

The 1816 Barbados Slave Revolt

Submitted by Lilian McNaught, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of *Masters by Research* in History, September 2017.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

.....

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the leadership, causes and impact of the 1816 Barbados slave revolt. Many historians of resistance and abolitionism have overlooked or dismissed the rebellion because of its seemingly negligible effects upon emancipation, while those who do champion the actions of the 1816 rebels have arguably overstated its impact out of a desire to return agency to a history of enslavement. In Barbados, the popular narrative of the uprising is similarly tainted. Its importance to a sense of national pride and identity, rooted in historical examples of resistance and defiance in the face of colonial oppression, has led to a simplified and romanticised understanding. An enslaved man named Bussa has come to represent the rebellion, and the rebellion itself, emancipation.

By revisiting often-used primary material, twinned with neglected or new sources, and the personal experience gained on a research trip to the island, the following will attempt to deconstruct these conflicting images. It is arguable that the only real way to restore a sense of autonomy to this history is by retelling it in its most complete form, and not simply viewing its causes and impacts through the uprising's relationship with abolitionism. It is only by unearthing the complexity and confusion of these events - through the collective nature of the rebel leadership, the myriad of local issues stirring discontent, the slow and subtle development of nationalism and community amongst the rebels, the rumour and anxiety that surrounded the international catalysts for resistance, and every influence that all of this had, both in 1816 and in present-day Barbados – that the humanity and agency of this uprising can be illuminated and understood.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
1. The Leadership Debate.....	10
2. The Local Causes	36
3. The International Causes	63
4. The Impact of the Revolt	88
Appendix	114
Bibliography.....	118

Introduction

Prior to 1816, Barbados had been one of Britain's most peaceful sugar colonies. Apart from a small handful of failed conspiracies dotted throughout the island's history, the Bajan planter class had remained largely untroubled by their seemingly docile enslaved population.¹ The colony's topography did not inspire the tumultuous tradition of marronage and resistance that appeared to plague neighbouring islands, and the white elite comforted themselves in the knowledge that their workers were afforded a greater level of independence both as an incentive for contentment, and a reward for their loyalty. Their trust in the enslaved was so great, in fact, that one planter later recollected how, 'the night of the insurrection I would and did sleep with my chamber door open, and if I had possessed ten thousand pounds in my house I should not have had any more precaution, so well convinced I was of their attachment.'² It was a sharp shock, therefore, when this illusion was shattered one night, in the spring of 1816.

On the early evening of Easter Sunday, enslaved men and women from the island's wind-swept eastern parish of St. Phillip began setting signal fires on their plantations. By the early hours of the morning, seventy of the largest estates were aflame and the slave rebellion had spread across to neighbouring parishes. It took three days for military forces to suppress the uprising, by which time considerable damage had been inflicted upon the cane stores and planter property, and hundreds of rebels had been killed. It had been the first and only large-scale revolt in the history of the island. The apparent tranquillity of their enslaved masses had lulled the plantocracy into a false sense of security, and convinced them that they were content in their servitude. But as fires sprung up along the eastern horizon it became clear that they were very much mistaken.

Although the uprising proved essentially unsuccessful, only lasting a few days before being quickly and ruthlessly suppressed by the island military forces, the true impact of the rebellion has been felt in the generations of Barbadians

¹ The words 'Bajan' and 'Barbadian' will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis to mean 'Barbados-born.' This is a purely stylistic decision to avoid too much repetition of either word.

² Planter Robert Haynes to Thomas Lane, 23rd September 1816, quoted in: H. Beckles, 'The Slave-Drivers' War: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion' in G. D. Howe and D. D. Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (Jamaica, 2001), p.6.

that have looked to these events as a shining example of defiance and resistance, emerging from the rubble of a history of enslavement. The 1816 slave revolt has come to represent emancipation, though more in spirit than reality. It has become important in the development of a national identity rooted in historical examples of agency and autonomy that challenge the colonial constraints of the island's development into a modern state. The events of Easter Sunday, 1816, have seeped into the popular consciousness of Barbados and inspired local historians who have chosen the uprising as the focus of their debates. The rebellion, in essence, has taken on meaning and significance far larger than itself in the way it has been interpreted and remembered, and has become solidified in the popular imagining of what it means to be Barbadian.

Because of this, any scholarly debate that focuses on the uprising by Bajan historians is often fraught with contention. Most controversial of all is the 'leadership debate,' which has sought to identify the leading rebels from a confusing, distorted and often contradictory collection of sources. In the popular historical consciousness, there has been a clear winner, where an enslaved African man named Bussa has come to personify the rebellion. The idea of the 'War of General Bussa' has indeed become so ingrained that the island's Emancipation Statue has been colloquially renamed after the elusive rebel leader, and he has been given 'National Hero' status by the government. Historians who challenge this narrative seem to be fighting an uphill battle. Hotly debated too, are the causes and effects of the rebellion, although these issues, unlike the Bussa question, have seen a far more international engagement and have been addressed by historians outside of the Caribbean historiographical sphere.

In the context of these existing debates, this thesis will seek to contribute to elements of all of them. The focus will be on the leadership, causes and impact of the uprising, rather than the events, as these areas provide the most room for fresh interpretation and analysis. The conclusions drawn are supported by a re-examination of often used, as well as newer and untouched primary material, and personal experience gained on a recent research trip to Barbados during the bicentenary commemoration of the revolt. The timing of the trip has proved particularly useful in assessing the long-term effects of the uprising upon national identity, and in recognising the prominence of Bussa in the popular historical consciousness. However, although this trip was valuable

in this regard, apart from the newspaper records housed in the Barbados Public Library, it seems that the majority of primary material relating to the uprising is kept outside of the island's borders. Both the London and New York archives appear to hold vastly more sources, which is both a shame for Barbadian scholars and perhaps a reflection of the country's colonial roots, where the ownership of their knowledge and histories is still in the hands of the old 'mother country.'

The chapter on the leadership of the uprising will address all facets of the existing historiography, while returning to the controversial sources that have fuelled the debate and combining them with newer, lesser-used material to draw a more rounded conclusion of the rebellion. This, alongside a re-interpretation of sources like the *Barbados House of Assembly Report* reveals an uprising that was far more collaborative and community-driven than many historians of the revolt have previously presented, and illustrates how the support of other leading rebels does not necessarily diminish the role of figures like Bussa. It does suggest that the popular narrative of the rebellion is a simplified one, and although this could be seen as a characteristic of popular histories in general, this has arguably distorted the very nature of the uprising from a collective, politically aware demonstration of antislavery activity, into a war against the plantocracy with General Bussa at the helm. Out of all of them, this chapter engages the most with Caribbean historiography, infused with the experiences of the research trip and bicentenary. The result is what borders on a micro-history, a study of communities, plantations and relationships within the islands borders, and the echoes of these histories that still resonate in modern Barbados, two hundred years later.

The second chapter is an attempt to re-examine some often-dismissed local causes of the uprising. These more immediate, and perhaps more personal, catalysts for revolt are rarely given much weight by historians in comparison to the broader international influences of abolitionism and tides of revolution. However, stimuli for discontent like food shortages, planter cruelty and burgeoning forms of nationalism amongst the enslaved became powerful in the context of these wider issues. They can also shed light on the geographical mapping of the revolt, like why some enslaved men and women took up arms in particular parishes, but also why it was *Barbados* that became host to an uprising when these international influences had pressed upon all the West

Indian colonies in equal measure. The focus on early nationalism amongst the rebels is intended to highlight a particularly neglected area of historiography. By studying the growth of cohesive enslaved culture and communities, we can see the powerful influence this had upon a sense of ownership and autonomy that was irreconcilable with slavery. This is also illuminative of the later developments of nationalism in the aftermath of the uprising, and the importance of the rebels' actions to a sense of modern Barbadian national pride across generations. In addition to this, emphasis on these local causes is significant in deconstructing the relatively passive and simplistic narrative of the uprising. The complexities of the rebel motivations belie the idea that these men and women were reacting purely to abolitionist rumours, and help to restore a kind of agency to the rebel histories. The examination of these 'smaller' causes is intended to illustrate that, within the wave of discontent, there were any number of personal or political motivations driving the rebels to take up arms against their masters. And when slave records are often so devoid of identity and autonomy, such intricacies are all the more important in revealing the humanity behind these pivotal moments in Caribbean history.

The third chapter focuses on the international causes of the rebellion. It explores the relationship between British abolitionism the Barbadian plantocracy, as well as the way in which the rebels interpreted news of the humanitarian campaign across the Atlantic. There is a strong emphasis on the power of rumour and distortion amongst the enslaved community in the lead up to the uprising, and the analysis of international causation is viewed heavily through this lens. It is arguable that the hopeful news of freedom, that seemed to spread with intoxicating speed amongst the enslaved, is significant *because* it was so misguided, yet wilfully and wholeheartedly adopted by the rebels. This deserves deeper analysis than it has previously been given by other scholars. News of 'freedom papers,' twinned with the fragments of information that had permeated the enslaved popular consciousness about the fabled Haitian revolution seemed to have a powerful effect upon the decision to rebel. This chapter utilises some of the often-referenced sources that have repeatedly illustrated the relationship between abolitionism and rebellion, and re-examines them alongside an extensive collection of planter newspapers taken from the Barbados Public Library and several rebel flags that, due to their relatively recent discovery, are absent from a large portion of the existing historiography.

Together, these materials create a more complete, rounded picture of the influence of international events, real and illusory, upon the motives and actions of the rebels in 1816. Though this chapter arguably travels a path well-worn by other historians (as the importance of abolitionism to the later West-Indian revolts has become an established 'truth' among experts in the field), the focus upon rumour, and the examination of this in itself, as opposed to simply identifying the distortions where they existed, provides a fuller analysis of the mentalities of the enslaved in the build up to rebellion. Additionally, the alliance of old, new and neglected primary material creates a fresh perspective on the power of these international influences, seeking to illustrate how the enslaved heard of these occurrences, and in turn came to interpret the information into further fuel for their resistance.

The last area of focus is the impact of the uprising. It is easy to fall into the trap of exaggerating the importance of the 1816 rebellion to the progress of international tides of emancipation and reform out of a desire to restore agency to the oppressed in Barbados, or to make martyrs of the fallen rebels. Though well meaning, this would be (and has been) a misrepresentation. This chapter concludes that the influence of the rebels' actions upon abolitionism was minimal in the short-term, and important in the long-term only in the context of later rebellions that, combined, could help to illustrate a 'cycle of violence' implicit in slavery. This assessment does not seek to dismiss or diminish the actions of the enslaved Barbadians, but to illustrate that while their international influence was subtle, it was nonetheless felt elsewhere. By only measuring the weight of the rebellion in its effect upon British legislation, we narrow our field of vision, and exclude the more lasting legacies of the rebels' campaign.

In the immediate aftermath, the 1816 revolt sparked almost mass-insecurity among the plantocracy in Barbados, and throughout the Caribbean. It is arguable that it created a permanent shift in the mentalities of both the white elite and the black majority, awakening fear and paranoia in the minds of the ruling class and a rumbling discontent among the enslaved across the West Indies. The violent suppression of the rebellion only played to this, since it illustrated both the anxieties of the plantocracy and caused ripples of outrage in the British metropolis. Though the initial response of the antislavery movement was marked by a rejection of the uprising and a retreat from the political stage, in the long-term the actions of the rebels and their ruthless punishing by the

Barbadian whites created a problem unavoidable. The abolitionists were forced to accommodate slave rebellion into their movement, and in doing so, redefine the images of enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans that would provide the object of their sympathy, and therefore the object of their campaign. It is arguable, too, that the greatest changes in the Caribbean were also the slowest to burn, where the next two decades saw further mass-revolt and resistance, in part influenced by the actions of Bussa and his fellow rebels. While most lasting of all, was the memory of the rebellion, and the power that this seems to have had upon Barbados to this day. It is seen as a symbol and a source of national pride, and regardless of whether it had any real impact upon the passing of emancipation in Britain; it is viewed as the Barbadian contribution to the struggle.

For clarification, the word 'enslaved' will be used throughout, following on from the assessments of historians like Hilary Beckles and Deborah Gray White, the word is far less freighted than 'slave.'³ The latter implies a whole passivity of identity, while 'enslaved' changes the focus of oppression to the planter who is keeping the person in bondage.

³ H. Beckles, 'João Pedro Marques, Slave Revolts and the Abolition of Slavery: A Misinterpretation' in S. Drescher and P. Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery? Slave Revolts and Abolitionism* (2010)
D. G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985)

1. The Leadership Debate

Just east of Bridgetown, nestled in the middle of one of the island's busiest highways stands the Emancipation Statue of Barbados. It depicts an enslaved man triumphantly raising his arms, broken shackles dangling from his wrists, with his fists clenched, looking up to the sky in a kind of reverent victory.⁴ The statue was unveiled in 1985, having been commissioned by the Barbados Government to mark the 150th anniversary of emancipation, and bears the inscription: 'Lick an Lock-up Done Wid, Hurray fuh Jin-Jin [Queen Victoria]. De Queen come from England to set we free, Now Lick an Lock-up Done Wid, Hurray fuh Jin-Jin.' This was the song of the formally enslaved on the last day of apprenticeship in 1838, celebrating their final freedom. The statue itself is so interesting because of the way in which the local artist, Karl Broodhagen, chose to depict emancipation as a concept. The man is shown in revolt, breaking his chains by his own hands in his own personal triumph, in a championing of rebel slaves and the pride in self-liberation. This is very different from, for example, the emancipation statue in Jamaica that depicts a man and a woman standing stoically alongside one another with their faces slightly raised to the heavens. It is most likely because of his appearance and stance that the statue has become commonly known as 'Bussa' by the local people.

The extent of this re-naming is clear with a simple Google search, which reveals pages and pages of Barbados tourism and heritage sites, all referring to the 'Bussa Statue' or the 'Bussa Emancipation Statue.' Indeed a couple of local children who I spoke to confirmed his identity, but they could not tell me who he was or why there was a giant bronze replica of him across the street from a busy mall. It seems as though Bussa has come to represent and personify emancipation in Barbados, as a vaguely drawn but undoubtedly *Bajan* national hero of resistance.⁵ His championing (proven by his appointment as one of the island's few 'National Heroes' in the late 1990s) is unsurprising. In the same way in which West Indian historiography has evolved in the last 40 years to introduce a strong theme of enslaved agency and resistance, Bussa has become the figurehead of this movement in Barbados. This is alluded to by

⁴ See Appendix I.

⁵ The words 'Bajan' and 'Barbadian' will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis to mean 'Barbados-born.' This is a purely stylistic decision to avoid too much repetition of either word.

David Lambert who describes this decolonisation of Bajan history as deeply connected to ‘post-independence projects of nation building’ – it is forging a kind of historical patriotism from the rubble of a vastly passive national narrative.⁶ Hilary Beckles also identified this process, as searching for a ‘usable and epic past by identifying forms of resistance to the institution of slavery and to colonial rule.’⁷ For many local people in Barbados, Bussa *is* this ‘usable and epic past,’ and so it only makes sense that a statue of a man meant to personify freedom and resistance has become so widely renamed.

Bussa’s role as the leader of the 1816 slave revolt has become deeply embedded in the popular consciousness of Barbados. However, not everyone is supportive of this narrative. It speaks volumes of the elusive nature of this history and reliable sources that even the *leadership* of the largest slave revolt in the island’s history is the subject of contentious debate. For many years now, Barbadian historiography of the rebellion seems to have been almost completely consumed by a fierce contest over whether the leader was indeed Bussa, another man named Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin, or a combination of both, along with several other enslaved men and women and free people of colour. The majority of historians in this field generally believe Bussa was the leader, led by Hilary Beckles who has become a vociferous spokesperson for the camp. On the other side are historians like Karl Watson and Jerome Handler, who though equally vocal in their opposition are pushing against the far stronger current of popular historical consciousness in Barbados. For them, changing the narrative of the revolt and dethroning Bussa as its figurehead would take more than winning an academic debate – it would require convincing the public (and renaming the statue).

However it seems as though their position, and particularly Handler’s, is equally as problematic as Beckles’. In their efforts to include men like Franklin in the history of the revolt, they seem to unfairly dismiss Bussa, as if he must be completely excluded in order to include others. But close scrutiny of the primary sources reveals that *both* men held important roles in the leadership of the uprising. An examination of the modern perception of the revolt, particularly through the 200-year anniversary celebrations, reveals how entrenched Bussa has become in the popular historical consciousness of Barbados. While a re-

⁶ Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (New York, 2005), p.108.

⁷ *Ibid.*

evaluation of the primary material illustrates *why* this might be the case, it also highlights why it is a distortion of this history. To dismiss the role of Bussa or Franklin is to read these sources incredibly selectively. Bussa emerges so *visible* in the remembering of the rebellion because it is likely he was the kind of military leader of the other rebels, while Franklin seems to have been more a kind of ideological leader operating behind the scenes, and away from the plantation. Indeed there is a strong argument that the popular history has transformed the rebellion into something it was not. It is seen as a war with a general rather than a collective political protest against slavery. Altering this perception of what the revolt *was* is vital in changing the way in which its leadership is understood.

Very little is known about any of the men at the centre of this debate, and due to the scarcity of any reliable sources, presenting an iron-clad case for any one leader is difficult. Even amongst the volumes and volumes of correspondences between the Barbados Governor's office and Britain. Government and military officials simply refer to the rebel slaves as a kind of single violent force moving across the island. They are only given names when their testimony can implicate others in the aftermath of the uprising. To the planter elite, the rebels were as nameless as they were as slaves, and perhaps the reason there is no mention of leadership until many months later is because they couldn't conceive that there had *been* any. The revolt, to them, was not the heroic conflict it is painted as in modern Barbados, instead it was seen as the wilfully destructive action of a rebellious rabble.

This absence from the elite historical record, of names and identities, is perhaps the key reason why this debate is historically valuable. It is so important because the people who died for their freedom, once overlooked, have become national heroes in the West Indies. The outcomes of this debate will not just change a paragraph or two in a school textbook, but will change who the public use as a symbol of their national pride. Although it seems unlikely at this point that Bussa can be replaced, it is also important not to neglect the alternative simply because it is too deeply imbedded in national culture. A couple of local Bajans told me on my research trip that it 'wouldn't matter' if the leader was established as someone else, because it wouldn't change anyone's minds. But it *does* matter. It matters so much more because the historical record of slavery and slave revolt is often so uncertain. The names

of these men and women who potentially led this uprising were lifted from obscurity by their rebellion, when so many millions have been long forgotten. To ignore their contribution to the revolt in favour of one man would be to forget them again. While ignoring this entire scholarly debate, as endless as it seems, when writing of this revolt would be to ignore the distinctly Barbadian contribution to its historiography.

Bussa

Last Easter marked the 200-year anniversary of the 1816 revolt in Barbados. To celebrate, various national institutions, including the University of the West Indies, organised events across the island. The first of these was a bus tour of all of the significant points of the revolt, stretching across the South-East of the island, where coach-loads of historically enthusiastic locals were dropped off at the main plantations and military sites that had been central to the rebellion. Events such as this are invaluable in seeing the way in which this history is presented to the public, and the high turnout and general enthusiasm by the locals is illustrative of the place this uprising has in their sense of personal history and national identity. Indeed, on the tour buses many could be heard enthusiastically recounting how their families were distantly related to the different rebel leaders with a great deal of pride.

The evening after the tour, the National Cultural Foundation of Barbados put on a theatrical performance in the grounds of Golden Grove plantation (one of the main sites of the rebellion) that proved to be wildly successful. Hundreds of local people turned out to see 'From Bussa to Barrow and Beyond,' a dramatization of the 1816 revolt interwoven with slave spirituals and excerpts of famous Bajans' writing. The review printed in the next day's *Daily Nation* described how the production 'told the story of Barbados' history, the pain, horror and how the country progressed to what it is today.'⁸ In this piece of public history, Bussa was the star. This was a continuing theme throughout the bi-centenary celebrations – in a display set up in the National Library to accompany a lecture on the revolt, Bussa was again the main focus. His imagined image was reproduced in life-sized paintings, while the display was entitled 'Freedom Fighter Bussa & the 1816 Rebellion' and detailed all of the

⁸ *Daily Nation*, 18 April 2016, pp. 20-21.

known or assumed information about him alongside the narrative of the revolt.⁹

It seemed as though these celebrations were more a kind of tribute a man already memorialised and championed in his National Hero status than the revolt itself. Though there were undoubtedly *many* other leaders, Bussa is the one who has been chosen to represent a country's active resistance against enslavement, and who has also become an important figurehead in the 'construction of post colonial national identity in Barbados.'¹⁰ But is this continued quasi-favouritism damaging to the popular historical consciousness of the country, and does a seeming reluctance to accept the role of any other leader stifle and stagnate progress of the revolt's historiography? In a particularly vicious newspaper debate between Hilary Beckles and Jerome Handler, Handler argued that 'the great prominence attributed to Busso [sic] is more an invention of modern scholarship.'¹¹ This is entirely possible, but equally it is also possible that the frustration of historians, determined to prove the role of other rebel leaders to a reluctant audience, has led them to dismiss Bussa unfairly.

Due to the fragmented nature of slave histories, with very limited primary material available, even Bussa's identity is relatively mysterious. Beckles has described how 'there is little that is known of his character and personhood,' but despite this, he 'emerged from the military record and the folk memory as the central figure.'¹² In his confession, printed in the Barbados House of Assembly report on the rebellion, an enslaved man named James Bowland named Bussa ("Bussoe") as the ranger at Bayleys plantation.¹³ This is what little evidence exists of Bussa outside of his involvement in the revolt. However, Robert Morris has done extensive research using the mass of plantation records held in the Barbados archive to add slightly more detail to this shadowy figure. He cites a record of Bayleys estate from 1807 that shows Bussa as third on a list of 259 enslaved men and women, indicating his status as an elite worker and an older

⁹ See Appendix II.

¹⁰ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.111.

¹¹ J. Handler, 'The Barbados Slave Insurrection of 1816: Can it be properly Called 'Bussa's Rebellion?' *Sunday Advocate*, 26 March 2000.

¹² H. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market* (Cambridge, 2006), p.112.

H. Beckles, *Bussa: The 1816 Revolution in Barbados* (Barbados, 1998), p.2.

¹³ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee of the House of Assembly, appointed to enquire into the origin, causes, and progresses of the late insurrection* (Barbados, 1818), p.33.

man.¹⁴ Morris also used the a will from 1759, in which Joseph Bayley (the owner of Bayleys estate) was given several enslaved boys, among whom was a young 'Busso.'¹⁵ If this is the same Bussa, also listed as living at Bayleys in 1806, then he was at least 57 at the time of the rebellion.¹⁶

He was undoubtedly a member of the enslaved elite, as head ranger on the plantation, and because of this would have been afforded a great deal more responsibility, power and freedom than the majority of the enslaved who worked in the sugar fields. In *Bussa*, Beckles writes how by 1800 'a black labour elite existed in Barbados,' who became 'comparatively privileged,' with superior clothing, food rations and far more free time.¹⁷ This lifestyle (in comparison to their fellow enslaved) created a kind of 'semi-freedom,' which would prove dangerous to the stability of slavery in the outbreak of rebellion.¹⁸ Rangers and drivers could also move relatively freely around the patchwork of plantations, meaning that rebel messages could be easily spread and propagated outside of the confines of their own estate. Micheal Craton describes their position as a kind of paradox, where those who had gained the most from enslavement were often the least content.¹⁹ He describes how, 'there is nothing more energising for a rebel leader, who feels superior to his fellows, than to be treated as a second-class person by the master class, especially when close association and privileged information provide a sense that the power of the masters is crumbling.'²⁰

One aspect of Bussa's identity that is often cited, perhaps wrongly, is his supposed African birth. Hilary Beckles is definitely the loudest supporter of this, but it is a 'fact' often stated, unquestioned, by many other historians of the revolt. Beckles has suggested that Bussa may have been from the Bussa Nation, a faction of the Mande peoples who held a great deal of power in West Africa after the 15th Century.²¹ Beckles argues that this great heritage may have influenced the rebel leader, while representing an 'undiluted and

¹⁴ R. Morris 'The 1816 Uprising – A Hell Broth', *Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society* 46 (2000), p.15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ M. Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Cornell, 1982), p.251.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Beckles, *Bussa*, pp.20-21.

Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, p.112.

uncompromising determination for freedom' to his followers.²² However, it seems the only primary source that identifies Bussa as an African is a handbook created by Goulburn Sinkler in 1912, and although quite uncommon, the name 'Bussa' was given to Barbadian-born children and was not exclusively Mande in origin.²³ It seems more likely that the leader was creole born and in his fifties, as Morris concludes, than the younger African man that Beckles has presented.

Now to turn to the evidence of Bussa's leadership. Perhaps the simplest indication of his involvement lies in the geographical narrative of the revolt. Michael Craton has described how the uprising began at the 'twin epicentres' of Bayleys and Simmons plantations, expanding rapidly to the surrounding estates in a matter of hours.²⁴ The testimony of an enslaved man named Robert printed in the Assembly report of the revolt supports this story. His is one of the fullest and most detailed of the rebel confessions, although there are very few that exist to this day, and hundreds more seemingly lost. He recounts several leading figures for both Simmons (his own plantation) and Bayleys planning the uprising, and mentions the neighbouring estates The Thicket, Golden Grove and The River.²⁵

In addition to this, the military record points heavily to these plantations. In his report enclosed by the Governor to the Colonial Office in Britain, Colonel Codd described how he dispatched his men on Easter Monday morning. He sent Colonel Mayers and some of the island militia to The Thicket and Major Cassidy and the 1st West India Regiment (made up of entirely black troops) to Bayleys, as the most likely places of rebel activity.²⁶ The leader (or leaders) of the revolt *must* have come from one (or several) of these plantations, within the geographical sphere of influence where support for rebellion was drummed up in the weeks and months before Easter. Bussa, as an important and mobile man at Bayleys makes a good candidate. Hilary Beckles has also argued that later on in the uprising, rebels from several estates used Bussa's plantation as the meeting point to consider their next movements and that, 'the insurgent

²² Beckles, *Bussa*, p.20.

²³ G. E. Sinkler, *Handbook of Barbados* (London, 1912), p.18.

J. Handler, 'Evidence and Dogma,' *Sunday Advocate*, 16 April 2000.

²⁴ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.260.

²⁵ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, pp.29-30.

²⁶ Letter from Colonel Edward Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85) The British National Archives.

forces rendezvoused at Bayleys, the rebel headquarters, because Bussa lived there and was the leader of the struggle.²⁷ However, it is unclear which sources Beckles used to draw this conclusion, and although the evidence all points to these few plantations in St. Phillip, that does not necessarily point to Bussa as the lead agitator for rebellion in this highly-connected plantation world.

The most important piece of evidence pointing to Bussa, heavily relied upon by his historiographical supporters (and generally used to create a narrative of the rebel actions), is the Barbados House of Assembly report. Published in January 1818 almost two years after the revolt, this report reads more like a proslavery pamphlet than anything else, featuring extensive interviews with planters concerning the diets and lifestyles of their enslaved men and women. Alongside these, however, are five slave testimonies of men from four different plantations in St. Phillip that were heavily involved in the uprising. Out of these five, three 'confessions' mention Bussa's involvement; Daniel, Robert and James Bowland.²⁸ These statements are called 'confessions' lightly, considering the men were probably undergoing torture and interrogation techniques to obtain this information. None of these men name Bussa as the principle leader.

In Robert's testimony from Simmons Plantation, already established as easily the most detailed of the five, it seems as though a driver named Jackey is the most important character. His only mention of Bussa is where he recalls how Jackey would 'send to the other Drivers and Rangers, and to the head Carters about, and to Bussoe (at Bayleys), to turn out on Easter Monday to give the Country a light.'²⁹ It seems significant that Bussa is the only elite slave mentioned by name, but additionally Jackey is clearly described as 'one of the head men of the insurrection' while Bussa is not.³⁰ This might have something to do with the fact that Robert lived at Simmons with Jackey, and perhaps saw him as the leader because he was in charge on that particular estate, but this is of course simply speculation.

In the next confession from James Bowland of The River Plantation, he describes how 'Bussoe, the ranger; King Wiltshire, the carpenter; Dick Bailey, the mason; Johnny, the standard bearer; and Johnny Cooper, a cooper; were

²⁷ H. Beckles, 'General Bussa,' *Daily Nation*, 5 April 2000.

²⁸ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, pp. 26-34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the principle instigators of the Insurrection at Bailey's [sic].³¹ Bussa is grouped with four other men as the leaders on *one plantation*, and although his name is listed first, Bowland does not distinguish him from the others as more important. However, if Bayleys and Simmons were the original sites of rebel activity then it would follow that the leaders there became the leaders of the whole revolt.

Lastly we turn to the confession of Daniel, also from The River plantation, which mentions Bussa very briefly.³² He recalls a dance at The River on Good Friday night where he saw Cain Davis and John Sargeant (both free men of colour), who he mostly implicates as the leaders, as they 'conversed together aside' with Bussa, but did not overhear what they were discussing.³³ This is not exactly damning evidence of Bussa's leadership, particularly as Daniel already established two other men as the most important instigators. However, it seems odd that he would mention such a seemingly mundane detail without reason in a relatively short confession. He must have believed this conversation to be of significance, or alternately must have been asked about Bussa by his interrogators, giving him a reason to recall this small event.

Although these men did *mention* Bussa (or 'Bussoe') by name, there were still two testimonies in the report that do not reference him at all. This is incredibly significant considering one of these men, King Wiltshire, was from the same plantation as Bussa.³⁴ Surely he, if anyone, would have recalled Bussa's leadership. There is a chance he might have been protecting him, as someone who presumably knew him quite well, and instead named the free men of colour already accused of inciting revolt. This, though, is unlikely considering Bussa is assumed to have died in battle, and therefore no longer in need of protection from his allies. One thing is quite clear from this report; that no one leader emerges from the testimonies. Daniel, Robert and James Bowland named Bussa, but they mentioned a whole lot of other names as well, and often ascribed much more important roles to the others. Considering this source is perhaps the most important to historians of the revolt, the conclusions it draws are vague at best. Jerome Handler has argued that this relative absence of

³¹ Ibid., p.33.

³² Daniel's testimony is particularly freighted as he was implicated in 1818 for another of his 'confessions' that was used in evidence in the potential wrongful conviction of two rebels. See correspondence between Lord Combermere and Lord Bathurst, (CO 28/87) The British National Archives.

³³ Ibid., p.26.

³⁴ Ibid., p.27.

Bussa from this important document illustrates that 'there is no evidence for Busso's actual role in the insurrection other than his probable involvement at Bailey's [sic].'³⁵

However, as Robert Morris points out, this report seems to have been highly selective in which testimonies were printed. Leading figures like Cain Davis and Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin were court marshalled after the revolt, and so undoubtedly produced statements during this process. These, among many others that would be invaluable in establishing leadership are decidedly absent from the report. Morris argues that the plantocracy 'had no intention of highlighting the role of the leaders, possibly fearful of creating heroic figures out of them,' and thus were silent on the issue.³⁶ Instead, the Assembly focussed on pointing blame at the abolitionist movement in England, in a document that is heavily tainted by the deeply politicised aftermath of the uprising. It is therefore essential to read the Assembly report with an especially critical eye, particularly as it is so heavily relied upon in constructing the rebels' narrative of revolt. Assessments like *Handlers* are arguably too simplistic. The rebel testimonies printed in the report were printed for a reason; they fit with the plantocracy's story. Even in testimonies where Bussa is not explicitly mentioned as the leader he is named when others are not, listed first, or minor seemingly insignificant details are cited. From reading between the lines of tortured confessions we can see he had some kind of important role, mentioned by these condemned men either because they thought he was important, or because their interviewers did. *Handler* cannot be so quick to dismiss the role of one man for seemingly outshining others. He was undoubtedly leading alongside others, but leading nonetheless.

Another of Beckles' main arguments, heavily criticised by *Handler*, is that Bussa is regarded as the leader in the 'folk and oral traditions' of Barbados.³⁷ Different from more traditionally recognised oral histories, here Beckles is referring to a kind of implied oral tradition that has left clues of its existence in sources from decades after the revolt. This is what he refers to as the 'folk memory' of the island.³⁸ Although this is perhaps the most elusive kind of

³⁵ J. Handier, 'The Barbados Slave Insurrection of 1816: Can it be properly Called Bussa's Rebellion?' *Sunday Advocate*, 26 March 2000.

³⁶ Morris, 'A Hell Broth', p.9.

³⁷ Beckles, *History of Barbados*, p.111.

³⁸ Beckles, 'General Bussa', *Daily Nation*, 5 April 2000.

evidence, in a largely pre-literate society this suggestion of collective memory is some of the only evidence we have left. These sources come from 1876 and 1912, within or just beyond living memory the uprising, and Beckles argues have 'secured Bussa's place, identity, and importance' by illustrating a society that 'understood and spoke of the rebellion in terms of his leadership.'³⁹

The first two sources that suggest this are from the British Parliamentary Papers for 1876, which include a collection of correspondences relating to the labour riots of that year. The unrest was a response to rumours that the white elite were planning to reinstate slavery and became the largest disturbance in Barbados since the 1816 revolt. It perhaps isn't surprising the instigators referenced the slave rebels in their protests. One of the letters, anonymously signed 'a white man,' warns that danger will come if the rumours are true – 'Negroes in this time does not put shot at bottom and powder at top, bussa's Marshall [sic] Law in this age enlightened.'⁴⁰ He is referencing a rumour, which had circulated and became a kind of urban legend, that the 1816 rebels could not use firearms, putting the shot and powder in the wrong order, and thus rendering them ineffective. This had perhaps become a local explanation for the low white death toll during the uprising, but also is quite likely to be true as the enslaved men and women had undoubtedly never used guns before. The writer of this letter uses this mocking rumour to illustrate how serious the threat is, and that by 'enlightened' he means more deadly.

Most significant of all, is that he calls the revolt 'Bussa's'. There is no ambiguity about leadership here. The second of these letters is slightly less clear. It is an account by a man named E. H. H. Grant where he describes being searched and threatened by some rebels – 'one of the men held a stone towards my face and threatened to knock me down, saying that he would not do like Busso.'⁴¹ From this, the assumption is that Bussa and his men were non violent (or unsuccessful in being violent) and that Grant would not be quite so lucky if he did not do as he was told. It is unclear if, like the previous source, this rebel was mocking the 1816 rebels' nonviolence by implying it was accidental,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ British Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence and Papers Relating to the Federation of the Leeward Islands of the West Indies and Recent Disturbances in Barbados 1871-76*, vol. 9 (1971), p.120.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.490.

or referencing it in earnest. Either way, Bussa is the only man named as leader once again.

From these two sources we can see traces of what Beckles calls the 'folk memory' of Barbados as it existed in 1870. Both of these men used Bussa to reference the 1816 revolt, as though his name had become synonymous with the uprising as a whole, and so we could assume that this had infiltrated the wider popular historical consciousness by this time. In addition to this, they both seemed to contrast the seriousness of their threats with an almost scornful comparison to the 1816 rebels. Despite this, however, the revolt still seemed to conjure a memory fearful enough to be used as a threat by these men. This is powerful evidence of Bussa's importance in the 1816 revolt, as well as evidence of the impact the three-day uprising had upon the population of Barbados, even several decades after it occurred.

It is possible, although it is merely speculative, that Bussa became so widely *remembered* because he may have been more involved in the military aspect of the revolt. If he was leading rebels under gunfire, and spreading plans for insurrection while working as a ranger, he would have been far more *visible* than anyone involved in more 'behind the scenes' planning. The 1912 handbook of Goulburn Sinkler seems to corroborate this. He described how the 1816 uprising occurred 'under the leadership of an African named Bussa,' while the operation was 'conceived and planned' by the free man of colour, Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin.⁴² From this statement we can see a differentiation made between the military aspects and the ideas of rebellion. Another source from 1876 supports this theory, as *The Times* of Barbados described the revolt as 'The War of General Bussa,' with a given title that provides 'a clear indication of a perception that he was a military leader in the field.'⁴³ It seems likely that Bussa made such an impact upon public memory in Barbados because he was the 'General' of the insurrection, drumming up support, leading troops and allegedly dying in battle. In a community where this history was suppressed by the elites, a kind of 'folk history' was bound to emerge, told by those who had seen and lived it, and retold and retold until it was only inevitable that the statue of the rebelling slave in the middle of a busy highway would take the name most often repeated.

⁴² Sinkler, *Handbook of Barbados*, p.18.

⁴³ Beckles, 'General Bussa', *Daily Nation*, 5 April 2000.
Morris, 'A Hell Broth', p.11.

Franklin and the Endeavour

There are, however, critics of this history. In their vicious newspaper debate in the spring of 2000, Jerome Handler argued that there is 'not one shred of contemporary written historical evidence' to prove Bussa's leading role.⁴⁴ He believes that historians (and particularly Beckles) are responsible for creating a Bajan national hero from fragmented and freighted sources. Indeed it is his 'national hero' status that has brought a great deal of public recognition to the previously vague historical figure. But it is arguable that dismissing Bussa in order to 'balance' the historiography of the revolt is the wrong approach. Alternately, more attention needs to be paid to the collective aspect of the uprising; the other faces who rebelled *alongside* Bussa rather than in his place.

Barbadian historian Karl Watson has been one of the strongest supporters of this approach. In his work on the iconography of the 1816 revolt he used sketches of rebel flags to draw conclusions about the motivations and character of those carrying them into battle. He argues that the lack of leader imagery on any of these flags provides 'confirmation' that there was no *one* dominant man or woman, and rather a group of leading individuals.⁴⁵ In these sketches, the characters depicted are ordinary Bajans living as free people and British soldiers, with the message of liberation directed to God and King.⁴⁶ Slogans such as 'Happiness ever remains the endeavour' and 'Endeavour for once' that adorned these flags have prompted Watson to argue that it would be more appropriate to name the uprising 'The Endeavour Revolt of 1816' rather than 'Bussa's Rebellion' (or variations of such) as it has become so widely known.⁴⁷ He maintains that this would 'avoid the elevation of one personage at the expense of others, thereby preventing other leaders from being swept into historical oblivion.'⁴⁸ While it is slightly tenuous to argue that the absence of leader iconography on a small number of surviving rebel flags is concrete evidence of collective leadership, Watson's conclusions are valid. These flags

⁴⁴ J. Handler, 'The Barbados Slave Insurrection of 1816: Can it be properly Called 'Bussa's Rebellion?', *Sunday Advocate*, 26 March 2000.

⁴⁵ K. Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt Revisited', *The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society* 57 (2011), p.189.

⁴⁶ See Appendix III.

⁴⁷ K. Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt and Some Brief Comments', *The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society* 46 (2000), pp.45-46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

and slogans create a picture of a politically motivated group of individuals, the 'endeavour' of whom has been forgotten for all but one man.

Quite unlike Bussa, a great deal more information exists about Franklin, thanks in particular to Robert Morris, who's detailed research into plantation wills and other legal documents has unearthed a complex picture of life on the Franklin, Bayleys and Wiltshire estates.⁴⁹ Franklin was born in the summer of 1782 to the son of a wealthy plantation owner, Joseph Bailey Franklin, and Leah, a mixed-race enslaved woman.⁵⁰ Although interracial relationships between white men and enslaved women were not uncommon in Barbados at this time, what *is* unusual about Franklin's birth is that he was baptised and his birth recorded, particularly as he was born into slavery. Although Franklin had two other siblings, and three half siblings by another enslaved woman, his name stands out amongst them as particularly interesting.⁵¹ His father chose impressive namesakes for his child; William Pitt the Younger and George Washington, both significant in their influences upon doctrines of social equality and in particular Pitt for his efforts towards abolishing the Slave Trade. It is curious that Franklin's father would name his enslaved son after such radical men, with a move that suggests favouritism, and as Morris speculates, 'tells us about his expectations for his child.'⁵²

Franklin grew up on Liberty Hall plantation, in a network of estates including Bayleys, Wiltshires and Franklins (Contented Retreat), bound together in a complex collection of family and marital property ties. Franklin's father included funds for his son's education and manumission in his will in 1794, and Morris speculates that he probably educated Franklin between then and his death in 1803.⁵³ After his father passed away he was likely given a house and land at Contented Retreat plantation (part of the Franklin estate) where he resided until the 1816 revolt, becoming a free man in 1806 when his manumission was finally settled by his half-brothers and heirs to the older Franklin's assets.⁵⁴

For ten years Franklin lived as a free man of colour in St. Phillip, as white hostility was slowly growing towards this community of un-enslaved black men

⁴⁹ Morris, 'A Hell Broth.'

⁵⁰ Can access baptism record here: <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QJ8R-F2Y3>

⁵¹ Morris, 'A Hell Broth', p.12.

⁵² Ibid., p.13.

⁵³ Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

and women. Free men and women of colour existed in the ill-defined space between the established black and white identities. For white creole Barbadians, their 'whiteness' was a more important symbol of power than their land or wealth, but became even more so when 'black' no longer meant enslaved, particularly in the parishes like St. Phillip where the poor white (or 'red-leg') population had flourished. At the turn of the nineteenth century there were approximately 8,000 'poor whites' living in Barbados or around half of the total white population, half of this group were the truly destitute, living off of charitable donations and poor relief.⁵⁵ The free black community was much smaller but rapidly growing. In 1812, there were 2,613, having tripled in less than thirty years, compared with 69,132 enslaved men and women living on the island that year.⁵⁶

David Lambert describes the poor whites and free blacks as sharing a common identity as 'liminal groups,' existing in between the dominant and subjugated of society, and 'on the border between coloniser and colonised.'⁵⁷ This shared space, however, did not constitute any kind of solidarity. If anything, this hierarchical ambiguity forged intense hostility and competition between groups who did not have the legal lines of enslavement to separate them. Lambert writes how, 'in a slave society in which access to and exclusion from power, wealth and freedom were starkly polarised, the ambiguous social position of both groups was apparent.'⁵⁸

As the free black population grew so did the tension between these two communities. It was common for free people of colour to live in Bridgetown, where they could avoid plantation work and live in large communities of fellow freedmen (over half lived here by 1800), and because of this became a source of economic competition for the poor whites living in the capital.⁵⁹ In the rural areas of the island, the lack of restrictions on free black acquisitions of land and wealth meant that over generations a small number of freed people were beginning to accumulate both by the turn of the century. Some, like Jacob Belgrave, who owned The Ruby estate, even became planters and slave-

⁵⁵ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.78.

⁵⁶ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.6.

⁵⁷ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.81.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79.

owners.⁶⁰ This fostered jealousy and contempt from many of the poor white population who could not reconcile this success (and their relative failure) with their sense of inherent racial superiority. These tensions often made free blacks a target of violence from the poor whites, while the 'racial qualifications to civil rights' from which their skin colour excluded them made the community, and their property, incredibly vulnerable.⁶¹

Perhaps the most dangerous of these withheld rights was the inability for free blacks to testify in court. Beckles writes how the 'poorest illiterate whites were fond of offending them – knowing that they could not be legally prosecuted upon their evidence.'⁶² This is illustrated in the case of Joseph Denny, a free mixed-race man living in Speightstown. In 1796 Denny's poor white neighbour, John Stroud was shot and killed by Denny who believed he was trying to steal from his home.⁶³ Because of the restrictions over free blacks testifying in court, neither Denny nor his family could testify in his defence and he was sentenced to death. In a remarkable twist, however, Denny was pardoned and instead exiled after the Governor Ricketts petitioned the British Government for clemency. This leniency 'unleashed a wave of unrest' amongst the poor white population of the island.⁶⁴ Three years later in the spring of 1799 Sampson Emmanuel Harding, a poor white from St. Phillip, was accused of murdering Solomon Sargeant, a free black man living nearby. Though charged with the crime, Harding was released without punishment and the poor whites of St. Phillip began 'a regime of terror against the free coloureds and blacks.'⁶⁵ In response, a member of this persecuted community described how, since the acquittal, 'we not only walk about under apprehension of being assassinated but we are continually in dread of being murdered in our own homes.'⁶⁶

This was the environment in which Franklin would have been living. Historian Hilton Vaughan has argued that these legal rights became a very personal issue for Franklin when in 1807, a white overseer allegedly broke into his home.⁶⁷ In response Franklin beat the man, and because of the restrictions

⁶⁰ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.256.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Beckles, Bussa, p.6.

⁶³ For detailed account of case see: Lambert, *White Creole Culture*.

⁶⁴ Morris, 'A Hell Broth', p.18.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.15.

on his testimony, he was sentenced to six months in prison.⁶⁸ This meant that within a year of Franklin's manumission he was already profoundly unsafe on his own property, and even more so under the eyes of the legal system which effectively silenced him. To a large proportion of the poor white community, the free blacks seemed little more than slaves, particularly evident in the fact that it was an overseer (probably from the estates Franklin's father had owned) who broke into his home with perceived impunity. Free people of colour were existing somewhere between slavery and freedom and as Michael Craton argues, often 'felt a greater social and racial affinity with the slave majority than the white ruling class.'⁶⁹

It is because of all of this, that free people of colour began to push for greater civil rights in the years preceding the rebellion. The plantocracy treated this politicisation of the free black community with a great deal of fear and suspicion, as the memory of the Haitian revolution with its alliance of freed and enslaved people was still raw, heavily tainting any debate over improved civil rights. Beckles argues that it was difficult for the elite whites to differentiate between this movement and the emancipation of the enslaved, particularly as many free blacks had only been recently freed themselves.⁷⁰

There were several attempts made by the governing bodies of the island to curtail the influence and size of this community. These included increasing the manumission fees in 1801, and in 1802 General Robert Haynes introduced a bill to the Assembly that would limit the property accumulation of free non-whites.⁷¹ Rather than increase their rights to match their influence, the plantocracy was attempting to restrict their power to match their existing suppression. In response to this bill, the free people of colour warned the plantocracy that the law would, 'remove the best security for our loyalty' in their first direct reference to the planter insecurities that were so heavily feeding their actions.⁷² A member of the council, John Alleyne Beckles, echoed this sentiment and told the Assembly, 'if we reduce the free coloureds to a level with

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.256.

⁷⁰ Beckles, *Bussa*, pp.5-6.

⁷¹ Morris, 'A Hell Broth', p.19.

⁷² Ibid.

the slaves, they must unite with them, and will take every occasion of promoting and encouraging revolt.⁷³ The bill was abandoned but the issue had not settled.

Morris argues that it was during this time that 'Franklin decided to throw in his lot with the free coloureds.'⁷⁴ Even in the decade before the revolt, Franklin and other freedmen like Cain Davis and John Sargeant were becoming increasingly ideologically motivated by this demand for civil rights, and increasingly stifled by a plantocracy who were fearful of their politicisation. All of this was occurring against the backdrop of the abolitionist movement in Britain, who had had their crowning success in the ending of the slave trade in 1807. Literate and informed, the free black population were aware of a change occurring across the Atlantic and at home in Barbados. The Assembly rejected the abolitionist Slave Registry Bill in 1815, and as the plantocracy plastered their contempt for the imperial law across their newspapers and periodicals, men like Franklin would have perhaps seen a window of opportunity to ally themselves with the enslaved as groups that would both gain from a rebellion, and very little left to lose.

