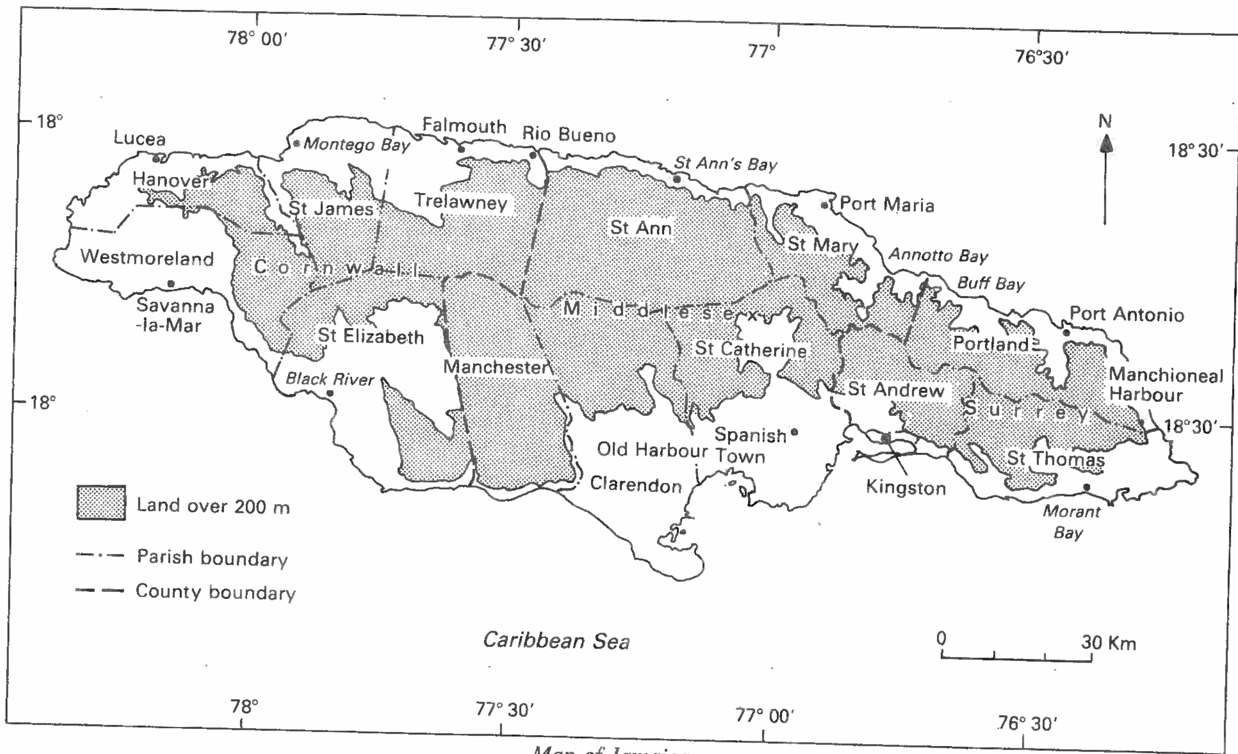
Warwick University Caribbean Studies

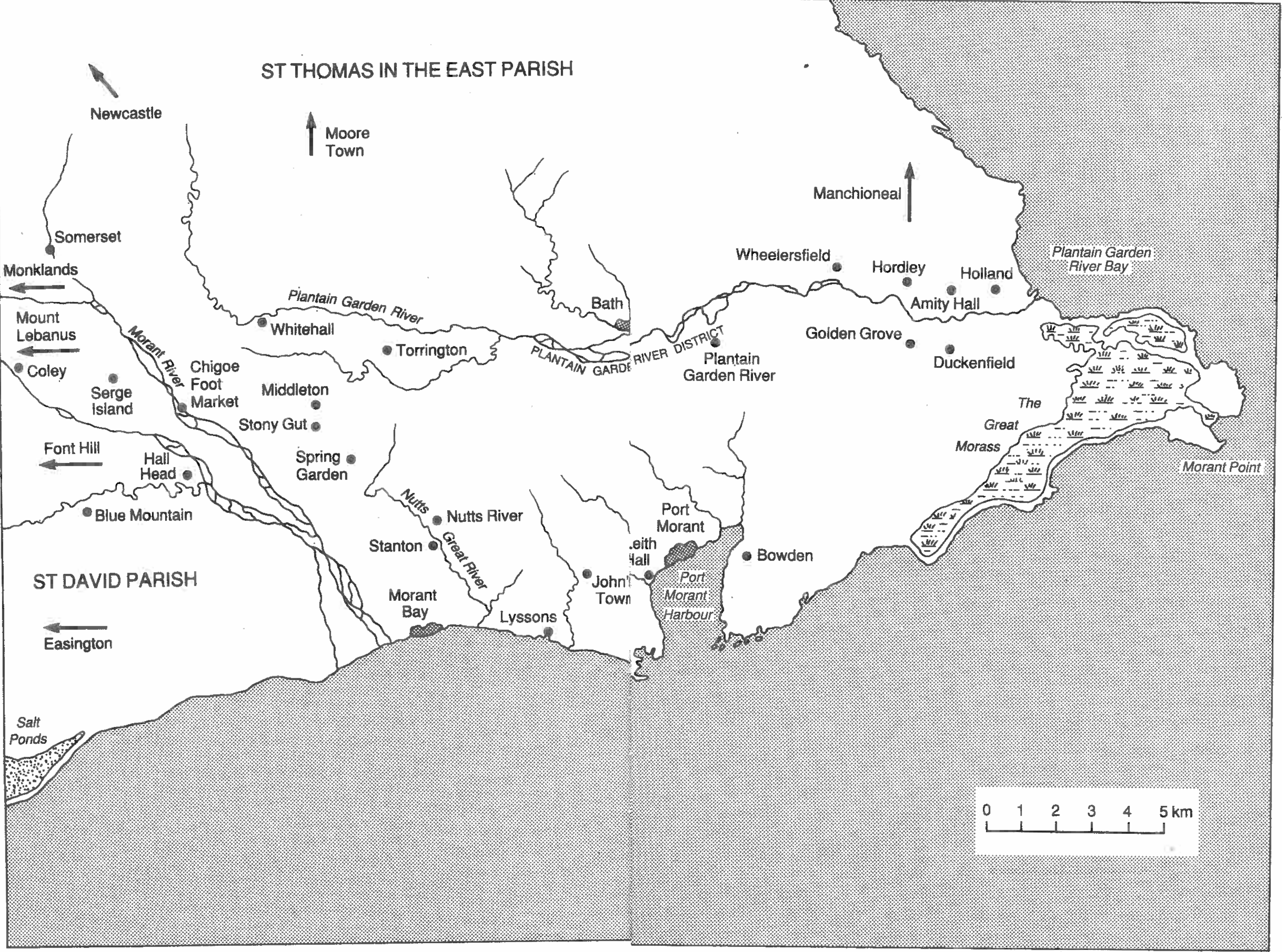
'The Killing Time'
The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica

