

TREVOR BURNARD,

MYSTERY, TYRANNY

+ DESIRE

chapter one

The Gray Zone

An Introduction to Thomas Thistlewood and His Diaries

[A] Good Ship and easy gales have at last brought me to this part of the New World. New indeed in regard of ours, for here I find everything alter'd. . . . Britannia rose to my View all gay, with native Freedom blest, the seat of Arts, The Nurse of Learning, the Seat of Liberty, and Friend of every Virtue, where the meanest swain, with quiet Ease, possesses the Fruits of his hard Toil, contented with his Lot; while I was now to settle in a Place not half inhabited, cursed with intestine Broils, where slavery was establish'd, and the poor toiling Wretches work'd in the sultry Heat, and never knew the Sweets of Life or the advantage of their Painful Industry in a Place which, except the Verdure of its Fields, had nothing to recommend it.—Charles Leslie, *A new and exact account of Jamaica*

A Year in the Tropics

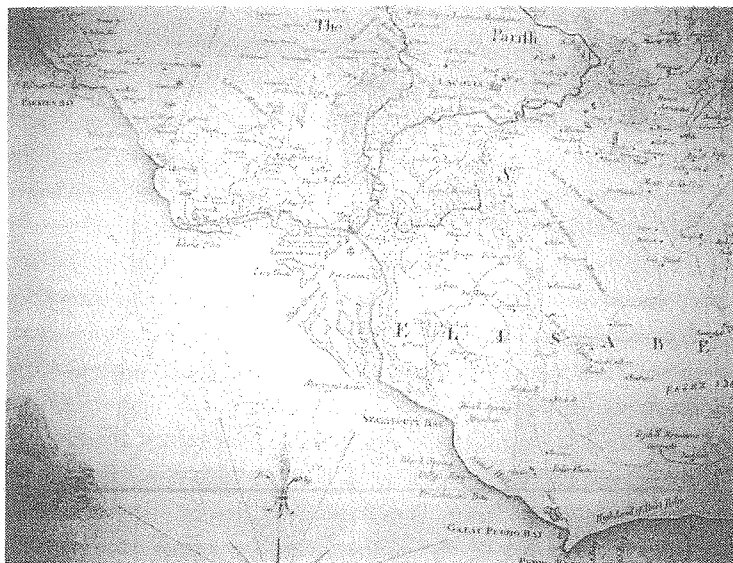
On 24 April 1750 at about noon, the *Flying Flamborough* docked at Kingston, Jamaica, after a long and troublesome voyage from London. Aboard was Thomas Thistlewood, age twenty-nine, the second son of a tenant farmer from Tupholme, Lincolnshire. Having failed to establish himself as a farmer in his home district, he had resolved to seek his fortune in the wider world. A trip to India as a supercargo on an East India ship had come to nothing. By late 1749, he had decided to set off for Jamaica.¹ His baggage was not impressive. After paying for his passage, he had £14 18s. 5d. He hoped to supplement this small sum by selling “36 cases of razors” he had bought from a merchant in Ghent, which were worth £28 16s. and had been “made over to Mr. Henry Hewitt of Brompton in lieu of £25 and its interest at 5% till paid.” He also had a promissory note of £60 from his older brother, William, which was all that remained of his inheritance from his deceased parents. In addition, he brought a bed; a liquor case with arrack, Brazilian rum, and Lisbon wine; two large sea chests crammed with books and four pictures, including “a very fine print of ye pretender, bought at Ghent”; surveying instruments; kitchen gear; mementos from his trip to the Orient; and an impressive collection of clothes that included nine waistcoats in various fabrics and colors. Most important for our purposes, he took with him a “Marble cover’d book for a journal.” Through this “Marble cover’d book” and thirty-six others just like it, we are afforded a rare entrée into the life and times of an ordinary man in an extraordinary society.

Thistlewood was no stranger to exotic locales. Nevertheless, the Caribbean presented him with novel sights and sounds. On a brief stopover in St. John’s, Antigua, he ventured into town with a fellow passenger to see “a pretty piece of modern architecture” that was to be the state house and spent “6d. which here is 9d.” at a rum house. He was not impressed. St. John’s was “an indifferent sort of place; streets rugged and stony and everything dear.” He visited a slave market, where he saw “yams, cashoo apples, guinea corn, plantains &c.” and first encountered West Indian slaves—“black girls” who “laid hold of us and would gladly have had us gone in with them.” Kingston was more agreeable. It was larger, with “24 ships . . . and other craft in abundance” in the harbor.² He visited two of the oldest residents of Kingston—the eighty-one-year-old William Cornish, who had been in Kingston since at least 1700, and the Reverend William May, rector of Kingston Parish since 1722, who gave him advice about how to survive—drink only water and eat lots of chocolate. He also started to learn about the culture of the majority of the inhabitants of his new land. He

went “to the westward of the Town, to see Negro Diversions—odd Music, Motions &c. The Negroes of each Nation by themselves.”³

He learned even more when he traveled to Savanna-la-Mar in Westmoreland Parish in the southwest corner of the island. Within hours of arriving at noon on Friday, 4 May 1750, he was offered a job as an overseer on one of the properties of wealthy sugar planter William Dorrill. Dorrill lent him a horse, gave him a meal, and let him stay at his plantation, “ready to succeed his overseer who leaves him in about two months.” As it turned out, Dorrill’s position did not become vacant until September 1751. In the meantime, Thistlewood accepted a position from another wealthy planter, Florentius Vassall, as pen keeper at Vineyard Pen (“pen” is a Jamaican term for a property producing livestock or garden produce) in neighboring St. Elizabeth Parish on 2 July 1750. In the two months he lived at Dorrill’s, however, he began to understand the extent to which white dominance rested on naked force. Twelve days after Thistlewood’s arrival in Westmoreland Parish, Dorrill meted out “justice” to “runaway Negroes.” He whipped them severely and then rubbed pepper, salt, and lime juice into their wounds. Three days later, the body of a dead runaway slave was brought to Dorrill. He cut off the slave’s head and stuck it on a pole and then burned the body. These lessons on the necessity of controlling slaves through fear and violence were reinforced at Vineyard Pen. In mid-July 1750, less than two weeks after becoming pen keeper at Vineyard, he watched his first employer, the scion of one of the richest and most distinguished families on the island, give the leading slave on the pen, Dick, a mulatto driver, “300 lashes for his many crimes and negligences.” In the nearby town of Lacovia on 1 October, he “Saw a Negroe fellow named English . . . Tried [in] Court and hang’d upon ye 1st tree immediately (drawing his knife upon a White Man) his hand cutt off, Body left unbury’d.” Given these examples, it is not surprising that Thistlewood also maintained his authority with a heavy hand. On 20 July, already convinced that his slaves were “a Nest of Thieves and Villains,” he whipped his first slave. He gave Titus, a slave who harbored a runaway, 150 lashes on 1 August.⁴

The relationship between whites and blacks was fraught but involved a significant degree of close interaction. During his first year in Jamaica, Thistlewood lived in a primarily black world. Between November 1750 and February 1751, he saw white people no more than three or four times.⁵ On 8 January 1751, Thistlewood recorded that “Today first saw a white person since December 19th that I was at Black River.” The forty slaves at Vineyard educated Thistlewood in Jamaican and African ways. Dick, the slave driver, introduced him to gungo peas (which were used in soup and served with rice) and slave medici-



Thistlewood's first post was at Vineyard Pen, marked on this 1763 map as on the southern edge of the Great Morass in southwest St. Elizabeth Parish, a few miles inland from the hamlet of Black River. From Thomas Craskell and James Simpson, *Map of the County of Cornwall, in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1763).

nal remedies. Other slaves taught him how to cure sores and comfort irritated eyes. They told him about Jamaican plants and animals and adaptations of African recipes they had developed in enslavement. His diaries in the first year contain African and Creole words such as *calalu*, a vegetable stew; *pone*, cornmeal; *patu*, the Twi word for owl; and *tabrabrah*, a Coromantee, or Gold Coast, name for a type of rope dance. He heard African animal fables, such as how the crab got its shell, and learned of *duppys*, or ghosts, and *abarra*, evil spirits who lured individuals to their death by adopting the guises of friends and relatives. His slaves told him “if you hurt a Carrion Crow in her eyes (or a Yellow Snake) you will never be well until they are well or dead.” He noted that to “drink grave water was the most solemn oath among Negroes” and began to distinguish between different types of African cultural practices. At Christmas, he allowed his slaves to celebrate and watched “Creolian, Congo and Coromantee etc. Musick and dancing.” Six months later, on his departure for Egypt Plantation, a sugar estate of Dorrill’s in Westmoreland, he threw a party for Marina, a house slave and his mistress, at which she got “very drunk.” Thistlewood watched slaves singing and dancing in “Congo” style and marveled at one slave

who could eat fire and strike “his naked arm many times with the edge of a bill, very hard, yet receive no harm.”⁶

The day after Marina’s party, Thistlewood also recorded in his diary, “Pro. Temp. a nocte Sup lect cum Marina,” detailing in schoolboy Latin the last time he slept with his first Jamaican sexual conquest.⁷ Thistlewood took full advantage of the sexual opportunities offered to white men. Living openly with slave or free mulatto concubines brought no social condemnation. White men were expected to have sex with black women, whether black women wanted sex or not. In his first year in the island—during which he slept with thirteen women on fifty-nine occasions—Thistlewood noted several prurient items of sexual curiosity. On 26 June 1750, he recorded an anecdote from Dorrill about a slave woman with a black lover and a white lover who had twins—one mulatto, one black. Three weeks later, the slave housekeeper at Vineyard borrowed his razor to shave her private parts, leaving Thistlewood to speculate that “some in Jamaica are very sensual.” He learned from slave men how to make a powder that made men irresistible to women and that in Africa girls were not allowed to tickle their ears with a feather because it would arouse them. They also told him that “many a Negro woman [received] a beating from their husbands” when they drank too much cane juice because it made them appear as if they had just had sexual intercourse and that “Negro youths in this Country take unclarified Hoggs lard . . . to make their Member larger.”⁸

