreds traditionally guarded with guild-style barriers to entry (and high costs of initiation). These skills included carpentry, blacksmithing, "brick and tile making, coir and oakum picking, boat building, printing, and lime burning."[131] Each of them might offer a specialized means of making money after

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[129] Thomas Harvey and William Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866: A Narrative Tour Through the Island, With Remarks on Its Social, Education and Industrial Condition* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1867), 6.

[130] John Daughtrey, "Brief Review and Report of the General Penitentiary," Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Returns Relating to Labouring Population in British Colonies, Part I. State of Labouring Population in W, Indies and Mauritius, 1846,* 28-29. In 1844, John Daughtrey noted how "the newspapers teemed with advertisements of these runaways, and with offered rewards for their apprehension. Several succeeded in escaping three, four and five times—two six times, and one of the most desperate, not less than 80 times; the repealed apprehensions of the last entailing upon the country, for rewards alone, a charge of 80 dollars. … Not only were dwelling-houses entered almost nightly, and ransacked, but the very bed-rooms in which families were sleeping, and from which the daring intruder often contrived to abstract every thing that was at once portable and valuable." Moreover, "In one instance not fewer than 17 of the convicts, taking advantage of the supineness of the officers, and then of their cowardice, placed themselves in combination, armed with missiles, overpowered such resistance as was offered, rushed out of prison, and when at large, committed outrages that spread alarm through the whole town."

[131] John Daughtrey, "Brief Review," February 26, 1844, Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Labouring population of the British colonies."—(West Indies and Mauritius.) Part I. State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius,* 31. "Besides an increased number of carpenters, we have now convicts employed as coopers, sawyers, blacksmiths, masons, tailors, and a

release from prison. In high demand, Black skilled workers could more easily justify their movement through both urban and rural spaces when carrying their tools for construction, which were identical to the same used for breaking and entering: axes, hammers, adzes, chisels, files, bits, jacks, crowbars, and so on. The most culturally and spiritually prestigious knowledge was probably blacksmithing. Experts in metallurgy, associated with deities such as Ogun, the god of war and iron, were valued as mediators of the supernatural powers from which useful items like horseshoes, iron locks for houses, farming tools, cutlasses, machetes, spears, gun barrels, and ammunition, acquired physical form.[132] Conversely, women prisoners were put to hard labor in teams planting subsistence crops, cleaning the prison grounds, and washing clothes. These women could use their time on work details to collect information on the barrier defenses of the prison grounds, as well as the routines and cycles of movement in the area.

The diverse constitution of the prisoner body belied stereotypical images of the black criminal as a destitute individual driven to crime because of poverty and poor upbringing. Quite the contrary. Contemporaries regularly complained that those who displayed the regalia, signs, and cues ascribed to loyal, respectable persons were, in fact, the most serious and professional of organized thieves. William Bell actively worried that wealthier black farmers were using prison sentences to accumulate wealth. He claimed that:

> The class of people concerned often in the most serious felonies, are freeholders, (having been accustomed to labour,) owners of one, two, or three acres of land, a good cottage, out offices, a mare, a follower, &c. This class is actually benefitted by going to prison for one or

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considerable establishment of brickmakers and lime-burners. As less important, though not unproductive, avocations, we have breaking bones for manure; making oil and coir from the cocoa-nut, and grinding corn for cattle. … Among the prisoners we have one or two excellent smiths, and others are employed as assistants and learners."

[132] See also Candice Goucher, "Rituals of Iron in the Black Atlantic World," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic,* edited by Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders, 106-112. Metal workers can craft, repair, melt down, etc. iron bars for thieving, gun barrels, horseshoes, iron locks for houses, farm implements, cutlasses, machetes, spears, fishing and hunting apparatuses, and so on.

> two years, for their live stock will have increased by one or more horses, the place is kept in cultivation, and the cash, for any produce or pigs and poultry, &c., more than enough for the family use, sold during his absence, is saved for him, and he comes out a richer man. … As riches here command the same respect as elsewhere, and dishonesty is overlooked, from the degraded feeling left by slavery, he is taken by the hand by all his acquaintance which [sic] a greater feeling of admiration than before.[133]

Bell also worried about the fact that formerly incarcerated people often emerged from the prison without any kind of negative social or cultural stigma or sanction after returning to old communities. The experience of incarceration, as well as the wealth that may have been generated in one's absence, only increased their prestige. The illegitimacy of the penal system in the eyes of Black Jamaicans further enhanced the reputations of the formerly incarcerated. Those returning to their homes after prison often enjoyed the reputation of "a made-man in the estimation of all his neighbours," Charles Rampini noted. It was common for the returnee to arrive "at the entrance of his native village, mounted on horseback…where a feast awaited him."[134] Arthur Rumbold of St. Ann's Parish went so far as to claim that formerly incarcerated people were "feted as the martyr[s] of

[133] W.A. Bell to Hugh William Austin, Parliamentary Papers [1842], *Papers Relative to the West Indies, 1841-42 (Jamaica, Barbados*), 28. See also Arthur Rumbold to Hugh W. Austin, December 31, 1853, Parliamentary Papers [1854]*, Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 38. At the court of Petty Sessions in Port Maria, " a black man pleaded guilty to the charge of stealing three shillings, stating that his object in committing the theft was, that he might be sent to the Kingston penitentiary."

[134] Rampini, *Letters from Jamaica,* 24.

unjust laws."[135] Following the festivities, they resumed their "usual employment" and earned "admission again to something like his former status among his fellows."[136]

Women had their own celebratory rituals of return which revolved around hair. It was well known that new arrivals to the prison would have their heads shaved "as a badge of them having found to be dishonest." Thus, women, "who felt [themselves] pretty sure of being convicted," preemptively removed their hair before entering prison. They gave it to friends for safekeeping, "until her term of 'labour at the Penn,' as the negroes jocularly call it, was over."[137] Bonds of friendship and solidarity between women were thus affirmed and reaffirmed through acts of saving and giving back a most treasured, slow-growing and relatively irreplaceable, possession to its rightful owner.

Ruling-class elites were nonplussed. As J.A.M. Davidson of Retreat in St. Mary's parish remarked, the difference between thief and respectable peasant had become impossible to distinguish. For him, the most successful looking Black men in material wealth were, in fact, the most successful thieves:

> Some practice thieving as a branch of profitable business, having cocoa-nuts or ground provisions of their own, and a horse or mule for conveying them to market; they rob their neighbours, poorer or richer, as it may happen, to keep up a regular supply to their own customers. Others resort to robbery, pure and simple, as the easiest and most independent mode of obtaining a living in the luxuries of life. There are those who rent an acre of land in

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[135] Arthur Rumbold to Hugh W. Austin, December 31, 1853, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica,* 38. See also T.A. Dillon to Hugh W. Austin, January 12, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 34. "Besides, detection and conviction carry no moral disgrace; the offender does not lose caste, and on his return from punishment is received more as a martyr than a criminal; in a word, punishment neither degrades nor disgusts."

[136] John Daughtrey to Robert Bruce, October 1, 1845, "Inspectors Report of the General Penitentiary," Parliamentary Papers [1846], *Labouring population of the British colonies."—(West Indies and Mauritius.) Part I. State of the Labouring Population in the West Indies and Mauritius,* 26.

[137] Reply of A.C.B. Espeut, CO/137/501, KEW, 614. See also Rampini, *Letters from Jamaica,* 23.

> the midst of an industrious settlement, with no other object than that of obtaining a footing amongst them, and putting up a hiding hut for booty. These people are active on Sundays, and asleep on week days, or, if overmatched at this, they betake themselves to midnight depredations.[138]

The appearance of a good reputation was merely a disguise. Davidson presumed that illegal commerce was the only means by which Black people could generate wealth over time. At the same time, smugglers moved contraband and stolen goods through the same networks in which the most banal, everyday legal commerce took place. Every Black person was a potential thief because both the respectable and the depraved traveled the same public roads and secluded paths as they moved to and from the watering hole, the grazing ground, the subsistence plot, and the marketplace. Indeed, Davidson suggested that Black people of higher social standing and wealth exploited this knowledge to avoid suspicion while organizing heists. This middling sort tended to possess expanded capabilities for transporting licit and illicit goods by animal-drawn carts, and, more importantly, alibis for being out during normal hours of the day and strange hours of the night. Sometimes, the safest place for thieves to hide was in broad daylight.[139] Contemporaries' claims about one's respectable reputation in judicial or business situations were skin deep and analytically meaningless.

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[138] Testimony of Reverend J.A.M. Davidson, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 63.

[139] "Wrongs of the Black Population of Jamaica," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, June 3, 1840, Volume 11, 116. To break down in the future: Movement within and through the spaces of daily survival involved movement within spaces not only criminalized by state authorities but also those used regularly by smugglers. By the early 1840s, claims against others for trespassing and theft as damage unfolded coevally through the criminalization of accessing freshwater spaces and the flora and fauna within them. Not only were the trades of entire river and swamp-based communities, which relied heavily upon aquatic animals and game (fish, turtles, snakes, crabs, birds) for survival and commercial exchanges during both wet and dry seasons, put at risk. In many instances, movement through common land to wells, ponds, streams, and rivers were also necessary for both households and their animals. The previously fugitive landscape steadily became enclosed by artificial physical fences as well as imaginary ones; planters and water companies conceptualized land in terms of the future possible exchange-value of natural resources, rather than their present use-value.

The only way Davidson could still draw intra-racial gradations was by paying attention to the ways in which thieves perverted the natural order of time. They blasphemed the Lord's Holy day of rest. They slept by day and worked by night—precisely when evil spirits like the Lowing Cow and dead men's ghosts walked the earth to scare, trick, and physically assault the brains and bodies of the living.[140]

Davidson exemplified the existential angst of the colonial state writ large. Dividing people of African descent, understood as a unitary, homogeneous "racial" heritage and ontological status, into overlapping groups of friends and foes, respectable and depraved, and loyal from disloyal, was a critical matter of military necessity. The perceived inability of colonial authorities to do so *after* Emancipation triggered a flood of semi-hallucinatory fears and confusion in contemporary minds over the uncertain future of white rule in the colony. The moral panic ebbed and flowed in parallel with a sequence of counterinsurgency operations which began with the firearms conspiracies of 1848 and culminated in the tollgate riots of 1859 and the 1865 Morant Bay War.

The Immigration Fix

In conjunction with the irrigation and carceral fix, former slaveowners invented ways of resolving environmental contradictions by throwing as much non-white bonded labor at the problem as possible. Non-white immigrants from afar would provide expendable surplus labor for this purpose.[141] This began in earnest in 1845, with the importation of the first indentured South Asian (i.e., "Coolie") workers to Jamaica, and which continued up to the early twentieth century.

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[140] Martha Beckwith, *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 119-20.

[141] Holt, *The Problem of Freedom,* 197-200.

Their work and living conditions could closely approximate slavery. In just a few years, many of "these poor creatures [were] wandering all about" the countryside, James Hume wrote. A few Coolies had come to Jericho to beg for money from Hume in 1847 and 1848.[142] Hume was shaken the first time he witnessed Coolies worked like slaves under the whip on a sugar plantation in May 1848. Hume asked a congregant if this was normal. The congregant told him it was normal for the planters to "work them like mules all hours." He said the planters tried to keep them at work by "giv[ing] them rum to 'make fools of themselves.'"[143]

It was an expensive and economically inefficient, politically necessary, stop-gap measure. As a comparison of scale, Alexander G. Fyfe calculated that £100,000 could fund the importation and exportation of only 4,000 Coolie laborers capable of raising 14,000 hogsheads in five years. This cost £7 more for every hogshead than native Black labor.[144] But the use-value of Coolies was boosted by the fact that planters could more-or-less abandon them unto premature death with impunity, thus avoiding the cost of paying for return passage back to India.[145]

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[142] James Hume to John Clarke, December 16, 1847, and February 9, 1848, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[143] James Hume to John Clarke, May 26, 1848, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[144] Alexander G. Fyfe to Hugh W. Austin, January 24, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 18. See also "Jamaica: Condition of the Labouring Population," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 5, no. 5 (May 1857), 104. Climatic racist theories and arguments imbued contemporaries with ideological ammunition to justify the importation of non-white labor over white labor, which had occurred with German, English, and Portuguese worker-peasants in the early 1840s. See also Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People: Race, Class and Social Control* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1991), 150. As Bryan notes, the importation of South Asian workers cost between £22 to £25 per person.

[145] "Jamaica: Condition of the Labouring Population," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 5, no. 5 (May 1857), 104. Climatic racist theories and arguments imbued contemporaries with ideological ammunition to justify the importation of non-white labor over white labor, which had occurred with German, English, and Portuguese worker-peasants in the early 1840s. One anonymous missionary-friendly white person wrote in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* in May 1857 that "the negro labourer is generally as vigorous and unintermitting [sic] as any other workman, German, English, Portuguese, Coolie or Chinese. … The climate is against that degree of exhausting labour which can be exacted in northern climes." Although the writer

White power in Jamaica wasn't reducible to access to cheap labor-power per se. It was about the control of workers' temporal rhythms, namely, their ability to move and remain immobile as they pleased. Whites found the seasonal population shifts and semi-nomadism of the Black population distressing. The constant flux of individual and collective groups of workers and farmers in and out of cities, plantations, and the provision grounds. The mass enclosure of water resources after Emancipation, as we saw in the last chapter, wasn't working fast enough for the planters, as a class, to break the will of the Black peasantry.

As William Bancroft Espeut reported in 1878, daywork in Jamaica was the norm because of the inability to secure and enforce worker contracts for any longer than that. Until Jamaica followed the course of St. Vincent, Barbados, and Demerara, among others, where working for just one day in any kind of work constituted an automatic contract to labor for a four-week period, which was renewed at its expiration by accepting another single day of work. To rebind labor to the plantations, Espeut recommended that contract and Vagrancy laws be updated to allow for law enforcement authorities to seek out offenders and return them to their employers to make good on their debts.[146] This makes sense. As I argued in the last chapter, planters made more hard money and enforced more customary and formal debt obligations through the force of tenancy and rent, not the production of commodities, which had hitherto functioned as the telos of their power. For any ruined planter that still held a title to the land could become a landlord.

Thus, as B. Chamberlaine claimed, only immigration could stem the "the caprice of the labourers, at those seasons of the year when they withdraw themselves from the cane fields to

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added that less work was needed in the tropical environment to meet daily food needs, the notion that Black people were predisposed for tropical labor as opposed to whites was a falsehood.

[146] William Bancroft Espeut to Henry Clarke, March 5, 1878, Parliamentary Papers [1878-79], *Correspondence Relative to the Financial Arrangements for Indian Coolie Immigration into Jamaica*, 48.

indulge in unreasonably prolonged festivities, or to attend to the cultivation of their own lands."[147] From the perspectives of whites, immigrants appeared more amenable to surrendering themselves to the formal rent-tenancy system of debt obligations, as well as irregular payment of wages and substitutions in kind. John Candler in 1850 asked the bookkeeper of Montpelier, St. James, why he employed forty Coolies on the property, when he had "an abundance of [Creole] labor" and also received £350 per year in rent from locals. The bookkeeper replied, "'They [the Coolies] were more expensive, but they could command labor at all times.'" Employing them year-round "'served to keep the Creoles from combining to ask high wages.'"[148] The bookkeeper's function as landlord proved the easier way to steal money by extracting value out of Black *tenants*, rather than producing valuable things through the valorization of Black *workers*.

In the 1840s and 1850s, Jamaica's planters envisioned tapping into the anti-Black abolitionism of U.S. or British-Canadian political elites to funnel unwanted African American workers and farmers to Jamaica. At first, they were intended to serve as replacements for Creole labor on the plantations.[149] Shortly after Emancipation, Baron von Ketelholdt had been in dialogue

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[147] R. Chamberlaine to Hugh W. Austin, January 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 40.

[148] John Candler, May 10, 1850, Personal Diary, quoted in "A Good Friend in Our Midst, 1850," *Jamaican Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (March 1959), 14. See also Kenneth G. Kelly, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong, "Identity and Opportunity in Post-Slavery Jamaica," in *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica,* edited by James A. Delle, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 254. Between 1844 and 1917, 36,400 South Asian workers immigrated to Jamaica from Bengal and Madras. See also Catherine Hall, Nicolas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 4, 7. Nicolas Draper has also shown how the indemnity payment was used not only to modernize sugar plantations in the "newer" sugar colonies and to procure indentured laborers, but also to move investments to enterprises from railway construction to maritime insurance and banking. The movement of indentured people into British Guiana and Trinidad was drive by absentee former slaveowners. Planters were able to use Emancipation to transform their positions from agents and managers who were at most small-scale slaveowners to large-scale proprietorship.

[149] Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom,* 197-200.

with the martial abolitionist David Turnbull to arrange for the uptake of Black people from the U.S. south. Turnbull had toured the southern U.S. and found many eager to entertain deportation for areas of the old South (Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, etc.) in which slavery was becoming economically unprofitable. Following the Gold Rush in California, however, slave prices skyrocketed, dashing Ketelholdt's and Turnbull's plans.[150] Even Marvin Delaney cited the climatic rhetoric of race and the superiority of Black bodies over white bodies to labor in tropical environments like Jamaica as a cause for mass emigration.

But other African Americans actively agitated against this program. Nancy Prince, for example, visited Jamaica in 1840 and found that the reputation of Jamaica as a multi-racial haven for Black people was an illusion. At the time, white men and women predominated the leadership positions of the Baptist church and used their power as platforms for enrichment. She had angered one local minister in St. Ann's Bay by giving "several Bibles away, not knowing that…the people buy them of [the minister] at a great advance."[151] The missionaries and class-leaders had already acquired the nicknames of "Macroon hunters" (a "maccaroni" was equivalent to one shilling, or one-quarter of a dollar), given their rapacious lust for charging fees for baptisms, tickets, and books, among others.[152] Prince was also advised by the American consul to speak against further emigration because they "came to him everyday praying him to send them home." Many of them died trying to save up enough money to depart an island where one had few local friends and where wage work was scarce.

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[150] *The Jamaica Guardian,* September 18-19, 1862, FO/5/934, KEW.

[151] Nancy Prince, *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (Boston: Published by the Author, 1850), 47.

[152] Prince, *A Narrative,* 54, 58.

The passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law in the U.S. spurred a resurgence of interest in these immigration schemes. In 1852, for instance, Mary Ann Shadd claimed that African American migration to Jamaica could only prove successful if they became full-fledged British subjects and "owners of the soil" they worked, rather than mere indentured laborers.[153] William Wemyss Anderson and Lord Elgin, who each were working with the Emigration and Anti-Slavery Society of Toronto, agreed with Shadd. Due to the relatively higher wages offered year-round in Canada, fugitive slaves were unlikely to willingly leave for Jamaica. Until this changed, "talented men of colour" would continue to "insist that it was the duty of the free coloured people of the United States to remain for the sake of their brethren in slavery."[154]

By the early 1860s, white Jamaicans had come around to Shadd's position. Encouraged by news of African American migration to Haiti and the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War, they had become hungry for African American immigrants to replace independent Creole farmers on the agricultural frontiers.[155] As John Clarke noted in 1862, planters were offering fugitive slaves who had made their way to Canada one acre per twelve to twenty shillings in Jamaica.[156] He thought this

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[153] Mary Ann Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration; Or, Notes of Canada West, in Its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect, with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (Detroit: George W. Pattison, 1852), 36-38. "The policy of the dominant party in the United States is to drive *free* colored people out of the country, and to send them to Africa, only, and at the same time, to give the fullest guaranty to slaveholders, for the continuance of their system. … Jamaica, with its fine climate and rich soil, is the key to the gulf of Mexico." Shadd's reluctance was despite, not because of, British posturing about the superiority of their racial liberalism over the racial feudalism of U.S. whites. Shadd argued that the greatest reason to accept African American immigration was that these populations would form "a wall of defense, or available for offensive operations…as the best interests and policy of the British government might demand."

[154] William Wemyss Anderson, "Immigration from the United States," January 9, 1852, *The Gazette*, CO/137/350, KEW.

[155] Gale Kenny, *Contentious Liberties: African American Abolitionists in Post-Emancipation Jamaica, 1834-1866* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 127-28.

[156] John Clarke to James Hume, August 24, 1862, D/CJL/5, ANG.

policy was better than shipping people to Africa, and it was cheaper, too. But there were problems. The costs to the colonial government would prove unfeasible to finance tens of thousands of people that were *not* enslaved, even if they built roads, cut wood, built homes, and farmed. Given time lags, we can imagine it would take a year before they would turn any profit at all.

More importantly, the mass influx of *small-scale settlers* was certain to kindle the anger of Creole Black farmers due to the mass surrender of land that such a policy would entail. Such an issue had developed in 1862 when Black immigrants from Canada scoped out the Crawle—Henry de la Beche's old mountain lands—for settlement by hundreds of expected new settlers. Thomas Gripps had purchased 700 to 800 acres of the land for £180, and he rented parcels to several Black farmers here with the intention of eventually building a home for his family and starting up a sugar plantation in the nearby plains below the hills. But the tenants refused to pay Gripps. He tried to deputize a man named Davis to enter the property and collect the unpaid debts, but they fought him off and forced him to retreat. Gripps hoped that interest shown by the immigrants from Canada would allow him to marshal a sufficient fighting force with a direct interest in reclaiming the property. In turn, another African American immigrant, who called himself King William, had his eye on coastal land about twelve miles to the east of Savanna-la-Mar. He immediately started "to claim and pretend to sell land" to other immigrants, rather than Creole and African people already in Jamaica. Worse, King William was offering lands along the coast that locals of the adjacent mountains used to carry goods to and from the markets, almost invariably by canoe transport. "These fierce mountaineers," Clarke warned, "who care nothing for King William" were certain to "come down to fight…and drive away those who came to occupy so large a portion of their coast."[157]

[157] John Clarke to James Hume, August 24, 1862, D/CJL/5, ANG.

Black Jamaicans tied wide-scale immigration schemes to fears that Jamaica's white overlords were eager to surrender Jamaica to the slaving empire of the United States in the attempt to salvage what remained of their power over the sugar industry. In 1848, for example, a conflict between Black workers and their privileged "coloured" overseers erupted around Lucea that included talk of an imminent war against the whites and their non-white allies. Rumors circulated that Black communities were busy accumulating firearms in anticipation for imminent war.[158] Black Jamaicans from Bellfield estate referenced the civil wars then unfolding in Haiti as proof that after the Jamaica's whites were destroyed in battle, rebels must "turn upon the browns and serve them as the Black people in St. Domingo served the browns there." The elimination of non-white allies of the old slave order was necessary, because "had it not been for the assistance of the brown people during the late rebellion [in Haiti], the whites never could have mastered the blacks."[159] Thomas P. Williams reported that independent Black farmers in Hanover and St. James were talking about how

> the United States of America are likely to take possession of this island, and to reduce them to slavery. This belief, it is supposed, has originated from the mention which has been lately made in some of the American papers, of the distressed state of this island, and the good which would result from its annexation, with Cuba, to the United States.[160]

This idea eventually spread as far as Clarendon, to Mandeville, St. Ann, Trelawny, St. Mary. In Falmouth, "the fact that different reasons are assigned for this outbreak is strong testimony as to

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[158] Testimony of Elizabeth McKay, July 1, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 15. Elizabeth McKay of Haddo rent-land in the neighborhood of Argyle estate, a potential site of revolt in 1848, claimed that she had heard at Prosper Pen "that the people had been to the Baptist parson, who told them to kill every white and brown person; that they should get the country to themselves." McKay also told the court that Gracey Sheaves reported that the people of Argyle Estate, Belvidere and Chester Castle "all had guns, powder, and shot ready" for war.

[159] Testimony of William Foss, June 29, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 13.

[160] Thomas P. Williams to Lord Bishop of Jamaica, July 10, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 23.

the probability that it will take place. Some say that they want higher wages…others, that buckra means to give up the country to America, that they might be made slaves again."[161] Governor Grey initially avoided deploying troops in anticipation of riot and revolt to avoid escalating the situation needlessly. But as popular unrest grew, Grey eventually deployed troops and the warship "*Vixen*" as a warning to any would-be rebels.[162]

As we will discuss in the next chapter concerning the Battle for Savanna-la-Mar in 1859, these fears of annexation and re-enslavement never receded from the minds of Black Jamaicans.[163]

Despite the risks of inflaming local Black communities, acting Governor Eyre was busy at work in 1862 trying to negotiate with U.S. diplomats to deport as many as 100,000 African Americans—free people before the U.S. Civil War and "contraband" runaways—to Jamaica. He intended to take advantage of the anti-Black abolitionist fervor of white Americans, as well as President Abraham Lincoln, who were eager to deport African Americans as a conciliatory gesture to southern slaveowners amenable to the Union. Eyre intended for African Americans to be indentured for three-year contracts to the sugar plantations, after which time they would receive lands to farm either for free or for low rent.[164]

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[161] Anonymous to Richard Hill, June 29, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 10.

[162] Edward Chitty and John R. Hollingsworth to T.F. Pilgrim, July 11, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 24; Walter Dendy, Benjamin B Dexter, John Clark, &c. to Governor Charles Grey, July 21, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 27-28.

[163] John Clarke to James Hume, May 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG. As thousands of Black Jamaicans swarmed the courthouse of Savanna-la-Mar, people chanted "Buckra want to make you all slaves again." Two whites in particular, Dr. Mason and Mr. Whitlock, "say they will wade knee deep in blood to get slavery back."

[164] John Eyre to Duke of Newcastle, July 5, 1862, CO/137/362, KEW. See also Extract of a Letter From Messrs. Roddington of London, May 1, 1860, CO/137/350, KEW. Ideas of deporting African Americans to the Caribbean had been entertained ever since the end of the Haitian Revolution. In Jamaica, whites began to advocate in earnest for African American immigration in the early 1850s, often through the intercession of missionaries and pro-peasant white planters like W. Wemyss Anderson. See also B.A. Franklin to William Wemyss Anderson, June 6, 1860, CO/137/350, KEW. "In every state, whether slave or free—the anti-colored feeling overrides, as a rule, all other considerations. …

Many ruling-class elites in Jamaica wholeheartedly agreed with Eyre. Non-whites indebted to the British empire and Jamaican colonial state would become the perfect allies with which to colonize the agricultural frontiers by rite of second conquest. This would act to deter mobile, non-aligned Creole labor from claiming unoccupied land. As J.S. Williams argued, "the best people for the country were [not] those who, after toiling…went away again." Instead, "We want men of whatever color or class, to become permanent inhabitants" of Jamaica.[165] Whites in Jamaica were well attuned to the racist underpinnings of the U.S. Civil War for both northern Free-Soilers and southern slaveholders. "My idea is that the war will end in freedom of the slaves," Henry Whitlocke admitted. "I think it our duty is to give a home to those who will be exposed to ill-treatment if they remain in their own native country [because] the whites vastly predominate." Whitlocke would welcome these people to Jamaica. He fantasized how this class of non-white allies would settle "the wastelands" of the old world, sustaining Jamaica "by the existence of a middle class."[166] This would produce an upward pressure for civilizational uplift. "If our peasantry were surrounded by people" who "work[ed] throughout the week," George Henderson argued, "our peasantry…would naturally become jealous and a wholesome emulation would be the consequence."[167]

In contrast with past immigration schemes concerning Coolie labor, Eyre desired that one-third of the immigrants be African American women. This shows that Eyre was imagining a future

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The almost universal desire is that the colored class should quit the country. This desire is felt by the free colored class themselves. … The free states have for some time aided their deportation. Annually three or four vessels leave Baltimore with them for Liberia. … Is not our climate and soil Nature's healthiest gift to the descendants of Africa?"

[165] *The Jamaica Guardian,* September 18-19, 1862, FO/5/934, KEW.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

in which this new class of foreign Black sugar workers and, for those who survived, independent Black farmers, could reproduce themselves indefinitely after obtaining choice lands nearby towns, ports, and plantations. By cultivating non-white allies across generations, Eyre was trying to twist the custom of Black Jamaicans passing down their land to their heirs toward the indefinite perpetuation of white rule.

These pipe dreams didn't materialize. One reason was financing. The other, more crucial, reason was that the implementation of Eyre's dream would entangle the British empire diplomatically with the United States, imperiling relations with the Confederacy.[168]

U.S. expansion of its commercial and maritime empire in the Caribbean in the post-Civil war period. The idea of being tricked back into a state of slavery remained current in Jamaica, even after Brazil, the last slaveowning empire of the Atlantic world, abolished slavery in 1888. For example, in 1891, when the World's Fair exhibitions came to Jamaica, Black Jamaicans at first didn't want to view the sights. Having to walk through to turnstiles blocked their movement, Frank Cundall reported, "thinking the Exhibition had been erected to entrap them into slavery."[169] The notion of re-enslavement also intersected with fears of being tricked into making their property legible to taxation. Government officials instituted local fairs for Black farmers to bring horses and other stock for sale, but they failed to attract them. Black farmers recognized that bringing their animals in was a way for the state "to find out how much stock they possessed, with a view to increased taxation."[170]

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[168] John Eyre to Duke of Newcastle, July 5, 1862, CO/137/362, KEW.

[169] Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in the Past and Present* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1896), 116.

[170] Ibid, 116.

Conclusion

The push/pull factors exerted by ordinary dry seasons and environmental enclosure remained powerful after Emancipation. The rise of the Black peasantry was not inevitable. Had the droughts of the 1840s continued indefinitely, the first decades of Black freedom in Jamaica may have mirrored the experience of Black people in Antigua and Barbados, where the sugar industry never declined, and sugar planters sustained their iron grip over the land and its waters. But when the droughts ended, Black farmers exploited the rains to their limit. They were in a better position to hold out against future droughts without becoming dependent once again on the planters for income. Their success was rooted in the development of modalities of semi-nomadism and self-defense, which included tactical assaults against thieves. Sugar work, agricultural work, the prison: all were nodes to travel through as seasonal, political, and economic circumstances dictated.

The planters were left holding the bag. They were fixed in place as sedentary peoples and were thus unable to adapt to the droughts through mobility and migration. In their weakness, they tried to sharpen the teeth of environmental enclosure through irrigation, immigration, and carceral fixes. Their actions had ambivalent outcomes. On the one hand, they did little to stop the spread of semi-autonomous Black communities; if anything, they encouraged their proliferation farther into the unpoliceable hinterlands. On the other hand, enclosure offered vectors for non-whites to align themselves with white power. In return, they received protection and benefits in the form of natural resources and defense. But the rise of semi-autonomous Black communities came with the escalation of conflicts emanating along a horizontal axis.

In the next chapter, we will interrogate the culmination of environmental enclosure in riots and warfare in Westmoreland parish, which had remained relatively immune to the droughts. Here, the planters pursued a risky policy of erecting tollgates to deter free access to water supplies, the provision grounds, and the marketplaces. The extraction of money and time out of those who

passed the tollgates enriched the state at the cost of the health and wellbeing of the sugar- and non-sugar producing sectors of the subaltern political economy. A critical mass of Black Jamaicans with interests in open lines of traffic between urban, suburban, and rural spaces joined together to wage defensive war against the tollgates and the institutions of state-power that denied them their customary rights to live as they pleased.