Gad Heuman

M
MACMILLAN
CARIBBEAN



Map of Jamaica



The Morant Bay area of Jamaica

Abbreviations

BMS	Baptist Missionary Society Records, London
CO	Colonial Office Records, Public Record Office, London
JRC	*British Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, [3683–1], XXXI, Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission, Part II, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix
MMS	Methodist Missionary Society Records, London
Papers	*British Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, [3682], XXX, Papers Laid before the Royal Commission of Inquiry by Governor Eyre
PP	British Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office, London
Report	*British Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, [3683], XXX, Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission

Preface

The Morant Bay rebellion broke out in Jamaica on 11 October, 1865. On that day, several hundred black people marched into the town of Morant Bay, the capital of the predominately sugar-growing parish of St Thomas in the East. They pillaged the police station of its weapons and then confronted the volunteer militia which had been called up to protect the meeting of the vestry, the political body which administered the parish. Fighting erupted between the militia and the crowd and, by the end of the day, the crowd had killed eighteen people and wounded thirty-one others. Seven members of the crowd died. In the days which followed, bands of people in different parts of the parish killed two planters and threatened the lives of many others. The disturbances spread across the parish of St Thomas in the East, from its western border with St David to its northern boundary with Portland.

The response of the Jamaican authorities was swift and brutal. Making use of the army, Jamaican forces, and the Maroons (formerly a community of runaway slaves who were now an irregular but effective army of the colony), the government vigorously put down the rebellion. In the process, nearly 500 people were killed and hundreds of others seriously wounded. The nature of the suppression led to demands in England for an official inquiry, and a Royal Commission subsequently took evidence in Jamaica on the disturbances for nearly three months. Its conclusions were critical of the Governor, Edward John Eyre, and of the severe repression in the wake of the rebellion. As a result, the Governor was dismissed. More importantly, the political constitution of the colony was transformed and its 200-year-old Assembly abolished.

In the months which followed the outbreak and in the period since, there has been considerable debate about the origin and nature of the disturbances. The Governor and nearly all the whites and browns in the colony believed that the island was faced with a rebellion. They saw it as part of an island-wide conspiracy to put blacks in power. This was not surprising in light of the Haitian revolution at the end of the eighteenth century and the massive 1831 slave revolt in Jamaica. Equally important, Jamaican society was demographically skewed: the overwhelming proportion of the population was black while whites and people of mixed race or coloureds formed a small segment of the population. For the whites and

Fig. 1 Governor John Eyre

browns of Jamaica, the Governor's actions in putting down the rebellion had saved the colony for Britain and preserved them from annihilation.

At the same time, there was a different perspective of the outbreak, especially in Britain. There, the humanitarian lobby perceived it as a spontaneous disturbance, a riot which did not warrant the repression which followed in its wake. John Stuart Mill and others formed the Jamaica Committee, hoping to bring the Governor to trial in England and thereby establish the limits of imperial authority.

This book seeks to show that the outbreak was a rebellion, characterized by advance planning and by a degree of organization. The leader of the rebellion was Paul Bogle, who, with other associates, organized secret meetings in advance of the outbreak. At these meetings oaths were taken and volunteers enlisted in expectation of a violent confrontation at Morant Bay. The meetings were often held in Native Baptist chapels or meeting

houses; this was important since the Native Baptists provided a religious and political counterweight to the prevailing white norms of the colonial society.

Bogle was careful to take into account the forces which would be arrayed against him and attempted to win over the Jamaican Maroons. Moreover, Bogle's men were carefully drilled; when they marched into the town of Morant Bay to confront the vestry, their first target was the police station and the weaponry stored in the station.

It is significant that the rebellion took place in St Thomas in the East. One of the parish's representatives to the House of Assembly was George William Gordon, a brown man who had clashed with the local vestry and was ultimately ejected from it. Gordon had grown increasingly close to the Native Baptists in St Thomas in the East and to Paul Bogle, a deacon of the

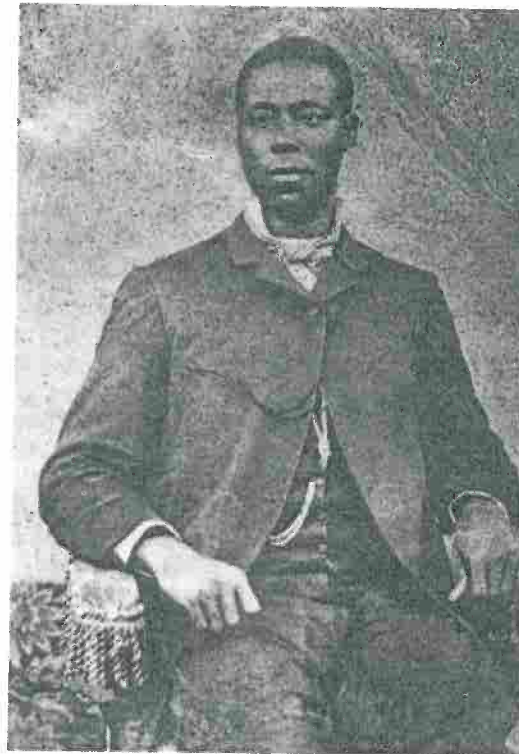


Fig. 2 Paul Bogle

Fig. 3 George William Gordon

church. This identification with the Native Baptists marked Gordon out as a religious and political radical, but he was also a very popular figure in the parish. His expulsion from the vestry led to a bitter court case which was scheduled for a further hearing when the Morant Bay rebellion broke out.

This was not the only grievance of the people in St Thomas in the East. Their stipendiary magistrate, another brown man, T. Witter Jackson, was also a highly respected figure. As a neutral magistrate appointed by the Crown, Jackson was perceived as an impartial magistrate and very different from the planter-dominated magistracy. A month before the outbreak of the rebellion, parish officials therefore engineered Jackson's transfer out of the parish.