Jamaica differed from Thistlewood’s native Lincolnshire in both small and large ways. Thistlewood thought it interesting that “At dinner today, every Body took hold of the Table Cloth, held it up, Threw off the Crumbs and an Empty Plate, Jamaica Fashion.” The heat, sunshine, and sudden tropical downpours were also outside his experience. Nevertheless, by the middle of what passed for a Jamaican winter, Thistlewood found himself “somewhat inur’d to the heat of the Country.” A cold snap found people complaining of “the coldness and Sharpness of the North [wind] and asking one another the things to stand it” even though it was “hotter than our summer in England.” Even more extraordinary was the tropical phenomenon of hurricanes. At midday on 11 September 1751, the wind, already fresh, became a gale. From 3:00 to 7:00 P.M., the hurricane raged. It “Blew the shingles off the Stables and boiling house” of Egypt, “burst open the great house windows that were secured by strong bars,” and inundated the house with water. Trees were blown down everywhere, and the white people fled the great house and “shelter[ed] in the storehouse and hurricane house.” The next day, Thistlewood surveyed the damage: “The boards, staves and shingles blown about as if they were feathers. Most of the new wharf

washed away, vast wrecks of sea weeds drove a long way upon the land, a heavy iron roller case carried a long way from where it lay, and half buried in the sand." Thistlewood was half terrified and half excited about a physical event that made "all the lands look open and bare, and very ragged, [and] the woods appear like our woods in England in the fall of the leaf, when about half down."⁹

His fellow whites also piqued his curiosity. One of the first whites Thistlewood met in Westmoreland was "old Mr. Jackson." Thomas Jackson was hardly a gentleman—he "goes without stockings or shoes, check shirt, coarse Jackett, Oznabrig Trousers, Sorry Hatt, wears his own hair"—yet he was a wealthy man, "worth £8–10,000." It was not difficult to make money in Jamaica's booming economy. Thomas Tomlinson, a servant, "expects to make £200–300 per annum by planting 4 to 5 acres on Mr. Dorrill's land by his leave." Abundant sexual opportunity, lavish hospitality, excellent shooting and fishing, and a remarkable egalitarianism accompanied whites' great wealth. Whites were given special legal advantages and were invited as a matter of course to the houses of leading citizens. The custos, or chief magistrate of Westmoreland, Colonel James Barclay, entertained Thistlewood within four months of his becoming an overseer at Egypt. Yet white supremacy was held precariously in a country where over 95 percent of the population on the rural western frontier was black. Whites acted brutally toward blacks because they knew only fierce, arbitrary, and instantaneous violence would keep blacks in check. Thistlewood knew blacks were prepared to turn the tables on their masters should the opportunity arise. On 17 July 1751, Thistlewood "heard a Shell Blown twice . . . as an Alarm." Dorrill—a man experienced in Jamaican mores—was highly agitated because he "greatly feared it was an insurrection of the Negroes, they being ripe for it, almost all over the island." Dorrill's agitation was "nought but a Silly Mistake," but white Jamaicans were correct in assuming that their slaves were "ripe for it." Two weeks earlier, Old Tom Williams had given "very plain discourse at Table" about the possibilities of a slave uprising (along with ribald tales of how he pleased his slave mistress).¹⁰

Africans were always prepared to resist enslavement. A Vineyard slave called Wannica told Thistlewood that in "the ship she was brought over in, it was agreed to rise but they were discovered first. The pickaninies [children] brought the men that were confined, knives, muskets & other weapons." Thistlewood found himself confronted at every turn by what he perceived as slave villainy. The second day he was at Vineyard, "Scipio's house was broke into and robb'd as supposed by Robin the runaway Negro." The robbers were, in fact, Vineyard slaves. Robin came to a bad end: he was hung for repeatedly running away, and

his head was put on a pole and "Stuck . . . in the home pasture," where it stayed for four months. Thistlewood responded by whipping delinquents. In his year at Vineyard, he whipped nearly two-thirds of the men and half of the women.¹¹

The Life of Thomas Thistlewood

This book is about how Thomas Thistlewood made sense of the strange environment he found himself in from April 1750 until his death at age sixty-five on 30 November 1786. Thistlewood is our main character, but the book is also about the society he lived in. I want to explore what it meant to be a white immigrant in a land characterized by extreme differences of wealth between the richest and the poorest members.¹² I am also interested in examining how Thistlewood operated in one of the most extensive slave societies that ever existed. Our perspective has to be largely that of Thistlewood. The source that we have, despite its remarkable depiction of the lives of illiterate if not inarticulate African-born and Jamaican-born slaves, reflects the prejudices and experiences of a white man in a black person's country. I make no apologies for the book's focus on Thistlewood. We need to know more about the foot soldiers of imperialism, especially the men involved at the most intimate level with slaves and slavery in the eighteenth-century British Empire.

Of course, to understand is in some ways to forgive. Forgiveness is especially easy when the person in need of forgiving produces the words that we rely on to construct a historical narrative. This account of Thistlewood's life and diaries is an empathetic one; it acknowledges the difficulties he was forced to labor under and the different context of an eighteenth-century world with values and experiences removed from our own. I hope, however, that empathy does not tend too much toward sympathy. Sympathy for the travails of a man living in the middle of a war zone (as Jamaica indubitably was in the eighteenth century) is constrained by the realization that the subject was definitely not on the side of the angels. Thistlewood was on the wrong side of history—he was a brutal slave owner, an occasional rapist and torturer, and a believer in the inherent inferiority of Africans.

Thistlewood's life can be recounted simply. It was not a life full of incident. He was born on 16 March 1721 in Topholme, Lincolnshire, the second son of Robert Thistlewood, a tenant farmer for Robert Vyner. His father died on 18 December 1727, leaving Thomas £200 sterling to be paid when Thistlewood was twenty-one years old. Thus, from an early age, Thistlewood was in the uneasy position of being a fatherless second son with few prospects of obtaining

land. Shortly after his mother's remarriage to Thomas Calverly on 27 September 1728, Thistlewood was sent to school in Ackworth in York, where he boarded with his stepuncle, Robert Calverly. Thistlewood received a good education for a person of his status, especially in mathematics and science. He continued his schooling until he was eighteen, when he was apprenticed to William Robson, a farmer in Waddingham, eleven miles due north of Lincoln. By this time, he had already established some of the habits he would keep throughout his life. He was interested in books and practical science, and he had begun a regular diary. He kept a diary on a semi-daily basis from 1741 onward.¹³

He was adrift in the world after his mother died at age forty-two on 7 October 1738. Thistlewood soon realized it was unlikely that he would become a tenant farmer as his father had been and as his brother was to become. He left Robson on 27 July 1740, explaining to him in a letter that he "cannot get money to pay you withal supplying [my] own wants & if I had staid with you till I was of age, I would owe you a great deal." Other factors played a part in his decision to leave. Thistlewood "had a mind to travell," and after leaving Robson, he journeyed south to Nottingham, Leicester, Stratford upon Avon, and Bristol. He returned to Robson's farm after the death of his stepfather on 19 November 1740 but never settled down. By 1743, he had entered into a partnership with his brother to be a tenant farmer for Robert Vyner, but he ended that partnership after less than a year. His wanderlust was strong now, as was his realization that he was unlikely to achieve his ambitions in Lincolnshire, or even England. His determination to leave may have been enhanced by events that occurred in late 1745. On 19 December 1745, Thistlewood was served a warrant for getting Anne Baldock pregnant on 1 August 1745 at a county fair. Baldock miscarried, but Thistlewood's reputation may have been damaged. On 7 March 1746, he left his family and Tupholme, taking with him £4.71 in ready money. He undertook a two-year journey to India via the Cape of Good Hope and Bahia, Brazil, on a ship belonging to the East India Company to sell English manufactures.

He returned to England on 27 August 1748, remaining in London until 6 October, then traveling to Lincolnshire. At loose ends, he alternated between the delights of London and the comfort of Tupholme and undertook an unsuccessful trip to the Low Countries in the summer of 1749 to sell goods he had brought back from India and Brazil. This was not a happy time for Thistlewood. He had no position and little chance of becoming a landed proprietor. Despite having torrid affairs with Elizabeth Toyne, the wife of his erstwhile employer, Thomas Toyne (Thistlewood related that on 21 October he had sex

with "Mrs. T in the night 4 tempora" and on 28 October "Cum E. T.— cum illa in nocte quinque tempora") and another married woman, Elizabeth Toyne's friend, Jenny Cook, he had not found a suitable partner. He courted Bett Mitchell of Fulsby, noting on 5 March 1749 that she was the eleventh woman he had had sexual intercourse with, and they exchanged gifts to signal their intentions toward each other. But her parents turned Thistlewood down when he sought her hand in marriage. Mitchell's parents were right to do so: Thistlewood was twenty-eight years old and had little money and poor prospects.¹⁴ Thistlewood was as low in spirits as at any other time in his life. He left Tupholme at the beginning of April for London. He had no job and was forced to rely on loans from his landlady. On 1 May, he recorded, "Took a walk in the long fields. Borrowed off Mrs. Gresham [his landlady] 5s. *Ecclesiastes* Chap. 7th. Verse 28th: which yet my soul seeketh but I find not: one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these have I not found." In these low times, Jamaica was an appealing prospect. He departed for the island on 1 February 1750, arriving in Kingston on 24 April. He remained in Jamaica for the rest of his life.