In terms of the primary material pointing to Franklin's involvement in planning the revolt, there is a relative wealth of evidence. Considering he is often overlooked by historians, or in Beckles case dismissed entirely, there are almost as many sources as there is for Bussa's role as leader. The first piece of evidence that points to Bussa's importance during the rebellion is his geographical location at Bayleys and his elite status as a ranger there. However, from his extensive research Morris has illustrated how completely interconnected the estates surrounding Bayleys were, with familial and marital ties creating a kind of patchwork of common land, with slaves regularly exchanged and estates constantly changing hands between different family members. He writes how there were several enslaved families living between the Franklin plantations of Liberty Hall (where Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin grew up) and Contented Retreat, and the Bayleys and Wiltshire estates where the rebellion undoubtedly originated.⁷⁵

These personal links and land ties create a far more complex picture of these estates. While the revolt probably began at Bayleys, as Beckles so adamantly argues, that does not mean that it was *only* the men and women

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.19.

living on that stretch of land who could have led it. As we have seen, the interconnected nature of these surrounding estates meant that the sphere of the leaders' influence was far wider than the border of just one estate. Additionally, both Bussa as a ranger and Franklin as a free man would have had markedly more freedom of movement than most other enslaved workers and so the confines of the plantation would not have limited the spread of insurrectionary plans. Franklin's home at Contented Retreat would have been well within reach of the 'epicentre' of rebellion.

In terms of the Assembly report on the rebellion, it is perhaps more problematic when it comes to Franklin than with Bussa. Beckles describes the report as 'a political tract to score points against Wilberforce and the English anti-slavery movement,' but more importantly, 'to justify the murder of Franklin.'⁷⁶ Having executed Franklin in the aftermath of the revolt, Beckles argues that the Assembly needed to give a more explicit motive and provide evidence for killing a free man. They did not, however, include Franklin's testimony. He would have undoubtedly been interviewed during the court martial process, and his trial may have even been more extensive and longer than his fellow enslaved rebels' because of his free status. Despite this, no such record exists, and so seems to corroborate Robert Morris's claim that the Assembly did not want to make martyrs out of the revolt, or that they only included statements which upheld their chosen narrative. This seems to contradict Beckles' statement, because if they were so adamant about pinning the blame on Franklin, why not include his testimony, or more of those who testified against him?

As it stands there is only one slave testimony that cites Franklin at all. This comes from Robert of Simmons plantation, who spends the majority of his confession describing Jackey, the enslaved driver at Simmons, as the main leader of rebel activity.⁷⁷ Robert recounts how 'Jackey used to go very often (sometimes at night) to see Washington Franklin – that he has heard Jackey tell Will Nightingale (who was Jackey's brother-in-law, and belongs to Mrs Nightingale,) to go to Washington Franklin, and he would tell him what was to be done.'⁷⁸ Robert also reports that he overheard these conversations while visiting Jackey's children, with whom he often played, as they were very 'fond of

⁷⁶ Beckles, 'General Bussa', *Daily Nation*, 5 April 2000.

⁷⁷ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.30.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

him.⁷⁹ This testimony creates the most vivid picture of the rebellion in its early stages, where men would meet under cover of darkness to plan their movements, and where hushed words were overheard in the slave dwellings. It also reinforces the idea of Franklin as the ideological leader, with men being sent to him for instructions. While Robert implies that Jackey was the main instigator of rebellion, he was still sending men to Franklin rather than informing them of the plans himself.

Most telling of all though, is Robert's claim that 'he heard Jackey say, that Washington Franklin was to be Governor, and to live at *Pilgrim*.' Jackey himself must have had an important role in the uprising, as did others like Cain Davis, John Sargeant, Nanny Grigg and Bussa. But *Franklin* was apparently the one who would be chosen to lead whatever society emerged from their rebellion. He must have shown enough leadership skill and effort to prompt this assumed agreement amongst the rebels, perhaps in the way in which he had already politicised a group of what would become the military leaders, drawing on their discontent while providing them with the abolitionist context for insurrection. Robert mentions Bussa too in his testimony, but it is in an almost fleeting way. He tells his interrogator that Jackey would 'send to' Bussa and others when they needed to begin lighting cane trash piles, signalling the start of the uprising. In comparison to Franklin's, Bussa's role definitely seems more active leadership, while apparently lower in the chain of command. If we take Robert's testimony at face value we can see a clear power structure; Bussa reported to Jackey, who then reported to Franklin. Although, as previously stated, it probably appeared to Robert that Jackey had greater power than he did, presumably as the main leader on *one* plantation. It is entirely possible that Bussa held the same role at Bayleys as Jackey did at Simmons.

However, we cannot take this 'confession' at face value. As Beckles argues, the Assembly report is first and foremost a piece of proslavery propaganda, designed to redirect responsibility externally to the abolitionist movement in Britain. One way in which they may have attempted to prove this was by resting a disproportionate level of blame on the shoulders of the free people of colour. The plantocracy's argument followed that the rebels heard of the abolitionist movements in Britain through antislavery pamphlets and British newspapers. They could not argue that the largely illiterate enslaved population,

⁷⁹ Ibid.

who could not easily travel and purchase periodicals, were responsible. They also did not want to admit that it had likely been they themselves who had spoken too candidly in the presence of curious enslaved men and women, who listened particularly carefully to conversations which dealt with their bondage. Instead, the blame fell to the freed people, already under suspicion for their quest for civil rights and already threatening disloyalty.

It was only this narrative that could completely absolve the planter elite from blame. For example, in the deposition of Reverend John Frere Pilgrim he described attending the execution of an enslaved man named Johnny.⁸⁰ The Reverend urged Johnny to confess and repent in his final moments, asking him if it was ill treatment that had prompted his rebel activity. Johnny 'emphatically' answered that it was not, but that:

'some coloured people, who could read, had occasionally (at their meetings) brought English Newspapers and read to them, by which they were led to believe that it was the desire of the Prince Regent and the people of England that they should be free, and that they therefore thought themselves free, but that their freedom was unjustly withheld from them by the whites, and that therefore they would fight for it.'⁸¹

Throughout the report, the Assembly repeatedly refers to the freed people. They argue that news of emancipation promised by Britain was imparted to the enslaved by 'some free People of Colour, as well as by some of the most daring of the slaves.'⁸² They also describe how 'the co-operation' of some of this group 'was promised' to the rebels, and how the revolt was undertaken by rebel slaves 'directed and encouraged by a few free People of Colour.'⁸³ While the correspondences of the Governor's office do not explicitly place blame in this way, they do refer to misinformation propagated by 'misguided people,' 'ill-disposed persons' and the 'wicked attempts' to inform the enslaved of their impending freedom.⁸⁴ A more cynical reader would perhaps argue that this

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.35.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.36.

⁸² Ibid., p.6.

⁸³ Ibid., p.8.

⁸⁴ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

vagueness was due to the fact that many of these letters were written during or shortly after the revolt, rather than two years later like the Assembly report, when there had been plenty of time to create this 'free coloured' narrative. This theory of faux blame would call any aspect of Franklin's involvement into question.

However, it feels as though the evidence for Franklin and other free people's involvement is too strong to be swayed by all of this. It is more likely that the Assembly was utilising their involvement for their own narrative. As a group, they had already been politically active in their efforts for legal rights and with growing animosity from white population, had perhaps been driven closer to the enslaved. The argument that the Assembly report was an attempt to place blame with this group, and particularly with Franklin, is made weaker by the fact that they aren't mentioned *that* much. Franklin himself is only named once in the whole document. If this was truly the case, then why not include his testimony or more confessions implicating him (of which there must have been enough to justify his death sentence.)

Indeed, Franklin must have already been a prime suspect, as on July 2nd 1816, less than three months after the uprising, his execution was printed in the *Barbados Mercury*. He was hanged on the Parade Ground at Enmore, just outside of Bridgetown for 'having been guilty of exciting and aiding in the late Rebellion of the Slaves.'⁸⁵ Of all the hundreds of rebels executed in the aftermath of the revolt, it is only Franklin who received a small note in the newspaper. His death must have been important, and so he must have been too. If anything, there is a sense of covering up his involvement, rather than blaming him. He was central enough to the rebel cause to be executed publicly just outside of the capital and it be reported in the newspapers, yet he is only mentioned *once* in the Assembly report, alongside countless other names.

There is even further evidence of his involvement, coming from within 'living memory' of the uprising in the same vein as the evidence for Bussa that Beckles relies upon so heavily. As well as the Sinkler source from 1912, historian Robert Schomburgh identified Franklin as the sole leader of the insurrection as soon after the events as 1848, well within the lifetimes of many

J. Leith, 'An Address to the Slave Population of the Island of Barbados' (CO 28/85) Proclamation enclosed to Earl Bathurst from James Leith, June 29th 1816 (CO 28/85)
⁸⁵ *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 2 July 1816. (Barbados Public Library)

who would have seen the rebellion first hand.⁸⁶ Writing in his epic *The History of Barbados*, Schomburgh describes Franklin's involvement:

'On an estate then called Franklyn's (now the Vineyard) lived a free coloured man, named Washington Franklin, a person of loose morals and debauched habits, but superior to those with whom he intimately associated: to him was afterwards distinctly traced the practice of reading and discussing before the slave population those violent speeches which were at that period delivered against slavery in the mother country; nor is there any doubt that he conceived and planned the outbreak which spread such desolation over the island.'⁸⁷

Schomburgh's account does not mention anyone other than Franklin in leadership roles, 'nor is there any doubt' that he alone was responsible for the uprising. He portrays the free man as a kind of revolutionary preacher of abolitionist doctrine, reminiscent of Samuel Sharp, the leader of the Jamaican Baptist War of 1831 who had stirred up rebellion in his congregation with 'the language, imagery and tales of oppression.'⁸⁸ This account, like the Assembly report, argues that the enslaved were influenced by an external corrupting force, poisoning their minds with ideas of freedom and equality.

But Schomburgh is not unlike many modern historians of the revolt who focus too much on championing one leader (whether it be Bussa or Franklin), and in the process, ignore the countless others who fought alongside them. Although Franklin himself is often overlooked, particularly noticeable in the popular history of Barbados and their celebration of the 200-year anniversary, his fellow rebels are even more so. Men like Jackey, Cain Davis, John Sargeant, Roach, Johnny and the enslaved woman Nanny Grigg were undoubtedly involved in some aspect of planning or leading the revolt. Their names crop up almost as often as Bussa's and Franklin's, particularly in the Assembly report of the revolt, and so they must have been important in some capacity, even if it was just in drumming up insurrectionary spirit in the sugar

⁸⁶ R. H. Schomburgh, *The History of Barbados: A Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island* (London, 1848), p.395.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ J. Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (New York, 1992), p.237.

fields. Karl Watson's argument that the uprising should be renamed 'The Endeavour Revolt' is one effort to counteract this. Though such details like the name may seem slightly trivial, it is arguable that maintaining 'Bussa's Revolt' or 'The War of General Bussa' is damaging to the historical record. From these rebel flags and slave confessions it is *clear* that this was a collective effort, guided by some but undertaken by many. Focussing upon one man, or even two, can only come from reading these sources selectively.

Conclusion

One of the most lasting and important consequences of the 1816 slave revolt is the impact it has had upon the popular history of Barbados. The revolt provides a 'useable and epic past' in the midst of a history that's main actors were so often nameless and stripped of agency. In the creation of national identity and pride, images of resistance and rebellion seem to provide the ultimate antidote to hundreds of years of enslavement. It is unsurprising that a country like Barbados, new as its independence is, would chose a man who seems to personify independence itself, a martyr of freedom, as one of their national heroes. But as popular history often is, the story of rebellion that has made Bussa so widely known is in its simplest form. That is not to say I believe it is wholly inaccurate, and in a lot of ways I agree with the conclusions of historians like Beckles. From the primary material and folk history Bussa emerges as a central figure of the rebellion, though it is the men and women who planned and fought alongside him who have been lost in this popular narrative. It seems as though Bussa's fame is both a product of a kind of hidden history preserved through word-of-mouth, and once resurfaced, an overenthusiasm by historians to rewrite the story with a revolutionary lead. But scholars have also unfairly dismissed him in their efforts to give recognition to forgotten rebels, who in their haste to prove the worth of others, have ignored the primary sources that support Bussa's role.

Bussa surfaces from the geographical, primary and oral history sources as an important figure of the 1816 rebellion. Though these may not seem as ironclad as most historical evidence perhaps should be, the nature of slave histories means that you often have to rely upon vague or implied signs to lead you to the right conclusion. It is particularly the 'folk history' sources which strongly imply oral histories within living memory of the uprising that reinforce

the idea that Bussa was probably the military leader of the revolt. This popular historical consciousness of Bussa seems to have arisen and become entrenched in Bajan society by the 1870s, suggesting that Bussa was a highly *visible* leader of the rebellion. Though he may not have been the man who concocted the insurrectionary plans themselves, it seems as though he had a significant role in propagating them amongst the enslaved and was active during the revolt's most destructive and dramatic moments. Bussa was active enough, in fact, that it was he alone who resonated among the formally enslaved for the next fifty years, when they seemingly took up arms again with his name on their lips.

As forgotten as Bussa was famous, Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin has not enjoyed the same reverence among the people of Barbados. Though the historical record suggests he led the rebellion just as Bussa did, if not in a more important role, he has been displaced from the narrative of the revolt by its popular history. The claims that his 'leadership' was a kind of cover-up by the plantocracy do not hold up to historical analysis of the sources or the context of his involvement in a pre-existing struggle for a truer freedom than he enjoyed as a 'free' man. His absence from the suggested oral histories, and his obscurity in modern Bajan popular consciousness can be attributed to his role in the insurrection. From the primary material it becomes clear that Franklin was a kind of ideological leader. He preached antislavery doctrine, informing the enslaved of the abolitionist movement in England, and accepted visitors into his home to instruct their rebel activity. He is less remembered because he was less visible. The other leaders which emerge from the sources like Jackey, Cain Davis, John Sargeant and Nanny Grigg are most likely forgotten because the simplicity of a one-man cause, followed by many, burns longer in public memory than the countless names of a collective rebellion.

All of this leads me to agree with Karl Watson in his insistence that naming this revolt after Bussa is damaging to the historical record. It creates an image of a very different kind of rebellion in the eyes of the public, of a war with a general, rather than what it more truthfully was – a collective, though dramatic, extended protest against slavery. It also casts into shadow those who were also martyrs for their cause. When a piece of history is so important to the national pride and identity of a country, anything other than the truest account

seems nothing other than a terrible disservice, even if that means having to rename a landmark or two.

2. The Local Causes

In the days, weeks and months after the close of the insurrection, the white elite of Barbados set about punishing the guilty in a bloody procession of hangings and beheadings across the island. Designed to enact a vengeful justice upon the rebels and provide a threatening spectacle to enslaved onlookers, these executions were often attended by a minister who would listen to the last words of repentance and remorse from the condemned as they stood at the gallows. Several of the testimonies in the House of Assembly report come from these men, who could attest to the final confessions of the rebels hanged in their parishes. The deposition of Rev. George F. Maynard of St. Thomas, for example, is particularly revealing. He described witnessing the execution of a man named Sandy Waterman, an enslaved tradesman belonging to Fisher-Pond plantation.⁸⁹ Maynard paints Waterman as a kind of sympathetic character, who had been baptised six weeks before the uprising and ‘appeared deeply impressed with his situation.’⁹⁰ He recalled how, in his final moments, Waterman uttered the Lord’s Prayer to himself ‘with great solemnity’, and told the Reverend that he had lived a comfortable life under humane treatment from his master.⁹¹ From his confession it seems as though he had joined the rebels on the spur of the moment, overcome with the drama and excitement of the uprising, without ‘considering the consequences’ of his decision.⁹² However, it is difficult to establish the truth of this source, or Maynard’s words, as it is likely that the account was warped in its retelling or that Waterman was touched by the fear and finality of his position.

There are other moments of this testimony that are far more revealing in their almost mundane detail, as these elements were less likely to be distorted to fit the planter narrative and they are arguably more illustrative of Waterman’s world than his appeals for redemption. Alongside his prayers and expressions of remorse, Waterman ‘acknowledged that he had been very comfortable, and had amassed some property, consisting of two houses and a crop of ginger: that he requested they should remain with his family, and that his debts should

⁸⁹ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee of the House of Assembly...*, pp.36-7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.36.

be paid from his property.⁹³ These details were not particularly important in the reinforcing of abolitionist blame and planter innocence that dominates the assembly report, other than in illustrating a cruelty-free existence, and so it may be assumed less tainted than its surrounding source material. Indeed, when it comes to the primary material produced by this insurrection, the truth often lies in the ordinary.

However, these few lines of testimony are also illuminative. They tell us that Waterman had owned his own land, which was considered unequivocally *his*. It was *his* enough, in fact, that ownership was uncontested, to the extent that he assumed he could pass on his garden of ginger and home to his family semi-formally, without incident. It appears that this was not considered unusual for an enslaved man in his position. It is significant that some of the last words he spoke as he stood before the gallows were to bequeath this small patch of land to his relatives, as one of the only things he truly owned. This overarching sense of ownership, though perhaps unexceptional to a modern reader, is especially important within the context of the geographical and social dislocation characteristic of slave-societies. Because, from this, we are reminded that the enslaved in Barbados in 1816 were not all the displaced people conjured up by images of the slave trade and the super-plantation, but people with homes that they had built for themselves and land to leave to their spouses. The source material reveals that, by 1816, a rooted, creolised enslaved community had developed. Waterman's testimony in particular illustrates how land ownership was becoming more commonplace and generationally established, while at the same time tainted by the insecurity of their position as slaves. These last words of bequest show not only a sense of pride and ownership, but also a fear that what was gained could also be easily lost.

This source provides a small window into the life and death of an enslaved man in 1816, as shadowy as the details still remain, representative of a community within a community, of rebels amongst slaves. His echoed words, though seen through the filter of Maynard's testimony, provide an example of an important transition that was occurring amongst the enslaved in Barbados. From an anchorless, heterogeneous and disjointed group, time and circumstance had birthed a truly creolised community, connected to the land

⁹³ Ibid., p.37.

and to each other. The slackening grip of the plantocracy in the years and months before the uprising, where enslaved houses, land, markets, celebrations, mourning and movement could foster the growth of a distinctly Barbadian sense of individual and collective identity, would prove essential to the progress of rebellious discontent. The burgeoning sense of ownership and community, aggravated by small freedoms and allowances by the white elite, would have made the injustice of their enslaved labour and oppressed peoples all the more apparent. And so, when rumours of freedom granted by Britain, but withheld by their masters, settled over the island in a hopeful haze, it is unsurprising that many took it as a chance to reclaim everything they already believed to be rightfully theirs.

However, there were also thousands of enslaved Barbadians who did *not* join the rebellion, and many thousands more throughout the island's history who had lived their whole lives working in the sugar fields and the Great Houses without ever taking up arms against their masters. The inaction of these men and women is just as significant as the rebellion of their counterparts, because it illustrates the complexity of causation and helps to explain the geographical mapping of the uprising. If these enslaved communities were influenced by purely international events, of revolution and reform, oceans away, then why was the unrest disproportionately represented in particular parishes and regions of the island? Perhaps more importantly, why was it *only Barbados* that felt the outbreak of mass resistance in the spring of 1816, when these influences had, arguably, pressed upon all of the neighbouring Caribbean slave-societies in equal measure? It is seemingly remarkable that the only island to react to new British abolitionist legislation with fire and tumult was the most historically peaceful, and the most geographically and demographically unfit for successful slave rebellion. In searching for the causes of the rebellion we must look at why these men and women rebelled at precisely the time that they did, in the context of the many more who did not.

Attempts to find coherent and blanket causes for the revolt, or indeed any event in slave histories are inherently problematic due to the nature of the primary material. The majority of sources that historians use to understand the narrative of the uprising come from the planter accounts. Even the rebel testimonies were undoubtedly obtained under torture, recorded by members of the plantocracy. Further, the aftermath of the rebellion saw a propaganda war

erupt between the Barbadian elite and British abolitionists, as they attempted to relocate blame for sparking the uprising. The sources are therefore coloured by this, as many were only written several months or years after the revolt. What is left is primary material contaminated by torture and propaganda, where finding the unfiltered voices of the enslaved in order to establish their motivations is almost impossible.

In *The Problem of Slavery as History*, Joseph C. Miller addresses the issues with locating causation in history. He argues that it 'almost always attributes agency to abstraction,' and that statements such as 'race caused slavery' or vice versa are 'mechanistic, regular, and deterministic; human actions are subtle and complex, unique and contingent.'⁹⁴ It would be short-sighted to suggest that one 'cause' was more important than another, or indeed that these motivations were true of all the rebels. The very fact that the majority of enslaved Bajans did *not* join the uprising is evidence enough that these causes did not carve an inevitable path to rebellion. But, for those who did take part there must have been reason strong enough, whether fuelled by desperation or hope, which outweighed the incalculably poor odds of victory. Miller's reasoning also helps to illuminate why it is important to highlight these smaller, local reasons for unrest. They help to add a layer of agency and humanity to a history that is frequently overwhelmed by 'abstraction.' The impersonal nature of enslavement has led to an impersonal history, and so any sources that can help to unearth complexity and autonomy from the faceless historical rubble are invaluable. But still it remains that with such limited and distorted primary material, and in the light of the problematic nature of drawing such conclusions from that which does remain, we must tread carefully in answering this question.

From the primary sources some main themes arise. There were local, individual causes for unrest for many of the rebels in St. Phillip, whether this was due to cruel plantation managers taking control of estates, the slump in the sugar market prompting overwork and mistreatment, or the struggle for civil and legal rights faced by the free people of colour in the years proceeding the uprising. Within this sphere of local catalysts there seems to be a strong thread of a kind of early nationalism amongst the rebels, fostered by a relatively relaxed plantation system that prompted a sense of ownership, community,

⁹⁴ J. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History* (Yale, 2012), p.26.

individual and national identity. Alongside this, the international influences of revolution and reform worked in tandem with the local, though these will not be fully addressed until a later chapter. It is unlikely that any local causes for unrest would have prompted a large-scale uprising had they not occurred at the same time as significant antislavery activity across the Atlantic. The following will focus primarily on the local, immediate causes for the uprising, whilst still acknowledging the context of abolitionism and how this was used by the enslaved rebels to give meaning and hope to their expressions of discontent.

Historians of the revolt rarely give much attention to these local causes for two main reasons. Firstly, because they were fully discredited in the planter accounts, but mainly because an absence of material discontent for the enslaved gives more weight to the argument that the rebels were fuelled purely by an engagement with trans-Atlantic antislavery.⁹⁵ Though this is arguably too simplistic, as the timing of their rebellion, as well as their expression of an early nationalism was inextricably tied to their belief that English abolitionists would support them and that their freedom was guaranteed. As important as antislavery was to their decision to rebel, and particularly to their ability to drum up support for their cause, there were other, more immediate factors effecting their motivations. Despite the clear relationship between the build-up to and aftermath of the revolt, as well as the incredibly blurred lines separating each cause from the other, historians often pick one or the other in their assessments. Attempting to create such order out of the truly messy history of this uprising, where so much was based on misunderstandings, rumours or steeped in propaganda, distorts the narrative into something almost unrecognisable from reality.

Robert Morris is one of the only historians to have conducted a detailed study into the local reasons for rebellion, and I will focus heavily on this research in drawing my own conclusions about the factors that changed the tides of resistance in 1816.⁹⁶ Historians have largely overlooked the influence of community and nationalism upon the rebels, although Pedro Welch's 'Forging a Barbadian Identity: Lessons from the 1816 'Bussa' Slave Rebellion' touches on

⁹⁵ See for example: Beckles, *Bussa*.