Although the tensions surrounding George William Gordon and T. Witter Jackson were specific to St Thomas in the East, the problems of a planter-dominated vestry and magistracy were symptomatic of island-

wide difficulties in post-emancipation Jamaica. The common people were bitter about the continued political, social and economic domination of the whites. Among other things, this meant a lop-sided and partial judicial structure; for many blacks the only solution was an alternative legal system which they themselves controlled. Another problem centred around land: the people believed that their provision grounds belonged to them and that they should not have to pay rent for those lands. Access to land was a symbol of freedom, a freedom which some believed might even be denied to them. In addition, there were repeated complaints about the low level of wages paid on the plantations.

These grievances were not new. Protests over these issues were a recurring feature of the post-emancipation period. Even during the Morant Bay rebellion itself, there was much that was similar to earlier protests in Jamaica as well as to other social movements elsewhere. For example, one of the lasting images of the outbreak was Paul Bogle's insistence that he was not rebelling against the Queen. Eric Hobsbawm has described this sentiment as 'populist legitism'; in Hobsbawm's view the distant ruler 'represents justice' and symbolizes the aspirations of the people. This was true for peasant movements in Tsarist Russia as well as those in nineteenth-century Jamaica.[1]

Hobsbawm has also commented on the importance of social upheavals in revealing problems that 'cannot be studied at all except in and through such moments of eruption'.[2] Since the Morant Bay rebellion was one of those moments, this book seeks to give an accurate account of the rebellion. It provides a detailed narrative of the events on 11 October 1865 as well as of the days which followed the outbreak. As Jamaica has been characterized by a long history of protest, the book attempts to place the Morant Bay rebellion in the context of resistance during slavery as well as after emancipation. In addition, it tries to understand the conditions in 1865 which helped to spark the outbreak and the specific problems of St Thomas in the East. The religious and ideological orientation of those who marched into Morant Bay are also explored as is the response of the authorities to those events. The book examines the suppression of the rebellion and its political consequences. Because the Morant Bay rebellion became a *cause célèbre* in England, some attention is devoted to events there; however, the primary focus of this study is the rebellion in Jamaica.

Note on sources

Many historians have dealt with the Morant Bay rebellion, although in most cases they have done so as part of a larger work or as the culminating event in the post-emancipation period of Jamaican history. Two classic studies,

Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830–1865* (1955) and Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838–1865: An Economic History* (1959) fall into this latter category. Curtin regards Morant Bay as 'another in the succession of riots since emancipation'; it was a demonstration which turned into a riot and then into a rebellion after the events at the court house on 11 October. For Hall, the rebellion was a local riot which was not markedly different from the riots in Falmouth six years previously. Hall believes that it was the reaction of the Governor and the nature of the suppression which distinguished Morant Bay.[3] Another study, Mavis Christine Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society: A Sociopolitical History of the Free Coloreds of Jamaica, 1800–1865* (1976) adopts a similar perspective: she sees Morant Bay as 'nothing but a local riot' and in modern terms, as 'not unlike current "marches" or "sit-ins" '.[4] In my view, Curtin, Hall and Campbell underestimate the planning and organization of the rebellion; they also devote relatively little space to the outbreak itself.

Several other studies have discussed the rebellion but only as part of a larger work. Geoffrey Dutton, *The Hero as Murderer: The life of Edward John Eyre, Australian Explorer and Governor of Jamaica, 1815–1901* (1967) is a biography of Eyre and an attempt to rehabilitate the Governor. Although containing some useful information, it presents a biased and dated view of Paul Bogle and George William Gordon. In my earlier book, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792–1865* (1981), I consider Morant Bay principally in light of the response of the free coloureds to the outbreak. Bernard Semmel, *The Governor Eyre Controversy* (1962) is a very useful work but deals mainly with the aftermath of the rebellion in England. Two other books, Monica Schuler, *'Alas, Alas, Kongo': A Social History of Indentured African Immigration into Jamaica, 1841–1865* (1980) and Robert J. Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica* (1992) are excellent studies of the period. However, Schuler concentrates on African participation in the rebellion and Stewart on the religious background to the outbreak.

Other works deal more fully with the rebellion itself. William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830–1865* (1976) maintains that the uprising was a local action 'rooted in grievances which were common to blacks throughout the island'. For Green, Morant Bay might have led to other outbreaks elsewhere in the island had it been more sustained; moreover, he believes that the implications of the rebellion were 'broad and dangerous'.[5] Don Robotham, *'The Notorious Riot': The Socio-Economic and Political Bases of Paul Bogle's Revolt* (1981), is an important analysis of the rebellion. He rightly points to the premeditation and planning involved in the outbreak. Yet

Robotham concentrates on the background to the rebellion rather than on the outbreak itself.

Two recent studies examine Morant Bay as part of the history of protest in Jamaica beginning with the slave rebellion in 1831 and ending with the labour disturbances of the 1930s. Abigail Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica: The Politics of Rebellion* (1990) is a work of synthesis; she does not intend to provide a detailed historical account of the rebellion. Instead, her aim 'is to identify a general and recurrent pattern of ideological resistance among the direct producers over a broad historical period of development'. However, Bakan does emphasize the importance of land in understanding the rebellion. Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (1992) is the best treatment of the rebellion in the literature. He concludes that Morant Bay was a rebellion and sees areas of unity between sugar workers and peasants in the outbreak. For Holt, the Native Baptists were crucial in providing a vehicle for 'cultural resistance' and for bringing together a religious world view and a heightened political consciousness. But although impressive, Holt devotes only a chapter to Morant Bay in a larger study of Jamaica from 1832 to 1938.[6]

While I agree with Holt and also with Robotham's view of the rebellion, this study is different in that it focuses entirely on the uprising. *'The Killing Time'* seeks to provide more detail on the outbreak and spread of the rebellion as well as on the background to it, the reasons for its occurrence in St Thomas in the East, and the nature of the military and political suppression. In the process, it uses a variety of sources; however, it relies heavily on the evidence presented to the Jamaica Royal Commission, a commission of inquiry established to investigate the origins, outbreak and suppression of the rebellion.

This evidence is a crucial source for investigating the outbreak: it allows the observer to examine the society in ways which would otherwise not be possible. For example, in the wake of the rebellion there was a large number of anonymous, threatening letters which were found throughout the colony, many of which came to light in testimony before the Commission. Sometimes directed at specific individuals, the letters also reveal a widespread sense of injustice in the society at large. Moreover, the anonymous writers complained about some of the same problems which helped to set off the rebellion in St Thomas in the East. Paul Bogle was prompted to go further than the authors of these letters, but their existence suggests that his grievances were not unique.