Chapter 5

Water Politics and Warfare in Wild Westmoreland

Sometime in 1857 or early 1858, at least seven tollgates were erected on the main roads in the vicinity of Savanna-la-Mar, Westmoreland parish.[1] Tollgates in Jamaica were an invention of Emancipation. The first was emplaced in St. Andrew's parish, on the highway stretching from the intersection of Hope and Hog Hole Rivers to Montgomery Corner on the Liguanea plains north of Kingston.[2] The costs of the tolls were two-fold. They not only absorbed Black Jamaicans' money, but also interrupted customary traffic patterns. Anger and acute disaffection spread rapidly among the Black population, from Savanna-la-Mar, the main port town and home of the courthouse and the police station, to the mountainous hinterlands of the parish.

John Clarke, the preeminent local Baptist missionary in the area, was deeply concerned about the turn of events.[3] In June 1858, Clarke learned that Governor Darling, flanked by an official military retinue, was set to arrive on an impromptu trip to Savanna-la-Mar to address the local Black population. Darling hoped to assure local white elite and respectable fractions of the Black population that the maintenance of law and order was his highest priority. He invited Clarke to attend the meetings, much to Clarke's chagrin. Clarke worried the trip would end up doing more harm than good to assuage popular unrest in the region. He feared that the Governor's visit would

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[1] John Clarke to James Hume, June 22, 1858, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[2] Sherilla Gordon, "History Takes Its 'Toll'," *Jamaica Observer,* July 16, 2006, https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/history-takes-its-toll/; Rebecca Tortello, "Roads and Resistance: The Toll Gate Riots of 1859," *The Old Jamaica Gleaner,* December 5, 2005, https://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/history/story0072.html.

[3] General Bell to Military Secretary, March 12, 1859, F. 231, CO/137/347, KEW.

ultimately upset the fragile political equilibrium which then obtained in the neighborhood. The Black population was certain to interpret the Governor's presence as a kind of preemptive warning to any would-be rioters and rebels lurking in the shadows.[4]

This chapter examines the environmental, racial, and spatial context through which the tollgates were erected and acquired meaning in the lives of local Black Jamaicans. The tollgates around Savanna-la-Mar harmed Black Jamaicans' ability not only to fetch freshwater, but also to move back and forth from the port market centers. Returning to the question of mobility underscores how Black communities emerged in inhospitable spaces only insofar as they were able to resolve the daily issues of freshwater and food scarcity. Many communities sought to avoid this contingency by claiming water sovereignty over spaces where whites held either little or no *de facto* control. But they, too, were impacted, because they had to cross the tolls to get to the market.

I argue that the wide geographical distribution of tollgates throughout Westmoreland helped crystallize popular discontent and solidarities in ways which cut across classes of ordinary sugar workers, squatters, tenants, and freeholders. Path-dependent sequences and processes from 1857 to 1859 eventually gave rise to an army of thousands of Black Jamaicans, determined to swarm Savanna-la-Mar to heighten the probability of the abolition of the tollgates. This force was the largest to amass since the Baptist War of 1831 and the insurrectionist conspiracies of 1823 and 1824. What is significant is that their targets were not plantations and specific planters, but state institutions. The action of Benjamin Vickers, one of the most powerful white men in Westmoreland, in these events offers a perplexing and incisive opportunity to reflect upon the nature of the ambivalence of white-Black alliances in the post-Emancipation period. The environmentally rooted

[4] John Clarke to James Hume, June 22, 1858, D/CJL/2, ANG.

motivations, stakes, and political objects of the battle for Westmoreland in 1859 repeated six years later in the battle for free access to water at Bluefields.

The Sweet River and the Swamps of Savanna-la-Mar

By the late 1850s, extant evidence suggests that the Sweet River, situated to a few miles to the east of Savanna-la-Mar, was likely the primary public freshwater resource for Black Jamaicans of the region, within a radius of several miles.[5] As Edward Long commented, the river acquired its high reputation among urban and suburban users "from the transparency and purity of its waters."[6] The perennial clean waters of the Sweet River were so prized that government officials in 1883 were busy figuring out how to use this river as the exclusive water source for Savanna-la-Mar.[7]

In the absence of direct documentary evidence, we can plausibly infer several facts about the nature of water enclosure in the urban milieu of Savanna-la-Mar. The port town of around 2,300 people likely followed water supply patterns consistent with more populous cities like Kingston. Whites almost invariably used a combination of private water tanks and wells for their private use, instead of consuming water that Black people drank, washed clothes in, and walked across.[8] It is also possible that water tanks were more reliable insofar as wells dug in low, flat, and sandy soils suffered

[5] John Clarke to James Hume, April 25, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG. See also *Falmouth Post*, March 4, 1859; Frank Cundall, *Political and Social Disturbances in the West Indies* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1906), 11.

[6] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Culture, Products, Laws, and Government, Volume 2* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 193.

[7] "Westmoreland," *The Handbook of Jamaica: for 1883: Comprising Historical, Statistical, and General Information Concerning the Island* (Kingston: Government Printing Establishment, 1883), 230.

[8] See Mark W. Hauser, *The Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economies in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2008," 79-90, 138-40.

from saltwater intrusion in the shallow water table, depending on the time of year. Contemporary maps denoted an aqueduct which straddled the eastern edge of the town, but that water must have been earmarked for military and naval use. It was not a true public water supply.[9] The Smithfield River was a mile or so to the west of the aqueduct. Logically, if people crossed that river to get to the Sweet River, they either avoided or were prohibited from gathering those waters.

Like the plantations, sharing water with urban Black people was likely rare and uncommon. In dry towns like Savanna-la-Mar, the only consistent way to get water without fetching it oneself was through buying it, with hard cash. Black water-porters were common fixtures of cities in slave societies throughout the greater Caribbean. In Spanish Town and Kingston, water-porters brought water to the marketplace by canoe or by cart, filling calabashes and pots for sale.[10] Their labor invested value into the commodity of water; supply and demand merely determined the asking price of that labor. In Cuba, independent enslaved water-gatherers could turn immense profits. For instance, Gavino, an African *emancipado,* "had earned a profit of $5228 in sixteen years for his mistress, who had paid $612 for him." Water-carriers were among the key industries satisfied by this class, alongside street porters, wharf hands, and laborers on the railways.[11]

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[9] "Maps of Jamaica by James Robertson, 1804," National Library of Scotland, https://maps.nls.uk/jamaica/; John Arrowsmith, "Map of Jamaica Compiled Chiefly from Manuscripts in the Colonial Office and Admiralty by John Arrowsmith (London: John Arrowsmith, 1844," *David Rumsey Map Collection,* https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~2777~270050:Map-Of-Jamaica-;JSESSIONID=5b4a69fc-e3f5-46e2-b55f-f9b03cfea12a?title=Search+Results%3A+List_No+equal+to+%274613.062%27&thumbnailViewUrlKey=link.view.search.url&fullTextSearchChecked=&annotSearchChecked=&dateRangeSearchChecked=&showShareIIIFLink=true&helpUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fdocumentation.lunaimaging.com%2Fdisplay%2FV75D%2FLUNA%2BViewer%23LUNAViewerLUNAViewer&showTip=false&showTipAdvancedSearch=false&advancedSearchUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fdocumentation.lunaimaging.com%2Fdisplay%2FV75D%2FSearching%23Searching-Searching.

[10] Hauser, *Archaeology of Black Markets*, 36-38, 156.

[11] Letters of Secretary of State, Gonzalez, August 28, 1841, and August 31, 1841, "On conditions of Emancipados," *Jamaica Movement,* 139, 141, quoted in Hubert H.S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511-1868* (New York: The Knickenbocker Press, 1907), 230-31.

Indeed, in Jamaica, prices for water skyrocketed during dry seasons and droughts. Edmund Sturge entreated William Monsell, M.P., in 1869 that many towns that arisen throughout the colony relied upon people fetching large amounts of water across miles of difficult terrain to meet their daily needs. Sturge claimed that he had seen water in these areas sell at the marketplaces for the exorbitant price of five to six shillings per gallon. A gallon of water was therefore the equivalent of five to six days wages at the average rate. Thus, only the richest whites, non-whites, and trading factors could possibly afford water in port towns like Savanna-la-Mar.[12] The high cost of water is also reflected in reports concerning the provisioning of military forces. The stationing of troops in Savanna-la-Mar from February to April 1859 cost £583, £109 (18.6%) of which was for food and £85 (14.5%) for drinking water.[13]

Multiple times per day, water gatherers had to travel back and forth down a "rough and stony road" to the Sweet River.[14] In the days of slavery, Edward Long followed this road from Savanna-la-Mar to the Sweet River, writing that "the face of the country opens at once upon the view…of well-cultivated sugar estates and rich pastures." The hills to the north remained wild and "infested with logwood."[15] When William Gardner traveled the road in the early 1860s, he saw nothing but overgrown forests, cattle pens, and pasturelands. Moreover, unlike many of the other

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[12] Edmund Sturge to William Monsell, September 29, 1869, CO/137/445, KEW. Sturge added that under the present state of the political economy in Jamaica, it would be impossible politically or financially for locals to undertake water infrastructure projects due to the cost. But he thought that "the people of these localties would cheerfully submit to the taxation requisite for the gradual repayment and for the maintenance of such works in good repair.

[13] Thomas Foster to Commissary General in Chief, May 23, 1860, CO/137/352, KEW.

[14] William Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour in the British West Indies* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1861), 216.

[15] Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2,* 193.

main roads, Gardner saw few houses of small-scale settlers along the road, which distinguished the region from Kingston, Spanish Town, and Moneague, among others. Whites knew, but couldn't see, that there were free Black villages in the densely forested hills to the north, full of people busy cultivating coffee and pimento destined for export.[16]

Travelling to and from the river on the main east-west road was physically taxing and time-consuming. The physical and financial costs of transporting commodities reliably across degraded parochial and main roads that ran south to the coastline and west to Savanna-la-Mar saddled planters with losses of commodities, slaves, cattle, and carts.[17] In the wet seasons, the swamps surrounding the roads rose in height, swallowing open routes of traffic by foot—while facilitating transport by canoe, a power that only the wealthiest peasants possessed. Whites were known to act foolishly in fording the waters. In 1862, for example, John Clarke saw "water…so high that the only parts of the horse visible while fording were the head, neck, and backs. The floods had also already carried off a magistrate and his two horses."[18] If Black Jamaicans on horseback or ferrying goods by mule-driven carts attempted the same, they did so not out of impatience and stupidity, but out of necessity. If they didn't arrive back home with food and water, their kin and village went hungry and thirsty. Travel by roads didn't improve much in the dry season, either. Due to the perennial

[16] Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour*, 217.

[17] Ibid, 216. "The expense of transporting heavy hogsheads from this district to the place of export," William Gardner remarked, which "must swallow up a large portion of the planter's revenue." See also Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1989), 163.

[18] John Clarke to James Hume, June 11, 1862, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

morasses, the roads often became mud pits, hindering efficient travel by foot and wheeled cart. Population density remained low due to the lack of fair roads.[19]

But the labor of water-gatherers facilitated the rise of robust swampland communities around Savanna-la-Mar that could sustain themselves over time, while at distance from freshwater sites. We can imagine that the morass landscape probably resembled others throughout Jamaica. In St. Ann's Bay, for example, houses constructed to the west of town were built into marshes "overgrown with wild sugar cane and other paludel weeds," through which "two or three paths" ran.[20] When heavy rainfall occurred in 1850, the water elevated one to two feet, modifying the paths. The risen waters also allowed for a broader range of movement by small watercrafts. On the dry patches, Black people kept small gardens and hog sties, as well as human waste ditches. Gavin Milroy observed them dumping refuse straight into the swamp.[21] Houses in the swampzone were often raised several feet off the ground, often consisting of multiple apartments. Hogs and chickens were kept in the space underneath the home, concentrating fertilizer to be distributed carefully and cautiously in dry micro-plots in the swamplands. Since these structures were not flooded out by the heavy rains Milroy documented, their Black creators must have carefully calculated the ebbs and flows of the swamp's level throughout the year. A similar situation obtained on the east side of town.[22]

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[19] Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour*, 216.

[20] Testimony of Gavin Milroy, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Report by Doctor Milroy to Colonial Office, on Cholera Epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51*, 19.

[21] Ibid, 19.

[22] Ibid, 74. On the road toward St. Ann's Bay in Clark Town district, respectable houses began and then turned into "Negro houses," which were away from the central town, surrounded by bush, on the slopes of damp luxuriant ravines. At Moneague, near the lake, a Black settlement called the "Swamp" formed five to six miles away from town. This was

A similar situation probably obtained in the neighborhood of Savanna-la-Mar after Emancipation. For instance, the areas around Egypt estate and Breadnut Pen, the stomping grounds of the infamous rapist and torturer Thomas Thistlewood, were ensconced in swamplands. He once traveled in 1768 with his enslaved canoe-man, Lincoln, and his concubine, Phibbah, to survey "small islands in the morass, having some thoughts of making a Negro ground there." Later, in 1779, following the explosion of an armory in town by fire, Thistlewood saw how Black people exploited the "morasses and environs of the Town" to hide "pipes of wine, puncheons of rum, beds, chests, trunks, &c. &c. Bills, hoes, hinges, axes, iron pots, iron hoops, nails, glass bottles, &c. &c. all about. Gun barreles, &c."[23]

Port Maria offers another glimpse at the post-Emancipation swamp suburbs. Between the mouths of two streams and mountain ranges, the westerly facing stream ran sluggishly, due to rapid shifts in elevation as the water made its way toward the coast. On the east facing side of the western river, a Black village stood within the boundaries of Frontier estate. On the west facing side of the same river stood Manning's Town and Stennet's Town. They each shared a slow-moving course of the river that, to Gavin Milroy, looked "no better than a foul stagnant pond." Manning's Town and Stennet's Town swelled with Black inhabitants. By 1850, the population of Manning's Town was 330 and Stennet's Town was 250. Port Maria itself only contained 420 people.[24] These two towns were

around Blue Hole and the old lake to the east, south of the area were ponds and morass. The other region was Hart's Run, which had also been recolonized and settled as a village.

[23] Diary of Thomas Thistlewood, "7th December 1779," in Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 1989), 270. "The sea remarkably low, & the Negroes so busy plundering & stealing that few could be got to fetch water."

[24] Testimony of Gavin Milroy, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Report by Doctor Milroy to Colonial Office, on Cholera Epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51,* 57.

vital areas for sugar workers to settle that avoided tenancy and rent. Due to their close proximity to the estates, workers could show up easily to work. Most of the townspeople of Manning's Town worked at Frontier and then returned to Manning's Town.[25]

Swamplands near the coast and the towns were also exorbitantly expensive to purchase. As John Candler obsevered, swampland between St. Ann's Bay and the ocean used to cost £100 before Emancipation. Afterward, it "is now worth more than £500, the latter sum having been refused for it."[26]

The social reproduction of Black communities reliant on the Sweet River over time testifies to their ingenuity and perseverance in ensuring that circuits of mobility remained open to the river. Their survival relied upon it. Not only hiding in, but also moving through, various landscapes safely were essential for independent Black villages to emerge after Emancipation. In the absence of pipes and constant water, the water-gatherer assumed a pivotal role in ensuring that communities could survive on the fringes of dry land. What the whites couldn't see or admit was that the proximity of dense wetlands helped deter whites from crossing into the subaltern swampscape. The climatic rhetoric of wetlands, Blackness, and disease worked to install a grid of separation between Black villages and white encroachers.[27] Nevertheless, communities that lacked close access to freshwater

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[25] Ibid, 57.

[26] John Candler, *West Indies: Extracts from the Journal of John Candler, Whilst Traveling in Jamaica* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1840), 32. "The labourers are very earnest to get land of their own, and place money in his hands for that purpose. William and Mary Waters were both slaves; William follows the trade of blacksmith at the Bay, his wife keeps a small store: they have saved since freedom 100*l.* currency."

[27] See also Theodore Foulks, *Jamaica: Recollections of the Late Rebellion* (London: Whitaker, Treacher, and Arnott, 1833), 30-31. In Kingston, Theodore Foulks described how "the streets are sometimes so completely under water, that walls have been swept away by the force of the flood." This left water courses streamed across the roads of Kingston after rainy weather. The rain fell from high land above Kingston, coursing across the Liguanea Plains to the city below.

did not have the ability to hold out very long against siege warfare in the event of martial law or the interruption of traffic patterns during heavy floods.

Detour: Finding Water in the Drought Zone

Black communities of the most drought-prone savannas and hills of the rain shadow in St. Elizabeth's Parish, bordering Westmoreland to the southeast, represented the most extreme and precarious form of this strategy. They embodied the ethos of long-distance travel as a means of staying secluded and free. On these drought-prone lands, finding water and running conventional subsistence or export-oriented farms was difficult. For most of the year, local populations relied heavily on the wetlands and swamps following along the southern coastline. For their protein, they fished and hunted for food in the morasses below. Alligator Pond was a potent site for hunting and fishing. Located in the mouth of a valley between the May Day Mountains and the Santa Cruz Mountains, "It consists of a few stores, with a wharf, a dwelling-house, and a few negro huts."[28] It was where people could offload and upload commodities for their use. For their money, they sold the surplus fish to neighboring communities. For their grains and carbohydrates, they planted maize and millet straight into the morasses, which served as a ready supply of irrigation.

Finding freshwater on the arid savannas was even more critical than food. On the one hand, getting water was akin to hunter-gathering. As Philip Gosse observed, the hollows and leaves of trees like the wild pineapple provided small amounts of water to collect in the morning and night; "the rains and dews accumulating there in considerable quantities, and forming a resource for

[28] Philip Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica* (London: Brown, Green, and Longman's, 1851), 26.

thousands of birds, and even for man himself, in the season of drought."[29] Gosse's guide pointed to the water-withe on a journey to see Coulter-Spring as a critical source of drinking water. The long vines hung down from the tall trees; by cutting the vine, one could drink from the tips. Indeed, "a junk of a yard long, it is said, will yield a pint; and lives have been saved by the seasonable supply of this plant, when travelers have lost their way in the woods, and have been fainting with thirst."[30]

Cocoanuts were consumed locally and exported, not just as food, but, more importantly, as sources of water. Cocoanuts grew in the sandy soils of the coastline, and planters and Black farmers alike intercropped them among other crops. The young nut in the unripe condition yielded water and edible jelly. Henry de la Beche consumed them often on his trip to Jamaica in 1824. "The water of the young cocoa nut is a very pleasant beverage in the middle of the day," he observed, "particularly if the nut is gathered in the morning and put into a shady place."[31] Cocoanut trees were cultivated throughout Jamaica by Black people. In the coastal zone of Port Maria, de la Beche "stopped at a negroe village, and procured cocoa nuts, the water of which we drank. We had an abundance of them, and found them very refreshing."[32] De la Beche had to procure and drink from cocoa nuts even in areas reputed for their copious perennial rivers resources, like the Plantain Garden river valley.[33] Cocoanuts also served non-dietary applications. As Alfred Leader remarked,

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[29] Ibid, 44.

[30] Ibid, 125-26.

[31] Henry de la Beche, "January 15, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[32] Henry de la Beche, "March 14, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[33] Henry de la Beche, "April 3, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

"The negro women may often be seen preparing cocoanut oil from the dry kernel of the nut, which is used for cooking and lighting. The leaves provided brushes, brooms, and roofing materials.[34]

Cocoanuts were so prized that planters in St. Thomas in the East ruthlessly prosecuted cases involving their theft. Out of 139 cases of larceny that went to trial between 1863 and 1865, 31 (22.3% of total) of them were for stealing cocoanuts; nine of those cases were resolved by money payment, 1 case was dismissed, and the remaining 21 resulted in prison sentences.[35] Planters singled out cocoanut theft as a *cause celebre* among the Black population. In 1871, Henry Westmoreland denied that he ran a private jail on his property, but he admitted that he directed his bookkeeper to confine "two men [caught] stealing a large quantity of cocoanuts off the property."[36]

The ponds remained the primary reservoirs of water. Many of these spaces were hybrid products of natural water flows and human engineering. While visiting Kepp plantation, located in a mountainous region of Manchester in the rain shadow, Philip Gosse noticed that "there are no streams…[so] the inhabitants…*dig large* ponds into the hollows, into which the rain-water collects in the wet season."[37] The words "dig" and "large" are crucial, as it connotes the work of human engineering prowess and knowledge in creating the ponds because of the size of the project, and

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[34] Alfred Leader, *Jamaica with a Kodak* (Bristol: John Wright & Co., 1907), 134. "Cocoanut water is supplied gratis at some of the Jamaica hotels."

[35] "Return of the Number of Cases, Civil and Criminal, heard in Petty Sessions at Bath, in the Parish of St. Thomas in the East," Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission on Origin, Nature and Circumstances of Disturbances in Island of Jamaica. Part I. Report; Part II. Minutes of Evidence, Appendix*, 1083-1098.

[36] William A.G. Young to Major Prenderville, September 11, 1871, Parliamentary Papers [1872], *Correspondence Regarding the Alleged Keeping of Private Lock-Ups By Magistrates in Jamaica* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1872), 3. Henry Westmoreland said he confined the thieves because of "the late hour and the distance they would have to be sent to Annotto Bay (6 miles), I considered I was only doing my duty by having them detained on the estate until the following morning."

[37] Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn,* 126. My emphasis.

because mountain spaces were often composed of porous limestone. In the absence of direct evidence, we can speculate that people may have accomplished this task by locating and hauling dried out clayey, non-porous soils to the site to cover gaps in the limestone. These soils might have been procured from either local sources or carried up from desiccated ponds and riverbeds in the lowlands.[38] Then, in order to harden the clay, creating an impermeable barrier for rainwater to collect, people could fill the empty pond with felled trees and set them ablaze.[39]

On his travels, Gosse encountered several such ponds. One of them, about a quarter acre in size between Shrewsbury and Content, was surrounded by forests in the upper reaches of a mountain. A giant Cotton-tree rose upon on its edge. Gosse saw Black Jamaicans driving their animals

> hither to drink…[and] to roll in the cool mud; water-insects swarm in it, and pond-turtles are abundant; yet this is the only water drunk by several families in the dry season. The negro girls of the neighbourhood come hither, each with a large shallow basket or tray of wicker on her head, in which stand many calabashes. She wades into the pond, pushes aside the duckweed, and fills her vessels.[40]

The ponds became magnets for edible wildlife, particularly birds. People followed the birds and wildlife to locate not only the nearest freshwater resources, but also potential hunting grounds.[41] For instance, Gosse observed bird migration patterns during drought conditions during an extreme drought from April to June 1846. Birds like the Pea-dove flocked to the borders of streams and

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[38] Thomas Harvey and William Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866: A Narrative of a Tour Through the Island, With Remarks on Its Social, Education and Industrial Condition* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1867), 38.

[39] I thank the water engineer David Wells for this insight.

[40] Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn,* 187.

[41] See also Philip Gosse, *The Birds of Jamaica* (London: J. Van Voorst, 1847), 358, 363. Richard Hill reported to Gosse that the droughts had brought Clucking Aramuses to the river swamps and marshes of the Caymanas district of the parish. "They were a bird almost unknown in these plains."

ponds, "haunt[ing] most the vicinity of water; particularly those dreary swamps and morasses which are environed by tall woods of mangrove."[42] The incessant calls and cooing of the birds during "the winter months, when the pastures are burnt up with drought." These birds told local Black people where to find secret water sites beyond the visual field of people traveling on the roads. During the same drought, Philip Gosse visited a gully that cleaved a mountain behind Bluefields, cloaked in dense timber, on the search for wild Clucking-hens. The droughts "had wasted the mountain pools" where the birds usually congregated. According to local Black informants, the droughts had thus shifted the birds to "the edge of the woods around the spot where the spring of Bluefields River gushes out of the mountain's foot."[43]

Locals became experts at monitoring the seasonal cycles of wildlife. In search of Grebe birds, Black guides led Gosse to "a large pond just within the woods," in the mountains above Grand Vale and Hampstead. They also knew that Grebe birds at Mount Edgecumbe pond constantly moved their nests to different areas of the pond in response to competition between members of their species for space. These birds fought during the night, and those who lost the battle fled to smaller, shallow ponds nearby. Black hunters carefully mapped out these secondary water resources. The Grebe birds could be caught by chasing them around their new pond until they tired out "and will dive no more, but make for the shore, and are caught before they can fly." The flesh was "dark and oily" and rich in fats and protein.[44]

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[42] Ibid, 308.

[43] Ibid, 356.

[44] Ibid, 443.

Nevertheless, the ponds were fragile places. During the most extreme drought conditions, even mountain ponds evaporated, leaving nothing but "a small space of water in the centre of a large area of parched and cracking mud."[45]

The experience of water-gatherers in the nineteenth century prefigured the experience of the same in the twentieth century. During the driest months of April and May, as well as during droughts, for instance, contemporaries witnessed "Long trains of people…carrying pans and tubs, often long distances, from some pond to their homes." The majority of these ponds were owned by proprietors, who, "as a rule," treated the water as private property. Even if ponds were formed by the natural action of rainfall, merely emplacing a fence around it was recognized as "the outcome of forethought and expenditure." This abstraction transformed the land from wild commons to private ownership. Because planters did not drink the pond water, "that water is usually bad…contaminated with vegetable matter like rotting leaves and blossoms from the trees usually overhanging it." Some Black people asked and paid for the water. Others "were known to sneak in and take it away, without permission." This was sometimes achieved by directly "break[ing] down fences [and] leav[ing] gates open," so that more thirsty Black people might enjoy the same access. In response, planters usually appointed watchmen to guard the ponds by day and by night. The former preferred ponds to investment in water tanks, as ponds cost little to construct, maintain, and most importantly, to enclose.[46]

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[45] Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn,* 126.

[46] *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 14* (Kingston: Sollas' Printing and Stationery, 1910), 222-23. "A water supply should be as much part of his possessions as his house and cultivation—it is necessary and so should be provided for."

Seclusion and Water Sovereignty

Some Black communities in the region settled the deluge-prone mountains to the north and northeast of Savanna-la-Mar as a means of avoiding the daily freshwater predicaments of the lowlanders.

We are tempted to assume that this was because these areas tended to receive higher than average rainfall. For sure, Black Jamaicans probably squeezed every opportunity to fill their calabashes with rainwater. However, surface water was rapidly lost to the limestone and karst landscapes of these mountains. Even in the Blue Mountains, where average rainfall for the island was at its apex, freshwater sources could be scarce. For example, Henry de la Beche traveled to the peaks of the mountains in March 1824 with a gang of around twenty enslaved men, who carried all the food and water. During the night, the water supplies ran out, "with the exception of one gourd, which we secured for ourselves." In the morning, de la Beche ordered a contingent to march four hours round trip to the nearest water supply.[47] Deluge-prone mountains were not automatic water havens. Black communities were motivated to locate their villages near accessible freshwater streams to minimize the need to send out water-gatherers on long, arduous trips to haul water for tens of people like de la Beche had done.

Black communities of the mountains mobilized and manipulated connections with local whites to secure favorable land and water tenure conditions. The mountain villages of Darliston were one such community, situated 15 to 18 miles east of Savanna-la-Mar.[48] The region had once hosted a middling sugar estate brought down by the droughts and Black labor resistance of the

[47] Henry de la Beche, "March 23, 1824," Personal Diary, NMW.

[48] John Clarke to James Hume, September 26, 1860, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

1840s. In the hills, there was an outpost chapel there that John Clarke visited semi-regularly. It is probable that much of the land at Darliston was not held in freehold but rented or squatted upon. For example, Clarke rented the chapel lands for £7, 10 shillings, a steep price when an acre of land supposedly cost only 20 shillings. But due to the blessings offered by the Cutting Grass Spots River, it was, in some respects, a reasonable price to pay. The site satisfied the imperatives of defensibility, seclusion, and water resources simultaneously. As John Clarke noted, a narrow path was the only way to get up the mountain. Locals had a cultural-spiritual connection with this river as well, as John Clarke noted that baptisms regularly took place there.[49] Thus, alliance with such a white leaseholder, in spite of the missionaries' tendency to expel as many members as they took in, increased the probability of obtaining propitious access to land and water tenure over time.

Black communities like Darliston proliferated in mountains with copious freshwater sources. Once a village was established, the respective community ensured that other villages which emerged were at sufficient distance from land and water sites already under occupation. For example, in 1857, an anonymous resident since 1826 and knew of four villages near a missionary station in the mountains above Savanna-la-Mar, placed three to five miles from each other, on lands that had been purchased outright. Each freeholder of these towns owned from one to ten acres of land.[50] Significant capital accumulation occurred among sets of the Black population that called these places home. Between 1855 and 1857, an anonymous respondent to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* noted that 255 persons had paid £3242 for hundreds of acres of land in the area of Brown's Town and Bethany. One member of his church bought scarce land for exorbitant prices, paying £79 for only three acres.

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[49] John Clarke to James Hume, December 8, 1854, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[50] "Jamaica: Condition of the Labouring Population," February 21, 1857, *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 5, no. 5 (May 1857), 109.

Two other individuals bought 12 acres for £180 and 30 acres for £360, respectively. On several occasions, Black people combined their capital to purchase land as a joint venture. Three people had asked the anonymous writer to facilitate the purchase of 188 acres for £360.[51] Eight others were willing to lay out £250 for a place advertised for sale, but the plan failed to materialize.

The people of the Darliston hills proved adept at bending local whites to their advantage. Mrs. Hutchins, a deputy of Clarke, had enjoyed a formal position of leadership over Darliston since 1852. She apparently let Darliston run wild—and free. Clarke complained that she allowed liberal access to the grazing grounds, filled with poultry, sheep, hogs, breeding sow, breeding mares, gardens, and breadfruit trees. But she turned no profit and instead begged Clarke regularly for more money. Later, she also stood accused of having lent £30 or more of Clarke's money to her brother, who then purchased cattle and a separate property for £20 for the use of the Hutchins of clan, while pocketing the rest.[52]

Clarke threatened to replace her with Mr. Nisbet in late 1857. Local Black communities protested the shift.[53] The arrival of Mr. Nisbet would necessarily involve a renegotiation of land and water user rights in which the probability of maintaining the status quo was low. Clarke joked in his private letters that he considered threatening the people into silence by invoking his right to backpay for the salary he had lost to keep Hutchins in charge over the years.[54]

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[51] Ibid, 113.

[52] John Clarke to James Hume, November 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[53] John Clarke to James Hume, December 19, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG. "They seem as stupid as if they were all grown children," he complained, "forget[ting] that every shilling she has got of salary has come from mine."

[54] John Clarke to James Hume, December 19, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG.

Six months later, she was removed and replaced with Mr. Nisbet anyway. Then, Clarke banished her from the land. It wasn't long before Nisbet began to expel members of the Darliston Black community for moral transgressions. Hutchins had not expelled anyone during her tenure.[55] Nisbet didn't last long. By August 1, 1859, he claimed he was leaving the church due to low wages. Darliston was now without any white leadership.