S. Drescher and P. Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery? Slave Revolts and Abolitionism* (2010)

⁹⁶ R. Morris 'A Hell Broth'.

some similar themes.⁹⁷ Combining these two causes is not an attempt to single them out as more significant than the others, but simply to illustrate that there were important elements which drove the rebels from within their own plantation world. Similarly, focussing heavily on the nationalist themes driving slave resistance in Barbados is not to establish their greater importance, but instead to highlight an aspect of the revolt that has been hitherto neglected.

Local Causes

It was not by chance that the 1816 uprising was the first of its kind in Barbados. Though there had been several minor conspiracies throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, and everyday resistance was as much a characteristic of plantation life as it was in most slave-societies, larger rebellions had not occurred.⁹⁸ On other islands like Jamaica and Haiti maroon communities could flourish in the thick, inaccessible forests and mountain regions, but Barbados' landscape provided little comparable shelter for escapees or cover for rebel armies. As the anonymous author of the abolitionist pamphlet, *Remarks on an Insurrection in Barbados* wrote just after the revolt, 'in no British colony is success in an attempt to obtain even short lived freedom by an insurrection so hopeless.'⁹⁹ The ratio of enslaved to white people also created a disincentive for unrest, as at five to one, it was one of the lowest of any Caribbean slave-society.¹⁰⁰

Due to a positive birth rate in the enslaved community, Barbados had stopped being reliant upon human imports long before the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Because of this, by 1816, the vast majority of the enslaved population was Barbados-born.¹⁰¹ The plantocracy had always believed enslaved Africans to be more volatile and prone to revolt than their creole counterparts, and so this overwhelmingly Bajan population added to the sense of over-confidence in the loyalty of their workers. All of this combined to create an image of the docile and faithful enslaved in the minds of the whites, and as

⁹⁷ P. Welch, 'Forging a Barbadian Identity: Lessons from the 1816 'Bussa' Slave Rebellion' in G. D. Howe and D. D. Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (Jamaica, 2001)

⁹⁸ J. Handler, 'Slave Revolts and Conspiracies in Seventeenth-Century Barbados', *New West Indian Guide* 56 (1982)

⁹⁹ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados and the Bill for the Registration of Slaves* (London, 1816), p.7.

¹⁰⁰ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.254.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.257.

Michael Craton argues, 'the ruling regime had become extremely complacent, claiming that it alone understood local conditions, that the black Barbadian majority was well treated and content, and that the only danger lay in outside interference.'¹⁰²

This misplaced confidence also seeped into the planter response to the revolt. Whether an attempt to protect themselves from accusations of barbarity, or due to a genuine belief in the sanctity and safety of their slave-system, the white elite of Barbados refused to concede that the uprising had been caused by anything other than abolitionist intrusion. In his correspondence with the Secretary for the Colonies, Earl Bathurst, the Governor James Leith wrote two weeks after the rebellion that the planters had 'flattered themselves that the general good treatment of the Slaves would have prevented their resorting to violence.'¹⁰³ This 'good treatment' was reiterated in Colonel Codd's military account of the revolt, where he described how 'it was acknowledged by all [of the rebels] who [he] spoke to or examined that they had been well treated.'¹⁰⁴

This response was echoed in the House of Assembly report. Though presented as an investigation into the root of unrest on their island, the underlying tone of the document is defensive. More than anything, it seems to have been written to counter abolitionist accusations that the primary cause of widespread discontent was simply the barbarity implicit in slavery and enslavement. Attempting to cast blame away from their plantations, the Assembly focussed on external causes for rebellion and firmly refuted any claims of mistreatment. They emphasised bountiful harvests, stores stocked full of grains and supplies. Alongside this, they printed slave testimonies that highlighted the kindness and generosity of the island's slave owners. The report described how 1816 'was remarkable for having yielded the most abundant returns with which Providence had ever rewarded the labours of the Inhabitants of this Island,' and that St. Phillip 'in particular' had produced a wealth of crops to feed its enslaved population.¹⁰⁵ It continued that because of this, 'the Origin of the Rebellion must be sought for in some other than in any local and peculiar

¹⁰² Ibid., pp.255-6.

¹⁰³ Letter from James Leith to Lord Bathurst, April 30th 1816, (CO 28/85) The British National Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

¹⁰⁵ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.15.

cause.¹⁰⁶ Almost all of those interviewed in the appendices of the report emphasised their disbelief that the uprising was due to the cruelty of masters and overseers, with many describing quite the opposite.¹⁰⁷

Though, of course, it is unlikely that any rebels being interviewed during the Court Martial proceedings would dispute their 'good treatment,' under the shadow of a death sentence. Similarly, many of the plantation managers and owners questioned were running estates that had been at the heart of the insurrection, and so it is probable that they were trying to relocate blame from what was essentially their back yard. As much as the plantocracy might have believed they were treating their enslaved workers humanely (evidenced by their confidence in the slaves' loyalty), the Assembly report should still be viewed critically, as it sought to create an image of Barbados so peaceful and fruitful that the catalyst for rebellion must have been sparked from outside of their borders.

The abolitionists, however, created a vastly different picture of plantation life in Barbados. This is exemplified by the anonymous pamphlet *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, in which the author emphasised the local causes of the uprising, and thereby levied the responsibility for unrest upon the shoulders of the plantocracy. David Lambert describes how the pamphlet presented the rebellion as 'symptomatic of slavery-as-usual,' portraying, 'an unplanned and geographically limited riot, born of localised grievances amongst an enslaved population subjected to the brutal form of slavery in the West Indies.'¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the peaceful image of plantation life conjured by the Assembly could not be further removed from the one described in *Remarks*. They argued that 'in no part of the British dominions does this unhappy state of society exist in a more unmitigated form than in the island of Barbados,' citing the colony's unreformed and archaic *Code Noir* as evidence of the barbaric system.¹⁰⁹ This, twinned with a temporary decline in food supplies, prompted the author to argue that the roots of enslaved discontent did not need a 'difficult

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ See for example: The deposition of Rev. Thomas Harrison Orderson, the Rector of Christ Church, who detailed how he attended several executions of rebels and asked many of them if they had rebelled because of mistreatment, 'to which they universally answered, "No."' Ibid., p.34.

¹⁰⁸ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.118.

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, pp. 3-4. The example used by the author was the law that dictated the punishment for the murder of an enslaved person be a small fine, unless committed 'without ANY provocation.'

explanation.¹¹⁰ To this writer, the cause of the revolt was slavery itself, with all of the mistreatments and degradation that accompanied it.

Michael Craton's analysis of the uprising supports elements of this. He argues that throughout 1815 'short-term hardships affected the slaves' as the end of the Napoleonic wars triggered a fall in sugar prices while the price of imports rose.¹¹¹ This, in turn, caused masters and overseers to push their enslaved workers increasingly harder, whilst limiting food supplies, and expecting them to be able to provide for themselves.¹¹² Contrary to the Assembly report's assertions that St. Phillip's crop returns had been especially fruitful, Craton describes how the parish 'was hit particularly hard,' as planters began to grow cotton to replace the failing sugar plantations and found this fared even worse.¹¹³ He alludes to the reasons why the rebellion began in the east, arguing that these worsening living conditions were 'not general,' and that enslaved workers from St. Phillip could see others in neighbouring parishes treated far better than themselves, which only 'exacerbated discontent.'¹¹⁴

Despite the slightly more realistic depiction of Barbadian slavery in *Remarks*, we must remember that it is as much a political document as the Assembly report, and was written with the intention of demonising the planters whilst absolving the abolitionist Registry Bill of blame. In their haste to make the rebellion seem as self-contained as possible, the author created an image of a small, unplanned uprising. They argued that the low white death toll and limited nature of the revolt 'clearly indicate a want of concert and premeditation' and that if the events had been properly co-ordinated under proper leadership 'they could hardly have acted so stupidly and irrationally.'¹¹⁵ The author reduced the origins of the rebellion to personal dissatisfaction and discomfort in order to eliminate abolitionism as a contributing factor. However, this alone was unlikely to have been the cause, and they were mistaken in assuming that the rebellion was unplanned or sparked almost by accident. There is much evidence to suggest that it had been planned for weeks if not months before the outbreak

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.259.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, p.6.

itself, and was far less reactionary and disorganised than the author made it appear.¹¹⁶

Continuing this self-contained theme, the author mentioned how the revolt began on two estates both under the ownership of the same planter, Reverend Alexander Scott. They implied that the uprising might simply have been an expression of discontent against the style and conditions of enslavement under that particular slave-owner.¹¹⁷ While this could be seen as an extension of their efforts to minimise the impact and scope of the events to the reader, there is also some truth in this statement. Robert Morris is the only historian of the revolt who has conducted significant research into why these plantations in St. Phillip became the site of mass unrest. By using wills, diaries, inventories, and deeds to track the history of Bayleys and Wiltshires, Morris creates a vivid picture of life for the enslaved who lived and worked there. He argues that historians have generally accepted the Assembly's depiction of plantation environments preceding the rebellion, as 'it could be used as the basis of an argument that the stimulus to revolt came from higher motivation than failure to satisfy basic needs.'¹¹⁸ For them, local causes pale in comparison to the enslaved rebel's engagement with antislavery and abolitionism. For Morris, though, it was likely a combination of these, with a wider dissatisfaction with slavery exacerbated by immediate, local discomfort.

His research provides a detailed study of the plantations that were central to the uprising, and through an exhaustive examination of the estates' administrative documents he has revealed a turbulent history, of debts amassed and cruel plantation managers desperate to squeeze every last penny from the land and the slaves that worked upon it. He describes how a relatively 'liberal' regime during the 1770s slowly disintegrated as the estates' profits continued to bleed, and debts became insurmountable.¹¹⁹ Previous owner's manumission bequests were ignored, and the conditions on the plantations steadily worsened throughout the decade or so before the uprising, as each new proprietor tried to reverse the economic damage inflicted by the poor management of their predecessors.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, pp.112-3.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, p.6.

¹¹⁸ Morris, 'A Hell broth', p.2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.3-5

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

By the time of the rebellion, the estate was in the hands of Rev. Alexander Scott and his wife, absentee planters living in England, supported by an attorney, John Rycroft Best and a resident manager, Edward Thomas. Best and Thomas were tasked with reviving the revenues from Bayleys and Wiltshires, in the context of a collapsing sugar economy and rising import prices across the island. In addition to this pressure, the previous owner, John Bayley Wiltshire had made the 'strange arrangement' that if his beneficiaries should die heirless, Best should inherit the plantations.¹²¹ But after the Scott's produced several male heirs, Morris describes how 'Best would certainly have realised his only chance of making gains out of an estate he could not really hope to own was by extracting as much as he could while it was in his control.'¹²² All of this contributed to a harsh environment for the enslaved living on these estates, as they were expected to produce more sugar, under worsening conditions, by a man motivated by the Scott's, and his own, economic interests.

It was not only food shortages and harder work that pressed upon the enslaved men and women of Bayleys and Wiltshires. By installing Thomas as plantation manager Best had also condemned them to a life under a sadistic, authoritarian rule. He was described in 1838 as 'distinguished as a severe disciplinarian under the old regime, or in plain terms, had been a cruel man and a hard driver.'¹²³ Because of this, Morris argues that 'an atmosphere of exploitation and oppression which would have been the normal operating environment for the 350 slaves on the plantations and would have created resentment among the leading slaves.'¹²⁴ This resentment could only have increased when faint news of freedom arrived in 1815. Through the confusing and distorting filter of word-of mouth and planter exaggerations, the abolitionist Slave Registry Bill quickly began to represent emancipation to the enslaved. They came to believe that their freedom, floating just offshore in British ships, was being withheld by their masters alone, and they needed only to overpower the will of the Barbadian white elite to claim what was rightfully theirs. For the 350 men and women living in rapidly deteriorating conditions at Bayleys and Wiltshires this may have been the spark required to turn their discontent into active resistance; to take emancipation by force and flames.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

This was perhaps what *Remarks* was referring to when the author claimed that the uprising had been against 'Mr Scott', and that it had spread when the island militia opened fire onto the rebels on those two plantations, scattering them into the surrounding countryside.¹²⁵ This was the image that the Assembly was trying to counter, as these material causes of unrest implied specific mistreatment from a particular owner or manager. Such a personal rebellion would not only suggest that the Barbadian government lacked control over their landowners' conduct, or that amelioration was not general or effective, but that their violent response to the uprising had been illegitimate and barbaric. It did very little to counter the growing opinion in the British metropolis that slave states were archaic and uncivilised if the hundreds (if not thousands, as *Remarks* suggested) of enslaved people had been needlessly slaughtered. The Assembly resisted this portrayal in their report by inclosing an extensive list of the planter property destroyed during the insurrection, with pages of names from different plantations, attempting to highlight the size and scope of the rebellion in the damage it inflicted.¹²⁶ They argued that this illustrated 'the extent of the mischief,' which the author of *Remarks* 'so generally attempted to diminish,' and therefore proved that the uprising had been far larger and more dangerous than their anonymous abolitionist counterpart had described.¹²⁷

They interviewed Thomas in the appendices of the report to prove that the enslaved workers on Scott's estates had no cause to rebel against him. Thomas described the condition of the enslaved at Bayleys and Wiltshires as 'happy and comfortable' and 'of a quiet and contented disposition.'¹²⁸ He listed an almost endless supply of food given to the workers, as well as their freedom to grow and sell their own produce. With regard to punishments, he argued that his use of the cat-o'-nine-tails is 'less severe than military punishment,' and that 'the whip was not used as a stimulus to action, but rather to correct vice.'¹²⁹ It is not clear, however, what constituted 'vice' and how often it needed to be corrected. He also stated that 'a severe owner is despised,' as if to distance himself from this image, and that there was a Barbados law that required an

¹²⁵ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, p.6.

¹²⁶ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, pp.59-63.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.43-44.

inquest into the death of a slave that 'cannot be clearly accounted for.'¹³⁰

Though it is obvious that Thomas was attempting to mitigate accusations of barbarity implied by *Remarks*, his defence was not particularly compelling. The fact that he did not beat his enslaved workers enough for them to require an inquest into their death does not automatically imply 'good treatment.' Thomas contended, in line with the theme of the whole report, that the revolt had been a response to the misrepresented Registry Bill, and that 'the negroes said, that the white people had sent money to England to prevent freeing them.'¹³¹ But for the enslaved living at Bayleys and Wiltshires, the 'white people' in question would have been Best, Thomas and Scott (as well as any overseers), and even if the causes had been international in scope, they would have felt very personal to those living under Thomas' whip.

While the Assembly's lists of damages illustrate how the revolt developed within hours of its inception at Mr Scott's estates, more convincing are the testimonies of rebel slaves in the appendices of the report. Though they are all undoubtedly warped by the techniques used to acquire their confessions, they do illustrate some coherent themes. From all, it is clear that the uprising was not some spontaneous affair, and that it had been planned for at least weeks if not months before Easter. Not only that, but the enslaved men interviewed came from a variety of plantations in St. Phillip including Three Houses, The River and Simmons, all of which (Simmons in particular) were relatively central throughout the uprising alongside Bayleys and Wiltshires.¹³² Though the revolt may have been partially borne out of resentment towards cruel managers, and the leading rebels actively spread their message of resistance to the surrounding estates, these neighbouring plantations had men and women seemingly willing to join the revolt for their own, separate, reasons. This adds a great deal of weight to the importance of the Registry Bill, and its interpretation as manumission in enlisting other enslaved people to take up arms alongside the rebels. Additionally, these testimonies illustrate the involvement of many free people of colour in drumming up support for the revolt. Free people could not be said to be rebelling against a cruel master, or being worked too hard in the sugar fields, and must have had some other motivation for becoming so central to the co-ordination of the rebel efforts.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.44.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.45.

¹³² Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, pp. 26-34.

It was quite unusual that the uprising had such extensive support from the free black population. Typically during slave uprisings, the free black or maroon communities often allied themselves with the plantocracy in order to protect their free status, with the notable exception of the Haitian Revolution.¹³³ However, during the 1816 revolt there was significant leadership by men like Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin, Cain Davis and John Sargeant. Their motivations for joining such a dangerous insurrection as those who, on the surface, had very little to gain from its success are therefore particularly interesting. In the aftermath of the revolt the Assembly laid a considerable amount of blame on the shoulders of the free black community, and in the letters and proclamations of governing officials these men emerge as a kind of evil influencing force, corrupting the minds of their peaceful enslaved workers with dangerous notions of equality and freedom. Governor Leith lamented the 'mischievous delusions of those who have availed themselves of every circumstance to influence the minds of the slave,' and the 'wicked attempts' to indoctrinate the enslaved masses.¹³⁴

Blaming the free people of colour fit nicely into the planter account of the revolt. A largely illiterate enslaved population cannot have readily consumed abolitionist pamphlets, and blaming free people for reading them to the un-free was the only solution. The alternative was to admit that the planters had been loose in their heated discussions of antislavery activity in London, whether by letting their workers overhear them in the Great Houses, or by publishing scathing attacks of the Registry Bill in local newspapers that often greatly exaggerated the implications of the legislation. But they were not fabricating the involvement of free blacks, they were simply utilising it to further their own narrative of the revolt. Free people of colour like Franklin and Davis had different motivations than their enslaved counterparts, though they were similarly driven by local factors that had become intolerable. Indeed, though the planters to blamed the free black community, it was the white elite that had driven them to mutiny. Michael Craton writes how they were 'a cause of social

¹³³ For example the Jamaican Baptist War where the Governor enlisted the help of the maroons in tracking down rebels, and paid them for every amputated ear they returned.

See: H. Beckles and V. Shepherd, *Liberties Lost: Caribbean Indigenous Societies and Slave Systems* (Cambridge, 2004), p.199.

¹³⁴ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

Proclamation enclosed to Earl Bathurst from James Leith, June 29th 1816, (CO 28/85)

unrest rather than the buffer that they might have been,' as often known to be loyal to the plantocracy during periods of slave resistance, their allying with the enslaved was symptomatic of a complacency on the part of the white elite who took their loyalty for granted.¹³⁵

They began a long civil rights campaign in 1799 when fifty-eight freemen signed a petition for legal distinction between themselves and the enslaved in regards to the 'wilful murder' of a free black person, which was still legislatively vague.¹³⁶ Eleven years later, taking advantage of the tensions between the poor whites and the plantocracy, free blacks petitioned the government for the right to testify in court. This was the most crucial right being withheld, and as long as they were denied it they were completely defenceless under the law. Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin, John Richard Sargeant and Roach were among the 172 names listed on the petition.¹³⁷ These men who would later lead the enslaved rebels under gunfire had been politically engaged for the previous decade, fighting for their basic rights as free people. Men like Franklin in particular who had been imprisoned because he could not defend himself in court against a white man who had intruded into his own home.¹³⁸ Their efforts proved fruitless and were whole-heartedly rejected by the Assembly.

In light of this, it is not difficult to imagine that a portion of the free black community would become discontent with their position in society, and fully aware of their powerlessness in changing it. Craton describes this group well, where many existed in a kind of 'neutral no-mans-land' of society;

'But a significant few- white men's rejected bastards treated with contempt by the meanest "Ecky-Becky" whites, with only black slaves for mates and children almost bound to remain slaves – felt a greater social and racial affinity with the slave majority than with the white ruling class or at least saw association with the mass of slaves as a chance for leadership and revenge.'¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.256.

¹³⁶ Morris, 'A Hell Broth', p.19.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹³⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.256.

It is likely that these freemen came to believe that an alliance with the enslaved rebels was the only remaining solution after their political efforts had stagnated. Hilary Beckles has argued that the relationship between these oppressed groups has meant that resistance by both 'must be seen as segments of the same wider political movement.'¹⁴⁰ Franklin would become a kind of ideological leader of the revolt, instructing the rebels and preaching the kind of egalitarian rhetoric that was so dangerous to the stability of slavery. He and the other free rebels used the Registry Bill and its vague promise of freedom to enlist support for the revolt, as mobile and effective recruiters. But despite this implementation of abolitionism, it seems that their motivation came more from their political and material disenfranchisement and utter powerlessness to change their condition through other means, rather than from a deep-seated sense of injustice in the slave system itself.

Nationalism

However, it was not just hardship and abolitionism influencing the rebels. Though only implied or alluded to by some historians in their descriptions of slave communities in Barbados, there seems to have been a strong thread of early nationalism running through the narrative of the revolt. By studying the enslaved's sense of society through the prism of Benedict Anderson's often cited theory of 'imagined community' we can see a group of people struggling for not only freedom, but for ownership of their own communities, and the land and power to which this was inextricably bound.¹⁴¹ This is revealed in many forms in the primary material, and is illustrative of an early conception of unity and nation from the enslaved population. It is particularly important because such groups are so often characterised by their geographical and cultural displacement, and studies of nationalism in the Caribbean often see the much later independence movements as the foundations of nation-building. Rather unsurprisingly, Hilary Beckles has argued that independence in Barbados prompted a changing tide in the historiography of slavery, where historians began to search for a 'usable and epic past by identifying forms of resistance to the institution of slavery and to colonial rule.'¹⁴² However, it is possible that the

¹⁴⁰ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.6.

¹⁴¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983)

¹⁴² H. Beckles quoted in: Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.108.

'epic past' was an expression of early national formation in itself, and not just a tool in the forging of post-independence national identity. It is conceivable that this process began far, far earlier with fire in the sugar fields in 1816, and rather than using the revolt as a channel for historical patriotism we should be looking to the resistance itself for the roots of Barbadian nationalism that would become more fully-formed by the 1960s.

It is possible that the same relaxed system of enslavement that prompted Edward Thomas to comment that there had been 'an obvious change in the negro character within the last ten years, and that they are fully sensible of their importance,' became so dangerous to the plantocracy for other reasons than simply increased mobility.¹⁴³ The relative 'freedom' afforded to the enslaved was also integral to forming ties of community outside of the normally isolating plantation borders. This ability to create strong personal links within and between estates was vital in the formation of an 'imagined community' of the enslaved across the island.

These ties began at the plantation. Craton describes how the slave yards on estates were 'were virtually villages, with a high degree of uniformity but a character that owed even more to the culture of the creolised slaves than to the economic imperatives of the plantation system.'¹⁴⁴ Jerome Handler has expanded on this idea of a 'creolised' space by describing the arrangement of slave dwellings, that the enslaved often built for themselves on allotted spaces of land, which were heavily influenced by African building practises. Though appearing 'haphazard' to European and white Bajan onlookers, Handler argues that, 'as in African communities, Barbadian slaves may have viewed their settlements 'as groups of people rather than as groups of buildings,' and in arranging their houses in the 'Negro yards' slaves placed emphasis on their social relationships.'¹⁴⁵ They also used similar building techniques typical of coastal West Africa, from where a great deal of the displaced enslaved had originated before the abolition of the slave trade.¹⁴⁶ These clusters of slave houses were the central point for most social activity on the plantation, and their style of building illustrates the cultural African influences upon creole slaves

¹⁴³ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.44.

¹⁴⁴ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.257.

¹⁴⁵ J. Handler, 'Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados, 1650s to 1834' in A. O. Thompson (ed.) *In the Shadow of the Plantation* (Jamaica, 2002), pp.129-30.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.132.

even after the majority of the island's workers were Barbadian-born. The houses were arranged to facilitate social interaction and foster a village-like sense of community. It was land given to the enslaved by the planters to arrange at their own will, and so it became a 'creolised' space, deeply connected to a communal sense of ownership and creole identity.