Similarly, the inquiry into the disturbances revealed a highly politicized society, with a vocal dissident group developing in opposition to the government. Although George William Gordon was the most prominent of these figures, there were many others who were critical of the Governor and

his policies. Consisting mostly of black men, these figures were rounded up after the rebellion and treated brutally. Several were hanged.

The evidence presented before the Jamaica Royal Commission is consequently a vital source for studying the rebellion and for a perspective on mid-nineteenth century Jamaica. However, there are problems with using the testimony of those appearing before the Commission. The Commission began its hearings more than three months after the outbreak of the rebellion. Following the repression of the rebellion the atmosphere in the colony was tense. No doubt some of the witnesses appearing before the commission were coached. The supporters of Governor Eyre sought to magnify the dangers of the rebellion, while his opponents were interested in minimizing the nature of the outbreak.

Yet there are ways to make use of this rich body of material. The Royal Commission not only interviewed over 700 people, it also published an appendix consisting of documents relating to the rebellion. The pre-rebellion correspondence between George William Gordon and Paul Bogle is an example of evidence which was not affected by the outbreak itself. The appendix to the report is therefore a crucial source. But the testimony before the Commission cannot be ignored. Although individual witnesses may have lied, this did not distort the general picture drawn from hundreds of witnesses. In looking at the repression of the rebellion, for example, it is possible that certain events detailed before the Commission never occurred. But there is no doubt about the savage and wanton nature of the suppression by various forces. This is equally true of the evidence revealing planning and organization of the rebellion.

Governor Eyre appeared before the Commission and also provided a considerable body of written evidence to it. Like the accounts of planters during slavery, this material has been discounted as biased and *parti pris*. In Eyre's case there is every reason to be careful about his submissions, especially about his belief in the widespread nature of the conspiracy. Yet some of the material which Eyre submitted was very valuable. It included evidence collected for the Attorney-General as well as transcripts of court cases held in the early part of 1866 involving men and women implicated in the rebellion. It would also be a mistake to discount Eyre's testimony totally and that of the leading whites and browns in the island. This is particularly the case when missionary accounts, newspaper reports, Colonial Office correspondence and contemporary records can supplement the analysis.

There are a number of additional considerations about the evidence given to the Royal Commission. There is a great deal of it, and the weight of the evidence is highly suggestive. In reviewing the testimony, it also becomes clear that this rebellion is comparable to other serious outbreaks; analogies to the 1831 slave rebellion in Jamaica, for example, are therefore

possible. Despite the inevitable exaggerations and post-rebellion paranoia, the evidence on the events preceding the rebellion and, in particular, on the atmosphere during much of 1865, is important in understanding the basis of the rebellion. The Royal Commission performed a useful service in 1866; its labours are still valuable almost 130 years later.

One of the pleasures of research, especially about a topic like the Morant Bay rebellion, is the animated discussion which surrounds the topic. I have had the good fortune of being able to discuss my research, often at great length with a variety of very patient, although sometimes vociferous friends. Among those who have withstood the barrage are Bridget Brereton, David Barry Gaspar, Paul Gilje, Woodville Marshall and James Walvin. Some of the same people have gone further and critically read the manuscript. I am grateful to Bridget Brereton, David Barry Gaspar, Catherine Hall and Kusha Haraksingh for their comments on the manuscript as a whole. James Walvin has been especially helpful: he read the manuscript, looked at subsequent drafts of various chapters and responded unfailingly to numerous requests for advice. Veront Satchell provided very useful research assistance in Jamaica, and Barry and Merle Higman offered superb hospitality on several research trips. A year spent as a Rockefeller Fellow at the Atlantic Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University in 1987–88 proved invaluable, and I am grateful to the head of the program at that time, David William Cohen, for his assistance. While at Johns Hopkins, I was able to seek the advice of, among others, Franklin Knight and Sidney Mintz. The editor of the Warwick series, Alistair Hennessy, has gently prodded this book to completion.

I am grateful to those who provided funds for research on the topic: The British Academy, the University of Warwick, and the Rockefeller Residency Program at Johns Hopkins University. I have also benefited from giving papers on the subject to a variety of audiences. This includes seminars at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London, at Johns Hopkins University, at St Antony's College, Oxford and at the University of Warwick. I have also profited from discussing my work at several conferences: among them were the ASSERCA meetings in Marburg, the Society for Caribbean Studies meetings in England, and other conferences in Pittsburgh, Erlangen and London. Some of these papers have appeared in print and I am grateful to the following publishers for permission to incorporate material from them: to the KITLV Press for my essay, '1865: Prologue to the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica', *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids/New West Indian Guide*, 65 (1991), to James Currey for material from 'Post-Emancipation Protest in Jamaica: The Morant Bay Rebellion', in Mary Turner, ed., *Chattel Slaves into Wage Slaves* (forthcoming) and to Königshausen & Neumann for

material from 'From Slave Rebellions to Morant Bay: The Tradition of Protest in Jamaica', in Wolfgang Binder, ed., *Slavery in the Americas* (1993).

I have had considerable assistance at a variety of archives and libraries. In Jamaica, the staff at the National Archives, the National Library of Jamaica and the University of the West Indies Library have all gone out of their way to aid my research. This was also the case in England and, in particular, at the Public Record Office, the British Library, the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (which houses the Methodist Missionary Society papers), the library of the Baptist Missionary Society, Rhodes House, Oxford (which contains the Anti-Slavery Society papers) and the Senate House Library and the library of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, both at the University of London. I have also profited from the collections at the US National Archives in Washington.

As usual, Ruth Heuman commented on the manuscript as it progressed and, more importantly, encouraged the project all along the way. My children, Daniel and Adam, are too young to have been involved seriously in this project. But, in their own way, they made it all worthwhile; the book is dedicated to them.

Notes

1 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1965), pp. 119–20.
2 E.J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', in *Essays in Social History*, ed. by M.W. Flinn and T.C. Smout (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 17.
3 Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830–1865* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 195, 178, 196, quote on p. 195; Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838–1865: An Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 249–50.
4 Mavis Christine Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society: A Sociopolitical History of the Free Coloreds of Jamaica, 1800–1865* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), p. 337.
5 William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 390.
6 Abigail Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica: The Politics of Rebellion* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), pp. 11, 87, quote on p. 11; Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 301, 300, 291, quote on p. 291.