Another group of more than fifty Africans who lived in the area of Dean's Water Valley estate in the lowlands underscores how Black people used the whites to obtain lands blessed with constant water. Africans were voracious adherents to John Clarke's chapel. Perhaps they had had experience with Christianity in Africa. They were *emancipados* taken from slavers bound for Cuba and Brazil.[56] Clarke held them in high regard, especially because each of them had given 18 shillings to construct the new pulpit for a Church at Savanna-la-Mar.[57] Such acts of kindness on the part of the Africans demanded reciprocity. For years, they had lived in a village upon rented land around one and a half miles away from Clarke's house. By 1862, they sought to purchase it outright. Clarke

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[55] John Clarke to James Hume, November 17, 1858, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[56] Letters of Secretary of State, Gonzalez, August 28, 1841, and August 31, 1841, "On conditions of Emancipados," *Jamaica Movement,* 139, 141, quoted in Hubert H.S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511-1868* (New York: The Knickenbocker Press, 1907), 230-31. "The demand for domestic servants was soon supplied. The number of emancipados which could be used on the public works was limited, and new methods of disposal had to be found. Manufacturers and proprietors were glad to take them and pay a fair premium for their services, and they came into demand as street porters, water-carriers, volante drivers, wharf hands, labourers on the railways, and in sweet-meat and tobacco manufactories. There were many very serious obstacles in the way of successful handling of the emancipados. The least of these was the danger that they might be carried off, induced to run away, or substituted for a dead slave; some cases of this nature did occur, and it was impossible to prevent them or afford a remedy. The most serious aspect of the whole question was the effect of their presence on the community as a whole. Some employment for them had to be provided. … But because of the great demand for labour some holders made a fine speculation out of the arrangement, as it was possible to get a large return by renting them out as labourers. But this system had its bad features. If the emancipado fell to a good owner, he was well taken care of; the number of such owners was unquestionably large, The commissioners found one case, where Gavino, a water carrier, had earned a profit of $5228 in sixteen years for his mistress, who had paid $612 for him. He had been let out four times, at five years each, under the system.

[57] John Clarke to James Hume, January 3, 1862, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

attempted to negotiate the purchase of over 52 acres of land for them. Over twenty-three Africans gathered £104 to complete the mission. The land was expensive and scarce, as it was located on the backlands of an existing, functional plantation, surrounded by "8 or 9 [more] estates within a few miles." Most importantly, this African community enjoyed "a constant mountain stream [that] follows through the village." This water allowed the village to focus their energies on surplus income generation as a collective force, rather than mobilizing labor toward water gathering. John Clarke held high hopes he would sign the titles of transfer on January 4, 1862. He believed "it will be a cheap purchase to them." Clarke was intimating that the Africans had accumulated enough money that the £104 was of little consequence for people holding such long land tenure in the area. Their farms would thus turn over greater profit immediately after they no longer had to pay for the rent.[58]

Clarke managed to draft sixteen deeds for the land, but he failed to follow through with his promises. Active disputes about the boundary lines and surveys determining primary user rights over the waterworks emplaced at Dean's Valley had revealed title deeds for the land dating back to February 2, 1802.[59] The current de facto proprietor of the estate lacked de jure right to alienate it. For the next year, the process met with delay after delay. Eventually, the Africans abandoned their claims. They didn't even ask for the money back. Instead, they headed to Kingston and set up a new village. They hoped to shovel coal and make enough money to book passage back to Africa.[60]

It is essential to note that many Black Jamaicans of the hills avoided the Christian missionaries just as much as the heathen planters of the lowlands, as white men cut from the same

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[58] John Clarke to James Hume, January 3, 1862, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

[59] John Clarke to James Hume, April 23, 1862, D/CJL/2/2, ANG. "The whole estate of "waterworks" has been redeemed only last year. … [And] There is a dispute about the Diagram of the waterworks on Dean's Valley land."

[60] John Clarke to James Hume, August 19, 1863, D/CJL/2/2, ANG.

cloth. An elderly Igbo man, born in Africa, purchased a small plot of land and a home near the Chapel at Jericho. In 1862, John Clarke regularly reproached him for his sinful practices, which caused the Igbo man to laugh. The latter told Clarke "the missionaries were employed only to keep the peace in the country, by means of telling people about heaven and hell." But the missionaries were liars. No one "had ever seen God," yet, the Igbo man added, the missionaries said "'dem see god in me country. Headmen go out into wood and god come talk with dem.'" The Igbo man saw through the magic trick. The missionaries "made it [the stories] up…to keep the people under subjection."[61]

The Tollgates Cometh

As we noted in the introduction, in 1857 or 1858, numerous tollgates were erected throughout the neighborhood of Savanna-la-Mar. They threw the mobility circuits of the people into flux.

As we broached in the introduction to this chapter, tollgates were nothing new in Jamaica. But a new system of tollgate extraction took shape in 1838. This change was tied to the final abolition of slavery. Tollgates were one of the few means available for the planters to tax the physical movements of Black Jamaicans producing food and commodities otherwise illegible to the law. The primary toll stood on the Hope Road heading toward modern-day Cross Roads, at the juncture of the Hope and Hog Hole Rivers, in the upper reaches of St. Andrew's parish. The initial cost for passing the toll was five to ten pence per carriage and draft animals, as well as sheep, goats, and pigs.[62]

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[61] John Clarke to Unknown, from Jericho, Undated letter, likely August or September 1862, D/CJL/5, ANG.

[62] Sherilla Gordon, "History Takes Its 'Toll'," *Jamaica Observer,* July 16, 2006, https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/history-takes-its-toll/; Rebecca Tortello, "Roads and Resistance: The Toll

If the tolls around Savanna-la-Mar were similar, water gatherers ferrying their cargo by cart paid at least 10 to 20 pence per trip at one toll, as they were forced to cross it twice. Marketers of produce bound for Savanna-la-Mar or for the canoes on the southern coastline paid the same rate, but did so on fewer days of the week, namely on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, according to the dictates of the market. As the principal higglers and marketers of produce, women more generally suffered the brunt of the tollgates. The price of the toll may have encouraged some people to earn more profit on the margins by sharing cart space not just for foodstuffs, but also water. It also probably disproportionately frustrated women who worked independently and carried their goods by a lone donkey.

The hidden-in-plain-sight costs of the toll for Black Jamaicans were not lost on the whites. In 1854, Alexander Fyfe advocated for the abolition of all tollgates in Jamaica, except one between Kingston and Spanish Town. In other regions, "the traffic is not sufficient to compensate for the cost of management and collection," Fyfe cautioned, rendering the tollgates "oppressive to individuals without materially benefiting the trusts." However, the true problem was that tollgates were prompting too many people to travel specifically by night. "Hundreds of all ages, on their way to the Saturday market in Kingston, will congregate at such distances as will enable them to pass the turnpike just after midnight on Friday, in order that they may avoid a double toll by returning before midnight on Saturday."[63]

Gate Riots of 1859," *The Old Jamaica Gleaner,* December 5, 2005, https://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/history/story0072.html

[63] Alexander G. Fyfe to Hugh W. Austin, January 24, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 19. Fyfe added: "The risk to health which this entails, and the scenes that occur at the different places of rendezvous may be easily conjectured."

Indeed, the manifestation of tollgates in Westmoreland might be tied to the historical ascendancy of the primacy of the subaltern political economy, the great profits that were being generated by the Black peasantry.

Black communities of the plains and hills of the rain shadow also adapted to droughts, focusing on export-oriented cultivation (e.g., coffee, pimento, ginger, logwood), instead of subsistence crops. The cultivation of these secondary commodities on the borderlands and hinterlands of abandoned plantations in St. Ann's, Manchester, and St. Elizabeth's parish by Black people injected vast amounts of coin and capital into the subaltern political economy of food distribution, as they were sold to storekeepers in town or ships.[64] Growing numbers of Black people were even breaking their way into the local animal husbandry industries. For example, in Montego Bay, Edward Underhill knew a formerly enslaved man who had accumulated "some hundreds of acres of land," which the man used as a platform for breeding horses and cattle. The man killed eight steers per week to sell the meat. Over a ten-year period, Underhill claimed the man had accumulated nearly £5000.[65]

Most importantly, Black farmers were funneling large quantities of independent-produced sugars and rums into the port and town marketplaces. These canes were grown in the mountain landscapes in small pieces; the juice was crushed by donkey-driven "John Crow" mills, boiled, and

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[64] W.A. Bell to Hugh W. Austin, January 1, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island Jamaica,* 27. In St. Dorothy, there was a limited amount of coffee picked by the Black peasantry, "to whom it does not belong, owing to absenteeism and non-cultivation; it grows on small properties that once supported an overseer and headman, now left entirely unprotected. Charles Lake to Hugh W. Austin, January 10, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 13-14. Black coffee farmers in Portland parish brought coffee once a week to the port. Black farmers of both subsistence and secondary export crops squeezed every opportunity to erode the competitive edge of the planter classes in these sectors.

[65] Edward Bean Underhill, *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Condition* (London: Jackson, Walford, and Hodder, 1863), 401-02.

refined, usually yielding between a half-barrel or barrel of sugar, if not more in good seasons.[66] At the John Crow mill, "the canes are passed through wooden or metal rollers, moved by hand or donkey-power, and the juice resulting is evaporated down."[67] Edward Underhill estimated that there were no less than five thousand "John Crow" sugar mills throughout the island. One Black farmer he met had access to enough land to produce eighty barrels of sugar a year. Another farmer who was a Creole leader at his Baptist chapel accrued ten acres, earning an income of £12 per farm, and pulling 19 barrels of sugar from the land.[68] R. Chamberlaine saw native Black grown sugar sold for seven to twelve shillings per 100 lbs.—the equivalent of seven to twelve days of time and wage labor under the disciplinary eye of the white planter.[69] In 1859, an anonymous writer to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* paid £2 for a barrel of sugar. White planters disdained what they thought was the inferior quality compared to plantation sugars, but town merchants regularly purchased Black-produced sugars anyway.[70]

Indeed, evidence exists suggesting that some of the wealthiest Black peasants began to see themselves as the real successors to Jamaica's old slaveowning classes. This group was not

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[66] W.A. Bell to Hugh W. Austin, January 1, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854*], Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 28.

[67] Leader, *Through Jamaica with a Kodak,* 145.

[68] Underhill, *The West Indies,* 401-02.

[69] R. Chamberlaine to Hugh W. Austin, January 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 40.

[70] "Jamaica: Condition of the Labouring Population," February 2, 1857, *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 5, no. 5 (May 1857), 104.

necessarily concerned with the welfare of all Black Jamaicans. Instead, their goal was to outcompete the planters at their own game.

As Governor Darling reported in 1860, a rich class of "small farmers, themselves Emancipated Slaves," tended to concentrate on hilly lands once occupied by coffee plantations. These farmers argued that it was not the price of coffee that imperiled their livelihoods, but rather the "present uncertainty of labour," and thus the impossibility of "carry[ing] on with profit."[71] Hence, like any other planter, they entreated government officials to send them *indentured South Asian workers*, attempting to capitalize on the same debt-financed, tax-backed immigration schemes responsible for conserving the sugar industry from total collapse. Middling and large-scale Black farmers encountered similar issues contracting other Creole or African workers, such as a scarcity of coin to pay wages on time and the inability to prevent random, untrusted seasonal workers from combining, fleeing, or destroying property. Moreover, Black farmers unaligned with whites could not easily access the organs of the colonial courts to enforce those contracts. Darling disparaged the idea on the basis of anti-Black racism. He believed that non-whites could not be trusted to manage "immigrants of a different race" without strict oversight by a white authority figure. Black farmers simply lacked the correct "sense of…moral obligations to justify the assignment [of indentured workers] to them."[72]

Most disquieting to Darling were arguments in favor of the legal codification of polygamy. "A member of this class," Darling wrote, used his face-to-face time with the Governor to explain

[71] C.H. Darling to Duke of Newcastle, August 6, 1860, CO/137/350, KEW.

[72] Ibid.

"the grounds upon which…he should have the right to employ his wives in the conduct of his farm."[73]

Perhaps a rearticulation of African labor regimes was at work in post-Emancipation Jamaica, where wives and concubines were principally tasked in providing sexual services, as well as managing agricultural and domestic operations. In Africa, the status of slaves and wives comingled; over time, the stigma of slavery was hidden and left unspoken about as taboo. Gradations took place in context-dependent situations, such as the payment of debt, war, and judicial proceedings. John Clarke recognized such practices from his time traveling in West Africa in 1840. For instance, near Old and New Calibar, he had met "King Belly," who kept 75 women as slaves while calling them his wives. The prestige this attracted "strengthen[ed] his power with surrounding chiefs who bought many of their sisters and daughters."[74]

Of course, the advocate for polygamy probably meant this in a quantitative sense: his claims for multiple wives ought to be respected as a means of increasing his labor force, in accordance with African traditions.[75] But he also may have been making a qualitative claim, insofar as his wives needed to be bound to their contractual obligations—under penalty of debt forfeiture, incarceration, and eviction. The normalization of gendered violence suffused both paradigms. Some Black farmers appealed to whites' sense of patriarchal supremacy to bolster their claims for juridically-enforceable forms of labor control.[76]

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[73] C.H. Darling to Duke of Newcastle, August 6, 1860, CO/137/350, KEW.

[74] John Clarke, "John Clarke's Journey to West Africa," Personal Diary, December 11, 1840, D/CJL/1, ANG.

[75] Leader, *Through Jamaica with a Kodak*, 145. Labor in the form of women were needed in the early twentieth century, Alfred Leader saw women carting the refined sugar down to the markets, usually in old kerosene tins.

[76] John Clarke to James Hume, April 1, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG. Women suffered incredible violence at the hand of men The "2nd or 3rd wife" of a wealthy butcher and Deacon at Heathford Hill, named Purrier. At the Sabbath before

In this context, the Christian missionaries probably played the greatest role among whites of intervening in day-to-day conflicts between Black men and women. For example, one man of James Hume's Baptist parish was expelled from the church in 1845 for quarrelling with his wife, and he was permitted to return to the fold only after "the attention he [showed] her during an illness" served as "satisfactory proof of his change."[77] In 1848, he expelled two men for "beating their wives. Both of them did not seem in a proper state of mind."[78] Years later, Hume met with a woman member of the church "whose head was wrapped in bloody clothes and her face bore many marks of heavy blows." Her husband was not a member. The woman, however, did not come to seek Hume's aid. Instead, "she believed her husband had been set out to his abuse by me or the Mt. Harmon members."[79] The mediation of conflict was not unidirectional, emanating from white authority to Black dependent. Instead, the abused woman issued the challenge, bravely confronting Hume to receive an explanation why Hume or his allies had ordered her to be tortured by an outsider of the church.

The whites labored in vain to convince the Black peasantry that their meager economies of scale and rates of profit were no match for traditional, steady work on the most technologically up-to-date plantations. Governor Barkly, for instance, visited the Baptist congregation at Mount Carey in 1854, near Montpelier, and Salter's Hill, on the road to Maroon town. Barkly tried to convince

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April 1, 1857, he returned home to this wife speaking to "a Brown man…and he threatened to shoot him and gave his wife a severe blow on the head." She ran into a room, locked the door, and jumped out the window to escape. After the Magistrate and police officers arrived, Purrier was arrested and taken to petty court by the Brown man for assault. His wife had no legal recourse except through an appeal to white and non-white men.

[77] James Hume to John Clarke, December 12, 1847, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[78] James Hume to John Clarke, January 14, 1848, D/HUM/2, ANG.

[79] James Hume to John Clarke, February 22, 1854, D/HUM/2, ANG.

them that fewer and fewer plantations led to less labor competition and lower wages. He argued that it was in Black Jamaicans interest to help create large-scale wealthy planters, as the latter were the only agents capable of earning enough profit at scale to afford paying a shilling *minimum* per day to wage workers. Black Jamaicans scoffed at Barkly's trite and cliché suggestion. Instead, the solution was for the state to help make already-existing Black agricultural operations more profitable for the Black population. "The Queen should send instructions to all Customhouse officers to purchase their produce from them, when ready for shipment," a person in the crowd exclaimed. They added that Black farmers should be empowered to determine the price of these commodities "at their own valuation," irrespective of swings in the international market. This was a challenge levied at the Queen, who had the ultimate responsibility "of protecting her oppressed [B]lack subjects."[80] People knew what to say in the theater of power to increase the probability of success. More importantly, by reappropriating the language of abjection, they advanced a tacit insult against white ruling-class elites for their underlying weakness: the failure to make good on their promises.

Contemporaries like Henry Clarke realized that white planters had lost their chance to coopt the Black-led sugar industry. Not even ceding access to land free of rent in return for a cut of the sugar in a kind of Metaire/sharecropping system was doomed to fail because Black farmers were already "the owners of the 5,000 wooden cane mills [and were] accustomed to cultivate canes on their own account." The sugar refinement and manufacturing techniques of Black farmers undercut the technological advantages of the planters to make raw muscavado and rum at profit.[81]

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[80] Governor Henry Barkly to the Duke of Newcastle, May 26, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 50.

[81] Henry Clark to William Bancroft Espeut, March 13, 1878, Parliamentary Papers [1879], *Correspondence Relative to the Financial Arrangements for Indian Coolie Immigration into Jamaica*, 50.

Testimony collected in the aftermath of the Morant Bay War of 1865 suggests that some Black sugar farmers and workers sought to capture Jamaica's sugar export industry in its entirety. For example, on October 13, 1865, as war and martial law were underway in St. Thomas in the East, Richard Cousins claimed that "it was not buckra making sugar all the time, it was black people making the sugar." When Thomas Cousins (no relation) asked him what they would do with the sugar after harvesting and refining it, Richard said "they would send it to England."[82] The next day, John Lucre threatened to kill John Wilson, the headman of the stillhouse for Amity Hall. Wilson had the reputation of being the "'favourite'" of Augustus Hire, the attorney for Amity Hall that had brought numerous suits against Black workers for theft, trespassing, misconduct at work, and breaking contracts. Thirty-two Black workers brought countersuits against Hire for unpaid wages; between 1863 and 1865, only two of those countersuits were successful.[83] Wilson asked Lucre, "'I hear you warrior swear to kill me?'" After Lucre answered in the affirmative, Wilson challenged Lucre with a follow-up question: "[W]hen you kill all the white people what are [you] going to do with the cane and the estate?" "We will make sugar out of it," Lucre responded, "and share it amongst ourselves. We never mind about the ship."[84]

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[82] Testimony of Thomas Cousins, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 424.

[83] Clinton Hutton, '*Colour for Colour Skin for Skin': Marching with the Ancestral Spirits into War Oh at Morant Bay* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2015), 66-67.

[84] Testimony of John Wilson, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Laid before Royal Commission on Jamaica Disturbances by Governor Eyre*, 38, 109. Lucre was later convicted as a rebel and murderer of Augustus Hire. After he and a party of rebels dispatched Hire, they symbolically desecrated it by "dragg[ing] it down the house steps, and chuck[ing] it into a the hole. They would not allow it to be put in the coffin standing at the door."

These examples testify that free Jamaica represented a peculiar spin on what Jean Casimir termed the "counter-plantation system" in the context of nineteenth-century Haiti.[85] Many Black Jamaicans struggled to prevent the resurgence of slavery-era labor regimes through subsistence agriculture and maintaining maximum distance from the plantocratic state. Others, however, envisioned seizing old sugar plantation lands and turning them productive through a combination of free and contract-bound laborers.

The Curious Case of Benjamin Vickers

On or shortly before February 10, 1859, Benjamin Vickers, a magistrate and long-running representative of Westmoreland parish to the Legislative Council of Jamaica, called for local Black workers, tenants, and farmers to assemble somewhere in the vicinity of Frome estate. The purpose of the meeting was not to castigate the Black population for their discontent. Instead, Vickers "spoke strongly against the tollgates." Vickers' caustic rhetoric apparently incensed the crowd enough for his son and his overseer to marshal the "youth among the crowd to pull down the tollgates."[86] Their first target was to be the tollgate at Truro.

Vickers must have been aware that this tollgate was certain to attract the ire of the local community. According to James Robertson's 1804 map of the region, Black people would have had to use the road leading north from Truro to travel to and from the mountains. It appears the only way to evade the toll was to go several miles around it, sacrificing precious time and energy. This

[85] Jean Casimir, "On the Origins of the Counter-Plantation System," in The *Haiti Reader: History, Culture, Politics,* edited by Laurent Dubois, Kaiama Glover, Nadeve Menard, Millery Polyne, and Chantalle Verna (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 61-66.

[86] John Clarke to James Hume, May 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG. The son's name is not mentioned by John Clarke, but it may have been William Vickers, who served alongside Benjamin Vickers in governmental roles in Westmoreland. William also became a judge.

was probably the primary route by which Black communities needed to access their provision grounds and coffee walks at higher elevation. People on foot might be able to risk going around the gate through the bush. But those with carts, the wealthiest facilitators of commerce, couldn't afford the same risks.

Vickers' incitement of the crowd appears rather peculiar. Vickers was ostensibly a respected jurist and one of the highest white ranking officials in the parish.[87] Yet, he was instigating for a mass of Black Jamaicans to engage in an extra-judicial form of political violence. He was an avatar of state sovereignty inciting racial lawlessness against his own masters.

Jonathan Dalby and other scholars have understood this as part of the broader anger toward the tollgates that, in some respects, crossed class and racial lines.[88] Missionaries and whites with ill-designs were blamed for inciting the Black population to lawlessness. Whites like Vickers didn't like tollgates because they harmed their commercial interests and political interests. The planters had to pay for cartage as well, an annoyance that took coin away from paying wages on time. And the tollgates ruined relations among neighbors and caused problems among people.

Perhaps local Black farmers and workers were, in their own ways, steering Vickers' actions. The Vickers clan were the *de facto* owners of Frome estate, through which the Cabarita River

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[87] "Benjamin Vickers," *Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery*, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/22191. Vickers' age and origins in Jamaica are blurry. Before 1838, he had been a resident small-scale slaveowner. He received around £98 for five enslaved people in 1836 as part of his indemnity payment. See also "1839 Jamaica Almanac," *Jamaicafamilysearch.org*, http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/a/AL39Mil4.htm; and "1851 Jamaica Almanac," *Jamaicafamilysearch.org*, http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1/1851al09.htm. Like most whites, in 1839, he was an ensign in the militia, and a Captain by 1851. If Vickers was old enough to serve in the militia, he was born before 1821. See also *Falmouth Post,* May 26, 1874. http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/f/falpst08.htm. At least by 1840, Vickers was busy serving the state as a magistrate. He became the manager and attorney of Frome estate sometime in the 1840s or 1850s. During this time, he also became a long-time member of the Legislative Council. By 1865, Vickers had risen to the status of Custos of Westmoreland.

[88] Jonathan Dalby, "Precursors to Morant Bay: The Pattern of Popular Protest in Post-Emancipation Jamaica (1834-1865)," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 50, no. 2 (2016), 110-15.

flowed.[89] That strategic access to a major waterway helped Frome estate survive the abolition of slavery as a functional plantation. William Gardner/G. Arnobaldi noted that three to four estates controlled the river, laying claim to it for sending down bungies to ships and wharves along the coastline.[90] Canoes and rafts could move from eight to twelve miles upstream, from which the sugar plantations transported their cargos of sugar, rum, mahogany, and logwood to the harbor below.[91] Alleviating the costs of transport helped Frome estate maintain sugar production throughout the nineteenth century; in 1877, 192 of its 828 acres were still under cultivation in sugar.[92]

Black Jamaicans who, at least on the surface, avowed loyalty to Vickers might gain fruitful access to the shipping places along the coast to the east and west of Savanna-la-Mar, such as Scott's Cove, Bluefield, the Cave, and Parker's Bay.[93] This would not have been a mere act of kindness on Vickers' part, but rather a calculated, pragmatic gesture to negotiate a customary agreement.

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[89] See also Josiah Cork to the Bishop of Kingston, March 7, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica,* 41-42.

[90] G. Arnaboldi, *The Tourist's Guide to the Chief Towns and Villages of the Island of Jamaica: To Which are Appended Several Scientific Synopses and Other Valuable Information Connected with the Natural History of the Island* (Kingston: R.J. Decordova, 1852), 15. A thick mangrove wall spread seven miles from town, along the coast and the morass. The Cabarita discharged into the sea. It had two wooden bridges across it.

[91] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Culture, Products, Laws, and Government, Volume 2* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 193; John Jarret Wood, *Jamaica: Its History, Constitution, and Topographical Description: With Geological and Meteorological Notes* (Kingston: McCartney & Wood, 1884), 150.

[92] *Falmouth Post*, April 17, 1877, http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/f/falpst13.htm. William Vickers, who may have been a brother or Benjamin's son, was in possession of Frome estate at the time of Benjamin Vickers' death in 1877, at Savanna-la-Mar on Thursday April 12. He fell into "a fit of apoplexy" during a meeting of the Municipal Board and never recovered.

[93] John Jarret Wood, *Jamaica: Its History, Constitution, and Topographical Description, with Geological and Meteorological Notes.* (Kingston: McCartney & Wood, 1884), 151; Edward Long, *History of Jamaica, Volume 2*, 193.

Black Jamaicans had also proven adept at pitting white missionaries concentrated in urban spaces against one another. The case of conflict in 1857 between Revd. McLagan and Revd. Clark at Sturge Town, in the interior hills of St. Ann's Parish, is instructive here. These two white men were ostensibly fighting for control over the Baptist church—its ownership, its management, and its property. McLagan had been in control of the chapel for several years prior to 1857, and he was embroiled in efforts to retain his position. At some point shortly before May 1857, unknown assailants had clandestinely destroyed his chapel. The destruction recalled that of the Baptist War of 1831, during which anti-Baptist white mobs destroyed chapels at Savanna-la-Mar, Brown's Town, Lucea, St. Ann's Bay, Fuller's Field, Ocho Rios, and Ebury, among others.[94]

But in the case of Sturge Town, McLagan himself stood accused of orchestrating the hit.[95] A substantial contingent of the congregation claimed that McLagan had done so because he "believes in Obeah. … A Myal man says he has employed him to destroy the power of Obeah used [to build the Church]."[96] They desired McLagan's expulsion and replacement by Revd. Clark. From another perspective, however, McLagan's act was potentially interpreted as an act of violent purification—cleansing the land of the old chapel to make way for a new, Obeah-clear, one. Whether or not he truly believed in Obeah or Myal is analytically immaterial; by becoming the vessel for the fears of

[94] Mrs. John James Smith, *William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica: A Memoir* (London: Alexander & Shepheard, 1896), 39.

[95] John Clarke to James Hume, May 5, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG. See also Mrs. John James Smith, *William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica: A Memoir* (London: Alexander & Shepheard, 1896), 39. During the Baptist War of 1831, the chapels at Savanna-la-Mar, Brown's Town, Lucea, and St. Ann's Bay were all pulled down by white mobs. Those at Fuller's Field, Ocho Rios, and Ebury were also torched to the ground. The wide geographical distribution of their destruction ultimately provided strong ammo for abolitionists to advance their case that the future of free Jamaica lay in the possibility of its total Christianization. Baptist missionaries in Jamaica tacitly advanced the notion that they were there not only to civilize the Black population, but also to interrupt the racial lawlessness of whites, who held no religion, kept concubines, and were drunkards. Only then, so the Baptists hoped in the abstract ideal, could Jamaica move past its legacy of slavery, and class and racial harmony be secured over time.

[96] John Clarke to James Hume, May 5, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG.

Black Jamaicans, he became a symbol for the Africanization of the whites. And McLagan understood this. Otherwise, he would not have tried to pit one kind of African-based priest-healer to wage spiritual warfare on another African-based priest-healer.

McLagan refused to surrender the church, however, until he had been paid his claim for back wages of £114. It would take months if not years to save enough money to pay him off in hard cash.[97] Until that debt was rectified, it appears the colonial state would not intervene in the conflict. McLagan remained on station, impossible to remove by appeal to reason or by court order.

A similar situation obtained at Montego Bay a month later, around June 1857. Here, conflict was simmering Baptist parishioners allied with either Reverend Reid or Reverend Henderson, the standing Rector. Both whites were locked in juridical struggles over who claimed not just "ownership" of the Church, its buildings, and its lands, but, more importantly, its unpaid debts. In this case, Reid argued that Henderson's poor financial practices were his and his alone to bear, rather than the congregation and the next Rector. This conflict fanned out into the city streets, as Reid's forces of at least 220 members fought in hand-to-hand combat with Henderson's forces.[98] The final outcome of this battle is unknown.[99]

But by November 1859, back in Sturge Town, Revd. Clark seemed unwilling to employ such tactics of direct confrontation. He had already acquired a reputation as a notorious thief who placed

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[97] John Clarke to James Hume, June 8, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[98] John Clarke to James Hume, July 27, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[99] John Clarke to James Hume, September 8, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG. For descriptions of street violence between parishioners of the East Queen Street chapel in Kingston in 1854, see James Hume to John Clarke, April 25, 1854, D/HUME/3, ANG. For riots in reaction to a failed court trial to replace Reverend Samuel Oughton as the property owner of the Baptist Chapel in Spanish Town, see James Hume to John Clarke February 27, 1855, D/HUME/3, ANG.

money straight from the collection plate into his pockets—the definition of a "mac-hunter." To defeat McLagan, Clark decided to fight spiritual fire with spiritual fire:

> [Clark] offered money to an old Obeah man to kill McLagan and his wife. A group of McLagan's allies confronted the Obeah man, who assured them that "'yes he had been applied to, but he would not injure any of God's people!'[100]

Either McLagan was forced out by a fighting force or he had decided that the foreshadowing of he and his wife's possible murder signified it was time to depart Sturge Town. However, he did not leave alone; 108 people who had supported his anti-Obeah campaign followed him on his exodus. John Clarke recorded that the group was busy purchasing new land and constructing buildings, obtaining financing from an unknown source.[101]

The churches provided the training grounds and practice sessions for how to undertake urban revolt and strike operations without getting imprisoned and caught. And they suggest that Black Jamaicans were at least partially able to bend and twist whites into becoming symbolic mouthpieces to advocate for policies and practices in the interests of the broader Black population.

As we will explore below, Vickers' future actions on the streets of Savanna-la-Mar offer fuel to speculate on his potential motivations for playing with the fire of Black popular anger toward the tollgates.

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[100] John Clarke to James Hume, November 18, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG. "Walker says McLagan was taken away, and Gordon sent without their wishing it—that they were never consulted at that Gordon will only examine those for Baptism, who give him money; and that improper persons have been baptized. That no church accounts are read to the church, and that only to a few does he tell anything."

[101] John Clarke to James Hume, November 18, 1857, D/CJL/2, ANG.

The Battle for Savanna-la-Mar

Before attacking the tollgate at Truro, the rebel army ingeniously concealed their identity so that they could hide in plain sight. Most of the participants were, unsurprisingly, women whose quest for income had been most impacted by the tollgates. Colonial authorities would not have found large groups of women traveling on the roads suspicious; after all, women thronged the streets daily fetching water and tending provision grounds. But men of fighting age also composed a portion of the fighting force. Their presence on the streets at irregular times would have attracted unwanted attention from witnesses. Thus, the men disguised themselves in women's clothing. (This was a common practice of war tactics in Europe. In France, these men were called "demoiselles").[102] As far as colonial authorities were concerned, it would be just another ordinary day.