It becomes clear how significant these spaces were to the enslaved in the narrative of the revolt. In his report to Governor Leith, Colonel Codd described how he was having trouble rounding up rebels near Bayleys plantation after a small clash between them and the West India Regiment. They had escaped into the surrounding countryside, and so Codd decided the only way to return them was to burn their houses. He explained:

'The only plan I could then adopt was to destroy their houses, in order to deprive them some of their hiding places, and resources, and to recover their plunder. After diligently searching them, I set fire to and consumed several on those plantations where little else remained. This measure had the desired effect, as numbers returned begging mercy, and large bodies of them also returned to those houses left standing, to preserve their effects, and prevent their destruction.'¹⁴⁷

It is clear that even the plantocracy were well aware of the community importance of these villages to the enslaved. Though Codd described burning the houses to recover plunder, his final sentence illustrates that the real goal was to draw the rebels back to him in their desperation to preserve their homes. It would have been incredibly dangerous for these men and women to return to their burning houses in the midst of rebellion, and yet they chose to, rather than escape into the cover of the night. This account does not just reveal the sense of enslaved ownership that had developed in regards to the land and the homes they had created upon it, but also the desperation and sense of loss that accompanied its violent removal.

As we saw in the testimony that recounted Sandy Waterman's last moments, in addition to their houses, many plantations allowed the enslaved small patches of land next to their homes, or an allocated piece of land in the

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

'Negro Ground' in order to grow their own produce.¹⁴⁸ Despite the limited time they had to tend to these gardens, they had remarkable success in growing crops and raising livestock to sell at the local markets. Michael Craton has described how, 'the slaves had come to dominate the internal marketing system of Barbados and even to enter a larger market by producing minor export crops.'¹⁴⁹ It was this freedom, to accumulate wealth and tend their own patches of land that the planters believed had been their most dangerous allowance in the aftermath of the revolt. Because this practise had produced a kind of imitation of freedom, giving the enslaved a sense of ownership of the land, and the fruit it bore. Waterman's final words of bequest are especially illuminative of the personal value that was instilled in enslaved land ownership, and are revealing of the result of this slow transition towards a rooted, creolised, enslaved community.¹⁵⁰

However, the true danger of this practise was not simply an increased sense of 'importance'. The freedom to own land came alongside the freedom of movement, in order to sell produce at the local markets. These markets, as well as dances and funerals were perfect opportunities for enslaved men and women to socialise outside of the confines of plantation borders. This is illustrated in the House of Assembly report examination of Daniel, when he described seeing several of the key rebel leaders 'at a dance, at The River [plantation]' on Good Friday, and watched as they 'conversed together aside' – the implication being that they were discussing the imminent insurrection.¹⁵¹ Craton argues that these dances were 'the most dangerous of all [the planter's] indulgences,' as they brought large groups of enslaved people together, provided 'cover for fomenting plots' and created 'a perilous level of excitement.'¹⁵²

But in addition to this, all of these social gatherings were invaluable in fostering a stronger sense of community amongst the enslaved. It was not only the rangers and drivers who could build friendships and romantic relationships on other plantations, when regular field workers and domestics could venture

¹⁴⁸ Handler, 'Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados' in Thompson (eds.) *In the Shadow of the Plantation*, p.133.

¹⁴⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.257.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁵¹ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee of the House of Assembly...*, p.26.

¹⁵² Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.258.

away from the estate regularly too. Indeed, the previous chapter touched upon Robert Morris's account of Bayleys and Wiltshires, which illustrates the complex web of relationships within and between estates.¹⁵³ There seems no reason why this wouldn't have been the case across the majority of the island, and that this wouldn't have been greatly intensified by such social activity. Because of their confidence in the loyalty of their slaves, the planters allowed this seemingly dangerous behaviour in the years and months leading up to the revolt, while the social ties forged by occasions like this were invaluable in creating a cohesive community that could seem far more national in its scope than the confines of plantation 'villages.' The fact that the revolt was book-ended by two important holidays, Christmas and Easter, illustrates the significance of these social events in the planning of the revolt, but also in the cultivating of insurrectionary spirit and rebel unity.

Similarly dangerous were the funerals, where Craton argues the burial rituals 'played an even more important role in cementing black solidarity than the traditional drumming and dancing.'¹⁵⁴ Because the majority of Bajan slaves were not baptised, they could not be buried in Anglican graveyards, and so most of these funerals took place at burial sites on their own plantations.¹⁵⁵ These events held a deep spiritual significance for the enslaved, something which was undoubtedly intensified by the absence of planter interference. Slave burials, much like their dances, provided an opportunity for the enslaved to bond as a community away from the prying eyes of the whites, and build the 'black solidarity' that came from taking part in the social rituals of their uniquely creolised culture.

Indeed Barbados was unique in its overwhelmingly creole demographic. By the time of the revolt, 93% of the enslaved were Barbados-born, compared to 63% in Jamaica.¹⁵⁶ At Bayleys, over 95% of the enslaved workers were Bajan, and though Beckles argues this would have given the (possibly) African-born Bussa a 'cultural freshness' and therefore more influence in drumming up rebel support, it was arguably the creole nature of the island that was more

¹⁵³ Morris, 'A Hell Broth.'

¹⁵⁴ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.258.

¹⁵⁵ Handler, 'Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados' in Thompson (eds.) *In the Shadow of the Plantation*, p.137.

¹⁵⁶ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.257.

important.¹⁵⁷ The plantocracy had long viewed African slaves as more volatile and prone to resistance than their creole counterparts, and for the most part this was true. African slaves were more likely to rebel, as people who were displaced from their homes, families, and previous freedom. However, though perhaps more dangerous to the planters, African slaves were also easier to control in other ways. In 1668 Barbados Governor William Willoughby wrote of the population of the island, 'of which 40,000 blacks, whose different tongues animosities have kept them from insurrection, but fears a Creolian generation now growing up and increasing may hereafter 'manicipate' their masters.'¹⁵⁸ Enslaved Africans may have been more prone to insurrection, but they were often far less organised than West-Indian slaves, as strangers in a foreign country surrounded by people who spoke different languages and had grown up in vastly different cultures from their own.

Barbadian slaves would not have faced the same problems as enslaved Africans. A much stronger community could develop amongst the enslaved as the creoles steadily became the majority on the island, as people who spoke the same language and had developed their own culture from the remnants of their relatives' myriad of African cultural influences. What emerged was a distinctly Bajan society. This only intensified as relaxing laws by the plantocracy meant more regular communication and the establishment of significant cultural practises in their celebrations and mourning. The Barbadian-born population would also have had a much stronger sense of ownership over the land itself, having worked upon and made small profits from it for most of their lives. Unlike enslaved Africans, they had no other 'home' to belong to, and though their ancestral roots were across the Atlantic, they did not experience the same level of physical and emotional displacement and disorientation of those who had been trafficked to Barbados during the slave trade. Perhaps the most striking testament that Barbados was truly 'home' to even the enslaved is the petition of exiled rebels from 1841. Though having lived remarkably successful lives in Sierra Leone after being deported for their involvement in the rebellion, these men wrote to Queen Victoria 25 years later pleading with her to return them to

¹⁵⁷ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.20.

¹⁵⁸ M. Craton, 'Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816-1832', *Past and Present* 85 (1979), p.100.

‘the place of [their] nativity,’ so that they could die there.¹⁵⁹ Welch writes how ‘their Barbadian nationality had been born as a badge of cultural identity,’ inextricably and deeply connected to one another. Though held in slavery and exiled for resistance, these men felt compelled to die in their birthplace, with more a sense of belonging to the land and culture of Barbados than the much more vague ancestral home where they had built new lives in West Africa.

This sense of burgeoning nationalism and growing importance of a ‘Barbadian’ identity can be seen throughout the later years of Bajan slavery. When George Pinckard visited the island in the 1780s he overheard an argument in which an enslaved man called, ‘[M]e neder Chrab; nor Creole, Massa! Me troo Barbadian born [sic],’ and described how Barbadian slaves ‘proudly arrogate a superiority above the negroes of other islands.’¹⁶⁰ It seems as though the environment developing for the enslaved by this time, through the relaxing of laws, increased mobility and the establishment of creolised cultural practises, had fostered a deep sense of national pride and communal identity. The idea that Barbadian slaves were somehow superior to other West-Indians illustrates the formation of a true ‘imagined community,’ where Bajan enslaved men and women were seeing themselves as one cohesive (and superior) group of people. Though Anderson’s thesis is usually applied to the development of official nation-states, in this context it can help to illustrate how the enslaved viewed themselves as their own distinct community; a kind of nation within a nation.¹⁶¹

This mentality, of separation and difference, was revealed in the midst of the revolt, when Colonel Codd recalled speaking to a group of rebels, who told him, ‘that the Island belonged to them and not to the white men.’¹⁶² It is clear from this that the rebels believed Barbados was theirs, and alongside a strong sense of ownership and injustice it is a statement coloured by nationalism. The island did not just ‘belong’ to the enslaved collectively, and *not* to the white elite, but by creating a racial distinction of ownership they grouped the plantocracy apart from themselves and identified the black majority as its own cohesive

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.51.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.37.

Also see: Craton, ‘Proto-Peasant Revolts?’, p.123, where Craton describes how ‘many other commentators remarked that by 1816 slaves of the island were already calling themselves ‘Barbadians.’

¹⁶¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁶² Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

community. It seems to many of the rebels, the 'imagined community' of their island did not include white inhabitants, and with such distinct culture and even language, it is quite possible that it never did.

This rejection of white Barbados was illustrated throughout the revolt. Though the rebels may have only killed one white man, they did turn their destruction to the symbols of white ownership. They torched trash heaps and sugar fields, looting the Great Houses and white-owned properties, rejecting the parts of the island that represented their enslavement and exclusion. It seems as though the uprising was an attempt to anger and alienate the Bajan whites as much as possible, without falling out of favour with the British, who they believed their allies. They did not kill their masters because they did not want to lose this perceived support, but instead set fire to the tools of their enslavement. This desire to frighten and alienate the plantocracy is shown in the rebel flag rumoured to depict a black man having sexual intercourse with a white woman.¹⁶³ This image appealed to the white elite's deepest sexual anxieties and fears of black revenge, and as Colonel Codd reported to the Governor, 'served to inflame the passions' of the plantocracy.¹⁶⁴ Karl Watson has argued that it was the complicated sexual politics of Barbados, where a white man could have sex with an enslaved woman without consequence, but the opposite would be met with barbaric punishment, that meant that 'this particularly flag was a deliberately calculated insult.'¹⁶⁵ Indeed it was these laws that represented the *absolute* nature of white male control over black bodies, and so it was to them that the rebels directed their most controversial attacks. Welch has argued that, because of these realities, 'it is not surprising that the world that [the rebels] wished to create after the 1816 rebellion was one in which the white male was removed.'¹⁶⁶

The 'endeavour' flag, mentioned in the previous chapter, appears to convey a very different message from the sexually explicit banner described by Codd.¹⁶⁷ With its depictions of Britannia, British war ships, the crown and British uniforms, the flag seems to be appealing to images of white culture and colonial

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt and Some Brief Comments', p.45.

¹⁶⁶ Welch, 'Forging a Barbadian Identity' in Howe and Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse*, p.44.

¹⁶⁷ See Appendix III.

power. But upon closer inspection, while these symbols may be representations of the British Empire, they were directed solely to the British and not the white elite of Barbados. It was an appeal to the mother country to override the will of the plantocracy and grant them the manumission of which the rebels had heard so many hopeful rumours. The artist of the flag combined images of the crown and empire alongside those of respectably dressed black Barbadians, as representations of both alliance and nationhood. The depictions of a black married couple beside images that represent the power and tradition of an established country illustrated a desire to become full members of their own nation, with all of the wealth, power, respect, freedom and marriage rights that would accompany this. This was not to appeal to the sensibilities of the white Bajan elite, but rather to reject their society in place of their own, where they would not be enslaved or oppressed, but rather hold the power to determine the nature and direction of their own community.

And so, though it may seem a world apart from the flag adorned with images of interracial and illegal sex, they both appealed to a similar sentiment; a rejection of white Bajan power. And though this may seem like a radical concept, as Karl Watson rightfully points out in his deconstruction of the flag, the imagery used conveys 'an understanding and appreciation for the value of order as opposed to anarchy.'¹⁶⁸ It is true that 'the tone of the flag is not a revolutionary one,' and though the rebels may have been challenging the social system of their country, they were doing so through the imagery of the already established social structure of crown and empire.¹⁶⁹

The slogans that adorn the flag are just as important as the imagery in providing a window to the intentions of the rebels. The words 'Britannia are happy to lead any such sons of endeavourance,' run along the base of the flag, leaving the observer with no doubt that these images were directed to the British, with a statement of confidence in their support of the 'endeavour.' Indeed the word 'endeavour' appears multiple times across the flag, and as Karl Watson explains, represents 'an undertaking of serious intent,' while its use by the rebels is significant 'and has great importance as the principle signifier of the slaves' discourse.'¹⁷⁰ This was the word the rebels chose to represent how

¹⁶⁸ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt Revisited', p.188.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt', p.45.

they viewed their resistance. An endeavour implies considerable effort and sacrifice for a higher cause, but in the context of its use on the flags, it suggests a *collective* effort. It was the 'sons of endeavourance' who appealed to, and championed British support, as a group acting as one towards a common goal. This flag is the only remaining source that provides the unfiltered words and intentions of the enslaved, and it is significant that this last remnant illustrates so clearly these themes of community, nation, solidarity and exclusion.

Though a sense of community or ownership is incredibly hard to measure, particularly in slave histories where the sources are so scarce, what emerges from the primary material is a transition in the collective consciousness of the enslaved in Barbados. Through a change in demographics ushering in a new age of creolisation, and the slackening grip of the plantocracy, the enslaved were able to develop their own distinctly Bajan slave culture, and because of this, begin to strengthen already existing ties of community amongst their fellow workers. However, for this sense of community to develop into nationalist sentiment, the enslaved in Barbados needed to be able to look outside of their direct social circles and see their fellow slaves as connected by their common language, experience and culture. It seems as though the environment fostered during the latter years of Barbadian slavery allowed for this transition, while the brewing discontent towards local conditions and rumours of freedom only exacerbated this. Many of the sources that help to unravel the narrative of the revolt itself also show how the rebels had begun to recognise their ownership over the island, and how their conception of 'Barbadian' wholeheartedly excluded Bajan whites. The rebel flag stands as the only remaining window into the motivations and views of the participants in the 1816 revolt, unblemished by the filter of planter interpretation and propaganda. Its imagery and language demonstrate the rebels' clear and collective intent, to become a free black community, legitimised by the power and tradition of nationhood.

Conclusion

To assume that any single cause was more important than the other to the 1816 rebels would be purely speculative and overly simplistic, as to do so would be to ignore the complexity of human intent and motivation. While at the same time, we cannot act as though the enslaved in Barbados (or in fact in any slave-

society) were in a constant state of active or passive resistance to their state of slavery. The revolt was not simply the result of a catalyst that provided the rebels with an excuse or reason for rebellion, but the response of a group of men and women who had come to find their condition intolerable. There were multiple reasons for this, and these affected individual rebels to different degrees, and undoubtedly did not affect some enslaved people at all. Though the leaders of the 1816 revolt have been championed in the popular historical consciousness of the island, there were many more enslaved Bajans who did not participate in the revolt, and the inaction of these people is just as historically significant as the action of their rebel counterparts. The disparity of resistance across the island illustrates that there must have been causes affecting some more than others, and so it is illogical that these would have been purely international influences.

It seems as though the rebels in St. Phillip were experiencing particular hardship in the lead up to rebellion, as sugar prices fell and imports became scarcer. This undoubtedly drove planters to push their workers harder, to squeeze every last drop of wealth from their sugar estates while their slaves suffered the consequences of drought and want. Morris's study of Bayleys and Wiltshires illustrates why the revolt may have begun on those particular estates, where the changing ownership had worsened treatment and chances of manumission. However, the broader picture of the uprising shows how these causes cannot have been the sole influences upon the rebels. Though discontent was brewing on particular estates, a general material discomfort was likely not enough to motivate the enslaved to take up arms against their masters. They had probably lived through similar conditions and were well aware of the danger of insurrection, and so there must have been external, international factors like the misunderstood Registry Bill driving their resistance. More convincing, though, is the influence of local causes upon the free black rebels. They had far less to gain from the 'freedom papers' and so it is likely that they joined the rebel cause out of frustration with the failure of their struggle for civil rights.

Inextricably linked with this local stimulus for discontent was the enslaved's sense of community and ownership over the land. We can see throughout the later decades of Barbadian slavery that the enslaved were beginning to change their perceptions of their communities, through a process

of creolisation and adoption of a shared cultural identity. This was only intensified as the planter's complacency led them to loosen their control. The greater level of mobility and freedom of cultural expression that this afforded the enslaved forged stronger social ties within and between plantations, and led to the development of a clearer sense of nationality amongst them. We can see from several of the primary sources that the rebel imagining of Barbados was essentially a black Barbados, and their desire to exclude and alienate the whites from this truly 'imagined community' seems to have been a strong motivating factor in their resistance. They believed that the plantocracy were withholding freedom granted by Britain, and as people who had already begun to understand the nation in terms of their own community and ownership, this must have been a truly maddening realisation.

3. The International Causes

In the months before the 1816 uprising, a woman named Nanny Grigg was working as a domestic servant in the Great House of Simmons plantation. There is very little record of her existence, no birth or death dates or documented family members. As Adam Hochschild put it: 'as both a woman and a slave, Nanny Grigg is doubly written out of history.'¹⁷¹ Almost all that remains is her sale record. At £130, she fetched a high price for an enslaved woman, and so we may assume that she was either a valuable worker or that her master was reluctant to manumit her, which really amount to the same thing.¹⁷² Her most revealing legacy lies in a couple of lines of court martial testimony, taken from the government report of the uprising. It reveals how she had become a kind of rebel leader at Simmons, drumming up insurrectionary spirit in the sugar fields with incendiary judgements about enslavement and freedom, spoken with the authority of a woman living within their master's walls. As a domestic slave she had overheard anxious conversations in the Great House, and her rare literacy had allowed her to read the planter newspapers.¹⁷³ All spoke of the Registry Bill, of English antislavery and masked emancipation. In their haste to condemn any interference with their laws, the planters had descended into hyperbole, not realising that an ear pressed against a door, a smuggled newspaper or an offhand comment would feed a far more dangerous rumour mill. Their words, steeped in anxiety, found their way into the slave huts and fields, as any whisper of emancipation rang far louder to an enslaved audience.

In his testimony in the Barbados House of Assembly report on the revolt, Robert described how Nanny Grigg had revealed such smuggled information to the other workers at Simmons in autumn of 1815. She told them 'the negroes were all to be freed on New Year's Day' and that 'they were all damn fools to work, for that she would not, as freedom they were sure to get.'¹⁷⁴ This deadline came and went, but undeterred, Grigg announced that freedom would instead arrive on Easter Monday. It would not, however, be an easy transition from

¹⁷¹ A. Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (New York, 2005), p.319.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee of the House of Assembly...*, p.29.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

enslavement. She told them that their masters would withhold liberty unless they fought for it, 'otherwise they would not get it.'¹⁷⁵ And looking to the most hopeful of examples, that had travelled to their island on a wind of distorted rumour and planter fear, she called upon the images of the newly independent Haiti. She declared that the only way to obtain their emancipation 'was to set fire, as that was the way they did it in St. Domingo.'¹⁷⁶ Haiti stood as a beacon of self-liberation, a kind of imagined plume of smoke on the horizon, and as little as the enslaved in Barbados knew of the only successful slave revolt in the Caribbean, they knew that it had worked. These lines of testimony are important not just because they reveal so much more of the elusive Grigg, but because her reported words illustrate the power of international influences upon the decisions of enslaved Bajans to rebel. Robert's account shows how important rumour and misplaced hope were to the 1816 rebels. The Haitian revolution and the actions of the British antislavery movement seem to be at the very core of Nanny Grigg's call to action, though it is her sources that are perhaps more important. Heard through the confusing filter of the plantocracy's anxieties, these threats to the slave-system loomed far larger than they ever did in reality, and so otherwise relatively harmless events began to cast shadows over the island, instilling a dangerous kind of optimism in the minds of the enslaved.

If the majority of the primary material from the aftermath of the 1816 Barbados slave revolt were taken at face value, it would seem the responsibility for the uprising lay entirely in the hands of the British abolitionist movement. In the correspondence between the Governor's Office on the island, and the Colonial Office in London this theme arises repeatedly, while in the local newspapers and reports from the Barbados House of Assembly it is explicitly stated. The complex and nuanced nature of causation is reduced to the simplest of forms, to a kind of blame game. To the planters, it was antislavery activity in the form of the Slave Registry Bill that had instilled false hope of freedom in the minds of the enslaved. The wretched bill had tricked their workers, and been used as fuel for a vicious rumour mill that had provided the catalyst for revolt. It was a highly convenient truth for the plantocracy, who had been resisting colonial interference in their laws, and wanted to stem the progress of any significant abolitionist activity that would threaten their

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

livelihoods. While slavery had begun to lose its credibility amongst the British public, slave revolt was still abhorred, and anything that was shown to trigger this behaviour in the enslaved masses was to be avoided. The planters wanted antislavery to become inextricably linked with violent rebellion, to become a cause and effect so irrefutable it would leave the abolitionists in Parliament mute when it came to the question of slavery in the West Indies.

The antislavery movement responded to these attacks with their own. They argued that it was the planter's loud and uncensored response to the bill, plastered across newspapers and pamphlets and publically criticised in the presence of their workers, which had convinced the enslaved that the bill would deliver their emancipation. The rebels believed the legislation was their 'freedom papers,' withheld by the plantocracy on its delivery from England. And who would be to blame for this misunderstanding? Those who had introduced a relatively conservative proposal to register the enslaved, already adopted by several islands in the British West Indies without complaint, or those who had dramatized the bill in their words and their press for months before the revolt, and called it emancipation before anyone else had?¹⁷⁷

It is arguably easier to illustrate the impact of local pressures upon the rebels than it is to chart the influence of wider, international influences. And yet the influence of external pressures, of Haiti and abolitionism, are hard to deny. Though there were undoubtedly many reasons for each *personal* rebellion, in the international causes we can see the context and catalysts for revolt, perhaps more subtle than local discontent, but also far wider reaching. Though the uprising may have began small, and saturated with immediate and personal reasons for insurrection, by the time the flames had spread out from the borders of Bayleys and Wiltshires the rebellion was driven by more than just sheer momentum. Though the local causes may be proven by the site and timing of the outbreak, the speed at which it flooded throughout the south-eastern parishes illustrates far more general roots of discontent than localised droughts or cruel overseers.

¹⁷⁷Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, p.3.

This is a reference to the line: 'who would be to blame; the West Indians who have uniformly and clamorously [sic] maintained, that the real object of the Registry Bill is emancipation; or the friends and supporters of the bill who have constantly denied that it has any such object?'

The majority of historians of the revolt are in consensus that the British abolitionist movement had some impact upon the rebels' decision to take up arms against their masters. Much of the scepticism surrounding the link between the revolt and antislavery lies in impact of the rebellion upon the British campaign, rather than the reverse. The influence of abolitionism upon the Bajan rebels is not only evidenced in testimonies where they recall hearing of 'freedom papers' or their battle-flags emblazoned with imagery of empire, but also in their relative non-violence during the uprising. Their actions speak of a group of people following the Haitian example with fire and destruction, but also illustrating the restraint that came with a strong belief in a rumour of British support.