Part I:

The outbreak

Another vestryman saw people in the crowd brandishing the police arms they had taken from the police station and heard them cry 'Colour for colour!' and 'War, war!' As the mob surged forward, Baron von Ketelhodt cried out, 'Peace!' and other officials called out 'Peace in Her Majesty's Name!' But the people responded 'No Peace! Hell today!'

The Court House, Morant Bay, 11 October 1865

CHAPTER 3 The tradition of protest in Jamaica

Jamaica has a long history of resistance, stretching from the early years of slavery through the post-emancipation period. During slavery the resistance took a variety of forms, from passive acts of protest such as malingering and sabotage to violent rebellion. The Maroons, run-away slaves who established communities in the interior of the island, also attacked plantations and, in the early eighteenth century, threatened the viability of the colony. It was the rebellions and the slave conspiracies, however, which left a more direct legacy for the rebels at Morant Bay.

Slave rebellions in Jamaica have been far more numerous than elsewhere in the British Caribbean and on a considerably larger scale than those in the United States. In Barbados, for example, there were no major rebellions for over a century from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth.[1] The largest outbreak in the United States, the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831, consisted of only seventy slaves. Many rebellions in Jamaica, on the other hand, involved hundreds of slaves; in the most serious outbreaks, thousands of slaves took part.

There have been a number of explanations for the significant number of rebellions in Jamaica, including the high ratio of slaves to whites. Jamaica had a heavy concentration of slaves compared to the number of whites on the island: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries slaves outnumbered whites by more than ten to one and by more than thirteen to one in the nineteenth century. This was markedly different from Barbados, where a more stable white population meant that the comparable ratio there was four slaves for every white. In the United States only two states had slave populations which slightly outnumbered the whites; in every other state, whites were in the majority.

Some have also argued that the ratio of creole slaves (those born in the colony) to African slaves was important. In this view, creole slaves had more at stake in the system and were less likely to rebel than African slaves, especially those who had recently been imported to the colony. Again, there was a greater percentage of Africans in the Jamaican slave population than in Barbados or in the United States. While this ratio may be significant for Jamaica in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it has less bearing in the nineteenth when creole slaves led a major rebellion.

Other factors might also be useful in explaining the slave rebellions in Jamaica. The marked degree of absentee ownership among whites in the island contrasts sharply with the patterns of white resident ownership in Barbados and in the United States. Also, Jamaica's geography, with a mountainous and often inaccessible interior, offered hiding places for rebels. A further element (which was not unique to Jamaica) was the impact of social, religious and political ideas, especially toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. The campaigns of the abolitionists, first to abolish the slave trade and then slavery itself, influenced the slaves as did the example of the Haitian revolution.[2]

Recent refinements to these arguments suggest that slave rebellions were more likely to occur where the forces of control were weakened or distracted and also when slave expectations were frustrated.[3] This was particularly the case when slaves believed they were to be freed, but that the planters or local authorities were withholding their freedom. An examination of some of the major rebellions in Jamaica bears out many of these observations.

The first serious slave rebellion which the British encountered in Jamaica occurred in 1673, less than twenty years after they first arrived in the island. It involved 300 slaves, mostly from the Gold Coast (Ghana), who worked on a large plantation in the parish of St Ann. They murdered their master and fled to the interior of the island. There, the slaves resisted attacks against them and, according to a contemporary writer, were 'never dislodged'. Indeed, the slaves

> almost destroyed the first parties that pursued them which not only discouraged other parties from going against them but also Encouraged many other negroes to rise, committ barbarities, and then fly to them severall instances of which Soon followed.

These rebels formed the basis of one of the two major Maroon communities on the island.[4]

This was not an isolated outbreak. The last quarter of the seventeenth century witnessed several more rebellions, the largest of which occurred in 1690. In that year more than 500 slaves, almost all from the Gold Coast and belonging to an estate in the parish of Clarendon, broke out in rebellion. Although many of them were captured or killed, others appear to have joined the existing band of Maroons.[5]

The number of rebellions increased significantly in the eighteenth century. Mary Turner, an authority on the slave rebellion of 1831, regards riots and rebellions against slavery in eighteenth-century Jamaica as 'endemic'; moreover, she calculates that such outbreaks occurred on average once every five years. Since Maroons were involved in many of these rebellions, the whites waged a campaign against them between 1725 and 1740. But the

attempt to suppress the Maroons proved to be costly and difficult. Between 1730 and 1734, for example, the whites spent £100,000 in a vain effort to destroy the Maroons. When peace was finally declared in 1739, part of the treaty stipulated that the Maroons should return runaway slaves to the whites. Yet slave rebellions and riots continued to plague the colony.[6]

The most serious rebellion of the eighteenth century broke out in 1760. Known as Tacky's rebellion, after the name of the African rebel chief, it occurred while the British were engaged in the Seven Years' War against Spain and France. This meant that imperial forces were more concerned about external attacks than internal rebellions. Moreover, the war played havoc with the economy: sugar exports were reduced by half and the cost of imported goods was doubled. In assessing the rebellion, Michael Craton concludes that slaves were encouraged to resist because of the weakening of the armed forces.[7]

The rebellion was one of the bloodiest in Jamaica's history. It lasted for six months and resulted in the death of sixty whites and the loss of over 1,000 slaves, 500 of whom were either killed or committed suicide and another 500 transported out of the colony. The Akan-speaking Coromantee slaves from the Gold Coast who were at the heart of the outbreak aimed at 'the entire extirpation of the white inhabitants; the enslaving of all such negroes as might refuse to join them; and the partition of the island into small principalities in the African mode . . . .'[8] The rebellion was an island-wide conspiracy which shocked the planters and was equal in its impact to the Christmas rebellion of 1831 as well as the Morant Bay rebellion over a century later.[9]

There were fewer outbreaks in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, although several conspiracies were discovered in 1823 and 1824. Yet the most serious slave rebellion in Jamaica's history was yet to come. It broke out two days after Christmas in 1831. Although the rebellion lasted less than two weeks, it did massive damage to property and involved thousands of slaves. One estimate suggests that 20,000 slaves may have been involved in the rebellion, more than 200 of whom were killed during the rebellion and a further 300 executed. Property valued at over £1,000,000 sterling was destroyed.[10] The Christmas rebellion or the 'Baptist war', as it came to be known, was a crucial event in the abolition of slavery. In a variety of ways it also foreshadowed the Morant Bay rebellion.