It is his life in Jamaica that is of interest here. If his diaries had not been preserved, we would know little about him except for a few references in Jamaica's public records. Although he was an acquaintance of the wealthy sugar planter and historian William Beckford of Hertford and knew members of the prominent Ricketts family, he is not mentioned in Beckford's 1790 history of Jamaica or in the Ricketts family letters, the only other surviving written records of Westmoreland in Thistlewood's time.¹⁵ The sole source that casts light on Thistlewood besides his diaries and associated writings is the collection of Edward Long's papers on Jamaica held in the British Library. Thistlewood wrote two letters on scientific and meteorological matters to Long, the scion of one of Jamaica's most distinguished families, owner of a considerable amount of Jamaican property, and author of the best contemporary history of Jamaica.¹⁶ Thistlewood was not an important man, even if by the end of his life he had attained some small celebrity in his immediate neighborhood for the extent and quality of his garden and had become a justice of the peace. He did not mingle in the highest circles of Jamaica—Long never bothered to reply to Thistlewood's letters, for example—and had no descendants through whom his memory could be transmitted over time. His grave is not marked in the Savanna-la-Mar churchyard, and no trace of his house or property remains. His unusual name is not found in Jamaica today and is rare in Britain. If the name "Thistlewood" resonates at all, it does so in a way that would have displeased Thomas Thistle-

wood—the name became notorious in 1820 when his great nephew, Arthur Thistlewood, was executed for treason as the leader of the Cato Plot to assassinate the prime minister.¹⁷

Moving to Jamaica cured Thistlewood's wanderlust. He did not venture beyond western Jamaica in the thirty-seven years he lived in the island and seldom went more than a few miles from the southern Westmoreland town of Savanna-la-Mar. The only move he made after 1751 came in 1757 when he left for a year to take up an overseership at the Kendal estate, a sugar property belonging to John Parkinson located a few miles due north of Egypt in Hanover Parish. On 3 July 1766, he purchased a half-share of a 300-acre property a few miles northeast of Savanna-la-Mar. On 3 September 1767, he moved to this pen, which he named Breadnut Island. He described it in 1781, when he briefly considered selling it and returning to Britain, as containing 160 acres, of which between 60 and 70 acres were "Negro grounds and pastures, very clean; most of the rest is a rich open morass, great part of which in the dry season is good pasturage; it affords fish of various sorts, more especially mudfish, also crabs, and in the season plenty of wild fowl." From the highest point, where Thistlewood had built a house that had been destroyed in the hurricane of October 1780, "there is a prospect of the shipping in Savanna la Mar harbor, and the country all round."¹⁸ Thistlewood developed Breadnut Island into a showpiece property, with one of the earliest and most spectacular gardens of western Jamaica.

Two great events intruded into this Arcadia (the original name of the 300-acre property was Paradise) between 1750 and 1786. Thistlewood provides us with vivid firsthand accounts of both events. In 1760, Thistlewood found himself in the middle of the greatest slave rebellion in the eighteenth-century British Empire, Tacky's revolt, in which slave rebels attempted to "extirpate the whites" and establish an African kingdom. Westmoreland bore the brunt of the rebel attacks, along with St. Mary's, and, as Thistlewood relates in his testimony about the revolt, the rebels came close to achieving their aims. At least 50 whites and perhaps 500 slaves lost their lives either in battle or in the grisly retributions that occurred after the rebels had been defeated. In terms of its shock to the imperial system, only the American Revolution surpassed Tacky's revolt in the eighteenth century.¹⁹

The second great event was the hurricane of October 1780. Hurricanes frightened white Jamaicans as much as slave rebellions. Thistlewood experienced his first hurricane as early as 1751, as we have seen. It terrified and excited him in almost equal measure. The hurricane of October 1780, however, was a different



Between 1751 and 1767, Thistlewood was overseer at the Egypt estate in southern Westmoreland Parish, on the Cabaritta River, north of the main road heading west from Savanna-la-Mar. Breadnut Island, where he lived from 1767 until his death in 1786, is not marked on this 1763 map but was on the eastern side of the Cabaritta River, bordered on the north by Goodwin's land and on the east by the Kirkpatrick estate. From Thomas Craskell and James Simpson, *Map of the County of Cornwall, in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1763).

matter. When Thistlewood compared the three hurricanes he had experienced (in 1751, 1780, and 1781), he ranked them on a scale of 1–10 as follows: "11th September, Violence or Force, NOT Velocity, say 6. 3rd October 1780, say 10. 1st August 1781, say 4."²⁰ The second hurricane was the most violent ever to strike the Caribbean in recorded history, and it made a direct hit on Westmoreland Parish. It devastated both the parish and Thistlewood, leaving "sad havoc all through the countryside." The loss of life was close to that in Tacky's revolt, and the physical destruction was considerably greater. At its height, the hurricane was "most tremendous, dreadful, awful & horrible. . . . [T]he elements of fire, air, water and earth seemed to be blended together . . . [and] it seemed as if a dissolution of nature was at hand." People could not stand upright in the force of the wind, and their clothes were torn from their bodies. "An old negroe man" who had "crept into an empty puncheon for shelter" was "carried over a high fence into a cane piece 2 or 3 hundred yards distance." The aftermath of

the hurricane was as devastating as the hurricane itself; most trees were “blasted” and destroyed, and survivors were assailed by sickness that probably arose from lack of clean drinking water and the destruction of food supplies. Westmoreland bore “the appearance of the dreary mountains of Wales, in the winter season,” with “not a blade of grass, nor leaf left or tree, shrub, or bush.” Traveling to Savanna-la-Mar, Thistlewood found “the havock at the bay . . . past comprehension, an intolerable stench in the air, every thing rotting and such a great number of putrid carcasses laying unburied.”²¹ It also brought out the tensions in Jamaican society. Westmoreland whites feared that their slaves, “who were at that time exceeding turbulent & daring, well-knowing a number of Inhabitants had perished in the storm, and almost all our arms & ammunition destroyed,” would take advantage of whites’ desolation. Whites were “much afraid of the Negroes rising, they being very impudent.”²² Thistlewood’s dwelling house had been destroyed, his prized garden had been flooded and ruined, virtually no trees remained upright, and he and his slaves faced the possibility of famine because of the scarcity of provisions. The British government, aware of the vast scale of destruction in its wealthiest colony, provided £40,000 sterling as a grant-in-aid.²³

Thistlewood had his share of personal tragedies, such as the death by drowning of his nephew, John Thistlewood, who had come to Jamaica in 1764, on 30 March 1765 and the death of his twenty-year-old mulatto son, John (the product of a relationship with Phibbah, a Creole black house slave), on 7 September 1780. Moreover, the dismal demographic prospects afforded whites in Jamaica meant the frequent loss of friends and acquaintances. Life as a white man among brutalized slaves bent on revenge was also always dangerous. Thistlewood’s stay in Jamaica was almost a very short one. On 27 December 1752, he barely escaped being murdered by a runaway slave named Congo Sam. But personal difficulties and setbacks were relatively rare. Thistlewood achieved much more in Jamaica than would have been possible in England. He spent the last twenty years of his life as an independent landed proprietor and died with a healthy estate worth £3,371.26 Jamaica currency or £2,408.04 sterling, including thirty-four slaves.

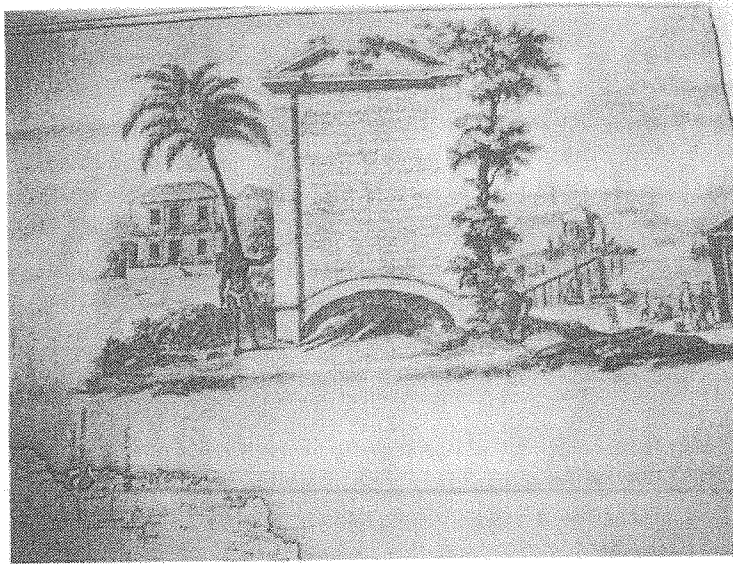
As well as securing moderate wealth, he gained some status within Westmoreland society. On 31 December 1769, he received a commission as a lieutenant at the Savanna-la-Mar fort with responsibility to “exercise the inferior Officers, Gunners and Soldiers thereof in arms” and hold them “in good order and discipline.” Six years later, on 17 December 1775, he became a magistrate. This date marked the peak of Thistlewood’s prosperity. He was comfortably well-

off, respected, a figure of some consequence in his parish, and the owner of a sizable number of slaves and an attractive estate. He had achieved some measure of fame through his creation of a renowned garden. Moreover, he was in a stable relationship with a slave housekeeper, Phibbah, his partner since early 1754, even if domestic happiness did not preclude frequent philandering with numerous slave women. His position declined in the subsequent decade, but at his death on 30 November 1786 after a month-long illness, three months short of his sixty-sixth birthday, he could be satisfied that in coming to Jamaica thirty-seven years earlier he had made the right decision.