Haiti

From Nanny Grigg's words we can see the impact the Haitian slave uprising had upon some of the enslaved in Barbados. Over a decade had passed since the close of a thirteen-year war in the French colony of Saint Domingue, but it had lived on in infamy for the slaves and planters alike. For the enslaved people who heard of the seemingly remarkable feat of self-liberation, of the manumission of 400,000 people and the emergence of an independent, black state in the Caribbean, Haiti loomed as a beacon of possibility. Though the vast majority of Bajans would never have left their island, and largely illiterate, would have heard of the rebellion through word-of-mouth, Haiti still seeped into the popular consciousness of the enslaved men and women throughout Barbados. And while many of the details of the revolt seemed to have been lost along the grapevine, with some rebels misnaming the mysterious island in their testimonies after the revolt, the example of freedom remained static. Hilary Beckles has argued that the Haitian revolution 'cannot be underrated in terms of its it's psychological impact upon all Caribbean slave communities,' though the white inhabitants of Barbados remembered the rebellion in an immeasurably different light.¹⁷⁸

To the plantocracy, Haiti represented their most intense fears about the society they had created for themselves. It reminded them that they existed on a knife's edge, and though a revolt on their own soil was unlikely to be quite as

¹⁷⁸ Beckles, *A History of Barbados*, p.108.

successful, their safety was perpetually threatened. David Brion Davis has written how 'imagery of the great upheaval hovered over the antislavery debates like a bloodstained ghost.'¹⁷⁹ Though the memory of Saint Domingue did not just haunt the halls of Parliament, but the homes of the planters living in Barbados. Haiti was used as tool to delay the abolition of the slave trade in the early 1800s, shown as the effect of instability, of tampering with the delicate balance of a slave society. But the harrowing details of the revolt, with its mass murder of white inhabitants and in particular, Bryan Edward's descriptions of 'a white infant impaled on a stake, of white women being repeatedly raped on the corpses of their husbands and fathers' would have created the strongest impression upon those living in slavery's midst.¹⁸⁰ Entirely within living memory, such images would not only intensify planter perceptions of African brutality and animalism, but also forge a potent sense of anxiety that trickled into all aspects of life. And so dual images of Haiti became entrenched in the popular consciousness of Barbados, one of hope and another of fear, though both equally as intoxicating as the other in the build up to rebellion.

It is hard to say whether the planters' seeming obsession with slave revolt was a propaganda tool or a result of genuine anxieties. In the months before the 1816 uprising the local papers printed repeated references to the Haitian revolution in their discussion of the abolitionist-proposed Registry Bill. But whether these statements did stem from a place of fear or pragmatism, the result was the same. Haiti had made its mark in proslavery rhetoric, where its impact was felt in the weight of every statement that recalled the horrors of revolt, and every time an abolitionist was forced to confront these warnings with the most careful of movements. On the 30th March, fifteen days before the outbreak of revolt, the *Barbados Mercury* printed a debate held in the Barbados House of Assembly regarding the Registry Bill. In response to a lengthy defence of the legislation, James Bovell questioned the safety of philanthropy when it came to slavery, recalling how 'The Amis de Noirs were philanthropic; - the Institution of Paris possessed nearly the same charity as the Society of London,' and asked his fellow Assemblymen, 'Is the history of the past forgotten? – and has the example of St. Domingo been lost on the world?'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ D. B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (2006), p.4.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 30 March 1816. (Barbados Public Library)

Others spoke of the ‘calamitous consequences’ of emancipation, and in another article at the beginning of the month, the paper printed a London meeting of merchants where one recalled how ‘by a similar interference of the French Revolutionary Government, the Island of St. Domingo had been lost.’¹⁸²

Historian Gelien Matthews has described how the pro-slavery lobby had ‘made it impossible for the British abolitionists to agitate without addressing the issue of St. Domingue,’ but in their haste to play such a valuable card, the planters actually *increased* the level of insecurity in their community.¹⁸³ They recalled images of white mass-murder to prevent a small piece of abolitionist legislation, but at the same time, reminded the enslaved of Haiti. Whether from word-of-mouth amongst the enslaved, a decade-long rumour, or because of these articles and overheard planter discussions, Haiti found its way into the rebel’s rhetoric. It was not just Nanny Grigg who had rebelled with the name of the fateful French colony on her lips. Of the five slave testimonies in the House of Assembly report, three of them mention Haiti in their motivations for the uprising. Other than Robert, who cites Grigg, James Bowland and Cuffee Ned also recalled the influence of rumours of this elusive, distant revolution. Bowland, of The River plantation described how he had heard from a literate free man of colour that, ‘he had read in the Papers which gave them the intelligence that they were free; but that the white people would not give them their freedom, and that they must fight for their liberty in the same way that they had done in Saint Domingo.’¹⁸⁴ Similar, and perhaps more revealing, is Cuffee Ned’s testimony where he recounted how, ‘he was told that the negroes had been freed in some of the Islands, and that they were to be freed in all the West Indies, and that in one they had fought for it and got it.’ The source continues by describing the interviewer listing the names of islands to ascertain which ‘one’ he was referring to; ‘upon being asked if he should recollect the name of the Island if he heard it? and [sic] having answered in the affirmative, several Islands were named; but when Saint Domingo was named, he said “that was the Island – he knew it by the name of *Mingo*.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ibid.

Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, 5 March 1816.

¹⁸³ G. Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Louisiana, 2012)

¹⁸⁴ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.34

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.28.

From these sources we can see two things. Firstly that the Haitian uprising seems to have been an influencing factor upon the rebels decision to take their emancipation by force once they believed it was being actively withheld by their masters, and secondly the influence of rumour upon these decisions, and its place within the popular consciousness of enslaved Barbadians. With very little contextual information, Saint Domingue had become a symbol of freedom and hope. Cuffee Ned's vague understanding of the events in Haiti is evidence of this. He uses the uprising as a marker for what could be possible, but cannot remember (or does not know) any real detail about this inspiring event or even the island's name, after having been given seemingly limited information by fellow rebels. The interviewer's prompting is also interesting, as they seem keen to establish Haiti as a catalyst for rebellion. And amongst similar testimonies we are reminded of the flawed nature of this source, where the testimonies seem to repeat convenient truths for the plantocracy. Though its memory was shrouded in the potent fear of black revenge for the whites of Barbados, establishing the revolution as a stimulus for their own rebellion only reinforced the idea that philanthropy and abolitionism were slavery's most destabilising influences.

Though there is extensive debate amongst historians as to the actual, physical impact of the Haitian revolution upon the emancipation of slaves outside of its borders, there seems to be some consensus over the revolt's influence upon neighbouring enslaved communities. The most tangible results of the Haitian uprising were felt in the slave quarters and the sugar fields, where the unlikely success-story became a kind of stimulus to action. Though as Marques points out, Haiti was 'unique' in her success, not because the enslaved rebelled with more vigour or better planning, but because the environment of their uprising was as close to perfect as a slave-society could provide.¹⁸⁶ The limited information acquired by the Barbadian rebels could not convey quite how different their odds were, though as Marques argues, 'the example it gave was undoubtedly encouraging.'¹⁸⁷ However, the enslaved in Barbados were not foolish enough to rebel on a rumour of triumph, ten years old and impossibly distant to those confined within the borders of their small island. Haiti's greatest influence was felt only when the conditions of unrest had

¹⁸⁶ J. P. Marques, 'Four Examples of a New Equation' in S. Drescher and P. Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery? Slave Revolts and Abolitionism* (2010), p.25.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

reached their peak. It was only when the rebels were truly convinced that an uprising was the only way to achieve freedom withheld, but seemingly promised, that images of burning Haiti became part of their battle cry.

Abolitionism and the Registry Bill

Nanny Grigg's call to action does not only reveal the influence of Haiti. More important than her references to the distant sister-rebellion is her unwavering insistence that her and her fellow slaves would be freed come New Year, and then Easter Monday. She spoke with the authority of an informed woman, but from where had this information come? And if it originated from the newspapers and discussions of the Registry Bill, how had a seemingly innocuous piece of legislation to create a kind of slave-census become so warped that it now resembled guaranteed freedom? In looking at the impact of British abolitionism upon the Barbadian rebels we must remember the disparity that exists between what was actually happening, and what the rebels perceived to be happening. We must also remember that the 'war of representation' that erupted after the close of the revolt between the pro and antislavery lobbies has led to sources almost as distorted as the rumours that circulated the slave quarters.¹⁸⁸ The majority of historians of the revolt agree that British abolitionism was an important, if not the most important, motivating force behind the rebellion. However, they rarely explore how and why the rumour of British support became quite so entrenched in the popular consciousness of the enslaved in Barbados.

Most of the 'blame' attributed to the abolitionist movement in the aftermath of the uprising stems from the planter response. They argued that the Registry Bill had been a smokescreen for emancipation, and that the enslaved had heard about this gateway-law from smuggled abolitionist pamphlets and British newspapers. This clandestine information had led the slaves to believe that the King was planning to free them, and the only thing standing in the way of this glorious mass-manumission were the planters themselves. This, in turn, created the conditions for revolt. The enslaved believed that they only needed to overpower their masters to obtain this promised freedom, supported as they thought they were by the might of the British Empire.

¹⁸⁸ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.107.

So what exactly was this catalytic legislation, which prompted these clouds of rumour, anxiety and hope to engulf the island? The Registry Bill represented the first significant antislavery activity in Britain since the successful abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Introduced in the summer of 1815, the law was designed as a follow-up to the 1807 abolition, and required each West-Indian colony to keep records of the births, sales and deaths of all of their enslaved workers. It was essentially designed to ensure that abolition was not being circumnavigated by a black-market in African slaves, and if this was the case, to prevent a further spread of these practises. The abolitionists hoped that this would stimulate the plantocracy into taking better care of their enslaved men and women, who could no longer be so easily replaced by fresh cargo. In a debate over the legislation, Wilberforce expressed how it was 'in the interest of those who had a property in them to promote their comforts, and secure the means of their increase without any possible supply from Africa.'¹⁸⁹ Marques has elaborated on these underlying motives, arguing how the antislavery activists hoped that the bill would, 'show up the demographic irrationality of slavery,' and eventually 'force the West Indian planters to improve their remaining slaves' living conditions, in order to keep them alive and, subsequently, to see the financial advantages of freeing them.'¹⁹⁰

However, this did not mean that the law was a guise for emancipation. The abolitionist had yet to make their peace with the concept, and would not even reluctantly approach the subject of freedom until the 1820s. The emancipation they foresaw was an incredibly gradual one, where it 'should flow almost effortlessly from cooperative planters' and that amelioration of slave conditions would eventually lead to a freedom-like state if not freedom itself.¹⁹¹ But despite its seemingly inoffensive motives, the bill still represented the first abolitionist interference with slavery *itself*, as opposed to the newly ended trade. As David Lambert writes, 'this was the first time that abolitionism seemed to pose a direct threat to the planter order,' and so its most controversial features were those still yet to come, that seemed promised by its passing.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Hansard. 13 June 1815. p.773.

¹⁹⁰ Marques, 'Four Examples of a New Equation' in Drescher and Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*, p.28.

¹⁹¹ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.35.

¹⁹² Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.113.

The enslaved, too, interpreted the abolitionist activity occurring across the ocean differently. They believed that Britain had or would grant their freedom *immediately*, prevented only by their masters, and if they revolted peacefully but powerfully their English allies would come to their aid, delivering their emancipation by force. There are several testimonies in the Assembly report on the rebellion that tell similar stories to Nanny Grigg's; of impending freedom, and freedom withheld. The examination of Daniel provides a particularly revealing window into this narrative. In his testimony he described a scene from three weeks prior to the revolt. He was sitting in his house at around sunset, when Cain Davis, a free man of colour, called for him to come and speak outside. They walked out into the darkening evening, and Davis asked whether Daniel had heard the good news. He informed him that 'the Negroes were all to be free –that the Queen and Mr Wilberforce had sent out to have them all freed, but that the Inhabitants of the Island were against it; that he had been at Cox-hall, and had seen it in the Newspapers; and that it was a great shame they were not all freed, and that they must fight for it.'¹⁹³ Davis told Daniel that his children were enslaved, and so he would join the rebellion despite his free status, and would light the piles of corn in his garden to signal the beginning of the uprising.

Indeed, every single slave testimony in the report repeats some variation of this story. In the examination of Major Oxley, of the Saint Michael's Regiment and who was present for many of the rebel testimonies, he recollected how the slaves had 'no idea of obtaining their freedom, until the knowledge of the Slave Registry Bill having been introduced into the British Parliament,' and that 'the slaves (generally) had taken up the idea of their having been set free at Christmas.' He continued that, 'finding their freedom had not been granted them at Christmas by the Governor, as they had been led to expect, they were determined upon obtaining it by the same means that it had been obtained in Saint Domingo.'¹⁹⁴ However, it was not the Registry Bill that drove the rebels to set fire to the island. Arguably, had they heard more accurate accounts of the bill they would have done very little in response. It was the propagation of wild rumours that created a stimulus to action. Oxley continued later to say that 'the English Newspapers had been read to them by several free people of colour

¹⁹³ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.26.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.33.

and slaves who could read and write, and that it had been mistated [sic] to them that the King of England had set them free.¹⁹⁵ And so it becomes clear that the enslaved had not rebelled upon news of abolitionist activity in England, but of false rumours of freedom that had spread across the island in a fever of excitement and expectation.

The extent of the misinformation becomes apparent in the slave testimonies. Alongside the false assumption that freedom was imminent, there are also major discrepancies between each account. As well as Cuffee Ned's misnaming of 'Mingo,' several of the rebels recall freedom being delivered by the 'Queen,' by which we can assume they meant King George III or the Prince Regent.¹⁹⁶ Even further removed from the 'truth' is the testimony of King Wiltshire, where he describes how, just before Christmas, there had been a report granting freedom to all of the enslaved in Barbados, and that 'their freedom was to be given them through a black woman who was Queen, for whom Mr. Wilberforce acted in England.'¹⁹⁷ Statements like this should not be swept aside as the result of distortion or naivety, as often they are far more illuminative of the enslaved's mentalities in the lead up to rebellion.

Several historians have examined the development of rumour during periods of intense anxiety or chaos, though these assessments often refer to a wartime environment. Catriona Pennell, for example, has studied the spread of rumour during the First World War, and in particular, the curious sightings of Russians 'with snow on their boots' landing in Britain.¹⁹⁸ She concluded that such tales spread amidst of a period of intense uncertainty as a way to offer comfort to the intense and widely spread anxieties of new conflict. In Pennell's example, the reports of these Eastern visitors were significant because they represented popular fears of going into war unprepared and under-supported, and they gained traction with the British public because they offered a solution to these concerns. Similarly, in the Barbadian case, rumours of British and Haitian military support would have provided a similar antidote to anxieties in the build-up to rebellion, and so it seems unsurprising that they spread so readily. Michael Craton has highlighted the importance of these kinds of

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.27.

¹⁹⁸ C. Pennell, 'Believing the Unbelievable: The Myth of the Russians "With Snow on their Boots" in the United Kingdom, 1914', *Cultural and Social History* 11 (2015)

rumours to the outbreak of enslaved resistance, and argues that many, 'could neither have been invented by the most ignorant or believed by the most literate and informed of slaves,' and that they, 'fulfilled the classic canons of successful propaganda – useful half-truths falling midway between fact and wish.'¹⁹⁹ This misinformation was so successful in its breadth of circulation and ease of adoption because it was *good news*, and it became solidified as fact in the enslaved popular consciousness *because* it was so popular; informing the ignorant and suppressing dissenting voices of the better informed.

Though much of Pennell's argument is in reference to counties at war, unlike the rebels of 1816, their situation was not much more secured. If we consider the local discontent already brewing in the south-eastern parishes of the island, and the recent memories of Haiti and, in particular, the British abolition of the slave trade, it is easy to see how exaggerated news of antislavery activity occurring in London could spiral into something far more dramatic. Their absolute conviction that their freedom was guaranteed reveals the desperation of their state, though seemingly ameliorated, still absolutely oppressed, and their awareness of allies across the ocean. As despite their misinformation about the actual contents of the Registry Bill, they were correct in their assessments of external support. As Pennell writes, 'when a crisis leads to heightened emotions, the critical ability of much of the population is decreased or suspended.'²⁰⁰ For the enslaved in Barbados, these heightened emotions were hope and excitement as much as fear and distress. It is clear from the testimonies in the Assembly report that the rebels had a kind of consensus of confusion, and considering how dangerous and rare slave uprisings really were, the rumours of freedom must have generated a truly potent effect upon the population for them to risk their lives so willingly.

However, as already established, the Assembly report must be read critically. It is littered with accusations against the British abolitionists and we cannot assume the testimonies featured in the appendix were chosen at random. The confessions that the government of Barbados selected to be printed amongst the interviews with plantation owners and military officials were picked because they aligned with the story the assembly wished to tell. Every single one blamed rumours of freedom for the outbreak of rebellion, and

¹⁹⁹ M. Craton, 'Slave Culture, Resistance and Emancipation' in J. Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society* (London, 1982), p.106.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

emphatically denied that any 'ill-treatment' contributed to an insurrectionary atmosphere. The rest of the report makes it quite clear that this misinformation originated from malicious antislavery sources, with intelligence of abolitionist movements coming from British, rather than planter newspapers. They were careful to make sure that any stimulus for resistance was seen as poisonously permeating their borders, rather than coming from within them.

Indeed, the plantocracy blamed the Registry Bill in every account of the revolt. In correspondences and newspaper articles it is cited as the main, and often sole, reason for rebellion. In his letter to Earl Bathurst at the Colonial Office in Britain, two weeks after the rebellion, Governor Leith wrote of the 'discussions which have so generally taken place on the question of Slavery, attended by the misconception, heat, and exaggeration of many individual opinions,' and how these could not 'have occurred to such an extent without producing dangerous effects.'²⁰¹ Though Leith does not explicitly cite the abolitionist legislation, he alludes to the antislavery activity occurring in Britain and its role in causing the enslaved to question their 'natural' condition.²⁰² However, the military account of Colonel Edward Codd enclosed in the letter is far less ambiguous. Codd recalled speaking with many of the rebels during his efforts to suppress the uprising, and concluded that the 'unfortunate calamity is to be attributed to the general opinion, which has pervaded the minds of those misguided people, since the proposed introduction of the Registry Bill, that their emancipation was desired by the British Parliament.'²⁰³

In later circulars and addresses to the enslaved population, distributed after the dust had settled and the island was returning to a relatively tranquil state, there seemed to have been an effort from the government of Barbados to dispel the rumours that had produced such an insurrectionary atmosphere amongst the slaves. They issued statements that maintained the absolute falsity of these whispers of freedom, and most tellingly, included a declaration from the Prince Regent, George IV, expressing his 'concern and surprise' over the 'unfounded and dangerous impressions' that he had ordered the

²⁰¹ Letter from James Leith to Earl Bathurst, April 30th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

emancipation of the enslaved.²⁰⁴ These actions illustrate the perceived importance in dismissing these wide spread rumours, and show just how incendiary this misinformation had become. In particular, the plantocracy's decision to call upon the monarchy to address the enslaved demonstrates how prevalent the 'freed by the King [or Queen]' tale must have been amongst the rebels, and perhaps calls into question the idea that mirroring testimonies were cherry-picked for the assembly report.

Gelien Matthews has written how the members of the House of Assembly 'strove to depict the slaves as wild and insensate villains. Like their ancestors, the 1816 rebels were blind to their destruction and violence.'²⁰⁵ However, this was a highly inaccurate portrayal. The enslaved had actually shown remarkable restraint during the uprising, where only one white member of the island militia and two black members of the West India Regiment were killed.²⁰⁶ And despite planter accounts that counter this, most notably Colonel Codd's, where he recalled the rebels telling him 'that the island belonged to them, and not to the white men, whom they proposed to destroy, reserving the Females, whose lot in case of success, it is easy to conceive,' there is very little evidence that this was *actually* their plan.²⁰⁷ And though they were faced by an incredibly violent planter response, the rebels seemed content with destroying only property and partaking in what essentially amounted to a mass-demonstration against slavery, rather than seeking revenge in a Haitian reign of terror against the white inhabitants of the island.

This relative non-violence illustrates more clearly than anything else the rebel's conviction they had external support in Britain. They did not believe, like their Haitian counterparts, that they had to win control of the island by force. The rumours of British support had become so intoxicating that the rebels were convinced that military aid would come for them, with their loud but relatively safe rebellion acting as the prelude to this inevitable emancipation. The uprising certainly contrasted with the earlier revolts of the eighteenth century, where, for example, during Tacky's Rebellion in Jamaica the aim had been to 'kill all the whites and takeover power on the island, where they intended to carry on

²⁰⁴ 'Copy of a Circular from Earl Bathurst, His Majesty's Principle Secretary of State for War and the Colonies' dated Downing Street, June 29th 1816.,' Moody's Address, June 19th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁰⁵ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.66.

²⁰⁶ Beckles and Shepherd, *Liberties Lost*, p.190.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

producing sugar by enslaving those blacks who refused to follow them.²⁰⁸ It seems as though the Barbados rebels were resisting against slavery *itself* (rather than personal enslavement), encouraged by antislavery activity in Britain, with their alliance with many of the free black population only cementing this perception. David Brion Davis has furthered this argument, describing how the 'rise of antislavery changed the nature and meaning of many subsequent slave revolts,' and that 'the incredibly low white mortality rates... [show] that the slaves' leaders were aware of a growing sympathetic public in Britain and were remarkably self-disciplined in preventing the killing of whites.'²⁰⁹

This link with British abolitionism is also evidenced in the rebel's battle flags. These visual sources provide an almost unfiltered insight to the mentality of the rebels, unlike many of the other documents that have passed through the hands of the plantocracy and the tainting influences of 'coercion and fear'.²¹⁰ I have previously used these flags as evidence of early nationalism amongst the rebels, but they also signal an engagement with British antislavery, and generally illustrate a more politically aware enslaved population than the 'wild and insensate villains' depicted by the planter class. Almost all of the remaining images of these flags and banners are adorned with some imagery or word associated with Britain, the monarchy and empire. Slogans such as, 'Britannier [sic] are always happy to assist all such sons of endeavour' illustrate the conviction that help would come, and as Karl Watson argues, 'underscores the belief of the slaves that their position was just and tenable and would be supported by the British government.'²¹¹ The most detailed flag, examined in the previous chapter, is awash with imagery of Britain.²¹² The British warship, drum, crowns and Britannia herself, sat astride a smiling lion, illustrate irrefutably the importance of a perception of British support to the rebels. Watson describes how it had been created with 'strong and reassuring visual messages,' and it is clear that this particular flag is a kind of pictorial

²⁰⁸ Marques, 'Four Examples of a New Equation' in Drescher and Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*, p.13.

²⁰⁹ D. B. Davis, 'Slave Revolts and Abolitionism', in Drescher and Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*, p.167.

²¹⁰ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt and Some Brief Comments', p.40.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

²¹² See Appendix III.

representation of the hopeful and misguided rumours that had led the rebels on their dangerous path to rebellion.²¹³

J. Stark's *History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands*, published in 1893 (77 years after the uprising), recalled the 'horrors of a negro insurrection,' and described how Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin had indoctrinated the rebels with antislavery rhetoric.²¹⁴ Mirroring Schomburgh's 1848 history, Stark recounted how 'to [Franklin] was afterwards distinctly traced the practise of reading and discussing before the slave population those violent speeches which were at that period delivered against slavery in the mother country.'²¹⁵ He told a familiar story of reports of freedom and 'distorted accounts of the negroes in Hayti [sic],' that were 'worthy of imitation and as exhibiting a prospect of those rights which were unjustly withheld.'²¹⁶ It is significant, though not surprising, that the planter account of insidious abolitionist doctrine influencing naïve rebels had remained unchanged for almost a century. But it still stands to reason that these international causes for revolt must have held some significance to have been so widely reported, and for their place to have remained, unwavering, in the popular memory of the uprising.