On February 12, 1859, a crowd of one to two hundred people sacked the Truro tollgate. The next night, they returned and destroyed the tollkeeper's house. They exercised surgical discipline in delimiting the scope and scale of their political violence. The tollgates and tollhouses were the prime military targets. Pillaging and burning of plantations, cutting the tongues of cattle, and taking human life, among other acts of war, were not on the table.

The motley army then marched to the next tollgate, which John Clarke claimed was over eight miles away from Truro. I have not located evidence where each of the tollgates are. Extrapolating from what we know of the diameter of the conflict zone around the Sweet River in government correspondence and Clarke's private letters, this tollgate was probably located to the

[102] See Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

southeast, at a juncture in the proximity of Beckford's/Queen's Town. Like the sequence at Truro, the army razed the second tollgate and the tollkeeper's house.[103]

The army remained intact over the course of the week, marching throughout the neighborhood, until seven tollgates were no more. The users of the Sweet Rive to the west and the people of the mountains to the east shared a common interest in their destruction. Four of the tollgates were still out of commission in late April 1859. We can be certain that the abeyance of those tolls made the dry season gave some relief to communities on the margins.[104]

We cannot know if it was one continuous rebel army, or if they congealed at separate times, with separate participants, according to the local area. The time lag and the distance the army must have covered over the week are significant. Fractions or the entire of the army must have rested and established temporary camps in the bush alongside and beyond the main roads. Hungry and thirsty people would not have been able to march such long distances or fight; thus, they must have obtained logistical support from somewhere. In my view, there were only two ways to provision such a force: (1) neighbors chose or were coerced into providing aid, food, water, and shelter along the way; and (2) the army brought their own provisions, carried by hand, donkeys, and carts. It was probably some kind of mixture of each.

Women were always on the road. In the early twentieth century, "Cooking proceeding by the wayside for the road labourers." [105]

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[103] John Clarke to James Hume, May 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Leader, *Through Jamaica with a Kodak, 31*.

The rioters dispersed and retreated back to their shadows after the imminent threats had been purged from the landscape. If the state had left the matter alone, the rebels would have had no further reason to escalate the conflict. When the state threatened to spare no lengths in locating and identifying every participant, twenty-seven people were arrested, many of whom volunteered to surrender, as Dalby has argued. But the ruse had worked. Hundreds of Black Jamaicans remained unidentified and unidentifiable, escaping the grip of the courts.

The second phase of the war began around March 8, 1859. On that day, Grand Jury indictments were finalized against those under charges of riot and rebellion. From the start of the hearings, Robert Dewer of Montego Bay, the foreman of the jury, exploited his position to stress the imminent military stakes of the trial. As Clarke reported, Dewer had "made a fool of himself by a little of the manner, and Bombast, of the blusterers in 1832."[106] That is, Dewer consciously appealed to the memory of the Baptist War, one of the largest slave revolts in the history of the Caribbean save the Haitian Revolution, to commensurate the moral gravity of that event with the tollgate riots.[107] I suggest that Dewer drew this connection as a way to ensure that the trial commenced *and* that the suspects receive the harshest punishments possible, perhaps to include transportation or death by hanging, depending on what was revealed during trial. It was nothing less than a call for immediate military occupation to safeguard the region from another Baptist War. Clarke intimated that Dewer's position as a Colonel of the St. James Militia may have been motivated him and other martial-minded planters to *cause* war through preemptive escalation.[108]

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[106] John Clarke to James Hume, May 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid. As Clarke added, "But [Vickers] is, or was, Colonel of the St. James Militia, a reckless spectation and at present."

It appears that Black people rapidly spread word of Dewer's false and misleading comments about the limited scope and scale of the battles. Discontent spread all the way to Copse estate, deep in the interior of St. James parish. News that the criminal trial was to commence on March 8, 1859, also traveled fast. Clarion calls for rural and urban peoples to amass and surround the Courthouse of Savanna-la-Mar soon emerged. As Clarke remarked, the clarion call specifically targeted "Africans and others to come to the Bay" in the event "these men [on trial for riot] should…be condemned to any severe punishment.[109] From the surrounding area, thousands of Black Jamaicans answered the call. There weren't any more disguises; the Black population would stand united and tall. Carrying bayonets and machetes, they first surrounded the Courthouse. Reports quickly circulated among the army that one of their own was being held at the police station. Hundreds split off from the main army and marched to the police station. They immediately hurled insults and a barrage of stones at it. The police force, which was composed of 30 or less, was overwhelmed. The police station was destroyed.[110]

Benjamin Vickers then appeared at the scene. On the surface, he attempted to diffuse the situation. To one side, Vickers persuaded the police to refrain from opening fire in retaliation for the assault against them and their station. To the other side, he entreated the crowd to disperse and return to their homes *outside* of Savanna-la-Mar.

However, John Clarke intimated that Vickers' motives were less than humanitarian. In fact, for Clarke, Vickers' posturing was a clever sham. Recall the pivotal role of Vickers in instigating the rebel army to coalesce in February at Frome estate. From one angle, Vickers intervened because he

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Jonathan Dalby, "Precursors to Morant Bay: The Pattern of Popular Protest in Post-Emancipation Jamaica (1834-1865)," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 50, no. 2 (2016), 115.

had lost control of the monster he had created. From another angle, Vickers sought to offer the world a perfect alibi. For, according to Clarke, Vickers was actually paying many of the rioters "money to make them mad," while simultaneously preaching peace, law, and order.[111] Vickers' ostensibly selfless act, putting himself in harm's way to prevent the Black mob from further acts of racial lawlessness, earned him prestige and trust from his white peers. So long as his role in provoking the riots remained secret or unprovable—so long as Black Jamaicans bore the public blame for his invitations and sanction of political violence—Vickers remained immune to responsibility. In turn, we must consider the possibility that Vickers, who effectively played the role of double-agent, actively *desired* to help escalate the riot into a full-blown counterinsurgency event.

The crowd perceived the unreciprocated attack against the police station as proof of their symbolic victory over the whites. Clarke witnessed Black Jamaicans leaving the scene and "laughing at the way in which they had frightened Buckra." Political rhetoric quickly amplified into calls for arming themselves for the coming war against the whites. It is essential to emphasize the ambiguity of the meaning of whiteness in this context. On the one hand, the crowd exclaimed that "one white man" firmly tied to their cause and interests "has three barrels of powder and guns for us." Black people may have understood this kind of white man, whether he existed or not, as worthy of trust because he acted against the interests of his race. (Conversely, like Vickers, this white man could have also offered powder and guns as a means to provoke a military response by the state). On the other hand, the Black masses clearly impugned the whites as a class. "Buckra want to make you all

[111] John Clarke to James Hume, May 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

slaves again," they chanted. Two whites in particular, Dr. Mason and Mr. Whitlock, "say they will wade knee deep in blood to get slavery back."[112]

Finally, people in the crowd warned one another that the imminent war would reveal the fault lines between those for or against the interests of Black Jamaicans. "Run and hide," Clarke heard, "as they will force all of you who go to the Bay that day to turn soldiers."[113] Non-combatants who cast their lot with the whites took the threat seriously. During the military occupation of the region in 1848, for example, General Bell recalled that "a very large amount of the black population have enrolled themselves as special constables, and, I feel confident, with the best feelings." He estimated that they numbered no less than 300.[114] Many wives of the Africans and Creoles left with the soldiers to Kingston, "taking all they could" with them.

Like clockwork, Governor Darling followed established military precedent. He deployed 300 soldiers, as well as a warship, to quell and suppress the disturbance.[115] On March 13, Governor Darling and General E.W. Bell arrived by ship, with the 2nd West India Regiment, artillerymen, and two field guns to restore order in the city and countryside.[116] Over 300 soldiers stood ready to fight in the event that any further designs were made by the Black population against buildings and persons that traveled under the sign of sovereignty.

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[112] John Clarke to James Hume, May 18, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[113] Ibid.

[114] H.A. Whitelock to T.F. Pilgrim, July 8, 1848, Parliamentary Papers [1849], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of Jamaica*, 22.

[115] John Clarke to James Hume, March 15, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[116] General Bell to Military Secretary, March 12, 1859, F. 231, CO/137/347, KEW; Jonathan Dalby, "Precursors to Morant Bay," 115.

No further disturbances took place in Savanna-la-Mar.

The trials resumed. On April 27, 1859, twenty-seven people were convicted of pulling down the tollhouses. Their punishments were not as harsh as one might expect. Four people were sentenced to one to two years with hard labor in the Kingston Penitentiary Six people received six months with hard labor in the jail at Falmouth; nine more did time at Falmouth without hard labor. The rest spent one to three months in jails at Montego Bay.[117]

Another round of trials began for those captured during the second phase of the war, when the rebels attacked the police station. Thirty-two Africans of Clarke's congregation were among them. Only one boy from the Darliston neighborhood, David Barret, was among those sentenced to jail in Falmouth. Unless they escaped guilty verdicts at court, they would not be permitted back into church. Baptist ministers from throughout the entire region descended upon Savanna-la-Mar for trials against their parishioners, indicating a broad and wide geographical region of activity of protest for those who sacked the tollgates.[118]

The soldiers left the area on the same day the trials concluded.[119]

But hundreds of Black people who helped sack the tollgates and descended upon the streets of Savanna-la-Mar were never identified. They took casualties and lost soldiers, but their army emerged victorious.

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[117] John Clarke to James Hume, April 11, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[118] John Clarke to James Hume, April 27, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

[119] John Clarke to James Hume, May 4, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG.

The Battle for Bluefields, 1865

It took until October 1863 for the tollgates in Westmoreland and throughout Jamaica to be abolished. Their removal from the landscape provided some kind of relief to local Black Jamaicans.[120]

But the de-escalation of conflict was temporary. By the middle of 1865, popular anger rose again in the district of Bluefields. William Tait, a local overseer, had enjoyed an exclusive water monopoly, and his water supplies were surrounded by fences. Tate had offered Black tenants access to a small watering hole on the outskirts of his estate. But that was not enough. Importantly, local Black users were not concerned with having right-of-way across Tate's land. Instead, they "claim[ed] a right to [the] water" that lay behind Tate's fences.[121] On multiple occasions, small groups of Black tenants "insisted in breaking down the fence and getting at the other" water supply, the one which Tate refused to share.[122] Perhaps the waters left in the pond were fetid and disgusting; perhaps the waters were too far away for easy access. Indeed, Philip Gosse scouted ponds in the area of Bluefields, lamenting that, for local Black people, "the only [water] resource is a filthy pond, whence the water has to be fetched for several miles."[123]

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[120] "Westmoreland," *The Handbook of Jamaica: for 1883*, 107.

[121] Testimony of Benjamin Vickers, March 1, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Jamaica Royal Commission,* 612. See also John Clarke to James Hume, September 5, 1859, D/CJL/2, ANG. For years, the land and waters of Bluefields had been under contestation from above and below. Clarke unsuccessfully tried to rally the people to pay approximately £220 for his people to purchase 100 acres and a house for the missionaries at an estate 8 miles by water across the harbor from Sav-la-Mar, at Bluefields, near the coast. The estate was not in cultivation, a casualty of Emancipation. But there was no way to get the property due to problems of legal title. Whites were fighting over the property based on ancestral claims and wills.

[122] Testimony of Benjamin Vickers, March 1, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Jamaica Royal Commission,* 612.

[123] Philip Gosse, *A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica* (London: Brown, Green, and Longman's, 1851), 126.

Rumors circulated that a revolt was being planned for August 1, Emancipation Day. At Slype Savanna, an area almost entirely populated by small-scale Black farmers, a large body of people from their neighborhood were planning to attack Black River. They accused John Salmon of keeping money supposedly sent by the Queen to purchase lands and divide it amongst the Black population; as Salmon lamented, the idea that they "'are again to be made slaves'" was rampant on the mountainous border of St. Elizabeth and St. James, centered around Holland and Y.S. estates.[124] In St. James and Trelawny, Black men on horseback were "observed riding backwards and forwards" at uncharacteristic times of the day and night.[125] Adam Smith, the head constable for St. Elizabeth introduced in the last chapter, was kicked out of Baptist and Moravian meetings by local parishioners for spying; over the next days and weeks, numerous people threatened Smith with death. Smith reported that locals were incensed that the local missionaries were stealing their money; those without guns turned to fire, a quintessential weapon of the weak.[126] Around Montego Bay, a mass tax strike was planned for August 1.[127] According to his intelligence, rebels from St. James, Westmoreland, and St. Elizabeth were to converge in the hills and then march down to the lowlands to Black River, torching the buildings and killing the whites, and then moving on to the next port town.[128] Just like 1859, women were to be included in their ranks; when the rebels attacked Black

[124] John Salmon to Edward Eyre, July 25, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW; S.J. Manley to John Salmon, July 27, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW; KEW, Statement of Adam Smith, July 28, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[125] Raynes Smith to John Salmon, July 24, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[126] John Salmon to Governor Eyre, July 28, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[127] G. Philips to Hugh W. Austin, July 26, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[128] Statement of Adam Smith, July 28, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

River, "the women should take at the stores anything they required."[129] People of the interior also pointed to the lack of employment and food shortages "consequent on the late drought" as a motivation for war.[130]

When August 1 arrived, Black communities throughout Westmoreland refused to turn out for work. When W.R. Braham asked them why they had absconded from their duties, "their answer was they were waiting for the law from St. Thomas in the East." Until Braham could ensure they were protected should any hostilities arise, they refused to leave their homes.[131] Following established military precedent, Governor Eyre requested the Commodore Cracroft to round the western coast of Jamaica with two Men-of-War. These ships were to pass and hover off the coast at Black River, Savanna-la-Mar, Lucea, and Montego Bay until the August holidays passed. Eyre also asked Cracroft to meet in secret with the Custos for the parishes of each respective city, including John Salmon of St. Elizabeth and Benjamin Vickers of Westmoreland.[132] Eyre also suggested that the warships "have a little practice in each of the ports," so that "the peasantry know of their presence." Eyre stressed that the "object of the visits of the Men-of-War "should be regarded as confidential and not be talked about, lest Eyre lose the element of surprise.[133]

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[129] John Salmon to Edward Eyre, July 25, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[130] Captain C. Wake to Peter Cracroft, August 3, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[131] Extract from Letter of W.R. Braham, October 17, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica, Part I,* 107.

[132] Governor Eyre to Commodore Cracroft, July 25, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[133] Ibid.

Between August and October that year, Tate repaired his fence. Tate and a posse hid and waited for the party fence-breakers to reveal themselves. As the latter approached the choke point, a gunshot rang out from the bush. An elderly, physically disabled man known only as "A.B" got hit. He survived. Everyone, including Tate, was later arrested. Tate was indicted for attempted murder and was set to stand trial on October 30, 1865. The evidence does not stipulate what the party of fence-breakers were charged with, but it was likely trespassing and the destruction of property.[134]

Thomas Wheatle, the head Inspector of Police, had noticed how few people were frequenting the public places of the towns of St. Elizabeth. Usually, people were at the grogshops on Saturdays and Sundays; market days were no longer well attended. Talk was circulating that "an insurrection among the blacks up in the interior" was underway. A man named Coley, supposedly a deserter from the 4th West India Regiment, claimed to be in the interior of St. Elizabeth drilling rebels and teaching them military movements.

Rumors had long circulated of nightly meetings of Black rebels, drilling with wooden guns in anticipation of battle at the courthouse of Savanna-la-Mar. Supposedly led by a headman from the Belmont district, named Cameron, these rebels met in the darkness of midnight, drilling "100 to 200 of the people of [Belmont] and the surrounding districts."[135] On October 17, Vickers received word from an informant present at those drills that he had been thrashed by the rebels because they suspected him of spying for the whites.[136]

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[134] Testimony of Benjamin Vickers, March 1, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 610.

[135] Joseph Adolphus to Benjamin Vickers, October 19, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica, Part I,* 108.

[136] Testimony of Benjamin Vickers, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 611.

Local Black communities were therefore prepared and willing to use political violence to ensure that justice was served against Tate. If he was not held accountable for the shooting, the army intended to torch the Courthouse, murder Tate and his accomplices, and burn Tate's and Mr. Brooke's houses to the ground.[137] War could yet be avoided, depending on the outcome of the trial.

Vickers quickly jumped to action. A small contingent of troops arrived on the "*Steady*" on October 20, and Vickers mustered the militia the next day. Soldiers presented themselves in arms by ten A.M.[138] A reward of 100 dollars was offered for any information that would lead to the apprehension of those suspected of conducting illegal drills with guns and weapons.[139] Vickers then requested a warship be sent to the station by the October 28 and to remain in plain sight in the harbor until the trials had ended.[140] The "*Fawn*" and the "*Lily*" arrived on scene soon thereafter with regular troops standing by for deployment.[141]

The Friday before the trial was set to commence, Vickers personally visited Bluefields. He desired to swear in as many Special Constables from the local community as possible. Only three people presented themselves for service: Mr. Tate's headman from Belmont; one person from Mount Airey; and one from Macalpine, where drills had been held since the month of June 1865,

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[137] Benjamin Vickers to Edward Jordon, October 19, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica, Part I,* 107.

[138] Benjamin Vickers to Edward Jordon, October 23, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica, Part I,* 108.

[139] Ibid, 109.

[140] Eyre to Captain De Horsey, October 23, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica, Part I,* 98.

[141] Eyre to Captain De Horsey, October 30, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Jamaica, Part I,* 115.

with bamboo shoots and wooden guns. None of them were local to Bluefields.[142] There were others present, "but refused to be sworn."[143] Vickers was dismayed. "In other districts special constables have been enrolled in large numbers," he moaned. But it was clear that in Bluefields, Black people wanted nothing to do with this kind of service to the state.

When the sun rose on October 30, 1865, Vickers and the whites were ready. Contingents of police and militiamen were stationed at various points of Savanna-la-Mar, from the armory and police station to Lee wharf and the courthouse. Vickers explicitly ordered that the police stationed at the Court openly brandish their firearms to warn would-be rioters of the mortal consequences for disobedience. Even "the lawyers and many others attended court armed with revolvers."[144]

We don't know if Tate and his five goons were acquitted of any wrongdoing, of if the Black Jamaicans who destroyed his fence and took his water ended up doing jail time.

But we do know that no rebel army approaching the scale and scope of 1859 emerged in the aftermath of the trial. This is unsurprising. The army of 1859 had possessed the element of surprise and had confronted a colonial government initially hesitant to deploy expensive military forces to quell the uprisings. Yet, as the Battle for Bluefields unfolded in December 1865, Black communities throughout Jamaica had already learned from the example of martial law in St. Thomas in the East the lengths to which jurists, colonial soldiers, militiamen, and Maroons would go to use war as a pretext for laying waste to combatants and non-combatants, without distinction. Lacking a

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[142] Daniel Sinclair to Benjamin Vickers, October 30, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 1003.

[143] Ibid, 1003.

[144] Benjamin Vickers to Mr. Myers, Undated 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866] *Papers Laid Before the Royal Commission on Jamaica Disturbances by Governor Eyre,* 51.

competitive edge to exploit, any potential rebels thought twice about the costs and consequences of further resistance against the colonial state.

Conclusion

Historians have interpreted the tollgate riots as an important, yet relatively minor, event in steering the course of Jamaica's post-Emancipation history. In essence, 1859 represented a kind of prelude or rehearsal for the high-intensity warfare counterinsurgency operations of the 1865 Morant Bay War in St. Thomas in the East. Historians' analysis of the riots is rather simple: the tollgates cost Black people money they couldn't afford to lose. Without recourse to colonial law, Black Jamaicans took the law into their own hands.

But when understood in its environmental context, the events of 1859 can stand on their own. A combination of environmental and political economic factors generated collective solidarity across multiple spaces of wild Westmoreland. The battles that subsequently unfolded didn't necessarily create fertile grounds for an even greater rebellion in St. Thomas in the East; war was never inevitable. Instead, these battles furnished a model for warfare that rebels could escalate in scope and scale. This model was precisely what Paul Bogle's army of rural farmers and suburban workers followed when they attacked the courthouse and police station, as well as killed numerous white men and their Black allies, at Morant Bay. But there were important differences between the events of 1859 and 1865. It is unknown if Bogle intended to attack the courthouse before the army marched to Morant Bay; but those who pulled down the tollgates of Westmoreland marched for weeks, gathering support as they made their way across the landscape. And the immediate military objectives of the army in 1859 ultimately remained fixed to a single concrete political object: the tollgates. Everyone could get behind the abolition of that which extracted value out of all Black people, without distinction. Striking out for lower taxes, political rights, higher wages, and even the

takedown of fences were worthy goals, but in themselves, struggled to achieve the kind of solidarities that coalesced in Westmoreland in 1859.

While the planters lost the tollgates, they kept up their program of environment enclosure. In the next chapter, we will return to the question of the Morant Bay War, in the context of why William Bancroft Espeut helped planters score small victory after small victory in their long-running ecological social struggle to deter the spread of semi-autonomous Black communities *by accident*. Ecological devastation from the 1870s to the 1900s set the preconditions through which the pipe dreams invented in the early 1840s finally bore fruit, in the form of the final enclosure of water resources in Jamaica.

Chapter 6

The Wrath of the Mongoose: The Political Ecology of Final Enclosure

Mongoose say him don' care fe a man who can't tek a chance.

- Jamaican Proverb.[1]

In 1891, Henry Villiers-Stuart encountered "an excited crowd of Africans, men, women and children" and "one or two redcoats from the neighbouring garrison" congregating outside a grogshop in the Craigton hills above Kingston, Jamaica. An "unfortunate mongoose [*Urva auropunctata*] brought there in a bird cage to make sport" served as the catalyst for the public gathering.[2] To build anticipation among the crowd, the trappers placed "a couple of bull terriers" outside the cage so as to "worry [the mongoose] to death." Villiers-Stuart immediately attempted to "save it from the impending barbarity," begging "the negroes who owned it to name their price" for its safe release. They rejected Villiers-Stuart's offer, refusing to "sell it any price, as it would disappoint all the people who had congregated." Then, one of the soldiers—perhaps upset by the loss of easy cash—"hurled [the cage], mongoose and all, down a ravine. The darkies, however, quickly retrieved it." Still alive, the mongoose was repositioned and released to the dogs. Stuart walked away from the scene, unable to countenance the sight and sound of the mongoose's inevitable defeat.[3]

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[1] Martha Beckwith., *Jamaica Proverbs* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar College, 1925), 84.

[2] Henry Villiers-Stuart, *Adventures Amidst the Equatorial Forests and Rivers of South America: Also in the West Indies and the Wilds of Florida* (London: J. Murray, 1891), 219. The "small Indian mongoose" is named in the Linnean classification system as both *Urva Auropunctata* and *Herpestes Auropunctatus*. In this paper, I refer to this animal hereafter as "mongoose" for simplicity.

[3] Villiers-Stuart, *Adventures Amidst the Equatorial Forests,* 219-20.

The event prompted him to query other whites about these kinds of rituals among the Black population. Villiers-Stuart learned that an even more violent practice of mongoose killing was currently in fashion: Black Jamaicans "dip it [the mongoose] in paraffin, set it on fire, and turn it loose to terrify its fellows."[4]

In European discourse, these moments came to exemplify acts of racialized "animal cruelty."[5] Villiers-Stuart saw the torture of mongooses as evidence for Black peoples' innate cultural-racial dispositions to inflict senseless violence upon both non-human and human animal life. Racist white contemporaries advocated for a traditional solution: criminalization, fines, and incarceration. Yet, the apparent propensity of lower-class whites to be drawn into the vortex of animal cruelty was equally distressing. The toleration and participation of constables and soldiers—agents of the sovereign—in gambling, frequenting the grog shops, and the ritualized execution of mongooses alongside the Black population impugned and debased the majesty of the state. Mr. Capper thus demanded in 1894 that the 1862 "Law for Cruelty to Animals" be quickly reformed to include the criminalization of excessive mongoose killings performed in public venues, entailing a maximum penalty of £5.[6]

This chapter probes the historical context and circumstances that engendered popular Black animosity against the mongoose. Anti-Black racist tropes of inherent lawlessness, savagery, and

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[4] Ibid, 221.

[5] See also "Return of the Number of Cases, Civil and Criminal, heard in Petty Sessions at Bath, in the Parish of St. Thomas in the East," Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission on Origin, Nature and Circumstances of Disturbances in Island of Jamaica. Part I. Report; Part II. Minutes of Evidence, Appendix*, 1083-1098. Between 1863 and 1865 in St. Thomas in the East, there were 14 convictions for animal cruelty; 11 people avoided prison by paying fines; 3 did prison time.

[6] *Jamaica Gleaner*, March 21, 1894, page 4. With unskilled wage-labor rates hovering around 1-2 shillings, the maximum £5 pound penalty would have required an unskilled laborer to work for one hundred days to pay it, not counting court fees, time and money expended in travel, incarceration, and the like.

violence against supposedly lesser forms of organic life conceal and obfuscate the location of the mongoose within a broader field of cultural meaning and political economy. The mongoose was a small mammalian quadruped between 20 to 26 inches long, originally native to Iraq and South Asia. A voracious and cunning hunter, the mongoose evolved alongside human settlements, and it was long regarded as the mortal enemy of snakes in its native habitats.[7] In 1872, William Bancroft Espeut (hereafter William Bancroft), imported nine mongooses into Jamaica and set them loose them onto his sugar plantations to kill cane-rats. By the 1880s, mongoose populations escaped the boundaries of the plantations and quickly found new targets for food: snakes, other rodents, lizards, small birds, turtle eggs, domestic poultry, and ground provisions.[8] This disrupted the ecological fabric of the island, and with it, Black Jamaicans' relations with the flora and fauna of the natural environment. I argue that Black antagonism toward the mongoose was rooted in disdain toward not only its deleterious environmental effects, but also the white planters who benefited disproportionately from the mongoose's negative impact on Black livelihoods, mobility, and property.

Drawing on contemporary printed and secondary works, newspapers, and parliamentary records, I use the story of the rise and fall of Peter Alexander Espeut (hereafter Peter Alexander) and William Bancroft Espeut, father and son, as a vehicle with which to situate the introduction and consequences of the mongoose in Jamaica. By doing so, we will discover why families like the Espeut clan were so desperate to climb the social ladder of genteel Jamaican society during the eras of slavery and freedom, not through the production of commodities per se, but by ingratiating

[7] For an excellent scientific work that is among the first to focus systematically on small Indian mongoose biology, see M. Aaron Owen, "Ecology, Evolution, and Sexual Selection in the Invasive, Globally Distributed Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*)," PhD Dissertation (The City of New York, Queens College, 2017).

[8] Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in 1924: A Handbook of Information for Visitors and Intending Settlers with Some Account of the Colony's History* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1924), 90. As Frank Cundall wrote, the mongoose "became almost as great a scourge as the rabbits in Australia or the historic rats of Hamelin."

themselves within the organs of the state and becoming dutiful servants of the *British* empire. Adopting the standpoint of Black Jamaicans allows us to understand that the ecological violence of the mongoose and the judicial and extra-judicial violence of the planter classes were mirror images of one another. Both were commensurate agents behind paradigms of anti-Black punitive governance. William Bancroft's introduction of the mongoose following the brutal violence of the Morant Bay War of 1865 encapsulated the underlying financial and environmental *weaknesses* of the planters, not their irrefutable strength and vitality, in the post-war landscape.

William Bancroft did not intentionally bring the mongoose to Jamaica to harm the Black peasantry. But when he and his white peers observed the harms the mongoose exacted on the latter, they sat back and let the mongoose do the dirty work of eroding Black agricultural power in ways that the courts, the cops, and the soldiers had hitherto failed to achieve. The mongoose's reign of terror continued until the dawn of the twentieth century and World War I, after which time mongoose populations crashed due to a lack of food supplies.[9] By then, the long-term damage had been done to the viability of agriculture for thousands upon thousands of previously independent Black farmers. As Black farmers began to abandon agricultural operations and their land claims in the 1880s and 1890s, the colonial state and the banana plantations swooped into to reclaim squatted, rented, and freehold lands that had been cultivated for generations.

The Origins of the Espeut Clan

In 1816, Peter Alexander was born into a middling class family of white slaveowners at Hope Hill, Jamaica.

[9] See *Jamaica Gleaner,* December 6, 1882, page 2; *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 17, 1884, Page 2.

He and his family were relative latecomers to the game of slavery and plantation monoculture in Jamaica. The precise origins of the family are obscure, but the paternal line likely stemmed from a line of French planters and merchants in Saint Domingue. Peter Alexander's grandfather, Peter Espeut (1750-1796/8), was likely born in Saint Domingue in 1750. He married Dorcas Carter (1754-1817), a Barbadian-born mother, either while serving as a soldier in Barbados between 1779 and 1782, or during their mutual residence in Saint Domingue later in the 1780s. Later, Peter the Elder served with British military forces during their occupation of Saint Domingue from 1793 to 1796 or 1798 (due to his death death), not as a career soldier, but as a French colonial who obtained a British commission as part of combat with Black revolutionaries.[10]

Peter Espeut's son, William Francis Espeut (hereafter shortened to Francis), was born in 1776 and also served as a young man in the British expeditionary forces in Saint Domingue. Francis, together with his father, managed to accrue five habitations and three pieces of land in the parish of Jérémie, on the westernmost side of the island. The onset of the Haitian Revolution and the decisive Battle of Cap Francais in 1792 challenged Espeut clan's dreams for wealth and status in Saint Domingue. Dorcas Carter fled Saint Domingue for Jamaica in 1793, following a train of hundreds of so-called white planter refugees and hundreds of their enslaved chattel property. Peter the Elder died in either 1796 or 1798. Then, the treaty between the British and Touissant Louverture in October 1798 effectively terminated Francis's land holdings in Saint Domingue. Francis had nothing left in Saint Domingue, and he followed his mother to Jamaica.[11]

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[10] Descendants of Peter Espeut of Saint Domingue. http://green.gen.name/espeut/D1.htm

[11] Descendants of Peter Espeut of Saint Domingue. http://green.gen.name/espeut/D1.htm

Francis was determined to strike out on his own as a planter and slaveowner among the new French contingents of Roman Catholics, who had concentrated in the coffee hills of St. Mary's, St. George's, as well as Kingston.[12] He married Adele Perine Josephine du bourg de la Loubert in 1802 at a grand wedding in Kingston attended by leading members of the refugee Saint Domingue planters. She had also come to Jamaica as a twelve-year old child in 1793. Like Dorcas Carter, de la Loubert helped Francis establish further familial and commercial ties with a new fraction of the Jamaican elite, in the attempt to recreate the family fortunes in land and human chattel property. Many whites without British elite status or rich patrons were fated to years of grinding and probable death by disease and misadventure as bookkeepers, soldiers, artisans, and overseers until they could ascend to positions of governmental and economic power. But Francis was able to pursue a career as a magistrate and lawyer. He eventually acquired Hope Hill in St. George. Sometime during or before 1816, the family became the owners of twenty-three enslaved people at the same time as their son Peter came into the world.[13] Appointed Collective Constable in the middle of 1822, Francis oversaw on behalf of the government the seizure of sixteen enslaved people, including a family of mother, son, and daughter, and a group of siblings.[14] The income earned through government employment provided a buffer for the losses and gains accrued through plantation production. The enslaved population of the estate would rise to forty-three by 1828, suggesting that Francis was

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[12] As we shall see below, Peter Alexander's attempt to downplay his foreign *French* cultural heritage in the process of wedding himself firmly to the *British* imperial clique in Jamaica.