Jamaica in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

Thomas Thistlewood arrived in Jamaica at the beginning of a prolonged period of prosperity on the island. From the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748 to the beginning of the American Revolution in 1776, Jamaica was the powerhouse of the British Empire. Growth began to falter only in the last decade of Thistlewood’s life as Jamaica was adversely affected by the breakdown of trade with the rebelling North American colonies and as it was battered by a series of devastating hurricanes. Nevertheless, when Thistlewood died in 1786—two years before the advent of the abolitionist assault on slavery that would eventually alter everything for Jamaican slave owners—Jamaica was on the cusp of another sustained burst of economic growth. From the perspective of British politicians, Jamaica was the most valuable of all British colonies in the second half of the eighteenth century, the one whose loss could least be afforded.²⁴ From the perspective of the thousands of British immigrants who sought their fortune in Jamaica, Jamaica was the place par excellence where they could attain wealth and happiness—if they were fortunate enough to survive its dreadful mortality rate.

First settled by the English in 1655 as a consolation prize after their failure to take Hispaniola from the Spanish, Jamaica was the largest of the British West Indian islands. It lies about 90 miles south of Cuba and 1,000 miles west of Britain’s other West Indian possessions. It is physiographically diverse, containing relatively high mountains, coastal plains, arid interiors, and swampy morasses. Temperatures and rainfall vary considerably depending on elevation and access to trade winds and coastal breezes, and variations in geological formation, soil types, and flora and fauna are equally pronounced in different regions and even within small districts. Although much of Jamaica’s land was either too arid or too mountainous for effective cultivation, its size allowed for greater



A scene of industry from the beginning of Jamaica's greatest period of prosperity. Detail from map by Thomas Craskell and James Simpson, *Map of the County of Surrey, in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1763).

agricultural exploitation than in any other British possession. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Jamaica was the largest producer of tropical goods in the British West Indies, accounting for 54 percent of tropical imports into Britain and approximately 13 percent of total imports into Britain.²⁵

The importance of Jamaica in the empire was that it was "a Constant Mine, whence Britain draws prodigious riches."²⁶ Jamaican wealth advanced by leaps and bounds in the eighteenth century. In 1700, the total wealth of the island, as measured by wealth in inventories combined with estimates of real estate, was £2,217,662. By 1750, its wealth amounted to nearly £10 million, even though the white population had barely increased since 1690. Population was not much greater in 1774, but wealth had catapulted to £28,040,217, making Jamaica easily the wealthiest colony in British America and individual Jamaican whites the richest people in the British Empire.²⁷ Jamaican wealth was based on sugar and rum and trade with Spanish America. The overall value of Jamaican exports to Britain increased exponentially over the eighteenth century, with the greatest rate of growth occurring in the period when Thistlewood was living on the island. In 1730, Jamaica produced approximately 25,000 hogsheads of sugar and 7,000 puncheons of rum from 400 sugar plantations. A comprehensive study of

Jamaican trade statistics done by Governor Charles Knowles in 1754 confirmed a rapid increase in production, with sugar exports up 60 percent to 40,000 hogsheads. A survey of trade undertaken by Edward Long in 1768 indicated that sugar production had increased again by over 70 percent to 68,160 hogsheads from 651 sugar estates. By 1774, Jamaica exported goods worth £1,650,000 to Britain, of which sugar accounted for £1,188,330 and rum £213,568. The remaining goods comprised pimento, cotton, coffee, and logwood. By this year, 1,640,885.5 acres were cultivated of the nearly 4 million acres in the country. Of these, 160,000 were in sugarcane on sugar estates that together accounted for 500,000 acres. Internal trade, especially cattle breeding, was also significant.²⁸

Jamaica's wealth accrued almost entirely to its white population. On the eve of the American Revolution, white Jamaicans were among the wealthiest subjects in the British Empire. In 1774, per capita white wealth was £2,201, with white men having average wealth amounting to £4,403. By contrast, wealth per free white was £42.1 sterling in England and Wales, £60.2 in the thirteen colonies, and just £38.2 in New England. The average white in Jamaica was 36.6 times as wealthy as the average white in the thirteen colonies, 52.3 times as wealthy as the average white in England and Wales, and 57.6 times as wealthy as the average white in New England. The richest Jamaicans had holdings that would have been emulated only by the wealthiest London merchants and English aristocrats.²⁹

The largest component of individual and colonial wealth besides land was slaves. The Jamaican economy relied almost entirely on the labor of African slaves. Jamaicans had an insatiable appetite for acquiring slaves, few of whom survived long enough to establish a naturally reproducing slave population. As a result, white Jamaicans bought rather than bred their labor force and were the mainstays of the flourishing British slave trade. Between 1655 and 1808, 915,204 Africans landed in Jamaica. Of these, just over three-quarters (701,046) were retained in the island, amounting to one-third of retained slave imports shipped on all British carriers. The result was a slave population that grew dramatically, despite the fact that deaths constantly outnumbered births and despite exceptionally low female fertility. The number of slaves more than doubled between 1700 and 1750 to 120,000 and multiplied a further two and a half times to more than 300,000 by the end of the century. By the mid-eighteenth century, 26 percent of all black British Americans and 43 percent of all black British West Indians lived in Jamaica.³⁰

Jamaica's slave population was large and distinctive. Africans failed to thrive due to poor diet, debilitating work regimes, and brutal treatment. The result

TABLE 1.1: Population in Jamaica, 1662–1788

Year	Total Population	Whites	Slaves	Free blacks
1662	4,207	3,653	554	0
1673	15,536	7,768	7,768	0
1693	48,000	7,365	40,635	0
1730	83,765	8,230	74,523	1,012
1752	ca. 120,000	ca. 10,000	ca. 110,000	NA
1774	209,617	12,737	192,787	4,093
1788	236,851	18,347	210,894	7,610

Sources: 1662: CO 1/15/192; 1673: Long Papers, Add. MSS 18273, BL; 1693: CO 137/2/97; 1730: CO 137/19 (pt. 2)/48; 1752–74: CO 137/70/94; 1788: CO 137/87.

was a slave population that remained between 75 and 80 percent African. It was a heterogeneous population, with slaves shipped to Jamaica from every slave-trading region of west and central Africa. In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, when Thistlewood was active in the slave market, the Bight of Biafra and the Gold Coast accounted for 63 percent of Africans imported into Jamaica, with just over 30 percent coming from the Bight of Benin, the Windward Coast, and west-central Africa. The process of sale and the dispersal of Africans from ship to plantation accentuated heterogeneity. The result was constant flux, disruption, and misery, especially for the approximately 60 percent of slaves laboring on sugar plantations, where the work regime was particularly brutal. Nevertheless, slaves did gain some measure of self-expression within an overall structure of fierce repression, social disruption, and constant uncertainty. They developed a rich cultural life, exemplified by their language, music, and religion. This culture helped mitigate the dehumanization inherent in their status and offered relief from the relentless torments they faced from their white overlords. They also established an alternative economic world through their efforts to grow food on provision grounds. Their economic endeavors allowed them to escape to some extent the perils of living close to subsistence.³¹

White immigration to Jamaica was also sizable—between 100,000 and 125,000 Europeans moved to Jamaica before 1776—but the health of the immigrants who moved to Jamaica in pursuit of Jamaica’s legendary wealth was even worse than that of Africans. Whites suffered worse mortality rates than did blacks, despite slaves’ debilitating work and punishment regimes. Every year between 1730 and 1770, between 1 in 8 and 1 in 12 whites died. Neither immigrant nor native-born whites were spared. Life expectancy at birth was under ten years,

with a full third of infants born in Kingston in the second quarter of the eighteenth century dying before their first birthday and another third dying before the age of five. Those few native-born men and women who survived infancy and childhood to reach the age of twenty could expect to live another sixteen to eighteen years. Immigrants could expect to survive for twelve and a half years after arrival. Thistlewood thus was unusual in surviving the “seasoning” process after arrival, when morbidity and mortality were very high, and in living out close to a normal life span. The average immigrant was fortunate to live past age forty, with the average age at death of a sample of indentured servants arriving in Jamaica between 1719 and 1750 being thirty-three. Mortality rates began to improve after the end of the Seven Years’ War but remained horrific right up to the end of slavery.³²

White demographic failure prevented the establishment of a settler society. The average length of marriage in early Jamaica was astoundingly short—less than eight and a half years for marriages begun between the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. Continuing high mortality among white settlers meant that white numbers could not be maintained by natural increase alone. White population hardly grew during the eighteenth century. As early as the 1670s, blacks formed a majority of the population, and the presence of a large black majority came to shape every aspect of society in Jamaica. During Thistlewood’s time, whites accounted for between 6 and 8 percent of the total population. White Jamaicans came to depend on blacks for their economic well-being but feared being overwhelmed—both culturally and physically—by a numerically predominant black population that never assimilated fully to European ways.³³ Indeed, the enormous importation of Africans in the eighteenth century led to a rapid Africanization or re-Africanization of slave culture. The cultural gap between master and slave was probably never greater than in the decades on either side of mid-century. Whites were few in number, especially in rural areas such as Westmoreland where the proportion of slaves to whites was perhaps as high as 15 to 1, and tended to be recently arrived immigrants with little knowledge of their predominantly African-born charges and little interest in regulating slave cultural patterns. As a result, slaves were able to lead a quasi-autonomous existence, free from white surveillance, especially in their cultural and religious lives.³⁴

The clear evidence of extensive Africanization in Jamaica and the failure of effective white settlement greatly alarmed contemporary commentators. White Jamaicans above all else wanted to transform Jamaica into a settled, improved, and civilized society. An “improved” society was, by definition, an English so-

ciety. Jamaican patriots like Edward Long tried to claim that Jamaica was becoming increasingly English by mid-century as landscapes came to resemble those of England and as native-born whites began to adopt English manners of living. But to be English was to be white, and Jamaica was indubitably not white. Instead of becoming English, Jamaica, it could be argued, was retreating into African “barbarity.” Evidence of the Africanization of European society was all around. Long lambasted white women for their overfamiliarity with slave servants. Women “bred up entirely in the sequestered country parts . . . are truly to be pitied” because their only examples of behavior came from blacks. As a result, a Jamaican woman’s “speech is whining, languid, and childish” and “her ideas are narrowed to the ordinary subjects that pass before her, the business of the plantation, the tittle-tattle of the parish; the tricks, superstitions, diversions, and profligate discourses, of black servants, equally illiterate and unpolished.” It was not entirely women’s fault. Their menfolk had deserted them for the charms of “scheming black Jezebels.” “In a place where so little restraint is laid on the passions,” Long declared, “many are the men, of every rank, quality, and degree here, who would much rather riot in these goatish embraces, than share the pure and lawful bliss derived from matrimonial, mutual love.” If white men did not marry but instead, like Thistlewood, rioted in “goatish embraces,” then Africanization rather than Europeanization was the inevitable result, with dire consequences, Long believed, for the future of white dominion in Jamaica.³⁵