As with events at Morant Bay more than thirty years later, the Christmas rebellion came at a time of economic and political stress. A severe drought had affected Jamaica and curtailed the production of ground provisions. Food was scarce and expensive, and when heavy rains hit the island, hunger was followed by epidemics of smallpox and dysentery.[11]

It was not only material conditions which created disaffection. There was also a heightened degree of political consciousness among the slaves stimu-

lated by the resistance of local whites to the British government. In 1831, and under pressure from the Anti-Slavery Society, the British government took steps to ameliorate the condition of the slaves. It sent out a revised Order in Council outlining improvements to be enacted locally on behalf of the slaves. The response in Jamaica was predictable: the whites organized a series of island-wide meetings to denounce the interference of the Home government in its internal affairs. Whites even began to reconsider their allegiance to the Crown; if Britain would not protect the institution of slavery, perhaps the United States could be encouraged to do so.[12]

The whites discussed these developments openly and apparently with little concern about the possible effects on the slaves. The slaves were consequently made aware of the growing anti-slavery agitation in England. As the whites became more vociferous in their denunciation of the British government, many slaves came to the conclusion that they had already been freed, but that the whites were withholding their freedom. Since they believed that they were free, the slaves surmised that they would not meet any resistance from the King's troops in the event of a rebellion; indeed, the soldiers might even come to their aid. Some slaves even asserted that gunpowder unloaded from a naval ship during the rebellion was for them.[13]

This naive belief in the Crown had echoes at Morant Bay in 1865. Many people in Jamaica believed that the Queen could never have written 'The Queen's Advice', a government document which was circulated throughout the island that year. They also maintained that the Queen had sent them clothes and money during the summer of 1865, only to have the goods diverted by the planters to the Indian indentured labourers. At various stages of the rebellion, Paul Bogle made it clear that he was not rebelling against the Queen. There was even a hope that the Queen would replace the current set of white authorities and send others with whom the rebels could negotiate.[14]

The leadership of the Christmas rebellion was also comparable to that at Morant Bay. Sam Sharpe, the rebel leader, was an urban slave, educated and well thought of by his master. He was highly articulate and became a leader in the Baptist church as well as a 'Daddy' or 'Ruler' in the Native Baptist church. Much like Bogle, then, who was a deacon in the Native Baptist church, Sharpe used the organization of the church to organize the rebellion. As Mary Turner has suggested, 'the Baptist war . . . was essentially the Native Baptist war; its leaders shaped mission teaching to their own ends'.[15]

Sharpe planned a campaign of passive resistance for the period just after Christmas, 1831: the slaves would simply cease work until their owners paid their wages and thereby conceded that the slaves were free. However, Sharpe also developed an alternative strategy of armed rebellion in case passive resistance failed.[16]

Some of Sharpe's methods were quite similar to those employed by Paul Bogle. For example, like Bogle, he made use of oaths to exact loyalty from his confederates. At a meeting before the 1831 rebellion, Sharpe asserted that 'if "Buckra" would pay them, they would work as before; but if any attempt was made to force them to work as slaves, then they would fight for their freedom.'[17] The oath was taken on a Bible:

> Sharpe said we must sit down. We are free. Must not work again unless we got half pay. He took a Bible out of his pocket. Made me swear that I would not work again until we got half pay.

One version of the oath included promising 'not [to] trouble anybody or raise any rebellion'.[18] However, another oath taken just before the outbreak of the rebellion was more threatening: those accepting it vowed 'not to flinch till they had succeeded in getting their freedom'.[19]

The oaths taken by the slaves in 1831 and by the ex-slaves in 1865 represent a fusion of religion and politics, but one in which political goals were dominant. Both the Baptist war and the Morant Bay rebellion were political movements, but they were based around religious meetings and partly inspired by Baptist and Native Baptist traditions. As Mary Turner has commented on the 1831 rebellion, it demonstrated 'some degree of political maturity among the slaves. They had created a protest movement . . . in which religion had been subordinated to political aims'.[20] The same analysis applies to Morant Bay.

There were, of course, significant differences between the two rebellions. The Christmas rebellion was far more widespread than Morant Bay. It engulfed all of the western parishes of the island rather than being restricted to one parish, and it resulted in the destruction of far more property. Perhaps as many as ten times more participants took part in the slave rebellion than at Morant Bay. It is also possible to contrast the aims of those involved in the rebellions. In the Baptist war slaves were seeking their freedom, a freedom they defined as the right to work for wages on the plantations. At Morant Bay the rebels were intent on making their freedom more meaningful; they were therefore concerned about more specific grievances such as the lack of justice, access to land, and low and irregular pay.

Yet the course of each rebellion revealed some striking similarities. In each case, slaves and ex-slaves could be found who were opposed to the rebels or, at the very least, sought to protect the plantations on which they worked. These divisions sometimes reflected class differences within the plantation community. On one cattle pen in St James, for example, the head driver in 1831 sought to safeguard the buildings from being destroyed, only to find the slaves following the lead of a recently-released prisoner who set them on fire. Some slaves mounted guards to defend their estates, others worked normally during the rebellion to harvest the sugar without white

supervision, and still others hid in the woods. Most of these responses were repeated during the Morant Bay rebellion.[21]

The suppression of both rebellions was savage. Soldiers and militiamen seem to have regarded all blacks in the affected areas as enemies and subject to immediate retribution. Running away from the soldiers was regarded as sufficient proof of guilt and alleged ringleaders were often executed without trial. The courts martial were shams; in the Christmas rebellion, out of ninety-nine slaves tried at Montego Bay, eighty-one were executed. Prisoners were sometimes executed for minor offences, such as killing estate stock, and whole slave villages on some of the rebel estates were destroyed.[22]

The extent of the 1831 rebellion as well as the brutal manner in which it was put down had widespread reverberations in England. Most importantly, it had the effect of speeding up emancipation: the Act freeing the slaves was passed less than two years after the rebellion had begun. For the ex-slaves, too, the rebellion was not forgotten; it surfaced later during the riots and rebellions of the post-emancipation period.