[13] "Return of Proprietors, Properties, Etc. Given in to the Vestries for the March Quarter 1818," http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1/1818al12.htm

[14] William Francis Espeut to William Bullock, November 27, 1825, Parliamentary Papers [1826], *Slave Population. Papers and Returns, Presented Pursuant to Address of the House of Commons, Dated 6 June 1825; Relating to the Slave Population of Barbados, Bahamas, Berbice, Demerara, Dominica, Grenada, Honduras, Jamaica, St. Vincent, St. Kitt's, Nevis, Tortola, Trinidad, Tobago,* 508-09.

actively trying to scale up his agricultural operations during a time in which the future of slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean was under attack from below and above.[15]

Hope Hill appeared to have hit significant financial straits in the 1830s. The enslaved population fell to 30 in 1831, by either death, sale, or manumission.[16] The next year, Louisa Charlotte Dorcas Espeut, Peter Alexander's eldest sister, assumed formal ownership of Hope Hill while Francis was still alive. She immediately sold five enslaved people, perhaps to make some quick money to pay down debts. After 1834, she also seems to have kept the remaining enslaved bound to the plantation as apprentices until February 1838, when she received her indemnity payment from the British state of £400 for twenty enslaved people. Curiously, Francis claimed only one enslaved person, for £26. Maybe he was in financial straits and transferred nearly everything he owned at Hope Hill to his daughter in order to avoid taxation, creditors, and bankruptcy.[17] After Emancipation in 1838, Francis ultimately reregistered Hope Hill under his name.[18]

At twenty-three years old, in 1839, Peter Alexander followed in his father's footsteps and began the crawl up the ladder of colonial society. He started as a cashier and secretary at the newly

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[15] "Return of Proprietors, Properties, Etc. Given in to the Vestries for the March Quarter 1828," http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1/1828al14.htm.

[16] "Return of Proprietors, Properties, Etc. Given in to the Vestries for the March Quarter 1831," http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/1/1831geor.htm.

[17] William James Louis (1808-1854), the only son other than Peter who survived, died unmarried and childless, and perhaps was unable to be trusted caring for property.

[18] "Hope Hill," *Center for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery*, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estate/view/16405

instituted Planters' Bank.[19] These post-Emancipation financial institutions emerged to produce paper-money liquidity for planters in a specie-poor environment and to provide avenues for international mercantilist firms to funnel indemnity moneys into the traditional sugar colonies (Barbados, Antigua, Jamaica) and the newer sugar colonies (British Guiana, the Pacific, Mauritius), while charging a premium on local planters to access that liquidity.

These institutions did not generate significant profits for shareholders, however. The Planters' Bank tended to advance only short-term loans of sixty to ninety days. Without these cash advances, post-Emancipation planters had no means of obtaining hard cash to pay Black workers for planting, harvesting, and manufacturing sugar and other cash crops.[20] But planters struggled to pay off their loans, resulting in the inability for the bank to maintain sufficient capital to redeem their own bills. Peter Alexander argued to a government committee that two factors were responsible. The first factor was the "frequent and unexpected fluctuations of the market." The second factor was the droughts of the 1840s, "to which many districts of the island had been subjected, which, in several cases, deprived the parties of the means of keeping their accounts active."[21] The Planters' Bank soon crumbled and closed its doors in 1851, as its bills accumulated in the English metropole and became unredeemable and worthless.

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[19] "Examination on Oath of Peter Espeut, Esquire, before the Committee appointed to consider the practicability of establishing an Island Bank,"*Fisher's Colonial Magazine and Commercial Maritime Journal*, 1842. http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/o/Ofisher.htm

[20] Banks in Jamaica purchased and discounted planters' and merchants' bills of exchange and then balanced their accounts off those held in other banks.

[21] "Examination on Oath of Peter Espeut, Esquire, before the Committee appointed to consider the practicability of establishing an Island Bank,"*Fisher's Colonial Magazine and Commercial Maritime Journal*, 1842. http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/o/Ofisher.htm

The dissolution of the Planters Bank was of no consequence to Peter Alexander. The experience had yielded indispensable social capital in the eyes of the state, allowing him to inch himself ever closer to the ranks of British-descended resident planters and colonial administrators. And, like his father, Peter Alexander capitalized on strategic marriages. Peter's first wife had been a woman of French background. She died in November 1841 and left one surviving daughter, after four years of marriage. Her death offered Peter Alexander a dark gift. Just ten months after her death, he married Marianne Augusta Bancroft, the daughter of the Edward Bancroft, famed doctor and scientist of New World diseases, particularly yellow fever.[22] Nevertheless, the links provided by Marianne must have helped Peter reorient and tie his fortunes to the *British* part of his heritage. Henceforth, it seems the family purposively occulted their French heritage, pretending as if they had been true-born Englishmen all along.

When Francis died in 1846, Peter Alexander probably used portions of his inheritance to secure loans to purchase several properties, including Dover Castle, a sugar estate on the north side of Jamaica, and Mount Espeut, a residential property in the hills above Kingston toward St. Catherine's Parish. In 1845, he even managed to purchase Sabina Park/Retreat Pen in the expensive suburbs of Kingston, on the grounds of the future horse-racing track.[23]

Leith Hall was his most significant acquisition as a site of agricultural production. Once a sprawling sugar estate with an enslaved population ranging from 136 to 183, Leith Hall was located next to Port Morant in St. Thomas-in-the-East, right along the coastline, a propitious site for

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[22] Births, Marriages and Deaths in Jamaica," *Fisher's Colonial Magazine and Commercial Maritime Journal*, 1842. http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/o/Ofisher.htm. Edward Bancroft died shortly before the marriage, and Marianne's elder brother took possession of her father's properties in Kingston and St. Catherine.

[23] See also "Return of Proprietors, Properties, Etc. Given in to the Vestries for the March Quarter 1845," jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/a/Al45andr.htm. In 1845, after the abolition of slavery, Peter Espeut purchased Sabina Park, with only 35 acres, in the expensive eastern district of St. Andrew.

moving sugars cheaply to trading factors.[24] We do not know how profitable Leith Hall was after Emancipation. In 1847, Hugh Fraser Leslie, the attorney of Leith Hall and ten other estates in the region, reckoned that out of 1,268 enslaved people once working on those estates, not more than 400 free Black workers remained.[25] In 1866, Peter claimed that he employed 200 to 250 people on the two properties, paying people weekly, on Fridays. He complained how he offered higher wages than other neighboring planters but could never manage to secure workers for longer contracts than by the task or by the day. Peter complained that a good cane-hole digger could earn 4 shillings per day in task work, but the gangs refused to labor past earning 2 shillings. "'Go and do another task; it is only 11 o'clock,'" Peter had once instructed a day laborer he hired, "'and you will earn 2s. more, and you will be a rich man.'" The worker's answer annoyed Peter: "'Massa, I could not spend it; why go and kill myself?'"[26]

In 1843, William Bancroft was born into a family of white former slaveowners from Saint Domingue that had ascended the rungs of Jamaican genteel society. They had done so through a combination of state service and proprietorship. In childhood, William Bancroft must have enjoyed the benefits of his father's and mother's lavish lifestyle. Their home had goggles of domestic servants and many more working outside than were ever really needed. Many of the workers at Leith Hall lived on the estate; Peter Alexander offered them a house and garden "free" as a customary

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[24] Peter apparently purchased the land from Robert Taylor, the second cousin of Simon Taylor, arguably among the richest and largest enslavers in late eighteenth-century Jamaica.

[25] Testimony of High Fraser Leslie, November 10, 1847, Parliamentary Papers [1847-48], *Seventh Report from the Select Committee on Sugar and Coffee Planting; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, 167. See also Parliamentary Papers [1852-53], *Sugar Growing Colonies: Return to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 16 November 1852; for copies or Extracts of Despatches relative to the Condition of the Sugar Growing Colonies (in Continuation of Parliamentary Paper, no. 624, part I. (British Guiana), of Session 1851*, *Part II. Jamaica*, 36. James Heighhengton was the employer listed in 1851.

[26] Testimony of Peter Espeut, January 31, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 95.

privilege but charged them five dollars an acre for land. This kept them bound and dependent upon the plantation for work.[27] His mother organized social events in Kingston among the Jamaican elite. When he was of age, William Bancroft's parents sent him to be educated at Ipswich in England.

Peter Alexander's government income and connections to government benefactors floated his unprofitable planting operations and opulent parties.[28] He began his official government journey as an Official Assignee for the County of Middlesex, assisting in seizing and distributing the bankrupt's assets to the creditors. Peter therefore must have traveled widely to diverse places around the county, speaking with hundreds of broke and destitute planters, bitter over the ruin of their family fortunes by the abolition of slavery in 1838 and the market and meteorological volatilities of the 1840s and 1850s. By the early 1860s, Peter was promoted to Assignee for the County of Cornwall, where sugar production had remained profitable after Emancipation. This position served as a direct pathway into higher positions in the government.[29] He advanced up to the House of Assembly, representing Kingston, for a number of years, until being elected to represent St. John in the Vale until 1866. He also held commissions of the Peace for several parishes as an on-the-ground law enforcement authority.[30]

Peter Alexander acquired a notorious reputation among Black Jamaicans in St. Thomas in the East as an arch-incarcerator and a master of extracting money and time from the population. For example, he hauled Charles McLean and Mary Thompson off to court in 1864 for stealing coconuts;

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[27] Ibid, 95.

[28] *Jamaica Gleaner,* June 17, 1868. As will discuss below, Peter Alexander died bankrupt.

[29] *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 13, 1868.

[30] Ibid.

they were fined 40 shillings, plus 8 shillings 6 pence court costs, and sent to jail for 30 days, in the event of default. He ensured that Simon Noble and Benjamin Mackenzie were fined 5 shillings for the same offence; when they failed to pay the fine, they did a month in prison. Such steep penalties reflected not just the ruthlessness of colonial law, but the criminalization of articles necessary for water provisioning. As we saw in the last chapter, coconuts, especially on the coastal regions, were among the few sources of water that Black people could reliably obtain through hunter-gathering operations during both the dry and wet seasons.

Upon his completion of education in 1860, William Bancroft returned to Jamaica. Like his father had done, he took up employment as a banker in the Colonial Bank of Kingston. William Bancroft readily secured relatively prestigious positions, given his young age. By May 1861, he was appointed clerk to the Agent General. Sometime before 1865, he worked directly for the Executive Committee Office and Colonial Secretariat, probably as a clerk.[31]

On the surface, the Espeut clan appeared to have advanced farther in the post-Emancipation political environment than they had ever achieved during the days of slavery. The bases of white rule and Peter Alexander's wealth in land would soon be tested by the Morant Bay War.

The Sins of the Father

On October 11, 1865, in St. Thomas in the East, Paul Bogle, independent farmer and Native Baptist preacher from the mountains above Morant Bay, led a force of several hundred to the Morant Bay courthouse. Like the battle for Savanna-la-Mar in 1859, they were determined to ensure that a boy standing trial for trespassing was released, along with others currently trapped in the

[31] William Bancroft Espeut to William Hicks Beach, April 17, 1878, Parliamentary Papers [1878], *Correspondence relative to the Financial Arrangements for Indian Coolie Immigration into Jamaica*, 35.

district prison of the town for the same infraction. Baron von Ketelholdt mustered the police and members of the militia to surround the courthouse. The chants of loud and proud Black protestors spooked the soldiers, who shot first. After the gunfire, seven of Bogle's forces lay dead. The rebel army went on the offensive. In the aftermath, eleven soldiers and eight civilians (including Baron von Ketelholdt, the Custos) were killed, along with eighteen civilians seriously wounded.[32] The first battles of the insurgency panics of 1865 had occurred not occurred in western Jamaica—where colonial authorities anticipated war—but in eastern Jamaica.

The event marked an inflection point in the fortunes of both the Espeut clan and Jamaica at large. William Bancroft's father and half-brother would play crucial roles in scattering the screams, blood, and corpses of "disloyal" Black Jamaicans upon the lands of Leith Hall and the coastline of St. Thomas in the East.

The next day, the rebel army fanned out throughout St. Thomas in the East and Portland. Among their first targets was Leith Hall, which the rebels attacked on October 12, 1865.[33] The rebels must have known that Leith Hall was Peter Alexander's property. They managed to sack some of stores and houses; a prisoner captured later that month had books in his possession belonging to Peter Alexander, which likely ensured the man received a sentence of death.[34] The cane fields were left untouched. Peter slipped away from his duties to visit Leith Hall around October 30. He noticed the neighborhood had been depopulated of whites, except for those engaged in regular army, militia, and judicial operations. Many of the overseers and bookkeepers had fled as well. In turn, Black

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[32] Captain Horsey to James Hope, October 22, 1865, ADM/128/48, KEW.

[33] G.D. Ramsay to Colonel Hunt, January 1, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866] *Papers Laid Before Commission on Jamaica Disturbances by Governor Eyre*, 84.

[34] The *Daily Gleaner*, October 19, 1865., http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/g/Glean85.htm

workers were in danger of being murdered as *a priori* combatants if they left their homes. Cultivation on Leith Hall had therefore ground to a standstill.[35]

Peter Alexander was among five whites, seven coloured members, and six people of Jewish descent mustered to a council of war on October 13. At this meeting, John Clarke claimed that evidence was presented of George William Gordon's incendiary letters threatening the lives of Governor Eyre, Peter Espeut, and Baron von Ketelholdt by name.[36] Some members of the council were anxious to install martial law in Kingston and to prepare the commercial capital for imminent siege. But as this would interfere with trade and commerce, the council decided against it.[37] Following the declaration of martial law, Peter Alexander accompanied Governor Eyre as his adjutant to sail from Kingston to Morant Bay to secure the territory.

Upon their arrival, Peter Alexander, as a Captain in the militia, was tasked with overseeing court martials over suspected rebels. His first case was against four to five persons suspected of rebellion. Peter then steamed with Eyre and soldiers toward Port Antonio to hear more court martials. He stayed there for over a week sentencing rebels to death, transportation, and flogging. He stayed in Kingston on October 20 and went again to Morant Bay on November 6 to hear more court martials.[38] Peter Alexander thus oversaw the executions of tens to hundreds of people. Most

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[35] Testimony of Peter Espeut, January 31, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 95. "A good many of them [Black workers]," Espeut complained, "came up to me and reported that they had nothing to do."

[36] James Hume to John Clarke, Feb 5, 1866, D/CJL/3, ANG.

[37] Testimony of Henry Westmoreland, March 13, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 860.

[38] Testimony of Peter Espeut, January 31, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 95. See also Brigadier General Nelson to Major General O' Connor, October 22, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Copy or Extracts of Correspondence between the Horse Guards and General O'Connor on the Conduct of Military Officers during the recent Deplorable Occurrences in Jamaica*, 12. Brigadier General Nelson praised Peter Alexander's ability to hold court martials "from 8 A.M. till dusk." See also Daily Gleaner, October 20, 1865, http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/g/Glean85.htm.

of those convicted, he later recounted, were small-scale settlers who never worked for the local sugar estates around York, Stony Gut, John's River, Bedford Town, Bath, Manchioneal, and throughout the Plantain Garden River district.[39] He was a ruthless judge. Many whites, including the Attorney General, for example, asked Peter Alexander to reverse a judgment of death for the first woman convicted of rebellion by court martial to transportation. He refused, and the woman was swiftly hung at the gallows.[40]

Several of Peter Alexander's workers at Leith Hall were caught in the violence of counterinsurgency. Leith Hall served as a military headquarters and barracks for the occupying soldiers, and it was designated as the official site of extra-judicial and judicial punishments for suspected rebels in the region of Port Morant. Flemming, Peter's head-still man for 15 years, was the first man executed at Port Morant.[41] The bookkeeper for Leith Hall, Peter Junior, classified as a "brown" man in the JRC files, Peter Alexander's (illegitimate) son and William Bancroft's half-brother, was an eager participant in the violence. For instance, Susanna Bennett, complained to her employer John Woodrow, an ally of the Espeuts and their overseer, Mr. Smith, about 10 shillings back wages owed to her. Soon enough, she was dragged to Leith Hall, where Peter Junior ordered Bennett to receive 100 lashes upon her body.[42] On another occasion, Peter Junior oversaw the

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George William Gordon was tried on the 21st and executed the next day, but Peter Alexander was not present during these events.

[39] Testimony of Peter Espeut, January 31, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 96.

[40] Ibid, 96.

[41] Ibid, 96.

[42] Testimony of Susanna Bennett, February 5, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 176. Dr. Richard George Banon and Dr. Edward Leslie Phillippo disputed the claim that she had been whipped 100 times due to lack of

hanging of a rebel, but the noose slipped and the man fell to the ground; he immediately "took a pistol and put it to the man's head, and blew his brains out."[43] He also had old simmering scores with his adversaries. The mistress of Peter Junior was flogged for having taken 6 shillings to procure Obeah amulets to "to tempt young Mr. Espeut…to do some evil to him, whether to love him or to kill him."[44] John Lewis, a master carpenter employed by Peter Alexander. to repair his house, was later arrested, tried, and shot by the Maroons, under charges that Lewis was an Obeahman.[45]

Peter Alexander continued to lay down sentences of death, transportation, imprisonment, and corporal punishment at court trials until the middle of November. By that point, at least 430 Black Jamaicans had been murdered and 1000 homesteads burned to the ground by the colonial army. We will never know how much more property was stolen, destroyed, or otherwise wasted in the process.

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After the cessation of martial law, the imperial government measured the cost of mustering the colonial armies and the damage done to white men and women's property. Only after did they turn to gauge the cost of Black life. The British empire, which postured as the most humanitarian colonizer of Europe, looked like genocidal buffoons incapable of governing non-white populations. The Morant Bay War of 1865 deeply worried metropolitan and royal elites concerned with public

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evidence on her shoulders and back from the cat-o-nine tails. See also Testimony of Mary Williams, February 24, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission*, 549.

[43] Testimony of John Collins, February 10, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 255.

[44] Testimony of John Briscoe, March 23, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 1030.

[45] Testimony of John Collins, February 10, 1866, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Royal Commission,* 258.

backlash at home in the event of future counterinsurgency operations in Jamaica. The Jamaica Royal Commission of 1866 debated whether Governor Eyre (and his most trusted sycophants, including Peter Alexander) should be held criminally liable for the gross excesses of the war. His career was over, but he escaped formal punishment. By 1872, the British government agreed to pay off the court costs he accrued defending himself from criminal trials for murder and civil trials for damages and restitution.[46] Thirty rebels tried by the ordinary criminal courts, including at least seven women, who rotted away in prison with life sentences, were not granted amnesty until 1884.[47]

Ultimately, the debate about Eyre as either a genocidal madman or a faithful, patriotic hero turned him into an anti-hero of sorts. Most metropolitan observers agreed that killing rebels and destroying property had to happen in any event; it was the quantity and the scale that were at issue. What choice did Eyre have, Lord Carnavon argued, given the demographic imbalance of Black people over whites 20 to 1? Whites feared that the violence of revolutionary war from below imperiled the sanctity of white men's lives and white women's chastity; Victorian ideals of racial hierarchy and gender had been at stake. "A moment's success to the rebels might have put the life of every white man and the honor of every white woman at the mercy of furious mobs of savage negroes," Lord Carnavon avowed. The perils of racialized and gendered warfare left no room for mercy. While anti-Eyre intellectuals "complain[ed] of the flogging of black women," they ignored that Eyre was acting to protect "the honor and the lives of white women."[48]

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[46] "Supply: Mr. Eyre's Expenses," *The Jamaica Times*, July 9, 1872, PHL/2/31, MAR. The Council for Jamaica voted to give £8472 to aid in Eyre's defense costs and pay him for damages to reputation.

[47] "The Morant Bay Riot of 1865," *Falmouth Standard and Gazette and Jamaica General Advertiser*, March 21, 1884.

[48] Unnamed Author, "The Negro Riot in St. Thomas in the East, Otherwise Called Erroneously the 'Jamaica Rebellion," MS 1828, JNL.

But the colonial state learned a valuable lesson from the war: Home Rule in a majority Black country was untenable. On one side, Home Rule empowered paranoid white legislative authorities to use the state-power toward counter-revolutionary ends, thereby escalating every minor conflict into a cause for full-scale military occupation.[49] On the other side, Home Rule opened the halls of the House of Assembly and coveted Vestry positions to radical Black fractions and their brown and white allies through traditional voting mechanisms, raising the specter of revolutionary war, in the key of Haiti. Metropolitan elites thus agitated for Jamaica to become a Crown Colony, and Jamaica's House of Assembly voted to dissolve itself in 1866.

Nevertheless, Peter Alexander's reputation and professional standing benefited from his dutiful conduct in the war. After the death of Baron von Ketelholdt, he took over the position of Custos of Saint Thomas in the East.[50] By 1868, Peter Alexander rose to the position of the Island Sheriff, a new position which replaced the powerful Provost-Marshal-Genera, the senior head of the entire military police for the colony. It was one more step toward obtaining a direct position in the Colonial Office and imperial government. Peter Alexander's advancement was predicated on the blood of Black Jamaicans dripping from every execution order he had signed.

But Peter Alexander soon fell into a strange illness. He initially recovered, but the disease kept resurging in waves and cycles, like malaria. He left the island on June 6, 1868, on a trip to convalesce in the Windward Islands and Barbados. He returned early on June 12, thinking himself cured. Two days later, Peter Alexander was dead.[51]

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[49] See also Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in the Past and Present* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1896), 114.

[50] *Jamaica Gleaner*, March 4, 1867, http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/g/gleaner8.htm; Daily Gleaner, June 13, 1868.

[51] *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 14, 1868. http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/g/glean19.htm

Then, the family learned that their esteemed banker, planter, statist, and soldier father had died flat broke, leaving less than nothing to show for his fifty-two years of life. His creditors emerged from the shadows and seized everything he owned to terminate his unpaid debts. In the end, there weren't any assets left for Marianne Bancroft to inherit.[52] By 1873, Retreat Pen was up for sale, and it took until November 1879 for someone to purchase it. Marianne Bancroft and her unmarried daughters left for England. Had it not been for William Bancroft's uncle paying an annuity to Marianne, she would have been left destitute.

Nine Mongooses

In the aftermath of the war and his father's death, William Bancroft left his position with the colonial government in 1869.[53] He did so with the knowledge that there wouldn't be any inheritance with which to build his independent wealth anew in Jamaica, his home.

But Peter Alexander's creditors couldn't take everything from him. He imparted his descendants with an abstract, socially indispensable, bit of social capital: an esteemed name in public discourse among the most powerful white residents of Jamaica. William Bancroft set out to combine the force of that name with the networks he built as a banker and colonial official in his new post-war career, the most traditional of white men's industries: sugar.

In 1870, William Bancroft purchased his first and last plantations, Spring Garden and Chepstow, in the heart of the Plantain Garden River district, where his father and half-brother had helped prosecute martial rampage five years prior. He purchased his estate and improved its

[52] *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 17, 1868.

[53] Anthony Musgrave to Michael Hicks Beach, May 8, 1878, Parliamentary Papers [1878-79], *Correspondence Relative to the Financial Arrangements for Indian Coolie Immigration into Jamaica*, 34.

technologies exclusively on credit; his production of 300 tons of sugar annually was subject to a £15,000 mortgage, at a ten percent interest rate.[54] The lands upon which William Bancroft would cultivate cash crops had been fertilized with the blood of the Black Jamaicans killed in the Morant Bay War and the ashes of their homes and property.

It was an inopportune time to enter the sugar industry. The extent of arable land planted in sugar was at a low point. In 1872, an anonymous planter in St. Thomas in the East claimed that only 75 square miles were cultivated in cane. Jamaica provided a paltry 3% of total sugar consumption in the United Kingdom; most of the produce went to the United States, under financial arrangements decidedly skewed against the planters. 4,608 Coolies performed the year-round work on still-functioning estates. About 42,000 Black Jamaicans continued to work casually in the sugar industry, at an average wage rate of nine pence per day. Children were commonly employed and expected to perform the equivalent work of an adult Coolie, while earning only three to four and a half pence per day. William Bancroft followed this trend but became a stalwart advocate for completely replacing Creole labor with Coolie labor. "Cultivation cannot long be continued without Coolies," Bancroft argued, "as the natives are either engaged in banana culture or steeped in indolence."[55]

Shifts in the international markets for agricultural commodities further disinclined Black Jamaicans to participate in the sugar industry. The cessation of the U.S. Civil War had restored of maritime circuits of trade, allowing Black farmers to keep exporting their sugar and non-sugar commodities. Then, in 1867, the inception of the fruit export trade, particularly in oranges and bananas, introduced a contingency into the subaltern political economy, boosting the availability and

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[54] Ibid, 34.

[55] William Bancroft Espeut to Colonial Secretary, August 26, 1878, Parliamentary Papers [1878], *Correspondence Relative to the Financial Arrangements for Indian Coolie Immigration into Jamaica*, 100.

supply of coin and capital passing between Black Jamaicans' hands. By the early 1870s, this upward trend escalated in scale and scope through the shipping operations of Lorenzo Dow Baker's Boston Fruit Company and several smaller, yet viable, British and American fruit distributors, to export fruits cultivated at the time exclusively by Black Jamaicans.

The fruit trade was significant because it funneled coin into Black Jamaicans' pockets and because it provided an outlet for foodstuffs that had hitherto held little economic value outside of local trade networks. Sweet fruits were prized for their flavor, vitamins, and minerals, but they were not as essential to Black health as carbohydrates (yams) and proteins (fish and meats). The potential supply shocks of fruits in the local markets due to increased exports would not have represented the same kind of threat that the loss of staple carbohydrates and proteins did. Fruits that once supplemented Black diets now served as an outlet for significant income generation, depending on circumstances. Dock workers, transporters, and the like also benefited from the extra money offered by the increase in shipping traffic.

However, Anthony Musgrave, Governor of Jamaica from 1877 to 1883, found William Bancroft an annoying alarmist. William Bancroft had complained incessantly in writing to multiple Governors that the fault of Jamaica's hardships lay not with the planters or the metropole per se, but with the figures the imperial government installed in Jamaica. They pretended as if the colony was peaceful and prosperous, while withholding vital moneys for the planters to acquire indentured Coolie workers. He rose the alarm, too, that the danger of another Morant Bay War was imminent.[56] But William Bancroft was simply following the lead of his planter peers. In 1870, rumors of a planned insurrection in response to a wave of evictions prompted Governor Grant to task state authorities in St. Thomas in the East with informing Black communities that he intended to repeat

[56] Ibid, 100-01.

Eyre's counterinsurgency ethos, should state authorities encounter any armed resistance.[57] In 1875, warships and police reinforcements were deployed to steam off the coast of Morant Bay, Holland Bay, and Manchioneal, on account of rumors that Black communities were holding secret public meetings and drills to revolt on Good Friday in resistance to the depredations of tax collectors.[58] Additional reports that Black people provided freshly sharpened cutlasses to Coolie workers at Duckenfield estate to help in the war effort further added to the anxieties of local planters.[59]

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William Bancroft's first years as a sugar planter had been consumed not by concerns over labor, but by a perennial, endemic environmental pest: the scourge of the cane rat.[60]

The rodent contagion had stymied his profits, irrespective of labor fluctuations. Throughout the year, the rats gnawed at the base of the canes, resulting in "many acres being altogether destroyed, and the canes rendered unfit for manufacture."[61]

Two additional features of the post-Emancipation environment enhanced the financial costs exacted by the cane rats. First, the destructiveness of cane-rats was highest when the sugar canes

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[57] Governor Grant to Colonial Secretary, July 18, 1871, CO/441/13/7, KEW.

[58] W. Demarcado to Frasionier, March 21, 1875, CO/137/479, KEW; Captain Mauwaring to William Grey, March 22 and 23, 1875, CO/137/479, KEW.

[59] H. Hague to Collector General of St. Thomas in the East, March 22, 1875, CO/137/479, KEW. Hague claimed that he had not encountered any troubles collecting taxes at the estates he had visited.

[60] See also James Hume to John Clarke, November 20, 1847, D/HUM/2, ANG. Cane rat infestations were not new. In 1847, James Hume complained how rats "running around in all directions and jumping on the bed" preventing him from sleeping well at night.

[61] William Bancroft Espeut, "Letter to the Editor of the 'Sugar Cane,' August 3, 1877," *The Sugar Cane: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Interests of the Sugar Industry, Volume IX* (Manchester: Galt & Co., Publishers, 1877), 543-44.

were small and weak due to drought conditions.[62] Second, it was expensive to clear cane pieces of cane rat infestations, only for their populations to resurge in the future. William Bancroft lamented how the task required weekly outlays of money, which "often exceeded £7 and £8." He calculated this must cost the average estate at least "£200 to £300" per year."[63] When Black fieldhands earned, on average, no more than 1 shilling to 1 shilling 6 pence per day, these expenses amounted to approximately 5,400 to 6,000 workdays that planters could have paid to labor in hard cash (and these expenses were independent of the decreased yields as a result of the rats). In turn, Black trappers, aided by dogs they trained for the purpose of hunting, dominated the rat extermination industry. Thus, the planters alone were effectively financing an entire sector of the subaltern political economy, offering a way for hundreds if not thousands of Black people to substitute backbreaking sugar work for careful bounty hunting.[64]

William Bancroft averred he was "driven nearly crazy in vain efforts to overcome such an enemy."[65]

Bessie Adele, who married William Bancroft in 1870, swooped in to save her new husband's degraded sanity. As a young girl, she had traveled often with her British father, Colonel Armit, as

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[62] Parliamentary Papers [1884], *Royal Commission to inquire into Public Revenues, Expenditure, Debts and Liabilities of Islands of Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago, St. Lucia and Leeward Islands: Report Part III. Leeward Islands*, 56.

[63] William Bancroft Espeut, "Letter to the Editor," 545. See also *Jamaica Gleaner*, December 6, 1882, page 2; William Bancroft Espeut, "On the Acclimatization of the Indian Mungoos in Jamaica," *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (November 28, 1882), 715. Espeut estimated that at another estate, it had cost an average of £362 to destroy the rats annually, [but] the importation of a few mongooses would cost only between £20 to £30, representing a fraction of the cost.

[64] Espeut, "Letter to the Editor," 543.

[65] Ibid, 543.

part of his military service in the colonies. On one trip to Ceylon, she had seen demonstrations of the small Indian mongoose hunting local snakes and rats.[66]

William Bancroft immediately requested permission from Governor Grant to import a small number of mongooses for trial use on his plantations. For unknown reasons, Governor Grant resisted William Bancroft's overtures. The latter engaged in "much trouble, difficulty and persuasion [to] induce" Grant to acquiesce to the request over the next year.[67] In the absence of evidence, we can only speculate why Grant resisted the request. Perhaps, like William Bancroft bothered Governor Musgrave in 1878, Grant may have tired of his incessant naysaying. Or Grant was reticent to approve the importation of a biological agent that might entail unintended consequences for the colony's ecosystems. As Peter Coates notes, the intercontinental craze for transplanting "non-native" flora and fauna to novel climes didn't take off until second half of the nineteenth century, in tandem with the same craze capitalists had for non-white bonded "foreign" labor. By the early twentieth century, fears of environmental contagion from "alien" non-human animal and plant life ebbed and flowed in correlation with fears of cultural and social contagion brought by "alien," and we might add racialized, human life.[68]

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[66] Espeut, "Acclimatization," 713-714.