Demographic disaster also influenced the character of white life. In particular, it heightened the already-strong impulses toward anarchic individualism inherent in the island since early settlement. Eighteenth-century Jamaica was a fast-living, intensely materialistic, and fiercely individualistic society. The white population was predominantly male (adult men outnumbered adult women by over 2 to 1), young (84 percent of adult men in Clarendon Parish in 1788 were between twenty-one and forty years old), and migrant.³⁶ Jamaica never made the demographic transition from an immigrant-dominated to a native-born-dominated society but resembled the heavily male, largely immigrant society of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake, in which the reckless and single-minded pursuit of individual gain was the central animating impulse and the chief social determinant.³⁷ Continuing high mortality and the transformations that living in a slave society induced were the other main influences on the character of white Jamaican life. They encouraged a resolve to live in the moment as well as a haughty independence, fierce egalitarianism, and intense racial consciousness.

White Jamaicans, Wealth, and Slavery

Migrants to Jamaica came principally to make money. The foremost characteristic of white Jamaicans, therefore, was an all-consuming ambition for wealth, an avaricious and aggrandizing self-interest. Jamaica was, as the early abolitionist James Ramsay lamented, a land devoted to “the Kingdom of I.” Jamaicans sought the “allurements of profits” and “great and sudden fortunes,” Long stated, “as if it were the only rational object of pursuit in this world.” Moreover, in their “great haste to be rich,” James Knight, writing in the 1740s, averred, they pursued private interests at the expense of the “generall good of the Country.” That passion for wealth engendered an intense competitiveness and a desire for wild extravagance. Jamaicans were addicted to ostentatious display and devoted to luxury. They spent their money on lavish feasting, copious drinking, and all manner of sexual and sensuous delights. Jamaica was a gambler’s paradise rather than a philosopher’s retreat. “Careless of futurity,” white Jamaicans showed little commitment to their native or adopted land, educating their children, if they had any, in England and caring little about developing and maintaining institutional structures. Everything was sacrificed on the altar of getting rich quickly. Jamaica was not a land of long-term planning. Its white citizens loved risk and hazard, their schemes were always vast but seldom well planned, and they “put no medium in being great and being undone.” They were inordinate risk takers, but their passionate natures and fiery, restless tempers did not encourage a persevering spirit. One of the great themes of Jamaican history was the speed with which plans were made and begun, then laid aside in favor of fresh novelties. Excess and speculation rather than restraint and planning were their watchwords.³⁸

But in order to achieve great riches, it was necessary to work hard. Establishing a sugar estate or other type of plantation was a time-consuming, expensive, and difficult undertaking. Involvement in commerce also required diligence and hard work. That so many Jamaicans achieved wealth suggests that they were industrious. Yet the means by which wealth was acquired—on the backs of overworked and badly treated slaves—militated against sustained economic success. Slavery itself was inherently dangerous. In their “rage to push on their estates,” whites bought more and more blacks until the land was filled with a people they both despised and feared. Like children “playing with Edge-Tools, which they cannot manage,” they exposed themselves to the constant risk that Jamaica would be “over-run and ruined by its own slaves.” The likelihood of physical assault was not the only risk. Being a slave owner changed a white man’s

character. It might not be true that owning slaves transformed the “natural Disposition[s]” of Britons “from humanity into Barbarity,” but it was undeniable that white Jamaicans treated their slaves with a brutality that demeaned them and disgraced the good name of a people who proudly declared that slavery was an un-British institution. Slavery was the very essence of barbarism, and the nature of slavery in Jamaica marked out its slave owners as barbarians. “No Country,” Charles Leslie proclaimed, “excels them in a barbarous Treatment of Slaves, or in the cruel Methods they put them to death.” An informed critic declared in 1746 that Jamaican slaves were the worst-treated slaves in any European colony and that nowhere else were slaves so completely at the mercy and caprice of their masters.³⁹

Slavery not only made Britons brutal. It made them self-indulgent, indolent, and full of overbearing pride. Indolence, claimed contemporaries, was partly the result of the climate, which sapped the blood of people accustomed to more temperate climes, but mainly the result of having either from birth or from first arrival in the island a host of slaves who performed all menial tasks. In a society where being a worker meant being black and where blackness was a sign of ineradicable inferiority, working was a mark of servile status. Whites were expected to be lazy, listless, and self-indulgent in part because these were qualities to which no black person could aspire. Patrick Browne wrote soon after Thistlewood’s arrival that white Jamaicans acquired an “aloofness” and “distant carriage” as a result of “the general obsequiousness of their numerous slaves and dependents, as well as from the necessity of keeping them at a distance.”⁴⁰

The ubiquity of slavery also made white Jamaicans intensely conscious of how disastrous it was to lose one’s liberty. Few people evinced as much desire to uphold their independence. They gloried in being a turbulent people, “fond of opposition to their governors,” as evidenced by a long series of disputes with metropolitan authority from the 1670s to the early 1760s. Their insistence on freedom was apparent in all areas of their lives. They were free from restraints of almost all kinds—legal, social, and religious. Plantations were almost autonomous kingdoms where masters were sovereign lords. White men extended that sovereignty outside the plantation. They took little heed, for example, of the doctrines of the church. Indeed, white Jamaicans were resolutely irreligious. Religion was “greatly neglected and disregarded,” and “Church Doors are seldom opened.” They were not much more observant of legal niceties. Although they prided themselves in living under British law and British legal and political institutions, white Jamaicans did not always use the law to solve personal disputes. Instead, they challenged each other to duels if they were gentle-

men or resorted to fisticuffs if they were not. Soon after Thistlewood arrived in Jamaica, William Dorrill told him “that in this Country it is highly necessary for a Man to fight once or twice, to keep Cowards from putting upon him.” White men were combative creatures, as hot-tempered as the climate was torrid. They were “liable to sudden transports of anger” and given to violence, although these outbursts were usually short-lived. Such combativeness was not surprising in a society in which slavery imbued slave owners with “something of a haughty Disposition” that “require[d] Submission” from all around them and in which every man insisted on being the “absolute master of himself and his actions.”⁴¹

The ubiquity of slavery also put a premium on whiteness. The divisions in Jamaica were not so much between various classes of white men as between free and unfree, which meant, in practice, a division between white and black. Jamaican society was racially stratified rather than class stratified. The result was a blurring of boundaries between whites and an expansion of civil liberties for all white men. Jamaica’s white population was more diverse than Britain’s, but that diversity counted for little against the rigid divisions between whites and blacks. The danger that slaves posed to whites meant that all whites had to join together. This sense of racial solidarity greatly enhanced the power of poorer whites, who were more essential to the maintenance of white rule and the continuation of white prosperity than were poor whites in British North American or British society. Wealthy whites were forced to recognize poorer whites as their equals, at least insofar as they were white. Just as the presence of slavery increased white awareness of the value of independence, so too did intense racial consciousness advance white egalitarianism.⁴²

Egalitarianism was an attractive feature of white life, especially for a comparatively poor man like Thistlewood. White Jamaicans’ famed hospitality was also a positive aspect of Jamaican life. All commentators agreed that white Jamaicans were a particularly hospitable people who adored sociability, conducting their lives in a veritable whirl of visiting, playing games, attending parties, and entertaining. Knight rejoiced that “there is not more Hospitality, nor a more generous freedom shown to Strangers on any Part of the World. . . . [A] man may Travell from one Part of the Country to another and even around the Island with very little if any Expense. . . . He may with freedom go and dine, or lodge at the next Planters House and Persons of low rank and Condition are as cheerfully received and entertained by their Servants.” Their entertainments were prolific, opulent, and fun. Unlike their seventeenth-century ancestors, who tried to live as in England, white Jamaicans in the eighteenth century adapted

English customs to tropical conditions. They were devoted to local and African-influenced delicacies such as pepper-pot and turtle soup, rum drinks, cassava bread, and tropical fruits and fishes, often devoured at that quintessentially West Indian social gathering, the barbecue. They wore lighter and brighter clothes than clothes worn in Britain and eschewed wigs. They dwelled in airy, spacious single-story houses where the furniture was limited but select and prided themselves on offering guests a magnificent table. White Jamaicans were attractive people, both in physique and in character. Leslie argued that “they seem perfectly polite and have a Delicacy of Behavior which is exceeding taking.” While it was true that the warm climate made it hard for white Jamaicans to “forbear indulging themselves . . . in their Indolence,” they were a naturally vivacious people with “a quick apprehension,” “naturally strong passions,” and “lively spirits” and unashamed extroverts who delighted in company and “social enjoyments” such as hunting, games, dancing, and music. Their “free and open dispositions” made them agreeable companions. Knight did not know of any “more Industrious, usefull, and beneficial Society to the nation” than these people, described by their greatest advocate, Long, as being “brave, good-natured, affable, generous . . . unsuspecting, lovers of freedom, tender fathers . . . and firm and sincere friends.” Long also characterized them as “temperate, and sober . . . [and] humane and indulgent masters,” but few others saw such qualities in them.⁴³