However, David Lambert importantly identifies the distorted nature of the rebellion's history, where the causes were identified after its end in documents and speeches shrouded in propaganda and blame. He emphasises the 'thoroughly narrated character of the revolt,' where there is a stark 'distinction between the 'reality' of the events and their representation.'²¹⁷ The pro and antislavery lobbies used the events to push blame onto one another; to discredit both slavery *and* amelioration with images of a volatile enslaved population, surrounded by the smouldering ruins of Barbadian sugar plantations. Lambert summarises this conflict succinctly by describing how the 'struggle to locate blame for the revolt was a conflict over Barbados's alleged status as an aberrant slave world. The spatial imaginaries revolved around the deployment and contestation of particular discourses of whiteness: were the slaveholders victims or sadists? Were the abolitionists agitators or humanitarians?'²¹⁸ In

²¹³ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt Revisited', p.189.

²¹⁴ J. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands* (London, 1903), p.93.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.94.

²¹⁷ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.111.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.112.

searching for causation for the 1816 uprising, or indeed searching for ‘blame,’ we must remember that this aftermath is almost inseparable from our perception of the revolt’s beginnings, where every source is coloured by its authors, distorting the narrative for their own political gain.

The Planter Blame

This distortion has proven particularly corrosive when it comes to locating the origins of the powerful rumours of freedom. Though the plantocracy insisted that this misinformation must have come from news of the Registry Bill, smuggled into slave dwellings and clandestinely distributed amongst the black population, read by literate free people of colour to an enraptured enslaved audience, there were other possible roots. Indeed, while the majority of the planter documents illustrate quite plainly that the rebels believed they had been freed, they did not often call this freedom the ‘Registry Bill,’ or even know such legislation existed. It seems that the majority of the rebels had heard only rumours of freedom, and the planters had deduced themselves that the bill must have been the source. And even if the legislation had been the catalyst, it is perhaps more likely that it was the planters *themselves* who had accidentally fed the information into the enslaved’s popular consciousness.

In the testimony that recounts Nanny Grigg’s rebel leadership, it is clear that it was freedom, and not slave registry that were on Grigg’s lips as she announced her calls to action. She told her audience that she had ‘read it in the newspapers,’ (though not saying whether these were British or Bajan) but most importantly, perhaps, was her assertion that her ‘Master was very uneasy about it.’²¹⁹ Craton has argued that, ‘the most common way in which political news and views were spread among the slaves was by domestics overhearing and passing on their masters’ incautious table talk,’ and so it is entirely possible that Grigg had learned of impending emancipation directly from the source of the exaggerations, and taken her master’s words as gospel.²²⁰ And so it seems, if only in part, that her misinformation had had planter origins.

The only account to emerge from Barbados in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion that contradicts the seemingly watertight case of the plantocracy

²¹⁹ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.29.

²²⁰ Craton, ‘Slave Culture, Resistance and Emancipation’ in Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society*, p.105.

was the anonymous pamphlet, *Remarks on an Insurrection in Barbados*.²²¹ As touched upon in the previous chapter, the author of the document emphatically denied the link between abolitionism and the outbreak of rebellion, and instead levied the blame upon slavery itself and its inescapably oppressive nature. In addition to providing local and ideological reasons for the unrest, the author also turned the focus to the planters themselves and the inconsistency of their arguments. They reasoned that the revolt had 'been employed by the West-India party to throw discredit on the measure proposed by Mr Wilberforce,' and that the white inhabitants of Barbados were the ones who were truly responsible for the propagation of rumours amongst the enslaved.²²² The rebels believed that their freedom was the final and imminent intention of British abolitionism, and so the author of *Remarks* implored the reader; 'now, even if this were the true representation of the case, who would be to blame; the West Indians who have uniformly and clamorously [sic] maintained, that the real object of the Registry Bill is emancipation; or the friends and supporters of the bill who have constantly denied that it has any such object?'²²³ They concluded that it was the planters, and not the abolitionists, who had called the bill emancipation and who had therefore planted the seeds of rumour in the minds of their workers.

The author continued that the plantocracy's blatant mishandling of apparently delicate and dangerous information revealed the inconsistencies in their attacks on the antislavery movement. For, if the news of Registry Bill had been so catalytic, why then had they printed it so widely, and discussed it so loosely in the presence of the enslaved? And why had they themselves been so quick to call the bill emancipation if they knew the word would inspire such an insurrectionary spirit in their workers? The author argued that the planter's 'own conduct... flatly contradicts that profession, and proves it insincere; for these very discussions of which the slaves could never hear without their help, have been regularly published by themselves, in the colonial newspapers, - or rather have been misrepresented by them, in the way most likely to infuse dangerous ideas into the minds of the enslaved.'²²⁴ To illustrate their point more profoundly, and to perhaps conjure images of the uprising itself, the author

²²¹ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*.

²²² *Ibid.*, p.3.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

described how, 'wishing to keep the light of a Registry Bill from their plantations, [the planters] would persuade us that those plantations are inflammable magazines. Yet they themselves at the same moment, as we have seen, are shaking torches and firebrands within them.'²²⁵

The author of *Remarks* is quite clear about where they believe the 'blame' for the insurrection should lie. The rumours of freedom had not come from British newspapers and news of slave registration, but from the planter's own words, printed and spoken in the company of curious enslaved men and women. And, indeed, it seems far more likely that this misinformation would stem from a declaration of impending emancipation by an anxious plantocracy, than from a piece of legislation that seemed to have very little to do with freedom at all. It is also true, and often overlooked, that the enslaved did not just believe they had been *freed*, but that their masters were *preventing* this freedom. It makes sense, therefore, that the knowledge of this withholding would come from the planters themselves. If the rebels had heard about the Registry Bill through British channels they would not have been so aware of its absolute dismissal in Barbados, and the lengths the white elite of the island were going to prevent its passing. It would only be by reading the planter denouncements of the bill, in the papers and pamphlets they churned out with increasing regularity as 1815 came to a close, that they would begin to see their masters as the only obstacle to be overcome. As Matthews argues, 'whatever the slaves learned about the parliamentary debates depended largely on how the colonists managed or mismanaged that information. The abolitionists were the authors, but they were not ultimately responsible for the circulation of their discussions in the colonies.'²²⁶ The plantocracy had reacted loudly to the bill, and the enslaved had heard.

Indeed, the white elite responded 'bitterly' to the proposal, affronted and enraged by a law that questioned whether they were conducting an illegal slave trade, and equally so that Britain assumed to legislate on their behalf while they held no such privilege in parliament. They printed articles upon articles in the local papers denouncing slave registration, and pamphlets that defended their rights and slavery itself, as if a powerful attack had been levied against them.²²⁷

²²⁵ Ibid., p.6.

²²⁶ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.32.

²²⁷ Ibid., p.31. Also See: *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, November 1815 – April 1816. And, G. W. Jordan, 'An Examination of the Principles of the Slave Registry

It had not. Their reaction was, on paper, an overreaction. But it was not only registration that they were so insulted by; it was ‘the old cry of Barbadian nationalism, “no taxation without representation,”’ that framed their rebuttal to Britain.²²⁸ And whether because of genuine anxieties or to add weight to their words, they conjured images of Haiti and ruin to the colonies, and the nightmare of premature emancipation, forced upon their civilised little island by a deluded and distant mother-country. Michael Craton has described how the bill, ‘fell like a rock into the pool of local politics, sending out ripples of perturbation and hope throughout Barbados that came back redoubled with the force of popular discontent.’²²⁹

Between November of 1815 and the uprising in mid-April, the *Barbados Mercury* published ten articles about the Registry Bill as it made its way through the British legislative process.²³⁰ This may not seem like many, but there was very little news to report. Perhaps to account for this shortage, many of the articles printed the resolutions of neighbouring islands in response to the bill, or reported meetings of merchants in London that had rejected the legislation. They spoke as often as they could on the topic, in long pieces that took up the majority of the issue and reprinted the debates in parliament as soon as the news had arrived on the ships docking in Bridgetown. In the first article printed about the bill in November 1815, the author cast doubt upon the motives of the abolitionist movement, warning that their ‘opprobrious epithets against the character of West Indians ought to awaken a suspicion of the purity of their intentions.’²³¹ This kind of rhetoric, with assumptions about underlying intent and hidden meanings would colour the planter’s writing (and presumably speaking) about the bill for the next few months. They argued that the legislation, and the abolitionists, ‘openly attacks the character of the island,’ and that if it passed the plantocracy would ‘be little better than slaves.’²³² They recalled images of slave revolts of the past, and warned of others to come if Britain continued to meddle in their affairs, and spoke of accidental or

Bill and the Means of Emancipation’ in *West Indian Slavery: Selected Pamphlets* (London, 1816)

²²⁸ R. Morris, ‘A Hell Broth’, p.22.

²²⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.259.

²³⁰ See: *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, November 1815 – April 1816.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1815.

²³² *Ibid.*, 30 March 1816.

impending manumissions that they believed would inevitably follow. In mid March they wrote that, should the bill become a law:

‘the planter having no longer any dependence on the good faith of that government which he has hitherto relied, may, at any moment, apprehend some new and unexpected legislative measure, that will have the effect of depriving him of his hardly earned possessions, and thus, instead of pursuing his present benevolent plans of meliorating the condition of his slaves, his only object will be, to amass a fortune with the utmost expedition, without, in any degree, regarding the means, or attending to the comforts of those who look up to him for protection and support.’²³³

This passage is alarming not just because it implies a sudden and unanticipated emancipation on the horizon, but because the author responded to this imagined threat by arguing that it nullified the need for any amelioration of slavery and concluded that a quick fortune, cruelly extracted from his workers would be the solution. In another article from the 30th March, even closer to the date of the uprising, one assembly member lamented how they, ‘shall not be certain of enjoying to morrow, what to day we call our own,’ while another raised concerns that a fault in registration by a careless overseer would lead to a slave ‘virtually emancipated, turned loose on the public to beg or to steal.’²³⁴ Most incendiary though, was the statement later in the same piece that described the bill as, ‘for the ostensible purpose of more effectually putting a stop to the importation of slaves from Africa, but in reality with the pernicious view of commencing a system of internal legislation for the Colonies, destructive of all order and subordination, having for its final and no distant object, the total emancipation of slavery in the West Indies’²³⁵

It is clear that the rebels, or their free black allies, would not need British newspapers to learn about the Registry Bill. They would also not need any help in deducing emancipatory intentions from the law, when the plantocracy had already created that link for them. Though the majority of the enslaved could not

²³³ Ibid., 16 March 1816.

²³⁴ Ibid., 30 March 1816.

²³⁵ Ibid.

read, there were several literate slaves and free people of colour who could pass along the information contained in these articles to the others. Indeed, there is evidence that Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin would do exactly that.²³⁶ Though some sources imply that Franklin obtained his rousing words of antislavery and equality from British news and pamphlets, it is equally likely that he, and others, had read of the threat of freedom in publications printed far closer to home. What need would there be for papers smuggled across the ocean when their own masters printed such inflammatory statements for all the island to see?

The overconfidence that the plantocracy had fostered in the decades of seemingly peaceful enslavement had led them to underestimate the curiosity and attention of their slaves. They could not believe that their own actions had provoked such destruction, and so they looked outside of their own borders for catalysts and blame, when it had likely been their own words, loosely spoken and printed under watchful eyes, that had lit the spark of rebellion. And what would be more stirring than a plantocracy warning of emancipation, and of revolt, but promising to do all in their power to prevent it. In their own words, printed for all to see, they had cast the hateful Registry Bill as something *worth* rebelling for, and had shown that they were prepared to work their enslaved men and women to the bone, or even secede from Britain (or at least threaten to) in order to preserve their way of life.²³⁷ And though they spoke of St. Domingue in hushed and threatened tones in their condemnation of slave registry, they did not realise that with every misplaced word or exaggeration they called the spectre of slave uprising ever-closer upon them.

When we attempt to track the influence of international movements upon the rebels, we are in actuality following a rumour trail. These distant and vaguely drawn events only stirred the enslaved's spirit of resistance when they had blossomed into something almost unrecognisable from the source. But it was not just the enslaved who fell afoul of the rumour mill. The planters themselves had whipped themselves into a fevered frenzy of anxiety and indignation in response to the legislative attempts of the abolitionists in Britain. It is likely that their grave warnings of sudden emancipation and slave rebellions were a tactical argument to silence their opponents, but it is also possible that

²³⁶ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, p.30.

²³⁷ 'The humble Address and Petition of the Council and Assembly of Barbados' to the Prince Regent, January 17th 1816 (CO 28/85)

their conditions had had a warping effect upon their critical thinking abilities, similar to that which had been so intoxicating to the rebels. Perhaps for the planters, slave registry had created a truly frightening prospect, where their already precarious position, balanced atop their slave-society, would now be in the hands of men thousands of miles away with little experience in navigating such unstable ground.

For the enslaved, a whisper of freedom rang loud and clear, and though misled, their rumours were so powerful because they desperately wanted them to be true. Trying to find the source of these rumours is more complex than it seems at first glance, but through the distorting filter of the rebellion's aftermath some patterns seem to arise. From the actions, words and flag designs of the rebels we can see the strong influence of British abolitionism. While from the planters' own conduct, and the paper trail of exaggerations and threats they left behind them, there remains clear evidence that the rebels needn't have looked outside of the island's borders for inspiration for resistance, or the building blocks of their misinformation. The white elite did not plant the seed of antislavery in Barbados, but they nurtured it with their own paradoxical poison of overconfidence and profound anxiety, letting their domestic slaves overhear their nervous words and literate blacks (both free and unfree) read their dramatic denouncements in the newspapers. The greatest irony of the rebellion, however, was not that the planters threatened dystopia of slave revenge was made true by their own words, but that by blaming the abolitionist movement for the uprising they attributed an unintended level of intelligence to their workers. Matthews has written how the planters, 'admitted, blindly perhaps, that the revolt manifested not a protest against bad treatment but the slaves' impatient desire for a freedom that seemed guaranteed,' and in doing so, cast the revolt as a distinct and remarkable expression anti-slavery activity long before any historian would do the same.²³⁸

Conclusion

To try to track the influence of international causes upon the 1816 slave revolt is essentially to attempt to navigate the motivations of characters fuelled by rumour and misinformation. There was a clear disconnect between the reality

²³⁸ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.69.

and perception of events, from both the rebels and the planter class alike. It seems more a history of the mentality of both of these groups on the precipice of rebellion, where the hope and anxiety that had consumed them reached its zenith. Almost all of the primary material reveals a confused state of society, where intentionally or not, the planters spun stories of abolitionist movement into impending emancipation, and the rebels turned a slave registry bill into freedom papers, floating just offshore. The roots of these rumours are perhaps impossible to conclude with any real certainty, but there are indications, amidst the muddied waters of the revolt's highly political aftermath, that suggest some kind of narrative.

It is difficult to deny the influence of the Haitian revolution upon the rebels and the planters in Barbados. From multiple sources we can see how the rebellion was a kind of beacon of hope for the enslaved, mythologised and distant though it had become. Its power to motivate the rebels existed within the context of more immediate reasons for resistance. When the only solution already seemed decided, Haiti became flare in the distance, guiding the rebels towards their imagined destination. This context was the promised and withheld freedom, originating with the abolitionist Registry Bill, heavily dramatized and embellished by the plantocracy, and interpreted by the enslaved until they had convinced themselves of its existence. All the lasting evidence left by the rebels indicates this belief, where the conviction of British support seemed to permeate every decision they made, from their flag designs to their conduct during the uprising. And while it is difficult to judge, because of the propaganda war that ensued at its close, the rebellion seems to have been encouraged in large part by the plantocracy themselves. Overconfident and short-sighted, the white elite in Barbados were the most likely source of the rebels' information. They wrote and spoke of emancipation, fuelled by anxiety and anger towards Britain, not realising that those most affected by its passing or withholding would be the ones listening the most intently.

In all, it seems as though the 'causes' of the Barbadian slave uprising were a complex combination of all of these. The local factors and elements of nationalism amongst the rebels provided feelings of deep discontent in the south-eastern parishes of the island, while British antislavery activity, heard through the clouding filter of the plantocracy gave the rebels the catalyst for rebelling at the time, and in the way that they did.

And, finally, a note on Nanny Grigg. Though she proved an inflammatory character in the lead up to rebellion, there exists a small piece of evidence that she managed to survive its bloody aftermath. Robert Morris has examined the plantation slave lists for 1817 in search of remaining rebels, but could only account for two familiar names.²³⁹ One of these, a 58 year old, Barbadian-born driver named Nanny Grig was documented as living at Edgecumbe Plantation in St. Phillip, not far from the insurrectionary Grigg's previous home at Simmons. Though it is entirely possible that this could refer to a different woman, it is quite unlikely, and so we may assume that at least one leading rebel managed to survive their endeavour, escaping both transportation and the gallows that claimed the rest.

²³⁹ Morris, 'A Hell Broth,' p.30.

4. The Impact of the Revolt

During a particularly poignant moment of the 1816 uprising's bicentenary celebrations, two musicians performed a rendition of Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song' at the University campus on the west coast of the Island. They stood amongst ledgers of enslaved names; a personal memorial to those who had lived at the plantation that once occupied the same site, overlooking the bright blue sea in the distance. The song seemed to illustrate the mood of the event perfectly, where celebration of resistance was marred by a deep mourning, but also where a bitter and terrible history seemed almost redeemed by these acts of fearless opposition, revived and remembered two hundred years later on a sun-baked hilltop. The whole day's events illuminated the deep significance of the rebellion to many Barbadians, where a large group of people from every age, gender, race and profession gathered together to revisit the sites of conflict in shared remembrance. It is undeniable that one of the rebellion's most lasting impacts has been upon the collective historical memory of Barbados, and the way in which memory had fed into and nurtured a sense of national pride. This has, in turn, contributed to the post-independence shaping of national identity, where Bussa has been crowned a 'Hero' fit to personify Barbadian spirit and progress alongside a select few others, and where the actions of the 1816 rebels provide a glimmer of hope and agency in a national history so steeped in faceless oppression.

Because this revolt, and other acts of enslaved resistance, have become so important in the collective memory of many ex slave-societies, it is important not to romanticise and overstate their *actual* historical impact in a misguided attempt 'right the wrongs' of the past. The impact of the Barbados rebellion was incredibly subtle by historiographical standards, and in many ways as positive as it was negative to the progress of abolitionism. However, even when the outcome seems to have been counter-productive to the cause, there was still *impact*, though perhaps not quite what the rebel leaders intended. Trying to bend the arch of the uprising's influence to a more historically satisfying shape does very little to aid a collective remembering, other than rest it on false foundations.

Exaggerating the positive impact of the Barbados revolt upon the progress of abolitionism in Britain is not only damaging to the historical record,

but it also does an injustice to the enslaved who did, and more importantly those who did *not* rebel. Joseph C. Miller has eloquently explained this mistake in *The Problem of Slavery as History*.²⁴⁰ He argues that historians need to be wary of projecting their own belief system onto the past- that they need to remove themselves from their own minds or else they ‘contradict the essence of thinking historically.’²⁴¹ This is particularly important when it comes to studying revolt, which can often leave the enslaved subject a two-dimensional figure – either a victim or ‘mechanically’ consumed with resisting their state.²⁴² Among others, Seymour Drescher has alluded to this idea in his work *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* when he dismissed slave revolt as a force of its own against slavery.²⁴³ Rather than undermining the impact of the rebels’ efforts, such a statement is fair. Revolts could only truly impact the global slave-system when it was already weakening. This explains why there were relatively so few revolts, and why those of Barbados, and later, Demerara and Jamaica were so significant. It also helps to deconstruct this two-dimensional image of the passive or resistant slave, as had they always had the opportunity to resist why had they not? And when they did, it was with balanced caution – to revolt when ‘the reigns of authority had been most slackened.’²⁴⁴

Rather than undermine or underplay the truly remarkable actions of the rebels in Barbados, this analysis does quite the opposite. It reveals a community responding to their enslavement in a conscious, decisive and measured way, when they found themselves under more relaxed rule, and hearing of abolitionist support in Britain. They recognised that their rebellion alone would not damage the plantocratic system they lived under unless there were other forces working against it in tandem with their own resistance. This thinking also reinforces why it is essential to study the local and international, and the short and long-term effects of the rebellion alongside one another. As alone, the local, immediate effects of the uprising can only translate to their tangible failure, high death tolls and heightened insecurity among the planter class. While the international influence of the rebellion upon the abolitionist movement is seen only through the way in which Wilberforce and his

²⁴⁰ Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History* (Yale, 2012)

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ S. Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009)

²⁴⁴ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.40, quoting the Planter Alexander Barclay.

antislavery allies rejected, and then moulded the rebel's actions to fit into their already established propaganda campaign, and does little to counter a historical image of enslaved passivity or illuminate their conscious involvement in the movement.

Immediate

After the fires had been extinguished, martial law declared, the rebels rounded up and executed en masse, or instead remained imprisoned awaiting their fate, both the plantocracy of Barbados and the pro and antislavery lobbies in Britain had to come to terms with the sudden and unexpected rebellion of the previously sleepy sugar colony. The immediate response of the abolitionist movement was one of rejection and detachment from the events. The Bajan rebel represented a dangerous kind of autonomy to a movement that had won the war against the slave trade armed with sympathetic images of enslaved people existing in a state of absolute oppression. A rebel setting fire to his master's crops and brandishing a hatchet at an oncoming militia did not move the British public quite like the kneeling figure of the Wedgewood slave medallion, who implored the beholder to take pity and break their chains *for* them, pleading to recognise their humanity with the slogan, 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?'²⁴⁵

William Wilberforce was the first of the antislavery camp to respond to news of the uprising in mid-June. He announced that 'whatever happened had no reference to himself or his friends, he had no share in creating the explosion that had been felt; he washed his hands clean of the blood that was spilt.'²⁴⁶ In doing so he was attempting to sever the ties that were quickly forming between the rebel's actions and the abolitionist Registry Bill, and as Matthews argues, 'disassociate the antislavery struggle in Britain from the counterproductive activities of the slaves in the colonies.'²⁴⁷ At the same time, Wilberforce reiterated the conservative aims of the abolitionist movement to Parliament, who would not begin to support even gradual emancipation for almost a decade. He reminded them that their plan was simply, 'the abolition of the slave

²⁴⁵ See Appendix V.

Also see: M. Guyatt, 'The Wedgewood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-century Design', *Journal of Design History* 13 (2000)

²⁴⁶ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.29.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

trade with a view to produce the amelioration of the slaves; that we might see the West Indies cultivated by a happy peasantry, instead of being cultivated by slaves.'²⁴⁸ This was seen as a gradual process, growing organically from the creolisation of the enslaved in the West Indies, where the planter class would have no choice but to improve conditions in order to sustain their working population. This had been the abolitionist reasoning for the Registry Bill's implementation before the revolt, and so Wilberforce and his colleagues saw no need to alter the party line, despite the burning wake left by the legislation in Barbados. Matthews argues that this reaction was borne from the necessity to retain the conservatism of the antislavery movement in light of a rebellion that 'may very well have rendered the metropolitan struggle a lost cause.'²⁴⁹ The actions of the rebels had upturned any abolitionist claims that the ameliorated slave was a far happier one, but the alternative argument - that it was slavery itself, and not planter cruelty that sparked the rebellion - was a far more liberal conclusion than the political climate of 1816 would allow.

The abolitionist pamphlet, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, reiterated and solidified the abolitionist distancing.²⁵⁰ In blaming the planters for their mismanaging and exaggeration of antislavery news, the author attempted to deflect blame for the insurrection, both geographically and politically, away from Whitehall and back into the Great Houses of Barbados. In their efforts to emphasise the local causes of the uprising, they underplayed both the level of organisation and the extent of the damage it had caused to the island. Indeed it was the abolitionists who painted the enslaved in the most degraded and least intelligent light of all, with the author arguing, 'If we suppose the generality of the slaves so wretchedly low in information and intellect, as not to perceive the insanity of such an enterprise, how can we believe that they should have acted on a speculation respecting the effects of the British Parliament with colonial legislation?'²⁵¹ There seemed a great irony in the way the abolitionists dismissed the political aims and awareness of the enslaved, while the planters emphasised them, and so dehumanised the rebel slave even further in order to salvage their floundering movement.