[67] Ibid, 714.

[68] Peter Coates, *American Perceptions of Immigrant and Invasive Species: Strangers on the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4-5; 45-50.

In 1872, Grant finally relented. Espeut traveled to Kingston and finally received nine mongooses from an East India trade ship, the "Merchantman." He brought them to Spring Valley and immediately released the mongooses into his cane fields.[69]

Within two years, his highest expectations for had become reality. Spring Valley was declared rat-free. William Bancroft believed he had secured his canes against the principal environment threat, save drought, that impacted his crop yields. Now, the extra profits gained from clipping waste out of his production process could go toward assuaging the labor issue: paying wages and obtaining more indentured Coolies, especially when public funding for those purposes ran dry.

Indeed, his victory over the cane-rat persuaded his initially skeptical neighbors as to the economic and environmental benefits offered by the mongoose to the sugar plantation complex. By 1875, planters throughout Jamaica began purchasing mongooses captured by local Black trappers. They initially demanded £1 per head, indicating the high value contemporaries placed on the mongoose as a master rat hunter.[70] By 1877, William Bancroft noted that the mongoose "ha[d] extended in pretty well every direction for 20 miles, and, everywhere, is perfect freedom and immunity from rats the result.[71] And by 1884, the government recognized that the "nuisance" posed by the cane-rats ceased to be an issue in Jamaica. Planters boasted that the mongoose had brought

[69] Espeut, "Acclimatization," 714.

[70] Ibid, 715. As supplies exploded over the next months and years, the price rapidly declined 75%, to 5 shillings per head.

[71] Espeut, "Letter to the Editor," 544; Espeut, "Acclimatization," 715.

about an aggregate savings of £45,000 to £150,000 for the sugar industry, just twelve years after its initial introduction into Jamaica.[72]

On the back of the mongoose, the fame of the Espeut lineage spread throughout the colony. News of the positive outcomes of the mongoose for the sugar industry spread throughout the Anglo-Caribbean. The example of Jamaica, "where in a few years the offspring of a few pairs have practically exterminated rats," persuaded colonial administrators of St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, Grenada, and Antigua to import the mongoose in these respective colonies, believing it "should lead to similar measures."[73]

Nevertheless, by 1883, William Bancroft was effectively pushed out of the plantation business. Like his father, his debts caught up with him. John Galloway the Younger and Charles John Galloway, the mortgage holders of Spring Garden and Chepstow, seized the property for the nonpayment of debt after four years of litigation. Espeut had not put a dent in the principal of the loan, owing £21,000 after making further loans. Since the late 1870s, he had also transitioned away from sugar and into the banana industry, allowing banana capitalists to use his lands, which benefitted from its own railway and wharf, both of which Espeut had constructed. The legal imperative to allow the investors of the banana crops to recoup their investment was all that held up William Bancroft's expulsion from the property.[74] William Bancroft tried to prevent the mortgagers

[72] Parliamentary Papers [1884], *Royal Commission to inquire into Public Revenues, Expenditure, Debts and Liabilities of Islands of Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago, St. Lucia and Leeward Islands, Report Part I. Jamaica,* 82.

[73] *Jamaica Gleaner*, December 6, 1882, page 2; Espeut, "Acclimatization," 715.

[74] Petition of John Galloway and Charles John Galloway against William Bancroft Espeut, June 7, 1882, CO/441/13/7, KEW.

from selling off the machinery, chattels, and rum barrels still emplaced on the estates. He failed.[75] Espeut had wracked ancillary debt totaling £2769, £2114 of which was solely unpaid promissory notes he issued.[76]

The Mongoose Feeds

Cane Rats

In the first years after its introduction into Jamaica, the mongoose consumed the cane rats. Easy access to a prolific food supply provided a platform for the mongoose's exponential reproduction. As Allan Eric reported, mongooses in Jamaica bred between six to eight times per year, with a brood ranging from five to ten.[77] Except for humans, the mongoose also lacked predators in Jamaica. In theory, if we assume that five mongooses were female, in one year, William Bancroft's squad of nine mongooses turned into a company of approximately 150. If 75 of these mongooses were female, by 1874, the company became a brigade, with a population of 2,250. By 1875, the mongoose army had become 33,750.

Cane rat populations dwindled on the plantation because the mongoose ate them and outcompeted them for space. But when the food supplies ran out for the mongoose, it had to spread outward, beyond the boundaries of the plantation, to sustain the soldiers of their army. For all his

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[75] Petition of William Bancroft Espeut against John Galloway and Charles John Galloway July 25, 1882, CO/441/13/7, KEW.

[76] "Amounts owed by Mr. Espeut for Spring Garden, Agent General," CO/441/13/7, KEW. The remainder was £343 for indentured South Asian hospital and upkeep fees, £108 for rent, and £203 for taxes on immigrants.

[77] Allan Eric, *'Buckra' Land: Two Weeks in Jamaica, Details of a Voyage to the West Indies, Day by Day, and a Tour of Jamaica, Step by Step* (Boston: Boston Fruit Company, 1897), 75.

posturing about engineering skill, it seems William Bancroft had not anticipated the exhaustion of cane rat populations, nor given much consideration to the breeding profiles of the mongoose.

The mongoose readily adapted to new environments beyond the plantation. Scientific studies suggest that, due to long-term evolutionary factors, the small Indian mongoose prefers, but does not require, cultivated and "improved" zones inhabited by humans to survive.[78] Thus, it is likely mongoose populations in Jamaica followed closely alongside the presence of human populations, where food supplies were concentrated in relatively small spaces. Here, mongooses found new habitations in the "the hollows of dead trees, dry walls, and other such [secluded] places" both within and on the fringes of human settlements.[79] Some planters soon complained that mongooses attacked their personal food stores and food crops yet to be harvested, now that the cane-rats had been exorcised from the plantations. A mongoose trapping industry emerged, replacing the old industry of catching cane-rats. At an unnamed estate, Frank Cundall claimed that over 1,400 mongooses were captured in eight months (this yields approximately 5.88 mongooses captured per day). Planters were willing and able to pay only one pence per head.[80]

Mongooses thus followed the food supplies in two directions. First, they moved from human settlement to settlement toward and alongside the coastline, becoming a constant agent of harassment against the urban storekeepers. "The owner of one of the principal coastal wharves in Jamaica," a letter writer to the *Jamaica Gleaner* stated, "told me that his premises are overrun with

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[78] Owen, "Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*)," 23-43, 58-79.

[79] Allan Eric, *'Buckra' Land*, 75.

[80] Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in 1924: A Handbook of Information for Visitors and Intending Settlers with Some Account of the Colony's History* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1924), 90.

mongooses against which he wages perpetual war."[81] The savings from the mongoose accrued by the sugar planters were thus passed down in the form of costs to the mercantile fractions which bought and sold agricultural commodities from not only the planter classes, but also the Black peasantry. Second, mongooses followed the path of human settlements reaching into the interiors of the colony—where the homes and farms of the Black peasantry stood.

Yet, the mongoose never actually destroyed the cane-rats. Instead, contemporaries bemoaned that the rats shifted their habitats from the plantations to the forests and grasslands, successfully adapting to relatively novel microclimates for the animal. The normally ground-dwelling cane-rats supposedly bred with the common tree-dwelling grey rat in the process of adaptation. With their newfound powers, these hybrid rats took to heights of the coconut, mango, and orange trees, as well as the banana plants. Snakes, whose populations were driven to near extinction by the mongoose, had been the traditional predator that kept any rat populations in the trees in equilibrium. To avoid the mongoose, their new predator, the hybrid rats transformed their temporal practices to counter the mongoose. Cane rats were normally active during the day, but they transitioned toward nocturnal hunting operations because the mongooses plied the ground and the trees by day, eating fruit and other wildlife.[82]

Soon enough, a new blight started killing coconut trees. One contemporary argued that this was not due to microbes or fungi, but rather "the continual soaking of the urine and other excrement produced by the rats," which "percolat[ed] down into the cocoanut trees…[causing] the

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[81] *Jamaica Gleaner*, September 5, 1895, page 4.

[82] *Jamaica Gleaner,* October 6, 1891, Page 1. See also *Jamaica Gleaner,* June 15, 1891, page 3. Mongooses also took to the trees like the new hybrid cane-rat, "eat[ing] the ripe fruit, while…attack[ing] growing yam under the ground." See also "The Mongoose in Jamaica," *The Commonwealth, the Louisiana Planter and Sugar Manufacturer* 17, no.1 (August 22, 1896), 119.

death of the plant and the strong smell of fermentation and rotting."[83] By the early twentieth century, when mongoose populations declined as wildlife food resources dried up, the new-and-improved cane rat populations moved back to the plantation. They continued to exercise their ability to live in the trees. "There are as many rats here now as there were when the mongoose came here," Charles Pickersgell groaned. "They nearly took off my pear crop this year while the fruit was on the trees."[84]

Logically, the artificially produced scarcity of harvestable fruit on the trees probably resulted in less available food and exportable goods for the Black Jamaicans who almost exclusively cultivated these crops. Just as important was the loss of thousands of unripe cocoanuts, which robbed Black Jamaicans of the coastal zone of indispensable water resources during the dry seasons.

Small Mammals and Ground Birds

Animals of mountainous and lowland riparian landscapes—ground birds and small mammals—represented the second group of casualties to the mongoose.[85] Unlike the rats, these creatures did not adapt so easily to the novel ecological conditions thrust upon them. Many of their species were driven near or into total extinction.

The loss of mammalian life to the mongoose may have impacted local ecologies and inter-animal relations more than Black Jamaicans' economic operations. (Fewer small mammals, however,

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[83] *Jamaica Gleaner,* October 6, 1891, Page 1.

[84] *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 1, 1890, page 7.

[85] Dr. Morris, June 17, 1884, *Jamaica Gleaner,* page 2. Morris laid out the case for the mongoose being responsible for driving "Harmless yellow and other snakes, lizards, ground-hatching birds, the interesting cony, and many members of our indigenous fauna" to extinction. See also *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 14* (1910), 226.

meant fewer traditional hosts for ticks, which we will describe in further detail below). For one, the so-called Indian Coney [*Geocapromys Brownei*] a small, short-tailed animal almost the size of a cat, made easy pickings for the mongoose. It had lived resident in the West Indies for thousands of years, and it formed an important part of the diet for the Arawak. Previously it was rare to see one in the lowlands; after the mongoose, they disappeared. However, in the twentieth century, contemporaries noted that small populations of them had survived by hiding in the highest recesses of the mountains.[86] At the same time, the extinction of the Jamaican Rice Rat [*Orzymys Antillarum*], which had also evolved in Jamaica for thousands of years and survived the creation of the plantation complex and competition with other rat species, correlated with the introduction of the mongoose.[87]

But the destruction of the ground birds exercised the most significant impact to Black Jamaicans vis-à-vis their relations with endemic wildlife. Like the cane-rats, snakes had once been birds' primary predators. These animals had millennia of experience adapting to this threat. The destruction of the snakes offered the mongoose a bountiful supply of food in the ground birds which frequented freshwater sites during the dry season—the same spaces Black people traditionally hunted, fished, and trapped wildlife to supplement their own food supplies. Multiple endemic bird species appear to have been driven to near extinction, a significant loss to the Black peasantry in need of supplementary food supplies. For example, birds like the common Guinea-Fowl [*Numida Meleagris Meleagris*], "Quail and clucking hen…have ceased to exist, for all birds building on the

[86] Cundall, *Jamaica in 1924,* 91.

[87] Ibid, 91.

ground have been exterminated by this pest, which if it does not find the eggs to suck, is soon attracted by the cry of the chicks."[88]

Again, local Black communities relied on these animals and the spaces they inhabited for supplementary food supplies, especially during dry seasons and droughts.[89] At the tallest mountains of Jamaica, such as Newcastle, even military officers complained that they had nothing to do; "there is absolutely nothing to hunt, nothing to shoot; the mongoose has eaten up every partridge, as it has exterminated snakes, and driven the remaining rats into dwelling-houses."[90] The domestication of wild ground birds that stayed wild was also fully integrated into husbandry practices of the peasantry. For instance, George Maxwell wrote to the *Jamaica Gleaner* in 1902 that he remembered, "when a boy, the peasantry rais[ed] Guinea Fowl away from their homes, on the pastures all over the country; they are nimble, hardy, and experts at taking the ticks off the animals."[91]

Other birds not consumed by humans were vital for the control of insect and tick populations, such as the native ring-tailed pigeon and the Jamaican blackbird. These species disappeared entirely during the 1880s and 1890s.[92] The Jamaican blackbird was the primary consumer of ticks that sapped blood from livestock and horsekind. Its number resurged only after

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[88] Unnamed author, November 1, 1890, *The Jamaica Gleaner*, page 2. See also Outram Bangs and Frederic H. Kennard, *A List of the Birds of Jamaica* (Kingston: Government Print Office, 1920), 6. Clucking Hen or Limpkin [*Aramus Vocijerus*]. It was common but was almost extinct after 1910.

[89] Bangs and Kennard, *Birds of Jamaica,* 2-9.

[90] B. Pullen Burry, *Jamaica as It Is, 1903* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 45.

[91] Letter from George Maxwell to the Editor, *The Jamaica Gleaner,* January 29, 1902, page 11.

[92] *The Field, The Country Gentleman's Newspaper* 91 (March 5, 1898), 358.

1900, in reciprocal relation with the crash in mongooses.[93] Outram Bangs suggested that only a handful of bird species, like the Whistling Tree-Duck and the Blue Dove/Crested Quail dove managed to adapt the mongoose by fleeing to the highest reaches of the mountains or by breeding on secluded islands of the swamplands, surrounded by water.[94]

In colonial discourse, it was not the mongoose, but the Black peasantry, which bore the blame for the loss of small mammals and ground birds. First, contemporaries simply denied that the mongoose was responsible for any true harm to the environment. Based on unsystematic experiments, they claimed that the mongoose only strayed from eating rats and snakes under conditions of extreme starvation. For them, the wide distribution of mongooses and sustained population numbers was attributable to the continued presence of cane rats and snakes in the forested and grassy spaces of the colony.[95]

Second, contemporaries argued that the extension of Black homesteads and villages contracted available habitats for ground-dwelling animals of all kinds, especially birds that nested beyond the trees. In a Malthusian register, they ascribed the growth of the Black population to the decrease of wildlife more generally. Black Jamaicans were also accused of overhunting the bird population, given the growing number of gun licenses, granted by the state, for people to hunt wild game in the 1880s. This was a government-directed initiative to alleviate food shortages amid the

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[93] *Jamaica Gleaner,* May 20, 1893, page 2 "The Jamaica blackbirds which formerly were as plentiful as blackberries are in the bush down in yonder hollow, [and] are now rarely seen." A Professor Newstead had given a talk on ticks and shown the undeniable "value of black-birds. … It cannot be too strongly brought to the notice of everyone who keeps stock, nor too much rubbed into the minds of schoolchildren, this knowledge that black-birds are tick-eaters to a large extent, especially the Tink-ling. The stomachs of some of these birds in different parts of the Island on being opened, were always found to contain ticks. *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 14* (1910), 226.

[94] Bangs and Kennard, *Birds of Jamaica*, 4, 9.

[95] *Jamaica Gleaner*, September 5, 1895, page 4.

droughts.[96] The increase of wealth among the Black population created a world in which "everyone with means sufficient to purchase a gun can shoot all year round." In turn, the increase of firearms led to an increase of stray hogs and goats being shot for trespassing.[97]

This unproven association between unsustainable Black hunting practices and the destruction of bird species endured for decades. For example, in 1914, M. Hewitt, Secretary of the Jamaica Botanical Society, proposed that "the Government…[must] make and enforce a law for a close season for all birds for a period of three years." Hewitt explicitly included the mongoose as a cause of the decline of bird populations, but he nevertheless displaced part of the responsibility onto "the late hurricane…[,] *the huntsman, and other destructive agents.*"[98] Hewett was, in essence, arguing that a multi-causal explanation for the decline of bird populations which did not center the actions of Black Jamaicans had to be treated with skepticism. His argument was designed to shift attention away from the one thing among these factors that the planters had had a direct role in implementing: the mongoose. Hewitt embodied the environmentally racist pathos and ethos of the white planters. Whites used the mongoose as a vehicle for claiming that Black people could not be trusted with the freedom to regulate their relationships with the environment on their own terms. The mongoose helped whites imagine that Black people, on the basis of race, were like locusts, overconsuming without care for the future, until there was nothing left.

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[96] *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 16* (1912), 608.

[97] Parliamentary Papers [1884], *West Indies. Report of the Royal Commission appointed in December 1882, to inquire into the public revenues, expenditure, debts, and liabilities of the islands of Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago, and St. Lucia, and the Leeward Islands; with a dispatch thereon from the Secretary of State to Governor Sir Henry Norman, K.C.B., C.I.E. Part I.–Jamaica*, 82.

[98] *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 18* (1914), 182. Emphasis added.

And the whites were dead wrong. They could not admit that Black communities must have lamented the deep loss of ground birds and ground mammals because their disappearance ultimately meant less food and more hard times during the dry season.[99] This wildlife was among the few supplementary food sources that the Black peasantry could procure *without necessarily relying upon markets and the exchange of money*. It is unsurprising, then, that the mongoose attracted such hatred and fantastical violence as the symbolic vessel representing the genocide of many wild animal species that Black people knew, cared about, even perhaps loved, about their natural world.

The Tick Menace

As noted above, ground birds were the historical predator of tick populations, which kept their populations in relative equilibrium. In the ecological disequilibrium caused by the mongoose, ticks proliferated to a scale never before seen in Jamaica. Jamaica's ticks were robust creatures, able to survive in the larval stage from 49 to 159 days and in the grass lice stage from 93 to 200.[100] As tick populations grew, farmers tried scorching the land with controlled fires, a traditional means of ridding plots of vermin and undesirable insects. Doing so only shifted their populations to new areas.[101]

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[99] See also Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in 1924,* 89. "The natives used as food, besides the cony or labba, the iguana lizard, still seen in Guiana, but almost exterminated by the mongoose in Jamaica, and probably the mountain crab, which is still considered one of the delicacies of Jamaica."

[100] Robert Newstead, "Tick and Other Blood Sucking Arthopoda of Jamaica," *Bulletin of the Department of Agriculture, Jamaica* 1, no. 3 (April 1910), 148-49. The mongoose was accused of carrying the ticks from parish to parish, but specimens obtained from trapping in the 1900s revealed very few ticks.

[101] Ibid, 148-49.

The ticks soon spread into every grassy and forested crevice of the island, infesting the overhanging flora dotting the secluded footpaths on the fringes of the main and parochial roads—places where Black people traversed when moving to and from their mountain farms. We must imagine that the explosion of tick populations probably deleteriously affected mobility circuits. Throughout the countryside, "One cannot brush the grass at the side of the path without transferring several [ticks] to one's clothes, and to wander in the pretty shady pastures is to incur a penalty which only the most hardy will brave twice. … Children…over the lawns at play" returned home covered in ticks. Contemporaries reported seeing them "crawling on every blade of grass, and entail enormous suffering on man and beast."[102] In consequence, "Planters w[ore] leather joggings when going through the grass. A physician told me that the only way to rid one's clothes of these intensely irritating pests is to iron the clothing with a very hot iron."[103] Ella Wilcox recommended that people "walk [exclusively] along the hard white roads" in order to avoid being inundated by ticks. She employed the story of an afflicted acquaintance as a warning: Her friend had "climbed an attractive looking hillside the day after her arrival and was obliged to lie in bed with bandaged limbs for more than a week."[104]

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[102] *The Field, The Country Gentleman's Newspaper* 91 (March 5, 1898), 358; *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 25, 1893, page 2. The *Jamaica Gleaner* reported that Mr. E. W. Scott of New York city, "who has spent many years upon the Island studying the Mongoose and the fauna… has arrived at the conclusion that it is the most destructive little beast that was ever brought to the country. It is far worse than the rabbit scourge of Australia. Since it has inhabited the island it has killed off all the tick birds, which formerly kept Jamaica free from that insect pest called the tick. Now that the birds has gone the tick has returned and the grass is covered will millions of the insects, and it is unsafe for a human being to walk through the forests or through the deep grass, and the cattle and horses suffer horribly."

[103] See also *Jamaica Gleaner,* August 18, 1890, page 2. "The mature ticks drop off the cattle into the ground and lay their eggs in the herbage…these minute vermin stick to everything that passes through the grass." In consequence, "Planters wear leather joggings when going through the grass. A physician told me that the only way to rid one's clothes of these intensely irritating pests is to iron the clothing with a very hot iron." Peasants would have therefore had to expend more work, time, resources, etc. in multiple domains: caring for animals, normal travel, and cultivation.

[104] Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Sailing Sunny Seas: A Story of Travel* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company, 1909), 44. See also Burry, *Jamaica as It Is,* 48-49. "Far worse than these [mosquitos] are the ticks which render it positively dangerous to walk in tall grass, or to gather at random from the country hedges as you take your walks. These obnoxious insects are the curse of the island; they attack both man and beast. Years ago West Indians roamed around as children about the hills and

The elimination of traditional tick hosts in the environment prompted the ticks to concentrate their attacks on the increasing numbers of cattle being kept throughout Jamaica, in tandem with the industrialization of pen-keeping. "The stock everywhere [were] sadly at their mercy, and one can imagine the patient beasts daily asking the lordly master of creation…if there is no balm in Jamaica for them, no form of death for their parasitical tormentors."[105] On estates by the twentieth century, dipping cattle and horsekind became legally and economically obligatory due to the tick menace.[106]

Of course, ticks did not confine their attacks to cattle and humans. They went after every animal that could provide a blood meal. Like the mongoose, the tick itself could have contributed to the direct morbidity or mortality of poultry as well as the utility of stock and donkeys. Young stock could not thrive; old stock became weaker. If one lacked technologies or resources able to be deployed in an industrialized plantation context, ticks must have impacted how much more time and labor Black people needed to expend in staying safe and healthy whenever anyone traveled through tick country. Taking stock to feeding grounds would have involved risks to the life or thriving of the animal, while perhaps also dissuading the acquisition of new stocks because of the extra constraints of ownership and necessary inputs. Fetching water supplies from areas without good roads must have involved instant exposure.

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woods, gathering what wild flowers they liked, never thinking or troubling about these insects. Now the nurses have strict injunctions not to let the children wander in long grass for fear of the noisome little pests. The introduction of foreign cattle into Jamaica some twenty-five years ago accounts for their presence; since then they have increased and multiplied till they are a positive plague."

[105] *The Jamaica Gleaner,* May 20, 1893, page 2. Like the mule, contemporaries believed that bulls were more resistant to ticks than other cattle, "though we are convinced that no animal is happy when tick infested." *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 18* (1914), 168.

[106] Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in 1924,* 90.

It is impossible to measure in terms of raw statistics what impact the decrease of mobility exerted on the availability of Black-cultivated produce at the market. But we can say that whatever those amounts were, they would certainly have been greater had tick populations not spiraled out of control. Furthermore, as some donkeys or stock failed to thrive or died due to tick attacks, peasants may have also been forced to overwork their healthy animals to compensate. The need for animal-power with transport only increased as the demand for exportable bananas increased at greater intensities and instances across more days of the week than Sundays. The practical use of animal-power (its realization of value) in late nineteenth-century Jamaica was not simply a question of ownership and possession of stock, but the ability to put it to work effectively. Draft animals incapable of work absorbed time, resources, and cash that might yield profit only far in the future, assuming the animal survived.

If tick infestations produced sick and sickly animals, then laws regarding animal diseases may have operated disproportionately against Black communities that relied on donkeys and mules for transport. Disease laws were nothing new. Take one early iteration, the 1835 "Act to Encourage the Breed of Horses, Neat Cattle, and Mules." This law imposed a maximum penalty of £50 for those who placed "Any horse, mare, gelding, mule or ass, infected with scab, mange, farcy, in or upon…commons, savannas, or waste grounds, or in or upon any highway, or in any street or lane."[107] But this was a fine that only the planters and freed people would have been expected to pay, reflecting the intended targets of the law. After Emancipation, the law was modified in 1841 to change the penalty to sums not exceeding £6 if the transgression was accidental and £12 if intentional, thus making the fines theoretically—but hardly practically—affordable by the expanding

[107] Chapter 14, "An Act to Encourage the Breed of Horses, Neat Cattle, and Mules," Section 3-5, December 18, 1835, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Sixth Year of the Reign of William the Fourth* (Kingston: Jordan & Osborn, 1836), 724.

peasantry.[108] Pen-keepers were also banned from receiving or keeping care of any horsekind or stock "which is suffering from any infectious disease or distemper usually considered infectious," and if found among stocks, the animal would have to be destroyed.[109]

During the infestation of the island by ticks, the legal definition of what counted as a "disease" expanded in 1869 with "A Law to Prevent the Running at Large of Infected Horses, Mules and Asses." Whereas previous laws specified only the diseases of scab, mange, farcy and glanders, this law added the category of "other infectious disease," a flexible category able to be applied to any animal that appeared sickly or weak. Furthermore, animal disease laws were previously focused almost exclusively on conventionally defined "horsekind" (horses, mares, geldings, and mules). Yet, the 1869 iteration now specifically named the donkey – the preferred animal for the peasant – as, in this context, included within the category of "horsekind," usually reserved for horses, mares, geldings, and mules. [110] If one's donkey had been afflicted by ticks for months or years and thus looked weak and sickly on the streets or at the market, authorities now had probable cause to harass Black people. Indeed, a common scam was to apply a naturally occurring kind of gum or resin to the

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[108] Chapter 11, "An Act to Encourage the Breed of Horses, Neat Cattle, and Mules," Section 2, *The Acts of Jamaica Passed in the Fifth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Jamaica: Published under the Direction of Commissions, 1841), 5-6. Section 3 and 4 each criminalized the allowance of sick animals to stray into "pastures, commons, savannas, or waste grounds, or in or upon any highway, or in any street or lane…having the farcy, glanders, or other infectious diseases…"

[109] Chapter 58, "An Act to Repeal and Amend an Act, Entitled, 'An Act to Consolidate and Amend the Pound Laws," Section 16, *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Fourteenth Year of the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Spanish Town: William J. Pearson, 1851), 398-403.

[110] William Rastrick Lee, "Infected Horses, Mules, and Asses," *A Supplement to the Digest of the Laws of Jamaica, Containing Those Passed in the Year 1869* (Kingston: M. DeCordova, McDougall & Co., 1870), 36. The penalty for letting a sick animal run was decreased to not more than £5. It would be absurd to believe that the average peasant could easily afford this fee.

mouths of cattle and horsekind, which gave "them the appearance of having hair-worm or mange, [which] prevented their sale."[111]

The new laws also allowed the police to enter any premises or lands containing the diseased animal so long as "proof" of witness by anyone had been made previously. In the event that a complaint was lodged, the police became empowered to conduct searches of household premises without a warrant. In turn, risking an inspection of one's home or plots would have invited authorities to find all kinds of actionable infractions, all requiring the payment of fees and/or appearances in court. For example, pursuant to Law 6 of 1867, "A Law to Establish a Board of Health," government officials were empowered to "visit the town, villages, and other localities of the Island" when deemed appropriate in search for "disease among the peasantry and the population."[112] In the process, if a plot or household was deemed unclean, a missed court appearance cost 20 shillings; the failure to rectify any problem within 48 hours also resulted in an additional 20 shilling fee per day.[113] Health officers were given the power to enter any marketplace (at a time when peasants would be concentrated in a single location) for the purposes of inspecting individuals. The failure to pay any court fees related to disease could result in imprisonment, "for any period not exceeding ten days."[114]

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[111] Samuel Glanville to L. Hoffman, Undefined Day in the Year 1860, CO/140/161, KEW.

[112] Law 6 of 1867, "A Law to Establish Boards of Health," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in the Year 1867* (Spanish Town: Robert Osborn, 1867), 13-23.

[113] Ibid, 33.

[114] Ibid, 45.

The whites did not learn their lesson with the mongoose. By the early twentieth century, Sir Alfred Jones was busy at work attempting to import the starling into Jamaica as a means of controlling tick populations.[115]

Blaming the Victim

In the late nineteenth century, Black Jamaican children redeveloped what was probably a very old game under a new name, "Mongoose." For this game, the players formed themselves into a line. At its head stood the "old hen." They were tasked with defending her chicks—those in the line—from an individual who stood apart from them, playing the role of the "mongoose." The mongoose tried to pick off the members of the line, one by one.

The game entailed the players forming into a line. At the head of the line, a person played the "old hen." They were tasked with defending the people in the line—her chicks—from the individual who played "the mongoose," who was not connected with the line. One by one, the mongoose picked off the back of the line, where the old hen couldn't reach.

The game was laden with symbolic meaning. The line formed an inseparable unit. The mongoose worked alone, a solitary thief and pillager. The old hen was unable to watch behind her back and protect every member of the line equally; only those closest to her had a chance for survival.

[115] Newstead, "Arthopoda of Jamaica," 148.

Like the old hen, it was Black mothers and daughters who managed the chickens of the household, not the men. And the domestic fowls of the Black peasantry counted the mongoose as their most deadly foe.[116]

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The findings of an official Commission mustered in 1890 to investigate the effects of the mongoose offer a useful starting point of analysis for understanding what Black households and cultivators were up against. While offering an extreme portrait exaggerated for affect at the time of production, I believe it can be read as representative of the probable targets that the mongoose destroyed. It also illustrates how this attack on peasants' property and wealth on multiple fronts:

> We find from the evidence that the mongoose destroys young pigs, kids, lambs, newly dropped calves, puppies, kittens…poultry of all kinds…ripe bananas, pines, young corn, avocado pears, sweet potatoes, cocoas, yams, peas, and certain fruits. … He is suspected of sucking the sugar cane; also that he will eat meat and salt provisions, and can catch fish; in short, that he is, or has become, omnivorous.[117]

The tolls exacted on the destruction of Black Jamaicans' food and export crops are easy to understand. More people must have gone hungry because of the mongoose. The mongoose put pressure on the surpluses that could be brought to the market. Even if statistics appear to show an increase in absolute output or circulation of provision grounds goods, the amounts available for

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[116] Gilbert Bowles, *Jamaica and Friends' Missions* (Oskaloosa: Western Work Publishing, Unknown Publication Date, Likely 1900), 39.

[117] "The Deadly Mongoose." *Outlook* 51, no. 7 (February 16, 1895), 287; *Jamaica Gleaner,* June 15, 1891, page 3; *Jamaica Gleaner,* October 17, 1881, page 2. Interestingly, Honorable Q.O. Beckford, United States Consul at Kingston, Jamaica, cited these findings from the Commission in order to argue against the desires of Mr. Vanderbilt of Asheville, N.C. to import the mongoose into the USA for rat-killing purposes. Already by 1881 it was reported: "Eggs are unusually scarce for October. The country people ascribe the scarcity to the mongoose." See also Eric, *'Buckra' Land*, 74. He will grovel away with his paws until he lays bare yams, cocoas, sweet potatoes, cassava, bitter and sweet…and other ground food tubers."

peasants to take to market may have been decreasing on some scales at the same time as a greater number of peasants were occupying land and bringing cultivated crops to market.