Westmoreland Parish and the Jamaican Frontier

The area of the country that Thistlewood chose to live in had its own peculiarities. English settlement in Jamaica had concentrated in the southeastern parishes, especially around the principal towns of Port Royal in the seventeenth century and Kingston in the eighteenth century. The western and northern parishes were slow to develop, hindered by difficult geography, poor links to Kingston, and the long, successful resistance offered to white rule by independent blacks called Maroons who controlled the almost impenetrable Jamaican interior. In the first four decades of the eighteenth century, whites and Maroons were continually at war, with the Leeward Maroons under the command of their great leader, Cudjoe, blocking the attempts of whites to penetrate the interior and settle the fertile *poljes*, or wide valleys, of St. James and Westmoreland Parishes. The 443 whites and 7,137 slaves who resided in Westmoreland by 1730 feared constantly for their lives. The parish was not truly open for development until after 1739, when members of the Jamaican House of Assem-

bly tired of their fruitless and expensive war with the Maroons and negotiated a peace treaty with Cudjoe and his followers. By this treaty, Cudjoe and his band were granted a large freehold property in the northwestern interior where they were to have almost sovereign rights and from which whites were excluded. They were also given rights to trade with whites. In return, Cudjoe promised to “cut, clear, and keep open large and convenient roads from Trelawney Town to Westmoreland and St. James’s” and agreed to return runaways to their owners and assist whites in quelling local slave revolts. The presence of the Maroons gave Westmoreland peace and protection. They were very much part of the texture of Westmoreland life. Thistlewood noted in 1750 that he “met Colonel Cudjoe, one of his Wives, One of his Sons—a Lieutenant and other Attendants. He shook me by the hand and Begg’d a Dram of us, which we gave him. He had on a feather’d hatt, Sword at his Side, gun upon his Shoulder &tc Bare foot and Bare legg’d. Somewhat a Majestick look—he brought to my memory the picture of Robinson Crusoe.” Six months later, at Vineyard, he met “Capt. Compoon” (Cudjoe’s brother, Accompong), who also dressed distinctively (at least for a black man), wearing a “Ruffled Shirt, Blue Broad Cloth Coat, Scarlet Cuffs to his Sleeve, gold buttons . . . white Cap and Black Hatt, White linen Breeches puff’d at the knee.”⁴⁴

After 1739, settlement and production in Westmoreland proceeded apace. It was good planting ground. Governor Charles Knowles in 1754 described it as “tolerable even ground and what hills are in it are pretty easy of access and the soil fertile.” By 1768, it contained 62 sugar estates and 96 other settlements (primarily cattle pens and estates producing cotton, ginger, and pimento), as well as 15,196 slaves and 13,750 head of cattle. It produced nearly 12 percent of Jamaica’s sugar, despite having only 5 percent of Jamaica’s white population and 8 percent of its slave population. Between 1730 and 1788, population and production expanded exponentially. The white population increased by 237 percent and the slave population by 145 percent, while sugar production increased from 5,450 hogsheads in 1739 to 8,000 hogsheads in 1768. Westmoreland’s agricultural fertility and previously unexploited land made its residents very rich. The value of the average estate in Westmoreland between 1732 and 1786 was 42 percent higher than the value of the average estate in the island as a whole. A sample of 95 Westmoreland estates probated in this period reveals the average wealth to be £4,730.65, with the average slaveholder owning 58 slaves, of whom 31 were male. Thistlewood’s estate placed him in the top third of probated estates. The largest estate belonged to Richard Beckford, the brother of London’s Lord Mayor and father of the historian and acquaintance of Thistle-

wood, William Beckford of Hertford. Beckford owned a personal estate of £83,286.81 Jamaica currency (nearly £60,000 sterling), in addition to 9,242.5 acres. Four other men left estates of over £20,000 Jamaica currency, one of whom was William Dorrill, who died in 1754 with 2,787 acres and personal property worth £30,871.25 Jamaica currency, including 442 slaves. Westmoreland residents made their money primarily from agriculture: 63 percent of estates owned by men belonged to agriculturalists. Westmoreland did contain a small town, Savanna-la-Mar, but the main business of the parish was the production of plantation goods for sale in Britain.⁴⁵

A “Marble Cover’d Book”

It was in this environment that Thistlewood sat down every day to write in his diary, tabulate daily rainfall and note weather conditions, copy passages from books he was reading, and, in 1764, compile an “account of the Game which I shot.”⁴⁶ Some of the most basic facts about Thistlewood—such as what he looked like—are not known. Nevertheless, the cache of materials deposited in the Lincolnshire Archives through the generosity of their owner, John Monson, 11th Lord Monson, is remarkable, unparalleled for its insights into Caribbean life and slave society in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world. No other source contains the wealth of information about slavery in the colonial period found in Thistlewood’s diaries. The deposit amounts to 92 items, of which 37 are the journals of Thistlewood from 1748 to 1786 and 35 are weather reports from Egypt Plantation and Breadnut Island between 1752 and 1786. In addition, it contains the journal of Thistlewood’s nephew, John, who lived with his uncle between 1764 and March 1765, nine commonplace books, two lists of books owned by Thistlewood, a volume entitled “Mr. Richard Beckford’s Instructions,” a book in which rules of war are set forth by Jamaica’s governor in 1756 after martial law had been declared, a book of game shot in 1764, and a volume with a list of slaves and an account of their labor on the Egypt estate between 1758 and 1766.

The diaries interest us most. Each volume is a small book covered in paper with the year written on the front. Each journal spans one year and contains between 184 and 354 pages of closely written and occasionally faded handwriting, except for the first volume, which runs from 27 August 1748 to the end of 1750 and contains 535 pages. In total, the diaries include over 10,000 pages of daily entries covering 39 years, 37 of which were spent in Westmoreland Parish. Each

page contains between 150 and 200 words, the total text running to perhaps 2 million words. Thistlewood was a remarkably diligent diary keeper, virtually never missing a day’s entry. He wrote in a clear, if tiny, script, so readers have little difficulty in deciphering his handwriting, although on occasion it is too faint to discern. A few pages are too discolored to be properly transcribed. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the text is accessible. At times, it is difficult to distinguish between vowels, and some of Thistlewood’s abbreviations are mystifying. Moreover, his spelling was less than perfect (though better than that of his nephew John, who had execrable spelling and even worse grammar), and he did not always care to make his entries grammatically perfect. In this book, I have modernized spelling and added punctuation if needed to clarify words and sentences. I have otherwise tried to leave direct quotes as Thistlewood wrote them.⁴⁷

Our reading of the diaries must be mediated by our understanding of Thistlewood’s strategies of inclusion and exclusion. He wrote the diaries to satisfy various needs arising from his personality. Although we can guess what that personality was like from reading his diaries, we have no other source by which we can validate our suppositions. Nor did Thistlewood provide us with much help in our effort to understand the underlying motivations behind why he wrote the diaries in the way he did. He did not tell us why he kept a diary so assiduously and what he gained from keeping such a detailed record of his life. Nor did he discuss why he wrote his diaries in the distinctive form he used. He wrote flat, serviceable prose in entries that are regular in form and consistent in the type of activities mentioned. Over time, the regularity of these entries meant that the overall length of each year’s entries was remarkably similar. A typical entry contains details of his and his slaves’ work routines; punishments he meted out; letters he wrote to other whites and which slaves delivered those letters; monies expended and on what; people he met and his interactions with them, including formulaic lists of his many sexual partners; illnesses he experienced and the remedies he tried (repeated bouts of venereal disease are the most memorable of these entries); books he read or borrowed; and items of curiosity he thought especially interesting and worthy of record. At the beginning and end of each year, he summarized the year’s activities and analyzed his financial situation by listing his assets and liabilities. His diary was thus part account book, part aide-mémoire, and part recapitulation of a life as lived.

Here is an example of a typical day’s entry, taken at random:

Friday 10th April 1761: Gave our Negroes today. Sent on board the Ruby Captain Sattie 5 tierces of sugar 5583 lbs Recpt Signed Wm Lindsay. Wrote to Mr. Thos Eddin, recd 100 yams. P. M. Cum Phibbah, Sup: Lect.

It was a slow day. This entry showed that he allowed his slaves to work for themselves rather than laboring in the fields, that he sent some sugar to Britain, that he transacted with a local merchant for some crops for his garden, and that he had sex with his mistress. In the same week, he noted that “Cyrus, Egypt, Susannah, Phillis and Abba in the hott house” recovering from illness, that he had given some trees to Dr. Gorse, that “Venus has got the Clap,” that he had sex with Little Lydde (to whom he paid 2 bitts) and Little Mimber, and that he set his slaves to work fishing and planting. On Sunday, he “gave many Ticketts to our Negroes,” presumably so they could go to markets or visit lovers or friends on nearby estates. On Monday, 13 April, he noted that “a Rebell Negroe [was] kill’d not far from Glasgow Estate lately (one off those who was at Mr. Thos: Torrent’s) and the other took by his Negroes after a desperate engagement.” This entry was the only one that week that ventured away from the commonplaces of ordinary life.

He does not appear to have reflected on how a reading of the diaries might make him appear to others. All of the textual evidence suggests that the diaries were intended for personal use only. An occasional entry indicates that he periodically returned to his diaries to read them and, if necessary, correct factual statements that he subsequently discovered to be wrong. But he does not seem to have shown his diaries to anyone else. The diaries are remarkably frank in their description of his sexual activities and the brutal methods he used to subdue and punish slaves. They contain no attempt at self-censorship and precious little self-justification. In this respect, the diaries present a warts-and-all portrait of an intelligent if not especially sensitive man unconcerned about the morality of his life and actions.