Post-emancipation riots and rebellions

Recent research suggests that the Morant Bay rebellion was not an isolated phenomenon in the years following emancipation. During the period after 1838 there were numerous riots and conspiracies, several of which had the potential of becoming island-wide revolts. The rebellion at Morant Bay has overshadowed these earlier events, but it is important to place Morant Bay both in the context of slave rebellions and of resistance in the post-emancipation period.[23]

As with slave rebellions, the post-emancipation outbreaks had certain elements in common. Rumours of re-enslavement helped to spark the conspiracies and disturbances of 1839 and 1848 as well as Morant Bay itself. The threat of re-enslavement was often associated with the possibility of Jamaica joining the United States as a slave state. Other issues, including disputes over rents and wages as well as problems about land, were also conducive to riots and conspiracies in this period.[24]

Several of these elements were prominent in a conspiracy which came to light in July, 1839. It arose from a rumour that 'the white and brown people were going to surround the chapel on the 1st of August [the first anniversary of full freedom], and kill the black men, and make the women slaves again'.[25] Labourers in several western parishes including Westmoreland, St Elizabeth, St James and Trelawny consequently purchased guns and machetes to protect themselves. They also carried out target practice and drilling exercises and, quite significantly, adopted the names of the leaders of the 1831 slave rebellion in these drills.

The fear of re-enslavement was one of the driving forces of this conspiracy. Another was the problem of land. As Lorna Simmonds suggests, for the labourers 'acquiring land was the true indicator that freedom had been properly achieved'.[26] Ex-slaves were therefore prepared to 'fight' for access to land. As one labourer, Edward Campbell, put it:

> the black people were going to fight in August, if the white and brown people did not deliver up the land to them . . . .That there must be a fight to get their lands; that if the last fight [the 1831 slave rebellion] did not happen, they would not get their freedom so soon; and that everybody did not join in the last war, but now all were free, and must help in the fight that was coming.[27]

The Christmas rebellion was the model for these ex-slaves. Moreover, just as in that rebellion and at Morant Bay as well, there were reports that the Queen and her forces would be on their side. There was also a suggestion that the Maroons would come to the aid of the labourers. Although no outbreak occurred, whites reportedly left the affected areas in anticipation of a rebellion.

Nine years later, in 1848, another conspiracy was discovered among the ex-slaves in western Jamaica. This time the conspiracy was accompanied by a series of protests and riots. Again, the ex-slaves regarded 1 August as the day the whites would choose to re-enslave the blacks. The date was particularly significant, as it was the tenth anniversary of full freedom. In addition, the labourers and peasants were concerned about the threat of increased taxation as well as a lowering of wages on the estates.[28]

The late 1840s was a particularly difficult time for Jamaica. The British government had announced the equalization of sugar duties in 1846, resulting ultimately in the loss of protection for sugar produced in the British colonies. In Jamaica this created an economic crisis for the planters. They therefore sought to depress wages on the estates, often by as much as 25 per cent. However, many ex-slaves regarded this development as a first step toward the reintroduction of slavery.

The peasants and labourers were also disturbed by the planters' public outbursts. As in 1831, the planters held meetings to denounce the actions of the Home government. Again, annexation to the United States was raised as a possibility. This idea was given added credibility by reports in the American press which linked the distressed state of the island with the benefits of annexation. Moreover, the planters were complaining that freedom had been granted too quickly and were speculating on the chances of reimposing slavery.[29]

Just as the planters came together in their denunciation of the British government, blacks involved in the conspiracy sought to create unity by using colour to appeal for support. A headman on an estate in Hanover reported being approached by several men who said, 'Mr Brown, now you see we are all black, we must stand to our colour.'[30] There were also condemnations of brown people for helping the whites to suppress the 1831 rebellion. The 1831 rebellion as well as the Haitian revolution continued to serve as models of protest.

One of the complaints of the blacks was directed at 'White Man's' or 'Buckra Law'. The labourers were particularly incensed at their treatment by overseers and bookkeepers on the sugar estates. In addition, as in the 1831 slave rebellion, there were reports that black Baptist leaders were leading the resistance, although the Baptist missionaries denied any involvement in any such plans.[31]

The whites took the threat of revolt seriously. Some moved out of the threatened districts. Although the Governor, Charles Grey, was sceptical about an outbreak, he none the less transferred members of the West India Regiment to strategic points in the affected areas. Grey also sent a warship to Montego Bay and to Savanna-la-Mar to calm the western part of the island. In addition, Grey issued a proclamation designed to dispel rumours of re-enslavement. The proclamation made it clear that there was no intention to revoke emancipation.[32]

While there was no general outbreak, there were localised protests in various parts of the island. In July disturbances took place in Black River, St Elizabeth and also in Clarendon. Some of the people involved in these protests were aware of the conspiracy. Later in the year a riot occurred in Brown's Town, St Ann, in which two people were killed and several people seriously wounded. It was followed by a riot on an estate in St Thomas in the Vale that involved over 150 estate workers who resisted police seeking to execute warrants. However, the most serious outbreak during the year broke out in August on Goshen estate in St Mary.[33]

The main issue in the Goshen riots was taxation. The people on the estate objected to the high tax assessments made by the collecting constable, Richard Rigg, and to his appropriation of personal property because of unpaid taxes. Since Rigg was told that he would be killed if he came to Goshen, he brought along two policemen when he travelled to the estate. In the course of carrying out his duties, Rigg as well as the policemen were attacked and seriously wounded by a crowd of at least 200 people armed with sticks. When the police returned a week later to issue warrants against twenty-four people involved in the assault, they were confronted by 500 men and women armed with sticks and some weapons. This skirmish appears to have been carefully planned: the mob consisted of people from several other parishes as well as a few Maroons. In the mêlée some of the policemen were seriously wounded and all fled. Another detachment of police met the same fate the following week, and it took the 2nd West India Regiment to restore order.[34]

The Goshen riots were directed against the tax system, which the people on the estate considered unjust. Governor Grey also regarded the assessments as unfair and was worried about the possibility of a serious escalation in the level of violence. He had good reason to be alarmed: one of the policemen who went with Riggs to Goshen reported hearing the people say they would 'murder Mr Rigg, and the police in particular; and that the St James's war would be nothing to what they would commence.'[35] Although seventeen years had passed since the 1831 slave rebellion, it clearly remained an important symbol.