Over time, then, the mongoose robbed the peasantry of all the time they had invested to grow crops that may have taken anywhere from one to three years or longer to mature. All the effort and care that paid to one's poultry, a total loss. With fewer surpluses and opportunities to make hard cash, greater fractions of the peasantry were forced to turn toward waged work on the sugar and emergent banana plantations for greater periods of the year. Black households being attacked by the mongoose struggled even harder to meet their subsistence and income needs during the dry seasons and drought events. Many farmers who began to abandon their land claims in the 1880s did so only *after* and *during* constant assaults by mongooses. When the droughts of 1880 and 1881 hit, it is no surprise that many Black farmers struggling for years against the mongoose decided to call it quits.

Less considered are the multi-tiered effects of the mongoose's attacks against the domesticated animals of Black Jamaicans, especially chickens, goats, and pigs, who survived by free ranging in unenclosed spaces for food. "No hen roost was safe from it," Villers Stuart wrote in 1891, and "it also has a passion for eggs."[118] The wide-scale loss of property invited "the curses and detestation of every cottager in the island, especially the housewives whose pin-money depends on their poultry. *They consequently show a mongoose no quarter*."[119] The cunning and elusive mongoose attacked, not in the darkness, but in eyeshot of humans; one contemporary claimed he "ha[d] seen one abstract an egg from a hen's nest, take it up with the forepaws, hug it to its heart, and walk off

[118] Villiers-Stuart, *Adventures Amidst*, 220-221.

[119] Ibid, 220-221. Emphasis added.

on its hind legs."[120] A contributor to the *Jamaica Gleaner* reported that many simply gave up the business of keeping poultry.[121] Mr. E.W. Scott raised the alarm at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, emphasizing how "The poor people [of Jamaica] cannot make a living by raising stock or fowls."[122]

Again, the whites blamed Black Jamaicans for being the architects of their own plight. The root cause of their troubles was ascribed to their resistance against enclosing and cleaning their lands behind wire fences and solid walls. The idea that enclosing henhouses was the solution to the issue intersected with broader enclosure movements that, as we have seen, had been unfolding since Emancipation.

Contemporaries did not call for peasants to protect their poultry because they wanted to safeguard peasant wealth and property. Instead, as one letter to the *Jamaica Gleaner* in 1895 argued, the real issue was that peasants "do not wish to trouble themselves about building fowl-houses and erecting fences; they want them to roam about and have the utmost freedom in their neighbours' properties."[123] Thus peasants appeared not only as both lazy and lacking knowledge of proper, European husbandry methods. They were also identified as a source of neighbor turning against neighbor – in reality, it was the planters and pen-keepers that saw themselves as the superior neighbors. Blaming Black people for leaving themselves vulnerable to the mongoose was a way of

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[120] *Jamaica Gleaner,* September 5, 1895, page 4.

[121] *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 1, 1890. page 7. "The poor cottager who a few years ago, could raise as many fowls as he liked to help him on his way, has now given up the business."

[122] *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 25, 1893, page 2. "Unless great precautions were taken," he added, "some designing person would [even] introduce the animal into this country [the USA]."

[123] *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 11, 1895, Page 4.

disparaging the practice of letting animals and poultry free range for better health and pest maintenance.

Whether or not a mongoose was to blame, it was the peasantry who would bear the burden of prevention and property losses. Tellingly, the writer thought "the mongoose is not without its purposes"—it provided Black Jamaicans with "good training and discipline" to enclose their lands and thereby purge not just the mongoose, but human thieves, from their midst.[124] *The Cornwall Herald* agreed with this logic. Their correspondent argued that the mongoose "must be philosophically accepted as a necessary evil one that must be borne."[125] Why? Because contemporaries believed that once examples of the poorer sort of Black workers and farmers began seeing concrete results by protecting their hens and crops long enough for sale or consumption, others would soon follow.[126] Where the colonial order could not force Black people to enclose their lands, the mongoose would.

The phenomenon of praedial larceny and mongoose attacks blurred together in contemporary discourse, such that one became interchangeable with the other. For example, a letter to the *Jamaica Gleaner* in 1899 stated: "It is necessary to have the enclosed yard to keep out thieves. We get a large proportion of our eggs stolen, not to speak of fowls which the two-legged mongoose

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[124] *Jamaica Gleaner*, June 11, 1895, Page 4. "If these animals are brought in and penned at night a great deal of manure can be saved. … The fowl manure is in 99 cases out of 100, wasted." In line with racist perceptions of black/African modes of agriculture: "It is really more economical for the man with 5 acres and upwards to cultivate by intensive methods the land around his homestead than for him to neglect it and grow crops on lands rented far away from his holding." *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 16* (1912), 641.

[125] Reprinted in *Jamaica Gleaner*, July 10, 1895, page 15.

[126] *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 1, 1890. page 7.

carry off."[127] "From the mountain tops to the plains, people – the lowest, diligent people who are the mainstay of the land, are plagued and pestered and suffer heavy loss from thieves who laugh at the little the law does to check them."[128] Perceptions of stark increases in theft, but a lack of proof as to the true culprit, only prompted contemporaries to call for an even greater enforcement of the law.[129] When people did enclose their lands, the farmer "is obliged to enclose his fowls to half an acre."[130]

The planters, as they had done in the past, embraced the carceral solution to deal with the issue of thieves, paying no mind to the deleterious effects of the mongoose. Magistrates and planters already had the option of practicing summary jurisdiction over many cases of minor theft and trespassing. But those with enough money, time, and elite connections could still press for trial by jury. By 1879, planters pushed for the modification of the legal code to enhance their powers of summary jurisdiction for all crimes not capital. After it was approved, the planters acquired another weapon in their arsenal that conflated customary law with formal law. Wealthier farmers could no longer press their counterclaims in court.[131]

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[127] *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 27, 1899, page 6.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Harvey and Brewin, *Jamaica in 1866,* 50; 56; *The Jamaica Gleaner,* May 30, 1900, page 15. Indeed, the *Jamaica Gleaner* praised how "A few persons…when robbed by the mongoose or praedial thieves" had learned to restrain themselves from "inflicting punishment on the offenders" specifically because of the wide usage of "the cat and stocks… publicly on market days as a remedy." See also Jonathan Dalby, *Crime and Punishment in Jamaica, 1756-1856* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2000), 97-98; Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992), 340. It appears that the mongoose played at least a small role in the historical attempts by the colonial state to restrict and contain the free movement of the peasantry, and to criminalize their blackness under the sign of poverty, theft, and deviancy.

[130] *Jamaica Gleaner,* November 27, 1899, page 6.

[131] *Falmouth Standard and Gazette and Jamaica General Advertiser*, Unknown date in 1879, JNL.

Debates over the mongoose intersected again with attempts to use the power of the (rule of) law both to dissolve common spaces throughout the island, and to expel all those without formal legal title and prepare lands for unencumbered sale. Furthermore, the passage of Laws 13 and 14 of 1888 requiring all "stock" to be fenced in modified the definition of stock in the original Law 46 of 1872 to include all "horsekind, cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, and *poultry* [my emphasis]." Both laws effectively criminalized the failure to enclose and fence off one's animals, with the maximum penalty of up to a year in prison plus hard labor.[132]

Peasants would feel the burden and penalties stemming from the failure to enclose animals by the harassment of the law, potential thieves, and the mongoose. The side-effects of the mongoose played no small role in actual political issues unfolding on the ground in ways which may have necessitated extra trips to the court room in order to resolve disputes with neighbors over fencing or the lack thereof. Over the span of a few decades, the mongoose ate away at the foundations of peasant wealth, allowing for the slow violence of environmental crises since Emancipation to crystallize.

Finally, although some contemporaries emphasized the ultimate negative effects of the mongoose, many others strongly denied that the mongoose ever posed any real detriments to Black Jamaicans in the long run.[133] In fact, from the perspective of the planters, the damage wrought by

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[132] Law 13 "The Cattle Trespass Law, 1888,"and Law 14 "The Dividing Fences Law, 1888," *The Laws of Jamaica Passed in a Session Which Began on the 5th Day of April and Adjourned on the 4th Day of May, 1888* (Spanish Town: Government Printing Establishment, 1888). Law 46 of 1872, "A Law to Regulate the Assessment of Damage by Trespasses of Stock," *The Laws of Jamaica Passed in 1872* (Spanish Town: Robert Osborn, 1872), 317-23. Law 46 of 1872 specifically stipulated that no action could be taken by the owners of unfenced land against horses, mules, asses, sheep, and cattle. Each instance of failure to fence in animals earned a forty-shilling penalty. Incarceration could await those who resisted fencing their lands off. If it could be proved that anyone had "willfully open or leave open any gate, or break down or injure any fence or other contrivance provided for the purpose of confining Stock, with intent to allow such Stock to trespass off the Land on which the same is confined…shall be liable…to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a period not exceeding twelve calendar months."

[133] *Jamaica Gleaner*, August 18, 1890, page 2. Some people admitted that the mongoose had "proved a greater general pest than the cane rat ever was. Planters go so far as to say that they would prefer the rat to the mongoose, and among the peasantry the latter has scarcely a friend." See also *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 14* (1910), 154.

the cane-rats to the sugar canes in the past had been equal to, if not greater than, the damage wrought by the mongoose. The elimination of the cane-rat from the plantations for decades nevertheless provided planters with savings in money from £45000 to £150000, plus time and labor costs for trapping cane-rats.[134] Indeed, Dr. Morris argued by 1882 that the mongoose represented a net gain for the Black peasantry. The "benefits conferred by the mongoose on the cultivation of corn, arrowroot, sweet potato, peas, and those ground provisions cultivated by the negro" by decreasing cane rat populations and pushing them to the margins of the landscape far outweighed the destabilization of Jamaica's wildlife and humans relations with that wildlife.[135] An anonymous writer for the Journal of the Jamaica Botanical Society in 1912 further stressed the net benefit of the mongoose:

> "The mongoose is a timid animal easily trapped, the rat on the other hand is not easily trapped…and is responsible for the loss of a hundred chickens, ducklings, etc. for one that the mongoose takes. … Our choice is between millions of rats, in our corn, cane, sweet potato fields as well as cocoa and coffee, and a few thousands of mongoose[s] whose depredations are as 1 to 10,000 compared with rats. … Although the mongoose has done harm in preying upon the ground birds and eating the lizard that eat insects, he is a necessity to us."[136]

Several contemporaries gave no credence to claims that the mongoose had any beneficial effects at all. For instance, on Feb 15, 1910, a meeting of the Agricultural Society in St. John's, a Mr. Benton and Mr. Richards put forward a motion that stated: "knowing that the mongoose is the chief cause by which scratching and wading birds are decreasing in most if not all parts of the Island, to say nothing of the havoc wrought on poultry, young goats, young pigs, etc., resolve that the parent Society respectfully approach the Government in order that a law might be passed preventing the importation of any more mongoose in this Island; for this Society is of opinion that some steps should be taken to rid us of this pest as is being done with the rats."

[134] *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 14* (1910), 92. As late as 1910, H.S. Hoskins of Vale Royal wrote to Jamaica Agricultural Society suggesting that new mongooses from India be imported because of the recent uptick in cane-rats. However, "No one sought action on the matter, and the meeting was adjourned."

[135] Dr. Morris, *The Jamaica Gleaner,* December 6, 1882, page 2. Morris argued that "this fickle animal [the mongoose] is very prevalent in the neighborhood," but he had not seen a mongoose attack poultry or eggs, as opposed to the rats.

[136] *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 16* (1912), 608-609.

However, there was a catch. The mongoose proved effective in keeping cane rats at bay in "lands kept clean" and deforested, where the "mongoose has free action to see and dart upon was prey."[137]

When the droughts of the 1880s hit Jamaica, whites were trained to have little sympathy. They blamed Black farmers for orchestrating their own demise. Their reluctance and outright hostility to the enclosure of their lands, homes, and animal coops could have no outcome other than their eventual destruction. The depredations of mongooses were but a clever subterfuge for concealing the real culprits: Black thieves. The reality of banditry was thereby disavowed at the same time as whites imagined that Black banditry was the primary vector through which Black farmers lost their crops and animals.

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Most Black farmers relied upon swidden, or slash-and-burn, agriculture to undertake crop cultivation. Black farmers selected plots by felling the trees and burning them to impart nutrients into the rocky, marginal soils of the hills, to clear tree stumps, and to eliminate insects, rats, and other pests from the plot. Prickly bushes always needed fire to be cleared.[138] But some farmers avoided burning bush and grasses of old deforested plots. Instead, they left them fallow, and when the time came for cultivation, they slashed the bush, allowing the weeds to dry, and then they turned the soil over into itself.[139]

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[137] Dr. Morris, *Jamaica Gleaner,* December 6, 1882, page 2.

[138] *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 18* (Kingston: Sollas' Printing and Stationery, 1914) 307; George Cumper, "Population Movements in Jamaica," *Social and Economic Studies* 5, no. 3 (1956), 266-68.

[139] "Hints for March," *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 9* (Kingston: Sollas and Cocking, 1905), 88.

Whites admitted that such controlled burns were often necessary, given environmental constraints. But Black farmers were also blamed for allowing fires to spread far beyond the plot designated for cultivation. Fires overspreading their boundaries for hundreds of acres were commonplace through the first quarter of the twentieth century. Drought conditions intensified the threat of fires spreading out of control. Whites complained to the police about the issue. But the police refused to investigate anything until the report had been made, by which time the perpetrators were long gone.[140]

Deforestation had long been associated with the increased frequency, magnitude, and duration of local drought events.[141] But in the 1870s and 1880s, whites singled out Black yam cultivators as the most pernicious feature of deforestation.[142] Preparing the land for planting yams took place in March and April. Contemporaries admitted that Black farmers could not profitably cultivate yams without controlled burns of the felled forests in the mountains.[143] What's more, cultivators were accused of using a plot for but a single season and moving onto the next—something that farmers under uncertain, precarious tenancy arrangements had to do in order to

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[140] *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 16* (Kingston: Sollas' Printing and Stationery, 1912) 383, 545-46.

[141] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Modern scientists support this hypothesis, while making sure to stress that meteorological drought was always the product of multiple factors, and rarely if ever reducible to a single cause. In other words, there is no 1:1 relation between deforestation and the absolute decline of rainfall.

[142] Alexander G. Fyfe to Hugh W. Austin, January 24, 1854, Parliamentary Papers [1854], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 18.

[143] Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 296. We must note that it is probable that Black farmers knew how to cultivate yams in sustainable ways. For example, in St. Vincent, a local farmer in the 1990s showed Richard Grove that forests marked off for preservation in 1790 had survived up to the present, despite the long usage of the area by Black people for felling timber, gathering surplus compost materials, and cultivating yams in particular See also *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society*, *Volume 16* (1912), 100-01, for information about how white planters thought yams should be cultivated. Instead of clearing the area of bush, the bush should have been chopped into rows, with the yams placed in between them. The bush would serve as manure for the present and future crops.

carry forward any crop to completion. The scale and scope of yam cultivation after Emancipation accelerated soil erosion more than other Black-produced crops.[144] William Bancroft claimed in 1877 that the Black peasantry annually destroyed 50,000 acres of forests.[145] This was an exaggeration, but the racial valences of the claim made it all the more compelling to contemporaries who appealed to conservationism as the *raison d'etre* of the state to help planters combat the spread of the Black peasantry.

Drought was one half of the issue. The other was progressive soil erosion and landslides, which left lands barren and unrecoverable without costly rehabilitation. William Fawcett attacked the practice of swidden agriculture because, "The presence of woods and forests increases the condensation of moisture from the clouds, regulates the flow of water to feed springs and rivers, preventing disastrous floods, and renders land fertile which would otherwise soon lapse into a barren waste."[146] Flooding intensified in scale and scope after even ordinary dry seasons. In St. John in the Vale, for example, James Hume reported in May 1848 that the drier May months in the past been replaced with constant rain in the highland mountains of the parish.[147] Floods fractured roads

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[144] William Bancroft Espeut, *On the Timbers of Jamaica* (Kingston: George Henderson & Co., 1881), 11. "After a year's use of one bit of land, they abandon the clearing, and at once proceed again in their work of destruction on another bit of land."

[145] Letter from William Bancroft Espeut to Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, August 15, 1879, Folios 79-81, Directors Correspondence 210/79, KEW. Accessed through JSTOR Global Plants.

[146] William Fawcett, *Woods and Forests of Jamaica* (London: The West India Committee, 1909), 1. See also "Drought and Trees," *Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society*, Volume 11 (1911), 573. "Treelessness is the chief cause of the lack of frequent showers. Dense canopies of leaves act as magnets to draw down the clouds…even during drought, but [the clouds now] drift over us." See also F.N. Isaacs and W. Harris, *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 16* (1912), 631. Along the Hardware Gap and Newcastle, tributaries to the Hope River, had been largely deforested. These may not have impacted rainfall, "but they certainly conserve the water and gradually give up their reserve supplies to feed the numerous springs and streams."

[147] James Hume to John Clarke, May 26, 1848, D/HUM/1, ANG. "May 26, a week of rain. The old May seasons absent here since 38."

and sent rocks blocking paths to Bog Walk and the surrounding region.[148] The rainfall also carried off topsoil from provision grounds, as hills toppled away from mudslides. Crops emplaced in these areas were thus lost.

Forest reserve laws would not emerge in Jamaica until the late nineteenth century, with the Mountain and River Reserves Law of 1889. These laws smuggled in anti-water access policies under the sign of anti-deforestation policy. The government assumed total control to withhold and dispense user-privileges to the banks of every river and running stream higher than 600 feet in elevation, whether naturally occurring or artificially produced, to private actors (i.e., the planters) and the undifferentiated "public," without the need to consider the interests of Black Jamaicans who were already using these spaces as fishing, hunting, and farming areas. Private landowners and Black farmers could use these lands so long as they were granted permission by the state to clear or otherwise access these forest and fresh reserves. Violations entailed a maximum £50 fine and three months imprisonment.[149]

Contemporary planters argued that Black farmers were predisposed to practice deforestation out of the ruthless drive for profit. For example, Charles Royes, Custos of St. Ann's Parish in 1865, bemoaned that the "peasantry destroy[s] all the timber, and thoroughly exhaust the soil, leaving it profitless for years, and then abandon it for fresh land," while the "estimated value of an acre of provisions [per year] is 20*l*."[150]

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[148] James Hume to John Clarke, May 26, 1848, D/HUM/1, ANG.

[149] Law 37 of 1889, "The Mountain and River Reserves Law, 1889," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in a Session Which Began on the 1st Day of October, and Prorogued on the 1st Day of November, 1889* (Spanish Town: Government Printing Establishment), 1889).

[150] Charles Royes to High Austin, April 18, 1865, Parliamentary Papers [1866], *Papers Relative to the Affairs of the Island of Jamaica*, 137.

Royes and other planters either didn't understand or couldn't admit that Black Jamaicans also moved plots seasonally to meet the challenges posed by insecure land tenure. Situating swidden agriculture in the context of fencing underscores how farmers kept their lands under cultivation safe from incursions by relocating them as circumstances dictated. The longer a Black farmer tended a single piece of land, the more likely such sedentary behaviors would attract thieves. Combating theft through enclosure provided contemporaries with a means of equating poor stewardship of the natural environment with poor stewardship of private property. For them, fighting theft and deforestation were one in the same problem. But for Black Jamaicans, enclosure was the solution for neither theft nor deforestation. Instead, the state's only role should be facilitating Black people to bring suits against Black people, while leaving everyone and everything else alone. In other words, the state had a responsibility to respect and help enforce the customary laws that obtained between the Black population. The error of the colonial courts had always been their support of the planters and white rule, not their existence as such.

As small-scale Black farmers were replaced with non-white middling and large-scale farmers, pen-keepers, and urban-based landholders, deforestation operations were ramped up. By the early twentieth century, contemporaries stood aghast at what they perceived as the near total deforestation of rural areas of the rain shadow. Wide swaths of territory in central and southern St. Elizabeth had been stripped of their trees. The hills and savannas from Manchester to the coastline of St. Elizabeth were almost bare, save small patches of mango trees.[151] The southern slopes of St. Andrew, from the top of Port Royal Mountains to the Liguanea plains had also been stripped. In many of these areas,

[151] "Drought and Trees," *The Journal of the Jamaica Agricultural Society, Volume 15* (Kingston: Sollas' Printing and Stationery, 1911), 573.

the cycles of annual burning produced lands "worn and wasted by rains and subjected to land slips. *Tenants will not even rent them again.*"[152]

When droughts and floods negatively impacted Black agriculture, whites believed that Black people were the architects of their own dilemma. Deforestation became another discursive vessel through which whites argued that Black people were incapable of preparing, planting, and planning with not only their economic future, but also the environmental future of the colony at large. Whites placed blame exclusively upon Black subsistence and export cultivators for the perils of deforestation. It represented a key shift in the discourse of environmental racism in Jamaica. The decline of the sugar planters' fortunes erased the historical truth that those planters had been, and remained, the principal agents involved in wiping away Jamaica's forests.[153]

And Black farmers condemned themselves because of their reliance on sustainable ponds at distance from the plantations, rather than water tanks and ponds emplaced within the enclosed spaces of their homes. Whites said that water tanks and ponds could be made "at the expense of a few pounds, provided a sufficient catch-water area is constructed, but this is seldom done, and most of the peasantry and a good many other occupiers of property do not thus secure themselves against the rainless day, but live on from day to day in contented neglect of what the future may bring." These communities ultimately became beggars and thieves, "in times of drought look[ing] to their

[152] Ibid, 573. My emphasis. Contemporaries claimed that growing bamboo on the hills was the surest way to rebuild the soil and restore fertility through burning. "Five years of bamboo can reclaim the barest and poorest hillsides."

[153] See also Grove, *Green Imperialism,* 5, 67. The mass deforestation practiced by the plantation industrial complex was, unsurprisingly, immune to critique.

more provident neighbours, usually the larger proprietors, to give them water for themselves and their stock.[154]

Criticisms against the tendency of many Black farmers to cultivate export crops and to rely on imported foodstuffs also resurged in the late nineteenth century. Doctor F.A. Sinclair ascribed this reticence to plant food crops on the specters of drought and theft. Further droughty years afflicted the colony in the 1890s. By then, these farmers refused to plant even export crops. Black farmers transitioned toward cultivating crops on smaller plots of lands they could watch and defend. Less goods were being brought to the market for sale.[155] R.W. Walcott, Resident Magistrate for Clarendon Parish, pointed to the same causes of agricultural decline. But unlike Sinclair, Walcott argued that the droughts in particular represented a political victory. Like at the dawn of Emancipation, banditry enhanced the negative effects of the droughts, forcing people to work for their subsistence, which would finally make a critical mass of the Black population dependent almost exclusively on imported goods.[156]

As people began to abandon their land, the new banana plantation interest swooped in with a vengeance to recapture it. As noted above, by 1880, Bancroft Espeut had begun to transfer away from sugar anyway. He was moving into bananas.[157] It would eventually be the United Fruit

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[154] "Jamaica 1897-98," Parliamentary Papers [1899], *Jamaica: Annual Report for 1897-98,* 20.

[155] Testimony of F.A. Sinclair, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III, Containing Parts VI. To XIII: Proceedings, Evidence, and Documents Relating to the Windward Islands, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica,* 399.

[156] Testimony of R.W. Walcott, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III, Containing Parts VI. To XIII: Proceedings, Evidence, and Documents Relating to the Windward Islands, the Leeward Islands, and Jamaica,* 412.

[157] *The Jamaica Gleaner*, June 14, 1880. http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Members/g/glean60.htm

Company that bought up Espeut's old sugar turned banana plantation: Spring Garden.[158] Takeover of the backlands by new plantations. The Crown Lands were reabsorbed and consolidated, now that colonial authorities finally achieved some kind of handle over the squatter menace.

Liquid Gold: The Final Enclosure of Water

The incoming colonial administration of the post-Morant Bay order saw the untapped potential of irrigation to secure plantation monoculture in perpetuity. The reorganization removed resident planters from positions of authority and replaced them with military and government officials who had served in British colonies in Africa, India, east Asia, and the Pacific. Many of them had seen the potential for irrigation works in much drier colonies than Jamaica. The state of water infrastructure in their new station colored their understanding of Jamaica as a technological backwater in need of modernization. As the President of the reformed Legislative Council put it, "When I see the [Rio] Cobre there…carrying down so much Gold, for Gold it is, to the sea, when we want it so much, I feel great regret that we cannot stop that Gold and throw it over our land."[159]

By the early 1870s, the colonial government was busy extending its jurisdictional tentacles over all of Jamaica's water resources. The foundational justification for doing so was laid out in Law 24 of 1873, "A Law to Provide for a Public Supply of Water in Parishes Requiring the Same." The government extended the domain of state-power specifically into the drought zones, where droughts "are of [so] frequent occurrence…[that] the inhabitants of such localities are reduced to great straits

[158] Parliamentary Papers [1912-1913], *Colonial Reports--Miscellaneous. No. 84. Papers relating to the Preservation of Historic Sites and Ancient Monuments and Buildings in the West Indian Colonies*, 17-18.

[159] "The State of the Country," *The County Union and Anglo-Jamaican Advertiser,* February 2, 1870, PHL/2/31, MAR.

by reason of their being no sufficient supply of water to the public at large."[160] All waters not already claimed by a private individual fell under the sole purview of the state, while "superfluous lands vested in the colonial secretary" would be sold off to municipal boards, *not* private persons, especially Black Jamaicans. When the mongoose-effects and the droughts of the 1880s forced small-scale Black farming communities to depart the agricultural frontiers, colonial officials and resident planters exploited this contingency to further enclose the land and its waters. It was the chance that white ruling-class elites had been waiting for. "The Public Water Supply Law of 1889" enabled the state to seize any fresh water supply it deemed necessary for the establishment of water and irrigation companies in the future, anywhere in the colony; the newly invigorated plantocratic state enclosed the land in anticipation for a day that might never come.[161]

Taking advantage of environmental contingency and crisis convinced these elites that their defensive and offensive postures dating back to the 1820s and 1830s had finally paid off. The influx of capital from the growing banana plantation complex provided the impetus for accepting the exorbitant start-up costs for new irrigation works throughout the colony. While the banana capitalists would rake in blockbuster profits and pay little export taxes, the Black population would fund the majority of the debts contracted in these public works projects. Once the water projects were complete, Black people would no longer have access to sites designated for water reservoirs and new plantation development. The dream that McGeachy had advanced five decades prior was finally starting to become a reality.

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[160] Law 24 of 1873, "A Law to Provide for a Public Supply of Water in Parishes Requiring the Same," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in 1873* (Spanish Town: Robert Osborn, 1873), 167-70.

[161] Law 28 of 1889, "The Public Water Supply Law, 1889," *The Laws of Jamaica, Passed in a Session which Began on the 1st Day of October, and Prorogued on the 1st Day of November, 1889* (Spanish Town: Government Printing Establishment, 1889).

The case of the tapping of Rock Springs is instructive in this context. It had been claimed by the government since 1847, but little to no infrastructure development had taken place for over forty years.[162] That changed with a round of major infrastructure project between 1891 and 1896, for instance, to take water from Rock Springs to Port Royal would cost a minimum of £17,000 to construct the pipes and the water tanks at 400 feet elevation, plus £2,000 for pumping machinery to draw the water up to the tanks.[163] This did not include the costs of constructing the giant reservoir at Rock Springs. It held 270 tons of water and was refilled by a natural spring which, during the dry season, filled the reservoir with 22 tons of water per hour. 150 tons of water per day were needed to provision Port Royal.[164] The site was of the reservoir was surrounded by bush and was located on the wetter side of the mountains, beyond the rain shadow—precisely where Black farmers would have tended to locate their provision grounds.[165]

This water was earmarked for primary use by the naval depot, hospital, and garrison, and for secondary use by coaling station and the wharf to supply visiting ships. The total cost per year of

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[162] Edward McGeachy to Commodore Gorman, May 21, 1847, ADM/128/35, KEW.

[163] B. Townsend to Commodore Herbert W. Dowding, "Scheme for Water Supply," D.W. 152, January 17, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW. See also "Jamaica: Port Royal Water Supply," D.W. 106, December 5, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW. Since 1864, the Cave River about two miles from the sea in the Port Royal Mountains, which discharged 74000 gallons per hour, had been tapped and enclosed. The Kingston Water Works held the Hope Reservoir, which shunted water to Kingston through long tunnels and aqueducts.

[164] B. Townsend to Commodore Herbert W. Dowding, "Scheme for Water Supply," D.W. 152, January 17, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW. See also F.W. Crosbie to Commodore Herbert W. Dowding, "Jamaica: Water Supply," D.W. 2796, March 7, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW. Another tank at Polygon Battery at the size of 1200 tons was proposed after the initial tank of 270 tons because the latter amount was determined to be insufficient for the purposes of holding out against siege warfare and drought. The 1200 ton tank could last nearly twenty days if water use was restricted to 62 tons per day.

[165] G.W. Colson to Commodore Herbert Dowding, D.W. 248, February 16, 1897, ADM/116/479, KEW.

supplying the navy, army, and inhabitants of Port Royal with water was estimated at £6321 per year.[166]

Never again would local Black users have access to the springs and reservoirs previously fed by it. They would never return, so long as the military controlled the spring and the water infrastructure.[167] While engineers advocated for pipes to avoid swampy and bushy land as much as possible, the installation of water infrastructure could still cut local Black users off from these areas. Engineers demanded that fences and brick walls be erected to protect pipes, piping stations, water tanks, and open-air courses of water exposed to the environment. They also worried about protecting the flow "in the event of interference with the pipes, through war or natural causes."[168]

Water infrastructure projects in the urban environment took on a new shape by the later nineteenth century, too. The Kingston and Liguanea Waterworks Company is the most notable example. Chartered in the early 1840s, the Company monopolized stretches of the Hope River and a network of reservoirs in an elevated portion of land to the northeast of Kingston. However, water distribution to the neighboring cattle pens and urban users remained intermittent and unreliable. The Company had a poor track record indeed. The urban poor had little to no access to the water, while the Company "compel[led] the public to submit to their terms by forcing them to take a larger supply of water than their necessities require." The rates charged were equivalent to a superadded

[166] "Jamaica: Port Royal Water Supply," D.W. 108, December 8, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW.

[167] B. Townsend to Commodore Herbert W. Dowding, "Scheme for Water Supply," D.W. 152, January 17, 1896, ADM/116/479, KEW.

[168] Ibid.