Thistlewood’s Presentation of “Self”

The diaries’ great strength and their principal weakness is their extreme lack of self-consciousness—they are a presentation but not an examination of self. Thistlewood appears to have kept a regular diary because he was an inveterate list maker and collector of facts. As a result, his diaries are diffuse, shapeless, and unremittingly concrete. They are not part of a polished autobiography, as are those of James Boswell, nor are they the raw material from which a later

book can be created, as are the diaries of his Caribbean contemporary, John Stedman, whose *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* is based on his daily log. Nor were Thistlewood’s diaries written to resolve problems of a pathological personality, as Kenneth Lockridge argues was true for William Byrd II of Virginia, or written as a form of emotional release and a justification for one’s conduct against the opinion of a hostile outside world, as has been argued for Thistlewood’s wealthy contemporary, Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, Virginia. If Thistlewood was concerned about creating in writing a coherent “self,” as Patricia Mayer Spacks argues was usually true of eighteenth-century diary writers, then he was remarkably unreflective about the process of such self-creation. Thistlewood seems instead to have kept a diary “to keep a kind of time and motion study by which the individual records and judges his output day by day.” What pervades the diaries is an overwhelming desire to maintain order, principally achieved through an obsessive fixation on facts. His diaries show Thistlewood’s compulsive urge to find, generate, sift, handle, collect, and record factual impressions and were one way in which his passion for collecting facts and desire for routine and regularity could be advanced. His desire for self-improvement was intellectual and to an extent financial, without any hint of moral self-accounting. A deeply conservative man, he accepted the world as it was and himself as he was. This means that his diaries are remarkably honest and accurate, but it also means that we have little access to his inner life and the inner life of others. He seems to have had virtually no capacity for abstract analysis or self-analysis. His diaries exhibit, even for a pre-psychoanalytic age, extremely limited insights into what motivated his behavior, what fears and ambitions he might have had, and how he perceived his relationships with others.

It is instructive to compare Thistlewood’s diaries with the famous diaries of his contemporary, James Boswell. Thistlewood and Boswell shared much in common, such as a thirst for sexual adventure and a love of learning. But Boswell’s diaries are more revealing than Thistlewood’s about his feelings, emotions, and attitudes toward others. His diaries demonstrate an acute self-consciousness, the diaries themselves being the embodiment of a lifetime’s preoccupation with self-exploration. V. A. C. Gatrell has used Boswell’s diaries to examine Boswell’s sympathetic identification with others, exploring in detail his excursions to public hangings and in particular a seven-week obsession, recorded extensively in his journals, with the hanging of a condemned sheep-stealer, John Reid, in Edinburgh in 1774. Boswell recorded his own reactions to Reid’s plight obsessively and narcissistically. On the night before Reid’s execution, Boswell

commented that “gloom came upon me.” He noted, “I had by sympathy sucked the dismal ideas of John Reid’s situation, and as spirits or strong substance of any kind, when transferred to another body of a more delicate nature, will have much more influence than on the body from which it is transferred, so I suffered much more than John did.”⁴⁸ Thistlewood’s dry retelling of occurrences shows no such self-consciousness.

Thistlewood’s absence of self-scrutiny is most evident in his accounts of his many sexual encounters. His honesty about his sexual predations and his lack of concern about what these sexual acts implied about his life and character are extremely uncommon among writers of diaries.⁴⁹ He chronicled his sexual conquests in an evenhanded, regular, consistent way, listing each in an easily translated code. He described each sexual conquest as an event, concentrating on time, place, and person rather than on emotions. He always identified his partner by name, ethnic origin, or owner. He invariably mentioned the time at which the coupling took place and noted, often very precisely, where it occurred. The only variations were when the sexual position was unusual (he might note, “[S]tans! [Standing] backward,” for example) or when the experience, from his point of view, was disappointing (“Sed non bene” [But not good] was an occasional laconic remark). He also noted whether other people were present and what payment, if any, he made to his sexual partner. Thus, after having sex with Rosanna “Sup Terr: hill Negroe gd” (on the ground on the hill of the Negro ground), he gave her a “Bitt” as payment.⁵⁰

But even if his descriptions of his sexual actions can be relied on as to time, place, person, and frequency, his account of his sexual life is deeply unsatisfying. The problem is not that he was not representative of all white men—his comments on the sexual behavior of other men suggest that his sexual athleticism was more typical than extraordinary—but a question of balance. Thistlewood wrote of his sexual conquests solely as “acts,” paying no attention to the emotional context within which such acts occurred. Moreover, he presented his many couplings solely from his own point of view. He never once displayed any interest in the feelings of his partner about the sex both had engaged in. Nor did he ever bother to explain how particular sexual encounters came to take place. His diaries in this respect are quite different from the much shorter diary of his nephew John. John was reticent about his sexual experiences. He does not mention keeping a slave mistress, though his uncle’s diaries make it clear that he took up with a slave woman. Nevertheless, his diary crackles with sexual tension, as he debated whether he should enter into a sexual attachment. He also describes how some sexual encounters came about, relating that a “Negro

wench came to persuade me if possible to lay with her” because she “wanted to have a child for her master” whom she feared to be impotent, adding that she “was a very likely wench of the Mandingo Countrey but speaks good English.”⁵¹ Thomas Thistlewood’s account of his sexual behavior is fuller but less revealing. It is impossible to tell whether his sexual partners had sex with him willingly or whether he forced them. Thistlewood made no effort to stand back from his relentless compiling of facts about his sexual activity in order to draw meaning from them. His lack of concern about the wider meaning of his and others’ lives is most apparent in the way in which he wrote about his relationship with Phibbah, his long-term mistress and a woman with whom he had a strong emotional attachment. Only once does he give a hint of his feelings toward Phibbah. In 1757, he left Egypt after a dispute with his employer. Phibbah “grieved much,” leading Thistlewood to reflect that she was a “Poor girl” who was “in Miserable Slavery.”⁵² But this expression of feeling is unusual. Moments of reflection let alone emotion are so rare as to be remarkable and occurred only after transformative events in Thistlewood’s life: his parting from Phibbah in 1757; the deaths of his nephew, his son, and his best friends; the slave revolt of 1760; and the 1780 hurricane.

A Representative Diary?

The deficiencies of the diaries as guides to eighteenth-century human behavior, however, cannot detract from the abundance of evidence they provide about what white and black Jamaicans did within their peculiar society. They are the richest source into either white or black society that I have come across in extensive archival investigations into Jamaican history. They offer a wealth of material about white society, slave interactions with their masters, and the manner of living in the eighteenth-century British tropical world. Their very richness makes them suspect: no one else kept a diary with the assiduousness of Thistlewood. Does this make Thistlewood unrepresentative? Is he an unusual man in an unusual society and thus not to be trusted? Of course, the very fact that Thistlewood kept a journal makes him curious. Just as Edward Long’s intelligence and sophisticated understanding of history make his history not only one of the great historical works of his age but also the product of his particular brilliance and opinionated views, so too does the singularity of Thistlewood’s diaries make him ipso facto unrepresentative. Diary keeping was not a normal preoccupation of white Jamaican men, and the type of person who keeps a diary—someone with a protobourgeois mentality, keen on accounting for time spent,

and someone engaged in self-improvement⁵³—does not fit with what we assume to be the quintessential eighteenth-century white Jamaican personality, in which self-indulgence and the lack of a persevering spirit were pre-eminent characteristics. As Alan Macfarlane has commented concerning another diary, if we used diaries on their own, we would receive a picture “biased toward the more methodical and the more introspective sides of life.”⁵⁴

Certainly Thistlewood was not the quintessential white Jamaican man. He was neither noticeably self-indulgent, except perhaps in his strong sexual appetite, nor conspicuously indolent and devoted to short-term pleasure. He seldom drank to excess, was careful about what he ate, and preferred his own company to the compulsive carousing that was common among white men. His slaves accurately summed up his personality as it appears in his diaries in the name they privately bestowed on him: “ABBAUMI APPEA i.e. No for Play.” The name they called his subordinate, John Hartnole—Cakra Juba, or “Crazy Somebody”—was a much more typical moniker for a white Jamaican.⁵⁵ Being fascinated by books and an avid reader was also unusual. Few white Jamaicans read very much, at least if contemporary denigrations of the cultural ambience of Jamaica can be believed and if the absence of books in Jamaican inventories is a guide.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, what distinguishes Thistlewood from other white Jamaican men is less significant than what connects him to them. Nothing in his diaries signifies that he was at odds with his neighbors in his behavior, personality, or values. He was not universally liked, which is not surprising given that he was prickly and highly conscious of his own dignity. He had several run-ins with authority figures, especially in his first years in the island, when his willingness to whip slaves first and ask questions later if he found them on his land created several powerful enemies among the owners of the slaves so treated. As an independent proprietor in the 1760s, he was prepared to openly insult one of the leading men of the parish when solicited for his political support. But his difficult personality did not prevent him from being recognized by other white men as an acceptable member of society and a man worthy of being included in significant social and political events in the parish. Wealthy white men invited him to dinner; he was made a lieutenant of the Savanna-la-Mar fort and a justice of the peace; and men of similar status to himself—tavern keepers, doctors, and slave overseers—appointed him as executor of their estates. By the time of his death, Thistlewood’s position in Westmoreland Parish was clear. He was a respectable old settler, well-off without being wealthy, and a man of some local consequence as a justice and a vestryman. He had no wider fame, except per-

haps in botany and horticulture. Like most white men in the parish, he made his living through planting and the ownership of slaves. He was skilled at both endeavors, as evidenced by the competition among planters to employ him as manager of their estates and slave forces. But he was not an extraordinary agriculturalist. He followed normal practices in cane cultivation and was not especially innovative as a pen keeper, though he had particular talents as a gardener. Thistlewood was nothing if not conventional, both in his behavior and in his views. Apart from exhibiting a strong dislike for Scotsmen, which may have been more pronounced than usual for white Jamaicans of English descent, he evinced no political or social opinion that marks him as unusual. He accepted the existing order as it was. He never questioned the morality of slavery, for example; the right of white men to dominate slaves, wives, and children; or, even in the American Revolution, the necessity of British sovereignty over its colonies. Nor he did he ever doubt that white men were bound to rule and that political and social authority should accrue to men who had the greatest social and economic standing in the community.