Two other riots – both of which occurred in 1859 – were also significant precursors of Morant Bay. The first, which took place in February, was directed against the toll-gates in several parts of Westmoreland. Residents tore down the toll-gates in at least four different places in the parish, suggesting a concerted campaign against them. Public feeling against the tolls had been vented in a petition sent to the Governor six months earlier, but he had ignored it. When some of the offenders were tried for their part in the assault on the toll-gates, people attacked the police station. Peace was ultimately restored when troops arrived from Port Royal.[36]

The second major riot in 1859 developed over a property dispute involving Florence Hall estate near the town of Falmouth. The controversy was between a coloured man, Theodore Buie, and his Scottish aunt who sought to evict him from the property. Buie and about sixty others were arrested, but before they could be brought to trial a large crowd attacked the police station and freed them. As the assailants continued to stone the police station, the police fired on them, killing two women and severely wounding eight or nine others, one of whom died a few days later. During the riot, the crowd set fire to the police station and prevented anyone from extinguishing it. They also tried to burn down other parts of the town, and succeeded in destroying the Falmouth wharf. Together, the events at Falmouth and Florence Hall have usually been described as a riot, but there were commentators at the time who believed that the situation was far more serious and that it bordered on rebellion. Moreover, much of it occurred on 1 August, the twenty-first anniversary of full freedom. Although it may have been coincidental that the trial of Buie and his associates was set for that date, Simmonds maintains that 'it was the perfect time to protest the absence of fair justice for black Jamaicans . . . .'[37]

The riots in 1859 highlighted some of the issues which profoundly affected post-emancipation Jamaica and would prove crucial six years later at Morant Bay. High taxes, whether in the form of assessments or of toll-gates, were a serious problem for the mass of the people, especially as the

Legislature had shifted a heavy proportion of the taxes onto the ex-slaves and away from the plantocracy. The lack of justice, which was an important element in the Buie case, was one of the leading factors in the outbreak at Morant Bay. In both the Florence Hall riots and the Morant Bay rebellion, women were major actors and also major victims of the authorities.

The Morant Bay rebellion, then, was preceded by a long history of slave rebellions as well as a series of riots in the post-emancipation period. Many of the people involved in these riots continued to look to the rebellions as models of resistance, especially the 1831 Christmas rebellion. However, the agenda of the rioters was different in the period after emancipation. It included resisting any attempt at re-enslavement and regarded access to land as a measure of full freedom. Above all, this meant creating the conditions for a meaningful freedom. This would also be the agenda at Morant Bay.

Notes

1 Hilary Beckles and Karl Watson, 'Social Protest and Labour Bargaining: The Changing Nature of Slaves' Responses to Plantation Life in Eighteenth-Century Barbados', *Slavery and Abolition*, 8 (December, 1987), pp. 272–93.
2 Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica* (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1967), pp. 274–9.
3 Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 13.
4 Richard Hart, *Slaves Who Abolished Slavery*, 2 vols., (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1985) 2, p. 14; Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, p. 267.
5 Hart, *Slaves*, 2, pp. 17–18; Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, p. 268.
6 Mary Reckord (née Turner), 'The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831', *Past and Present*, 40 (July, 1968), p. 108; Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, pp. 269–70. On the Maroons, see also Barbara K. Kopytoff, 'The Maroons of Jamaica: An Ethnohistorical Study of Incomplete Polities, 1655–1905', Ph.D. thesis, U. of Pennsylvania, 1973; Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1973); Hart, *Slaves*; Gad Heuman, ed., *Out of the House of Bondage: Runaways, Resistance and Marronage in Africa and the New World* (London: Frank Cass, 1986) and Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655–1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal* (Granby, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1988).
7 Craton, *Testing the Chains*, pp. 125–7.
8 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vol. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 2, p. 447.
9 Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 138. See also the discussion in Hart, *Slaves*, 2, ch. 6.
10 Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, p. 273; Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 14; Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Rebellion: Anatomy of the Slave Revolt of 1831/32 in Jamaica', *The Jamaican Historical Society Bulletin*, 8 (December, 1981), pp. 80–1. See also Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'The Slave Rebellion in the Great River Valley of St James – 1831/32', *The Jamaican Historical Review*, 13 (1982), pp. 11–30.

11 Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787–1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 149.
12 Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792–1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 84. British plans for ameliorating slavery began in 1823 when the first proposals to improve the condition of the slaves were dispatched to the colonies. However, whites in Jamaica resisted these directives, as they would again in 1831.
13 Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 154.
14 JRC: Evidence of Sligo Campbell 140; Evidence of W. Cutherbert 139; Evidence of Raynes Waite Smith 744; Evidence of William Rennie, p. 418. For more information on 'The Queen's Advice', see ch. 4.
15 Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, p. 153.
16 *Ibid.*, pp. 153–4.
17 Henry Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being a Narrative of Facts and Incidents which Occurred in a British Colony during the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1853), p. 112.
18 CO 137/185, Trial of Samuel Sharpe, 19 April 1832, pp. 308, 309.
19 *PP*, 1831/32, (561) XLVII, 35.
20 Reckord, 'Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831', p. 123.
21 Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, pp. 158–9.
22 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–1.
23 Lorna Elaine Simmonds, ' "The Spirit of Disaffection": Civil Disturbances in Jamaica, 1838–1865' (M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1982), p. 147.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 15; Michael Craton, 'Continuity Not Change: The Incidence of Unrest Among Ex-Slaves in the British West Indies, 1838–1876', *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Comparative Studies*, 9 (September, 1988), p. 145.
25 *PP*, 1840, (212) XXXV, McNeel to Smith, 23 July 1839, Evidence of Robert Murray, 40. The discussion of the 1839 conspiracy which follows is based on Lorna Simmonds' treatment of it: see Simmonds, ' "The Spirit of Disaffection" ', pp. 37–39.
26 Simmonds, ' "The Spirit of Disaffection" ', p. 38.
27 *PP*, 1840, (212) XXXV, 43.
28 Simmonds, ' "The Spirit of Disaffection" ', p. 77.
29 *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 80–1.
30 *PP*, 1847/48, (685) XLIV, 11.
31 Robert J. Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 152.
32 Simmonds, 'The Spirit of Disaffection', pp. 83–4.
33 *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 88.
34 *Ibid.*, pp. 85–6. See also Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, p. 205.
35 *PP*, 1849, (280) XXXVII, 53.
36 Douglas Hall, *Free Jamaica, 1838–1865: An Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 248; Simmonds, ' "The Spirit of Disaffection" ', p. 123.
37 Anon., *The Florence Hall Controversy and the Falmouth Riots* (Falmouth, Jamaica, n.d.[1859]), pp. 10–13; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, pp. 267–8; Simmonds, ' "The Spirit of Disaffection" ', p. 128.