"tax of nearly twenty percent" and subject to change by the arbitrary order of the Company.[169] The same issue obtained with the Spanish Town Water Company, which drew water by pump and canal from the Rio Cobre. Urban users began paying compulsory water rates in 1872, but five years later, they still had little access to constant water. This required more, not less, public expenditure to bring the infrastructure up to speed with demand.[170]

Furthermore, water developmentalists claimed the Company was necessary for the purposes of fighting urban fires. But Kingston burned under their watch. For example, in 1857 and 1861, great conflagrations raged through downtown Kingston, destroying numerous businesses. The cost of the combined damage of both fires exceeded £87,530. During the 1861 fire, contemporaries unsurprisingly suspected the work of Black arsonists. The fact that many Black Kingstonians were "busy with plunder" and "stood by with stolid indifference contemplating the havock [sic]" contributed to these fears. After authorities determined that the fire had begun in the chimney of George Fisher's bakery on accident, the principal blame for the spread of the flames fell to the Company, which had failed to provide any water for fighting the fire.[171] Not only were "nearly all the pumps of Kingston…allowed by the company to become useless."[172] The Company also hoarded water as often as possible and ensured that it was distributed to the pen-keepers before the city.[173]

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[169] Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, March 12, 1861, CO/140/161, KEW.

[170] J.R. Mann to Earl of Carnavon, August 18, 1877, CO/137/484, KEW.

[171] Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, November 19, 1862, CO/140/163, KEW.

[172] Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, March 12, 1861, CO/140/161, KEW.

[173] Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, November 19, 1862, CO/140/163, KEW.

Efforts to get a grip on water resources amidst drought conditions convinced white planters throughout the Caribbean that drought-resistant qualities of sugar cane over other potential cash-crops assured the conservation of this most traditional industry. Planters in Antigua in 1894, for example, argued that the island's long history with drought had ultimately proven that sugar could never be abandoned. It was imagined as the most drought-resistant of all cash- and non-cash crops. If the sugar industry collapsed, secondary commodity production and the cattle industry would fall in tandem.[174] Thomas Smickle of Jamaica agreed. He had tried coffee, coconut, and banana cultivation, but all of his crops failed because of the droughts, rather than a scarcity of cheap labor. He then realized that nothing but sugar could hope to stem the tide of the planters' collapse in the colony.[175]

Antiguan government officials displayed some degree of vested interests in developing public water resources as a means of preventing water riots. The planters could not be trusted to think in such pragmatic ways. As P.T. Payne reported, a severe drought hit the region of Lyon's estate, Newfield, and Farr's Hill in 1895.[176] Widespread death due to food and water scarcity gripped the entire colony. People of St. John's parish sustained themselves with water from state-protected sources for a short time one to two times per day. "Nearly every cistern in town was dry," Doctor A. Wykham observed, "and people roamed all over the place, getting for love or money the last drop of

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[174] Testimony of Mr. Shand, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 174; Testimony of Oliver Nugent, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 204.

[175] Testimony of Thomas Smickle, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 325.

[176] Testimony of Mr. P.T. Payne, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 205.

water from every nook and cranny. … The poor could not afford to sleep. They were kept on the roads at nights carrying small quantities of water from long distances." Local Black people watched horses and mules drink from a government-managed pond they were disbarred from accessing, even with the offer of money.[177] Desperate and humiliated, Black people eventually broke down the fences and stole the water. The overseer and his goons stoned the trespassers in response. The overseer of Lyon's estate hurt an old woman and he was fined twenty-seven shillings in court; but a Black man responsible for breaking the fence in the first place was undergoing prosecution for civil damages.[178]

Meanwhile, all throughout Jamaica, starting up costly waterworks for irrigation to combat the droughts became the rage among planters and government officials. The Rio Cobre Irrigation Works and the Vere Irrigation Works slowly extended their services into plantation zones that hadn't ever had access to constant water, even though neither existing plantations nor the irrigation companies had shown any greater profits from the schemes. Plans and surveyors were deployed to determine the viability of water infrastructure in dry towns from Savanna-la-Mar and Black River in the west to Port Royal, Bog Walk, Spanish Town, and Port Antonio.[179] To help fund these projects over the long run, starting in 1897, taxes on homes across the island increased by 33%. These taxes

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[177] Testimony of Doctor A. Wykham, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 197.

[178] Testimony of Mr. P.T. Payne, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C, Volume III,* 205. Testimony of Reverend A. Romig, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 190, 193.

[179] Jamaica, 1911-12," Parliamentary Papers [1912], *Jamaica: Annual Report for 1911-12,* 40. See also Director of the Railway to Colonial Secretary, May 12, 1910, CO/137/677, KEW.

were levied on Black households even though agricultural production declined in half, while breadkind and fruit crops were totally destroyed.[180]

Rural Black people benefited little to nothing from water development. The installation of government water tanks remained haphazard and geared toward large-scale pen-keepers and planters. In 1920, the poor were still compelled to march miles for drinking water. Again, government officials blamed Black people for their plight. The latter refused "to own their own good land" that the government would help them improve the land with water tanks, "if they themselves would take the necessary steps." The first step was to expect to pay handsomely for the land, rather than it being gifted by the Crown. Paying good money for land that would be heavily taxed, when the government averred it had adopted a pro-peasant policy, was a contradiction in terms. Should they purchase land, the second step was to enclose their property behind physical barriers.[181]

Conclusion

While the mongoose laid waste to native wildlife and Black farmers' property, William Bancroft Espeut quit his dreams of achieving greatness through traditional proprietorship. Technological modernization hadn't been enough to secure his position among the resident planting classes of Jamaica. But his prestige among imperial elites was stronger than ever. He moved to England in expectation of being appointed to higher positions of authority within the imperial government. Rumors abounded that William Bancroft was soon to be offered a Parliamentary seat.

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[180] Messrs. R. Craig, Parliamentary Papers [1897], *Report of the West India Royal Commission, Appendix C., Volume III,* 260, 63.

[181] Messrs. Cradwick and Barclay to the Governor Leslie Probyn, October 9, 1920, CO/137/742, KEW, 259-61, 270.

The son was finally set to exceed his father in service to the British empire. It seems he never intended on returning to Jamaica. He had sucked enough blood from the colony and its peoples to move on to greener pastures with the imperial state.

Before William Bancroft could assume any position, however, he fell ill while in England. He died in 1893.

Black Jamaicans may have forgotten about the Espeut clan, but they never forgot about William Bancroft's brainchild: the mongoose. This chapter described how the ecological effects of the mongoose finally achieved what drought, theft, war, and taxation could never have done alone. The mongoose condensed multiple pressures into a beam of destruction that disproportionately harmed the Black population. The planters unwittingly benefitted from this outcome. William Bancroft and his planter peers didn't intend for the mongoose to disproportionately help them achieve such victory against independent Black farmers. But once the former gleaned what was happening on the agricultural frontiers, they sat back and reaped the rewards: the progressive negation of Black wealth, mobility, and agricultural power at a time when the plantation complex was itself slowly collapsing. Bananas and U.S. capital did not resurrect the planter class alone; the mongoose and droughts acted in concert with these pressures to drive Black farmers off their lands, for good.

By the early twentieth century, mongoose populations crashed and stabilized. Contemporaries didn't have a clear explanation for the decline. It is possible that the crash in food supplies for mongoose populations finally forced them into infra-species competition. Mongooses died out and stopped reproducing as frequently. After three decades of ecological chaos, the mongoose's brief reign at the top of the food chain came to a close. But mongooses remained a fixture of Jamaica's rural landscape. With luck, one can still see a mongoose skirt across the road at night.

Contemporaries also noted that some native wildlife species thought extinct slowly began to return to their old habitats, namely, the birds that consumed ticks. Some birds and small mammals who fled to the mountains to avoid the mongoose stayed far away and hidden from civilization. But many small mammals, snakes, and lizards never returned. Thousands of Black farmers also never came back to their lands.

In time, whites disavowed that the mongoose had played anything but a marginal role in destabilizing the fabric of Jamaica's ecologies and political economy. Whites remembered the mongoose as an environmental agent that impacted everyone—white and Black—equally. As contemporary botanist wrote of the mongoose in 1899: "Now all mankind is its enemy."[182] That was a lie. The mongoose was never a friend to Black Jamaicans.

[182] Mr. Falconer, "A Botanist's View of Jamaica," *Jamaica Gleaner,* June 13, 1899, Page 7.

Conclusion

Isodore's Tale: The Lost Promise of Subaltern Water Politics

In 1959, the *Jamaica Gleaner* asked its elderly readers to send in letters about their memories of Jamaica fifty years in the past.[1] The newspaper received hundreds of responses.

Isodore Buckey was one of those letter writers. She began her story in 1914, when she was a young girl in Whitfield Town, the adjacent slum to the west of Trench Town. Eking out a meaningful existence in this stretch of Kingston was hard work. Without education, technical skills, and white allies, steady jobs were hard to come by. Men and women plied the streets and wharves for anyone willing to pay. Without income or a provision ground to grow their own food, they had to purchase most, if not all, of what they ate; water was expensive, too, so if they could not afford to pay for it, they would have to walk miles to gather it. By 1920, "stealing" these resources entailed harsher penalties than were meted out in the past; the maximum penalty for taking goods less than £5 in value was raised from six months imprisonment to eighteen months. Furthermore, convicts could be collectivized on government-run plantations in lieu of prison time, yet they were entitled to none of the produce or profits achieved by such activities.[2]

This was the hand dealt to the second generation of freed people that they had to play to survive in post-Emancipation Jamaica. We don't know when Isodore's family settled on the fringes of Kingston. But as we have described in this study, the decision of many Black Jamaicans to settle permanently in urban landscapes at the dawn of the twentieth century was a matter of both coercion

[1] "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/21, JNA.

[2] Letter from Hebert de Lisser, Secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association, April 27, 1920, CO/137/739, KEW, 370; "A Law Further to Amend the Laws Relating to Praedial Larceny, 1920," CO/137/739, KEW, 283.

and free choice. In the past, modalities of semi-nomadism had undergirded the strength of the subaltern political economy. Both poor sugar workers and middling Black farmers expertly exploited poor seasonal conditions and the relative weakness of white proprietors to settle land and then move on before conditions shifted out of favor. For decades, they bested the droughts, the planters, the police, the taxmen, and the colonial courts to realize freedom on their own terms. Their enslaved ancestors had taught them how to take advantage of Jamaica's natural environment and political-racial landscapes to hide both in the shadows and in plain sight. Their individual and collective action told the world that another Jamaica—one ruled by decentralized Black semi-autonomous communities in practice—was not just possible, but probable.

But after the 1880s, inauspicious environmental factors and the constant deterrence effects of environmental enclosure prevented the flight of the poor and already landless into the agricultural frontiers. Migratory circuits now trended into another direction, funneling people into the city and the young beyond the shores of Jamaica. Inhabitants of the urban and suburban zones knew all too well that large tracts of empty, fallow land suitable for food cultivation still existed in the rural areas. But most of these lands had been reabsorbed by large-scale landowners. In the cattle grazing parish of St. Ann, for example, "there was practically no middle class—only large proprietors and labourers."[3] Many ordinary workers still asked to get land. But "The people would not take land as a favour," Cradwick and Barclay argued in 1920. "They must either have land to hire with secure tenure or to purchase." Barring this outcome, "they would continue to emigrate and nothing would stop them. The proprietors had played too many tricks on them in the past and they would trust

[3] Messrs W. Cradwick and A.A. Barclay to the Governor, October 9, 1920, CO/137/742, KEW, 273.

them no more."[4] The small number of small-scale farmers who continued to cultivate in the parish still had to walk seven to ten miles away from their homes to tend their plots. Tenancy was extended only insofar as farmers "took up all sorts of unproductive land, cleaned it up, cultivated it for two years or so, and handed it back to the proprietors cultivated in Guinea and Para Grass."[5] Even workers who returned with hundreds of pounds sterling from labor in Central America or Cuba found it difficult to acquire more than ten acres of land at a time.[6]

Farmers also encountered greater difficulties in defending their lands against incursions by animals and thieves. For instance, those that lived close to St. Ann's Bay had given up cultivation because stray fowls, goats, and pigs not only destroyed crops, but also incited feuds and quarrels between neighbors that were not worth fighting in the long-term.[7] Middling and large-scale non-white proprietors increasingly demanded that the government pay for stationing armed guards upon their lands, who would be granted automatic immunity from prosecution in the event that they shot, maimed, or killed thieves.[8]

The specter of drought and endemic water scarcity also continued to discourage the emergence of a new class of independent Black agriculturists. Many regions of the drought zones simply didn't have enough unenclosed public water supplies that were free to access. The invention

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid, 276.

[6] Ibid, 268.

[7] Ibid, 273.

[8] Letter from Hebert de Lisser, Secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association, April 27, 1920, CO/137/739, KEW, 376-77.

of the diesel engine offered planters and the state a lucrative stop-gap technological fix to the issue. Government officials assuaged unrest in St. Ann and Trelawny concerning water during the island-wide drought of 1919 by using lorries to carry water to needy inhabitants.[9] The underlying environmental contradictions, of course, remained. Locally-grown food supplies from rural regions also became rarer and rarer due to drought. Small-scale farmers increasingly focused on sugar because it made more money than food crops on the market. The capital and time inputs necessary to bring any crop to fruition made sugar, as opposed to food, cultivation worth the risk.[10]

Isodore's parents tried to insulate her from poverty as much as possible. So, they sent Isodore to receive a proper education. In the past, they may have tried to become farmers. In the new Jamaica, education was the only local institution which offered an inkling of a chance for Black Jamaicans to escape the cycle of poverty breeding poverty. Her parents hoped that she would not experience the economic humiliations which had befallen tens of thousands of Black Jamaicans over the course of the nineteenth century.

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The cultural and spiritual landscape of water in Kingston reflected the broader history of water politics throughout the colony. Water served as the vehicle through which marginalized Black Jamaicans expressed their hopes for the future and fears of an imminent apocalypse. Alexander Bedward functioned as the ritual mouthpiece for the victims of hydroracism. Born in 1848, Bedward had lived through and heard about water scarcity and drought in the times of slavery and freedom. As a youth, he may have learned about the role of water in shaping the context for the battle for

[9] Governor L. Probyn to Viscount Milner, July 8, 1920, CO/137/739, KEW.

[10] Ibid.

Savanna-la-Mar and the Battle for Bluefields. He experienced the revivalism movements of the 1860s and certainly knew about the state-sanctioned terrorism that unfolded in the Morant Bay War. As an adult, Bedward couldn't find meaningful work, and he traveled abroad to earn income by chipping away at constructing the Panama Canal in the 1870s. He was surrounded by Black people from throughout the Caribbean. They were surrounded by hazardous conditions and death; they were boarded up at night to prevent running away and coordination among the workers. He survived and returned to Jamaica.

Locals remembered Bedward's rise to fame. As Eustace Brown of Kingston recalled, the predecessor of Bedward, a man named Shakespeare, had come to August Town while Bedward was a youth. Shakespeare proclaimed that the inhabitants had to swear oaths around a jar of water and a Bible to prevent "the Lord [from coming] up the river [to] sink this district."[11]

After Bedward was back in Jamaica, a spirit visited him. The spirit instructed Bedward "to take the river water for medicine and give [it to] the people. … He who are going to think of me must take medicine from me." The Lord was to inflict pain and suffering soon on the people. It was Bedward's responsibility to heal them through the holy waters of the river and to banish the spiritual rot that had accursed the island since slavery and Emancipation. But the spirit's presence was also a potent warning. It offered the tools to combat harm, but it also made clear what punishments awaited those who refused to imbibe the water. The danger of going without it was not just affliction by uncurable disease. If the people of August Town refused to follow the edict of the spirits, strange foreign settlers would arrive and expel locals from the neighborhood.[12]

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[11] Eustace Brown, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/21/74, JNA.

[12] Ibid.

Thus, from the banks of the Hope River at August Town—a watery node that the Kingston Water Company wanted enclosed and centralized under its command—Bedward procured holy waters and began to heal peoples' spiritual and physical maladies. By the 1890s, thousands regularly flocked to Bedward's chapel at August Town to be healed. R.A.L. Knight of Kingston remarked that Bedward held mass baptisms once a month, charging six pence per head. In contradistinction with European Christian practices, these baptisms were held at night. While Knight was at Jamaica College, he would watch Bedward and his flock marching through the streets, "their torches smoking and singing at the top of their voices."[13] Florie Burkley had participated in these night marches, as they sung and walked "over the hills down to the valley where the river runs between huge rocks." What was important to her was not just the excitement and the prospect of being healed and prepared for the great imminent cataclysm; it was also that people feasted and shared food with one another at these events.[14] For Eustace Brown, Bedward did not attract the ire of colonial authorities because of superstition and religious heterodoxy. Instead, the police and the state were angry that Bedward's cures were "emptying churches and no one care to go to doctors. … Doctors [were] losing their patients for Bedward's word."[15]

Bedward's ideology and baptismal practices are often situated in the context of Christo-African syncretism. Water as a substance and metaphor is symbolically significant in major and minor spiritual-religious traditions globally. Bedward was but one practitioner in Jamaica and the

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[13] R.A.L. Knight, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/21/36, JNA. "Bad boys" were known to mock Bedward as he passed, singing, "Dip him, Prophet Bedward, dip him, dip him, dip him in the healing stream."

[14] Florie Burkley, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/21/161, JNA.

[15] Eustace Brown, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/21/74, JNA.

Atlantic world whose ideas about water were colored by the apocalyptic millennialism of the fin-de-siecle, as world empires fought and killed one another and their colonized subjects at scales hitherto unknown in history. But we still too often skirt over how the environmental and ecocultural histories of water and drought in Africa and Jamaica decisively shaped why Bedward and the devotees of the Hope River invested so much meaning in governing and defending their relations with the riparian landscape. African polities stayed free if their sacrifices pleased the gods that kept the rivers flowing and the rains and dry seasons predictable; they were enslaved when they lost the favor of the gods and the rains and rivers shrunk and disappeared, rendering the polity vulnerable to famine and to being conquered in warfare. In exchange for labor and time, the free expected their rulers and oracles to maintain healthy relations with nature and the social body by redistributing the bounty of agriculture, commerce, and war to the free. Enslaved people deported in the transatlantic slave trade translated and reimplemented these ideas of water, sovereignty, and custom in Jamaica. The slaveowners tried to use their formal monopolies over water and land resources to pit the enslaved against one another as a matter of military necessity. The enslaved resisted by reappropriating Jamaica's riparian and watery landscapes. In the process, they *Africanized* English slaveowners, forcing them to enter, as inferior outsiders, their political and (super)natural reality. In this space, the enslaved made and enforced claims over water, land, food, and most importantly, free time. When slaveowners violated the fabric of customary law, they paid for it with slave revolt.

Quasi-freedom after Emancipation was infinitely better than slavery. But a hidden casualty of the negative environmental event of Emancipation was the ascendancy of formal law over custom as the guiding principle of power relations between planters and workers and whites and non-whites. For whites, now that Black Jamaicans had no capitalist value as chattel property, their only real governmental and economic concern was the prevention of rebellion. When the droughts of the 1840s struck with a vengeance, the planters would sooner have had the Creole population go

extinct and be replaced with foreign non-white labor than radically redistribute land and water to the formerly enslaved per custom. The emancipated kept trying to assert the primacy of customary law and one's word and promises as the moral-legal fulcrum of society. When possible, they reappropriated the colonial courts and manipulated white ruling-class elites to create zones of semi-autonomy in which the laws of Black polities reigned supreme. Through their expertise in adapting to unpredictable meteorological and political shifts of the tide, mobile, semi-nomadic Black Jamaicans thrived while sedentary, ignorant, useless whites festered and desiccated into hollow shells of their former glory. But the latter never stopped squeezing with the weapon of environmental enclosure. Wars in 1859 and 1865 were, in part, struggles to assert the customary right to move freely through the built environment whenever and however they pleased. The counterinsurgency efforts to smash these novel rebel armies composed of urban, suburban, and rural Black Jamaicans united by common concrete political objectives were all that kept the plantation machine running at all. After these conflicts, the mongoose dealt the planters a trump card: a radical disequilibrium of Jamaica's Black ecologies. The coarticulation of drought, banditry, the mongoose, and environmental enclosure in the last quarter of the nineteenth century scrambled circuits of production and traffic, and with them, the viability of independent agriculture.

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On Isodore's way home from school one day, she heard people saying that war—World War I—was on the horizon.[16]

Isodore hadn't ever experienced war. She didn't understand what the word meant, and she asked her parents to explain the concept to her.

[16] Isodore Buckey, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/12/154, JNA.

Their answer dismayed Isodore. "They told me that whenever war starts," Isodore bemoaned, "we are not going to get anything to eat." Isodore began to cry. "We are going to die for hunger," she told her mother, "and walk naked before we die." Her mother tried to comfort her: "No darling the Lord will provide."[17]

The Lord did no such thing. A few months after Isodore's fateful question, "my clothes was torn off," she recounted, and "my shoes also was gone." Her wardrobe was reduced to a single dress. She washed, pressed, and mended it studiously, taking care to ensure that it remained not just intact, but clean, beautiful, dignified. Her family might have been driven to the edge of abject poverty, but Isodore was in no hurry to shout this new fact about her life to her peers, to her teachers, to the world. Soon enough, it didn't matter. Isodore finished fourth grade and progressed no further. Her parents couldn't afford to purchase her schoolbooks.[18]

She and many Black Jamaicans endured crushing famines during the war. German submarines plumed the depths of the Atlantic, interrupting maritime trade. Wage labor opportunities were still scarce. Unionization and collective labor power was certain to bring down the hammer of the colonial state. Like the young men who volunteered for indentured servitude building canals, railroads, and banana plantations in Central America, military service was a chance to escape landlessness and precarious employment through the cultic world of war and pain. Many Black Jamaicans enlisted themselves to die in the name of the empire. Adult men served as soldiers and adult women served as nurses in the war. It was a dangerous gamble. "Many were frost-bitten on

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

their outward voyage [and] a few died in the war," Hopeful Betty recalled. But those who "returned…boasted of their lives abroad."[19]

Isodore immediately "had to go and work with people to help myself and my sister."[20] Like most women and young girls, she probably worked in domestic labors for little pay, cleaning peoples' homes, cooking, carrying things, washing clothes, and fetching water. Some women worked at the wharves hauling coal to hungry ships and offloading cargo. Isodore didn't have the same opportunity to go off island as the young men did.

Isodore's mother and two sisters died a few years later. "I grow a lonely girl," Isodore wrote, "till now I become a ageable woman."[21] Life without family in Jamaica was a sad one, but still, Isodore struggled onward.

All around her, Kingston changed. Her world changed. W.L. Jones of East Queen Street tied this event to his memories of Kingston's rebirth in the following decades. It "took on a completely modern aspect of advanced cities," rivaling the metropolises of America and Europe. The streets were remade and paved with asphalt. The Tramway ferried workers throughout the urban milieu; those with enough money didn't have to walk everywhere anymore. Electricity coursed through the homes of the non-white middle classes and the rich whites. Water flowed into their homes and their water closets. Laws governing water supplies and sewage were enforced, so the poor dumped their

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[19] Hopeful Betty, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/12/72, JNA.

[20] Isodore Buckey, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959. 7/12/154, JNA.

[21] Ibid.

human waste in neighborhood cesspools, whose stench blanketed one's senses when the winds died out.[22]

But all this development happened beyond Isodore's neighborhood, in the zones of heightened capital accumulation and development. Whitfield Town, the outskirts of the urban fringes, remained choked with water and floods, filth, pestilence. Piped water and sewerage skipped over Whitfield Town in the 1950s and 1960s, just like other so-called slumscapes of west and east Kingston. Decolonization and independence placed undue, disproportionate pressures on the lower class. In addition to chronic un- and under-employment and dependence on the informal sector for income, people like Isodore were funneled into high-density slums where shared access to toilet facilities and lack of piped-water connections to the tenements was the norm.[23] The suburbs were energized by development and the area around Half Way Tree made halfway tolerable. This is what Colin Clarke calls "plural stratification"—racial and class stratification in the context of cultural pluralism.[24] In the 1960s, 40% of Kingstonians lived without any public water supply piped into them; the proportion remained the same in the 1990s.[25]

In the course of development and under-development, Black Jamaicans of Isodore's generation thought that something precious and meaningful from the past had been lost: communities and chosen families stitched together by networks of mutual aid. "People were more

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[22] *Blue Books of Jamaica, 1898-99*, 638-39, CO/137/539, KEW.

[23] Colin Clarke, *Decolonizing the Colonial City: Urbanization and Stratification in Kingston, Jamaica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 96-103. Shared toilet facilities were virtually nonexistent in the wealthier northern and northeastern suburbs of Kingston.

[24] Ibid, 103.

[25] Ibid, 101.

willing to help one another in times of distress," Isaac Bucknor wrote to the *Jamaica Gleaner* in 1959, especially in the aftermath of violent "storms and earthquakes." The time inspired him to wish he could return to a simpler world, where the poor helped one another survive the violent precariousness of everyday life. Bucknor read the quotidian stories in the newspapers of murders and street robberies, longing for an imagined past when such combat between the poor was rare.[26] Marcus Garvey's political ideas helped inspire unity among poor, landless Black Jamaicans, and he did not call for direct violence against his subaltern detractors; his ideological enemy was white power. After the 1938 labor riots swept Jamaica, however, the rise of party politics in squarely refocused the anger, frustration, and poverty of ordinary Black Jamaicans against one another, in internecine power struggles to seize control of state-power through both judicial and extra-judicial means.

For Sarah Carter, the loss of community was most evident in the context of funerary rites. She reflected upon how funerals in her neighborhood in rural Westmoreland could not take place without the help of her neighbors. Some would come to mourn; others would go to Lucea to purchase wood to build the coffin; women would sew the burial shrouds and decorate the dead with lush, beautiful clothing. Neighbors arrived throughout the day to pass their children across the dead to ward off evil spirits. Indeed, "in some cases the small children were even bathed in the water used for washing the dead to ensure that the dead would protect them!"[27]

Isodore fought to make something of her life. But as she closed her letter in 1959, she signaled that her body and heart had grown weary of the crushing poverty and atomized loneliness

[26] Isaac Newton Bucknor, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/12/13, JNA.

[27] Sarah Carter, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/12/75, JNA.

of modern life. Of a childhood robbed from her. Of shoes, clothes, and a decent education. Of enjoying food, water, and rest among family, friends, and children. "Looking for my dear Lord and Master," she wrote. "This is my memories."[28]

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People like Isodore are not usually the stuff of real history. For the Braudelian thinkers of the world, Isodore's life was too small to be of historical significance. If events were nothing but the cresting of waves on the ocean, Isodore was the water, passively acting in repetition like a natural force. Her actions, thoughts, and ideas about life precipitated no historical conjunctures worth remembering. She was nothing but a "hewer of wood and a drawer of water," working day in and day out in activities that were meaningless to the active men and women of history who extricated themselves from such mindless labor. Jacques Ranciere traces this division to the denial of poetic-fictional rationality in the narration of temporal succession by scientific historians, represented most crucially by the *Annales* school—those wedded to thinking history and historical change in terms of epochs, epochal shifts, and epochal repetitions. Those who seek to employ the tools of literature to re-write "passive" actors, "with no ends other than those of immediate survival, no errors, no shift in fortune," into or beyond a given epochal formulation provokes accusations of anachronism and denunciations of the act as an ahistorical fiction. Those who had no time are to remain in the location of timelessness; those who were no longer confined to the workhouse and pursued leisure, politics, scholarly life—activities not oriented toward the reproduction of bare life—were the real makers-and-doers of history.[29]

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[28] Isodore Buckey, "Recollections of Fifty Years Ago," Letters to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 1959, 7/12/154, JNA.

[29] Jacques Ranciere, "Anachronism and the Conflict of Times," *Diacritics* 48, no. 2 (2020), 113.

Waters of Liberation has labored to show how enslaved and free Black Jamaicans alike adapted and readapted a politics of water and food in order to create beautiful, meaningful lives full of love and loss beyond the state of bare life. "The hewers of wood and drawers of water" used their strength, cunning, and ingenuity to wrest back access to natural resources, and with it, time itself, back for themselves and their chosen families. To do so, they pooled their energy, time, and resources together to spread the same across larger and larger communities, bonded together through networks of mutual support and self-defense. Sharing and fighting for food and water as a collective force conditioned and enabled the eruption, processes, and outcomes of minor and major events and inflection points in the history of nineteenth-century Jamaica, rather than the reverse. Political and economic factors acquired concrete form in the lived experiences of Black Jamaicans through the nexus of the natural world. Environmental conditions shaped, and were shaped by, coeval and connected shifts in political and economic circumstances. Demands to pay less taxes and rents and to farm a plot of land in peace were intimately and inextricably tied to reflexive demands for safe travel to and villages, marketplaces, fishing and hunting grounds, and water holes, unmolested by state authorities and bandits. Lingering upon subaltern water politics in the nineteenth century shows that Black Jamaicans did not act, live, and die for abstractions. Their politics were rooted in banishing hunger and thirst from their everyday lives. Their vision of freedom was predicated on the redistribution of ecological and financial wealth from the modestly wealthy to the abject poor. Those with real riches shared it with others or they opened themselves up for critique and attack. To exploit those suffering under the weight of environmental catastrophe and economic insecurity was both an act of strength and an act of weakness.

From the lowest water gatherer to the richest Black farmer, Black Jamaicans helped one another realize slices of freedom in an inhospitable, racist world. People like Jack, who took up the mantle of healer and political oracle among slave rebels as a matter of last resort. People like Mary

Ann Reid and John Cunningham, who shared their gifts with others and helped coordinate a defensive war in response to the robbery of their free time. People like the free workers of the Mocho Mountains, who took to the highways after their former enslaver sealed up the only freshwater resources available in their neighborhood. People like the settlers who resisted William Buchner's overtures to enclose their properties behind fences and surrender to the developmentalist trinity of irrigation, incarceration, and immigration. People like the men and women who smashed the tollgates of Westmoreland and heard thousands marching in the streets of Savanna-la-Mar demanding their release. People like the men and women whose property, crops, and livelihoods were wrecked by the ecologically devastating effects of the mongoose and final enclosure.

Isodore's and her ancestors' plight lives on today, as the landless, unemployed, and water-poor Black masses of not just Jamaica, but the Global South, find their livelihoods under incessant attack by the new force of global climate change. The sky withholds the rain too long and unleashes it upon the earth too much and too quickly. The rivers groan from industrial runoff and will eventually fill up with sediment and disappear. The earth slowly desiccates into a man-made desert. The sea rises and drowns the coastline, invading groundwater aquifers with salt. When undocumented immigrants of the Global South flee these conditions and are caught by state authorities, they are automatically slotted into one of two categories: the "political refugee" or the "economic migrant." Until environmental factors are treated as legitimate causes for granting amnesty to the masses, without respect for national borders, most of these immigrants will be deported back to their homelands to die by physical violence, starvation, and dehydration.

The poor, marginalized, and vulnerable of the earth will suffer and die first and last. Black Jamaicans in slavery and freedom have dealt with these kinds of issues for centuries. The environmental story of nineteenth-century Jamaica doesn't hold the final answers for abolishing the slow violence wrought by environmental enclosure and meteorological crisis. But if we listen close

enough, this story teaches us that, at one point in time, Black Jamaicans' powers of free movement were potent enough to take on some of the most clumsy, racist, and violent human collectivities that history can offer.

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