He was also very normal in what strikes modern readers as the most aberrant aspects of Jamaican life: his sexual, social, and physical relationships with slaves. Modern readers of Thistlewood’s diaries—and I presume readers of this book—do not think well of Thistlewood because of the brutality of his behavior toward his slaves. His sexual appetite appears less that of a Caribbean Casanova than the unnatural and bestial longings of a quintessential sexual predator and rapist. His willingness to subject his slaves to horrific punishments, which included savage whippings of up to 350 lashes and sadistic tortures of his own invention, such as Derby’s dose, in which a slave defecated into the mouth of another slave whose mouth was then wired shut, reveal Thistlewood as a brutal sociopath. It is hard to get past these aspects of Thistlewood’s behavior in order to see him as he saw himself: a harbinger, in a modest way, of the Enlightenment in the Tropics; a scholar and perhaps a gentleman; a loyal friend and respectable imperial subject; and a man of principle and integrity.

A Violent Man in a Violent Age

As historians, it is not our responsibility to attribute retrospective blame. We do, however, need to explain why ordinary people such as Thistlewood acted in the ways they did—ways that dismayed contemporaries as much as they horrify us today. How could Thistlewood behave as he did toward his slaves and develop strategies of control that were designed to demean, demoralize, and

traumatize them when in other situations and in relations with fellow whites, he adopted patterns of behavior that we associate with a man of intelligence and integrity? Why was his ethical behavior so strongly influenced by the situations in which he found himself? Thistlewood's behavior indicates a very strong sense of situational ethics, of having different codes of conduct for different circumstances. The conduct adopted depended on the race of the person involved. Although Thistlewood saw slaves as human beings and did not see them as biologically inferior in the manner of a scientific racist such as Long, he accepted common Jamaican understandings that whites could act toward blacks in any way they wanted with impunity. Whites had total license to behave toward slaves as they saw fit, with white juries excusing all white crimes toward blacks short of psychopathic serial murder. John Wright, who was convicted of murder after killing four partners, was the only white noted by Thistlewood in thirty-seven years of residence in Westmoreland who was punished for his ill treatment of slaves. Moreover, he was only "fated" when he murdered a mistress who was mulatto: perhaps if he had confined his killing solely to blacks, he would have been safe. In the end, he escaped hanging and died by shooting himself at sea, having been allowed to escape from jail on the condition that he left the country.⁵⁷

That whites were free to act as they pleased toward blacks does not, however, explain why they were so brutal toward their slaves. White Jamaicans, as Charles Leslie noted, were notorious for their ill treatment of slaves.⁵⁸ One of the causes of that ill treatment arose from the almost complete absence of constraint over how that power was exercised. Psychological studies, notably the famous Milgram experiments on the makeup of authoritarian personalities, have confirmed the increased extent to which individuals are willing to abuse normal ethical standards when they are placed within institutional structures that allow normal ethical standards to be violated.⁵⁹ Studies of the Holocaust have revealed that extraordinary circumstances can encourage ordinary people to commit acts of unrestrained violence and evil.⁶⁰ Late-eighteenth-century commentators were similarly interested in the extraordinary circumstances that led white Jamaicans to treat their slaves so abominably. Some attributed white Jamaican brutality to the climate, arguing that the heat transformed the "natural Disposition" of Britons "from humanity into Barbarity." Others blamed the "Barbarity" on the way white Jamaicans were raised. "Bred for the most Part at the Breast of a Negro Slave; surrounded in their Infancy with a numerous retinue of these dark Attendants," white Jamaicans were, John Fothergill asserted, "habituated by Precept and Example, to Sensuality, and Despotism." They were used, in short, to "play the Mogul and *lord it*" over their slaves "without Con-

troul." Not only did native-born whites take immense pride in the constant obsequiousness of their slaves; migrants also became quickly attuned to West Indian ways. "Like wax softened by heat," J. B. Moreton argued, men from other countries "melt into [Jamaican] manners and customs." He continued: "[M]en from their first entrance . . . are taught to practice severities to the slaves . . . so that in time their hearts become callous to all tender feelings which soften and dignify our nature; the most insignificant Connaught savage bumpkin, or silly Highland gauky, will soon learn to flog without mercy to shew his authority."⁶¹

Nevertheless, I would argue that the major impetus of white Jamaican "Barbarism" was the belief that slaves could only be controlled through severe force and were not entitled to the same treatment that was meted out to Englishmen. Jamaicans imagined that Africans were used to harsh treatment in their native land. They also thought them "a sort of beast, and without souls," "a set of vile beings, of a species different from ours." They believed Africans had "as great a Propensity to Subjection, as we have to command and love Slavery as naturally as we do Liberty."⁶² Harsh measures were needed to control such "savage and uncivilized creatures." White Jamaicans believed in force because they were frightened. Jamaica was a society at war. Slaves had to be kept cowed through arbitrary, tyrannical, and brutal actions, supported at all times by the full weight of state authority. White Jamaicans developed a legal system and a social structure in which any brutality exercised by whites toward blacks could be excused by the fundamental necessity of keeping blacks subdued. Only in this way could white fears be assuaged. Such assumptions, of course, were a license for sadism and tyranny among all whites, not just those inclined to psychopathic behavior. Whites knew that they had the full support of the state and white public opinion for whatever they did toward slaves. As James Knight declared, "Whoever considers the Negroes Superiority in Number, the sullen, deceitfull, Refractory temper of most of them . . . and how much their Masters Interest depends on the Care, and Diligence of His Slaves must be Convinced, that there is an Absolute necessity of keeping a Vigilant Eye, and Strict hand over them."⁶³ Because white Jamaicans considered themselves at war, they convinced themselves that normal rules of behavior did not apply. This conviction was reinforced by their all-pervasive racism. As Long asserted, Africans were "men of so savage a disposition, as that they scarcely differ from the wild beasts of the wood in the ferocity of their manners"; thus they had to "be managed at first as if they were beasts; they must be tamed, before they can be treated like men."⁶⁴

The ethos of Jamaican society was similar to that described by Primo Levi in

his searing accounts of life in Auschwitz, a gray zone with moral rules peculiar to its own distorted social structure, a society with ill-defined and abnormal outlines in which oppressors and victims were both separate and joined together. As Levi observes, to understand the incredibly complicated internal structure and strange morality of such a society, one must understand how power operates when it is not constrained by moral considerations. Both the powerful and the powerless—the master and the slave—seek power in totalitarian societies, and power is “generously granted to those willing to pay homage to hierarchic authority.” The immorality of societies based on the rightness of force alone makes the wielders of power themselves immoral, whether they are part of the oppressors’ power structure, such as Thistlewood, or the oppressed, contaminated by the need to identify with, imitate, or emulate the oppressors.⁶⁵

Outline of the Book

The operation of power in Jamaica is the principal theme of this book. The book is divided into two sections. In the first four chapters, including this introductory chapter, I examine Thistlewood as a white man trying to make his way in a new environment. I test what it meant to be a white immigrant in an economically, socially, and racially polarized society in which whites could attain great wealth (chapter 2), enjoy high status and a degree of equality with each other (chapter 3), and follow their “pursuit of happiness”—independence, individualism, and improvement in all its guises—as avidly as their contemporaries in mainland North America (chapter 4).⁶⁶ In the final four chapters, I consider Thistlewood’s relations with his slaves and attempt to recover the lives of some of the slaves under his charge. In chapter 5, I analyze why whites were able to retain power in Jamaica despite being heavily outnumbered by a group of people with weapons of their own who were motivated by an all-consuming hatred of their oppressors. From an exploration of white-black interactions, I turn in chapter 6 to an examination of the structures within which Thistlewood’s slaves lived and study in detail four male slaves’ interactions with their master. For individual slaves, two countervailing principles operated in dealing with masters. On the one hand, proximity to a master spelled danger, assuring slaves of frequent punishment and constant changes in condition. On the other hand, only by getting close to masters could slaves escape from the debilitating grind of field work. In chapter 7, I examine female slaves’ lives through the prism of resistance and assess whether this common paradigm in studies of

slave societies can explain female slaves’ behavior. The chapter concludes with an account of the life of Phibbah, Thistlewood’s long-term mistress and the most extraordinary slave encountered in Thistlewood’s diaries. Phibbah was Thistlewood’s great support, an accommodator to slavery who could at times treat her fellow slaves with as much brutality as any white. Yet she was able to transcend slavery through her determined efforts to create a family estate for herself, her family, and her female friends. By accommodating herself to slavery and overcoming many of the obstacles that limited slaves’ “pursuit of happiness,” she forged the greatest challenge to Jamaica’s slave system of any slave under Thistlewood’s control. In the final chapter, I attempt to sum up the significance of Thistlewood and his diaries in the context of British American and Atlantic history.

The operation of power was complex in Jamaica. Whites had most of the power in society and exercised that power ruthlessly, but they did not hold a monopoly over power. Slaves possessed little power, but what they had, they used, sometimes to extraordinary effect. Masters did not always win; slaves did not always lose. But masters always had the upper hand, primarily because they controlled the coercive powers of the state. Slaves and masters negotiated relationships because masters could not force slaves to acquiesce to their authority unless slaves agreed, but the negotiations were wildly unequal, with slaves seldom having any choice but to accept the lot they were given. White Jamaicans were proud to live in a land of liberty, but that liberty was predicated upon the symbolic and real infliction of terror on slaves’ bodies and minds. At bottom, Jamaica was an anarchic society, suffused with violence. Its pretensions to civility were mocked by the brutality with which whites alienated and traumatized the majority of the population. Thistlewood was a vital cog in that oppressive order. This book tells his story.