²⁴⁸ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.35.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p.7.

However, despite this attempt to disassociate themselves from the rebellion, the abolitionists' activity would become inextricably linked with slave revolts in the West Indies, and so one of the most immediate and damaging results of the events in Barbados was the stagnating effect it seems to have had upon the British antislavery movement. The power of slave registration was quietly handed over to the colonial assemblies and the bill became the last piece of abolitionist legislation, or even significant activity, for seven years. Seymour Drescher argues that, 'the revolts immediate impact on the metropolitan political scene still closely resembled the impact of the Saint-Domingue revolution,' in that, 'both uprisings contributed to a hiatus in major abolitionist initiatives.'²⁵² In another of his works, Drescher has also described how this response contributed to, and was encouraged by, the distinctly proslavery narrative that dominated the press reports of the uprising, where *The Times* reprinted the planter accounts and proclamations, describing 'negroes of the worst disposition,' and most cutting of all; 'we have to thank the projectors of the Registry Bill for this.'²⁵³ In their renouncement of the plantocracy, the author of *Remarks* wrote sombrely how the abolitionists must 'speak at a whisper, even when we speak at the distance of 6000 miles, of slavery in the West Indies,' but in the aftermath of the Barbados rebellion, not even a whisper would suffice, when every hopeful word seemed to throw a lit match into the heart of the sugar colonies.²⁵⁴

It is this stagnating effect that has prompted the majority of historians to dismiss the impact of the 1816 uprising. Though some of them believe that, when combined with the subsequent late slave revolts in Demerara and Jamaica, the Barbados revolt holds some collective value, they argue that it alone was a negative force for antislavery. Similarly to Drescher, David Brion Davis has described the rebellion as 'clearly a setback' for the abolitionist movement, while Michael Craton argues that the events, 'made comparatively little impact on Britain at large.'²⁵⁵ All three of these historians do concede,

²⁵² S. Drescher, 'Civilising Insurgency: Two Variants of Slave Revolts in the Age of Revolution' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010), p.125.

²⁵³ Drescher, *Abolition*, p.232.

The Times, 5 June 1816.

²⁵⁴ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*, p.5.

²⁵⁵ Davis, 'Slave Revolts and Abolitionism' in Drescher and Emmer (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010), p.166. and Craton, 'Slave Culture, Resistance and Emancipation' in Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society*, p.120.

however, that once the political climate surrounding abolitionism had softened by the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Barbados uprising could be called upon to illustrate the 'cycle of violence' evidenced by the later rebellions, and so became a useful propaganda tool many years after the fact.²⁵⁶ João Pedro Marques is even more dismissive of the influence of the Bajan rebel's actions. He decries other scholars of abolitionism who give too much weight to slave resistance as a force of its own against slavery, calling it, 'historiography substantially tainted by ideology,' written by historians seeking 'to restore dignity to the oppressed.'²⁵⁷ Though he acknowledges a link between abolitionism and the late rebellions, he does not think the latter influenced the former, and in the case of Barbados, he argues that 'the revolt did not contribute to the progress of emancipation in Britain; in fact, quite the contrary.'²⁵⁸

Alternately, a small number of historians like David Lambert and Gelien Matthews have presented the argument that this rejection by Wilberforce and his allies was, in itself, a significant impact that would have more positive ramifications for British abolitionism. Lambert describes how, though perhaps not ideal, the rebellion, 'did result in an imperial declaration that emancipation was not the immediate object of government policy,' and as the aftermath developed into a war of blame and representation, the propaganda produced from both sides unearthed slave testimonies and debates over treatment and emancipation that would have otherwise remained buried.²⁵⁹ In this sense, even an abolitionist rejection was better than comfortable ignorance that had prevailed over issues of enslavement. The debate allowed 'some access to enslaved 'voices,' and as Matthews argues, forced the abolitionists to acknowledge slave rebellion and slavery itself for the first time since the abolition of the trade in 1807.²⁶⁰

Across the ocean, on the island, the immediate response of the plantocracy was marked by violence and bloodshed. It spoke not just of the barbarity of slavery, but of the terror that slave insurrection instilled in the white population

²⁵⁶ Drescher, *Abolition*, p.262.

²⁵⁷ Marques, 'Four Examples of a New Equation' in Drescher and Emmer, (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* pp. 72-75

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

²⁵⁹ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.109.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*.

that such a high death toll would result from a comparably non-violent rebellion. James Walvin has described the planter reaction as rooted in a ‘puzzled horror’ that their previously peaceful colony could so easily descend into chaos.²⁶¹ He argues that, ‘even by the standards of an age whose penal system was characterised by blood-letting and public execution, the fate of the rebellious slaves was grotesque.’²⁶² It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of rebel casualties, as the planter and abolitionist accounts offer wildly different statistics. In his first letter to England, less than two weeks after the uprising, Governor Leith stated that it was, ‘impossible with any certainty to state the numbers who have fallen,’ but he estimated that 50 men had been killed during the fighting, and 70 executed under martial law.²⁶³ In late September, he reported that the number of those condemned to death had risen to 144, while another 170 awaited their trials, and would eventually be sentenced to transportation to limit the rapidly rising death toll.²⁶⁴

These ‘trials’ were little more than a formality, where witnesses were brought to condemn the accused rebels, offering evidence of their involvement in exchange for leniency in their own sentences.²⁶⁵ Once the verdict had been given, the rebels were publically executed across all of the parishes, with the dual purpose of enforcing the law and providing a grim warning to any enslaved onlookers of the danger in resistance. It was an exercise in ‘psychological terror’ designed to create the strongest impact upon the innocent enslaved Barbadians and douse any further insurrectionary spirit that may still linger amongst them.²⁶⁶ Throughout the Barbados Assembly report’s testimonies there is evidence of this gruesome parade, where rebels were taken to different parts of the island ‘for the sake of example to the slaves.’²⁶⁷ Reverend John Frere Pilgrim, for example, was called to attend the hanging of Johnny, who was a carpenter belonging to Bayley’s plantation in the southeast, but was subsequently hanged upon Trent’s Hill in St. James’s parish on the west coast of the island.²⁶⁸ One of the leading rebels, Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin was

²⁶¹ Walvin, *Black Ivory*, p.236.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Letter from James Leith to Earl Bathurst, April 30th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁶⁴ Letter from James Leith to Earl Bathurst, September 21st 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁶⁵ See the court martial documents in: (CO 28/87)

²⁶⁶ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.37.

²⁶⁷ Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee of the House of Assembly...*, p.35.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.35-6.

also killed in this way, with his execution in the public square in Bridgetown even printed in the local newspaper to ensure maximum impact.²⁶⁹ In addition to this, the remains of many rebels, often only their heads, were displayed on their own plantations to restore a kind of fearful order amongst the enslaved men and women left behind.²⁷⁰

This alone would have been enough fuel to feed later accusations of planter barbarity in England, but there is evidence that the rebel death toll was far higher than the conservative estimates given by Leith. In his military account of the uprising, Colonel Codd described how ‘under the irritation of the moment and exasperated at the atrocity of the Insurgents, some of the Militia of the Parishes in Insurrection were induced to use their arms rather too indiscriminately in pursuit of the fugitives.’²⁷¹ This was confirmed by Rear Admiral Harvey, who was far more direct in his description of, ‘the Militia, who could not be restrained by the same discipline as the Troops, put many Men, Women & Children to Death, I fear without too much discrimination.’²⁷² Indeed, in the midst of the rebellion, the violence of the militia had reached such an alarming height that one government official was forced to issue a proclamation urging them to exercise more restraint in their suppression of the rebels, and offering a free pardon to any insurgents (except the leaders) who returned dutifully to their plantations without having to be rounded up.²⁷³ In light of this, it is not difficult to believe the other accounts smuggled out of the island in *Remarks*, and a private letter from St. Vincent’s, that over 1000 rebels had been killed before martial law had even been lifted.²⁷⁴

This vicious response from the plantocracy was not just intended to punish the guilty. It was designed to ensure that the 1816 rebellion was the *last* rebellion to disturb Barbadian soil. The public executions and trials were a threat to the enslaved, and the seeming overreaction by the white elite was borne out of a desperate desire to ensure that all insurrectionary spirit had been truly extinguished by their bloodthirsty retribution. Indeed, the planters’ response was

²⁶⁹ *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 2 July 1816.

²⁷⁰ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.265.

²⁷¹ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁷² Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.264.

²⁷³ From the draft of President Spooner’s proclamation, April 18th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁷⁴ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*.
Extract from a private letter, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

more a reflection of their own anxieties than anything else. They had been terrified of slave rebellion, and more importantly, slave revenge, before it had even happened, imagining the violent Haitian spectre that would infect their peaceful island with the arrival of Slave Registry. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the Easter uprising would leave their society 'shaken to the very root.'²⁷⁵ One of the most potent effects of the rebellion was the way in which this planter fear seemed to evolve into mass-insecurity in the weeks and months that followed, as something that had once only been imagined became a terrifying reality. Craton has written how the 'suppression of the rebellion seems to have doused neither the slaves' unrest nor the masters' brutally awakened fears,' and so one of the most lasting and powerful effects of the uprising was the way in which it solidified both of these mentalities in Barbadian society, in an irreversible social shift that would prove highly contagious throughout the West Indies in the coming years, and provide the abolitionist movement with valuable ammunition in their attack on the stability of slave-societies.²⁷⁶

Although it is difficult to measure the mentality of a community, evidence this 'social shift' amongst the plantocracy can be found in their responses to the uprising. As soon as Governor Leith had returned to the island, within two weeks of the rebellion's close, he issued a proclamation to the enslaved reiterating their unchanged and unchangeable condition.²⁷⁷ He dismissed any notion of emancipation and called upon them to 'return with cheerfulness' to their duties, but more revealingly, implored them not to force him to use the 'ample power' he possessed to 'crush the Refractory and punish the Guilty.'²⁷⁸ The fact that the Governor felt compelled to clearly outline the working population's position as slaves (in a rare example of a direct address to them), is illustrative of his continued concern that this message of 'natural' bondage was still lost on many enslaved Barbadians. Additionally, his ending of the proclamation, with a stark warning to any rebels still hidden amongst them, reveals that though the battle had been won, many of the white elite feared the war of slave resistance was far from finished. In another circular, issued two months later, Leith again provided a warning to any remaining rebels. He announced that he had, 'already pointed it out to the Slaves how impossible it

²⁷⁵ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.2.

²⁷⁶ Craton, 'Proto-Peasant Revolts?', p.105.

²⁷⁷ Proclamation of James Leith, April 26th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

would be that they should act with violence, without bringing down the severest punishment on those who should henceforward be concerned in any attempt to disturb the Public tranquillity.²⁷⁹

Alongside this seeming obsession with public punishment and order, the plantocracy's growing insecurity is revealed in their discussion of the rebellion. David Lambert argues that the revolt was 'pre-imagined' by the white elite, and it seems as though this sense of inevitability may have caused them not to focus on the relative non-violence and small scale of the rebellion, but instead the horrors that *could* have befallen the island.²⁸⁰ Many of those who reported upon the events appear to have been fixated upon this imagined, and narrowly avoided catastrophe, rather than what had actually transpired. In his first correspondence with the Colonial Office after the rebellion, Governor Leith speculated that there had been a 'premature bursting out of the Insurrection,' because of the 'intoxication of one of the Revolters,' and that the real rebellion was in fact scheduled to take place three days later.²⁸¹ He followed that, because of this, the damage inflicted was 'more partial than would have otherwise been the case.'²⁸² There is no documented evidence that this statement was true, and indeed there is an abundance of slave testimony that cites the Easter Monday as the date set for the uprising.²⁸³ In emphasising that it was simply by blind luck that the rebel activity was hindered by a drunk and disorderly member of their party, Leith dismisses any comfort gained from the limited damage caused to people and property by the actual rebellion, and instead weaves the horrors of an imagined and more dangerous revolt into the narrative of events.

In a similar vein, Colonel Codd's account of the rebellion reveals his speculation of what could have been. He described a scene from the midst of the rebellion, where several rebels told him that they planned to 'destroy' all of the white men on the island, 'reserving the Females, whose lot in case of success, it is easy to conceive.'²⁸⁴ This account, again projecting an imagined revolt onto the reality of the uprising, paints the rebels in a distinctly Haitian light, blinded by revenge and a thirst for the blood of white men and the bodies

²⁷⁹ Circular of James Leith, June 29th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁸⁰ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, pp.112-4.

²⁸¹ Letter from James Leith to Earl Bathurst, April 30th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ See Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*,

²⁸⁴ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

of white women. Once again, there is very little evidence to prove that this would have indeed happened, had the rebellion not been suppressed within three days. Despite ample opportunity, the rebels did not seek out whites to murder or rape, and so it seems as though Codd's account is distorted by the images of what he believed a slave uprising could and had been, in other times and on other islands, rather than what it actually was.

He continued his account by describing the flag carried by one of the rebels that 'served to inflame the passions,' depicting a black man and a white woman engaged in sexual intercourse.²⁸⁵ It is significant that he chose to highlight this particular rebel flag, as we have previously seen that the majority of banners carried by the enslaved during the uprising depicted far less controversial images. Codd's two observations, perhaps designed to tarnish the character of the rebels even more in the eyes of the plantocracy, or justify the violence of his militia, speak volumes of the intense sexual anxieties that underpinned their slave-society. Despite the non-existent threat of black rape of white women during the 1816 rebellion, the white elite seemed obsessed with its occurrence, as inevitable as it was illusory. From the way that Leith and Codd reported the uprising, they both seemed to envision an outcome that they were fortunate to avoid, and one that would undoubtedly come if the insurrectionary spirit brewing amongst the enslaved were not extinguished immediately.

Even more interesting than Codd's description of the rebel flag, is the case of two sketches of the same flag that have appeared in the primary material. In his description of white fear of black sexual revenge in *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition*, David Lambert illustrated his argument with a sketch of the 'endeavour' flag featuring images of Britain and empire (previously discussed in other chapters).²⁸⁶ This image was bound into an 1801 history of Barbados, housed in the New York Public Library.²⁸⁷ When Lambert was writing in 2005, this was the only image of the flag that was widely known to exist, and in his analysis of the sketch, he observed that it depicted, 'a black man and a woman of lighter colour holding hands,' and speculated about whether this was intended to show an interracial

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, pp.128-132.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p.128.

coupling similar to the flag described by Codd.²⁸⁸ Indeed, it is easy to come to this conclusion, as the image of white Britannia is drawn in the same shade. However, in 2011 Karl Watson identified another sketch of this flag in the British National Archives, which clearly depicts the couple as both being black Barbadians, and in the context of the surrounding images, seeks to display the rebel aspirations of respectability and marital rights.²⁸⁹ Though no physical flag still remains, it is likely that the latter copy was closer to the original, as it fits within the relatively conservative theme of its surroundings. It is revealing that the artist (undoubtedly a white militiaman or troop) chose to warp the rebels' image in order to create a more scandalous subject, and in doing so, confirm and encourage the sexual insecurities of the white elite.

In all, rather than dousing the plantocracy's fears of vicious slave revenge, the relatively small and non-violent rebellion only served to intensify and reveal them to their fullest extent. It did not matter that the rebels only killed three men and did not rape or assault any women, when the white elite had convinced themselves that they would have, had the opportunity arisen. And this terrifying idea, that the worst was narrowly avoided, and yet to come, would engulf the planter class in Barbados for as long as they remained atop the unstable pedestal of their slave-society. The atmosphere of resistance and discontent that seemed to still burn amongst the enslaved only exacerbated these fears. It took only five months for another slave conspiracy to be unearthed on the island. Though the September plot was much smaller, involving only 'two or three' enslaved men, it shook the island once again and caused a resurgence of fear and anxiety amongst the white population.²⁹⁰ Writing to the Colonial Office at the end of the month, Governor Leith described the disturbance as several men 'arrested for seditious conversation, tending to excite mutiny,' who had been turned in by a member of their group and were therefore unsuccessful in their attempts at armed resistance.²⁹¹ Though he assured that the island remained peaceful and untroubled by these events, later letters from other members of the Barbados government paint a rather more

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p.132.

²⁸⁹ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt Revisited', and see: (MFQ 1/112) British National Archives, for original flag sketch.

²⁹⁰ Letter from James Leith to Earl Bathurst, September 21st 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁹¹ Ibid.

Beckles, 'The Slave-Drivers' War' in Howe and Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse*, p.27.

anxious scene. In a letter from Thomas Moody (Leith's aid de camp and secretary) two weeks later, he recounted how a man named Billy had been executed for his part in the conspiracy.²⁹² He also described another incident, where an enslaved man had been arrested for attempting to poison his master and was awaiting his trial.²⁹³ Moody revealed how these two events had 'excited much alarm and uneasiness in the minds of the Inhabitants,' and that the island was not, in fact, existing in a state of sleepy tranquillity.²⁹⁴

Also illuminative of the state of Barbadian society after the rebellion is another letter, dated the 6th June and existing only as an extract in the British National Archives with no author or recipient noted. It describes how:

'the disposition of the Slaves in general is very bad. They are sullen & sulky and seem to cherish feelings of deep revenge. We hold the West Indies by a very precarious tenure – that of military strength only and if they do not change at home their system... I would not give a year's purchase for any Island we have excepting Trinidad, where the system of Government is very superior and the character of the population totally different.'²⁹⁵

It would seem that the violent suppression of the uprising had done little to dampen the enslaved's spirit of resistance. The plantocracy, so obsessed with alternative outcomes of the late rebellion, could find ample proof to support their ever-growing fears. Rather than punishing the rebels into submission, the 'bloodletting' that followed the Easter revolt had only intensified a feeling of 'revenge' amongst the enslaved, that would spread like wildfire across the West Indies in the months and years that followed. Indeed, later that same year a group of enslaved men in Jamaica were convicted of stirring insurrection with a song containing the lines, 'Oh me good friend Mr. Wilberforce, make we free!' and 'Buckra [white men] in this country no make we free! What negro for to do?...Take with force!'²⁹⁶

²⁹² Letter from Thomas Moody to Goulburn, October 14th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Extract from a private letter, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

²⁹⁶ Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 319-20.

In the wake of these conspiracies the speaker of the Barbados Assembly announced that, 'the Insurrection has been quelled, but the spirit is not subdued... nor will it ever be subdued whilst these dangerous doctrines which have been spread abroad continue to be propagated among the Slaves.'²⁹⁷ He implored the plantocracy to 'be upon guard, to keep a watch that we may not again be caught so shamefully unprepared,' lest the safety of their homes and of the island be threatened again.²⁹⁸ They illustrated this insecurity and desire to become better prepared for any oncoming storms of slave resistance by passing acts to strengthen the island militia, and to outlaw the meetings of slaves over holidays and the possession of weapons or instruments like drums that could be used to incite rebellion.²⁹⁹

Mass-insecurity did not only spread within the borders of Barbados. Along with the tide of enslaved discontent, so too the white elite of neighbouring islands became consumed with fear as they heard of the events that had shaken their quiet neighbouring isle. As Adam Hochschild writes, 'the effects of the rebellion reverberated through the British Caribbean.'³⁰⁰ A month after the uprising, the Governor of Demerara issued an address that warned his enslaved subjects that should they be led astray by 'the contagion of this mad insurrection' that he would 'be among [them] like an arrow from a bow to execute an instant and terrible Justice on the guilty,' and that, considering the great power of Britain, 'what could an undisciplined mob of Negroes expect, should it rouse the sleeping lion – but destruction?'³⁰¹ Similarly, in August, an address from Antigua stressed the need for a more organised and stronger island militia to protect themselves from acts of enslaved resistance far closer to home.³⁰² It is clear that one of the most powerful effects of the 1816 uprising was the intoxicating impact upon both the enslaved's and the planter psyche, where discontent and fear seemed to permeate all facets of life in Barbados and beyond her borders to other slave-societies in the Caribbean, where the

²⁹⁷ Quoted in: Beckles, 'The Slave-Drivers' War' in Howe and Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse*, p.28.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 17 August 1816. (Barbados Public Library)

Ibid., 20 August 1816.

³⁰⁰ Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, p.319.

³⁰¹ *Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette*, 14 May 1816. (Barbados Public Library)

³⁰² Ibid, 13 August 1816.

plantocracy were reminded that as long as slavery reigned they would exist at the precipice of rebellion.

Long Term

Michael Craton has argued that, 'in the long view, none of the slave rebellions was a failure.'³⁰³ It is true that the most powerful and lasting impacts of the Barbados uprising were the slowest to burn, and most became far more significant in light of the later revolts in Demerara and Jamaica in 1823 and 1831. Together, these rebellions would prove to be a powerful force in the emancipation debate waging in Britain, where they provided the most compelling evidence that slavery could not be ameliorated, and was simply too dangerous, expensive and unstable to continue. The 1816 uprising signalled the beginning of a series of revolts that were starkly different from those that had come before. The rebels of Barbados, Demerara and Jamaica all demonstrated a political awareness of British abolitionism, and an attempt at engaging with the antislavery movement themselves through their non-violent resistance.

In the years following the ending of the slave trade, there was a general belief amongst the pro and antislavery movement that creolisation and amelioration of enslaved communities would lead to a more stable society.³⁰⁴ The plantocracy used this reasoning to dismiss any claims that cruelty prompted slave resistance, whilst the abolitionists implemented it as one of their most powerful arguments against the transportation of new enslaved Africans. The 1816 revolt in Barbados shattered these theories about slave behaviour, by rebelling as a distinctly creole community in the midst of ameliorative changes to their condition. In short, their resistance created a problem for both sides of the slavery debate. Because of this, though sceptical about the influence of the revolt, Drescher has conceded that the uprising was successful in subverting, 'the assumptions of both sides of the debate' about the 'safety of even the most creolized and assimilated slave colonies.'³⁰⁵ The resistance of the Bajan rebels revealed that discontent could fester in even the most peaceful of sugar

³⁰³ Craton, 'Proto-Peasant Revolts?', p.124.

³⁰⁴ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.241.

³⁰⁵ Drescher, *Abolition*, p.254.

colonies, and undermined the old plantocratic ruse of a happy enslaved population.

Though it may seem obvious to a modern observer, one of the most powerful messages of the 1816 uprising was that the enslaved men and women in Barbados were unhappy. They were unhappy enough, in fact, to risk their lives in pursuit of vague rumours of freedom despite their incalculably poor odds of success. Amelioration made very little impact on a population still living in absolute oppression, when they believed that the 'island belonged to them,' and slightly better treatment or living conditions would not satiate any desire for emancipation once they thought it might finally be possible.³⁰⁶ As Beckles argues, 'they proved to the English Parliament that, contrary to the assertions of the planter, they were not content with their status as slaves, and that their intention was to free themselves by force of arms, as imperial reformist measures seemed unduly slow, if not unreliable.'³⁰⁷

The 1816 uprising was the first of its kind in the British West Indies, where catalysts outside of their island's borders proved just as influential to the rebels as those much closer to home. Bussa, Franklin, Grigg, Jackey and others set fire to the symbols and tools of their enslavement in a demonstration against slavery itself, instilled with hope from their perceived allies in Britain and the example left by Haitian freedom. The most compelling evidence for this abolitionist influence lies in the non-violence of the rebels, which as Drescher and David Brion Davis have both argued, 'revealed important facets of slave behaviour' that would resurface in both the Demerara and Jamaican uprisings.³⁰⁸ After 1816 a shift had occurred in the enslaved population, but it was not just the reinforcing of resistance, it was the way in which slave communities would translate this discontent into peaceful, political uprisings that would reverberate the loudest in the halls of Parliament.

Though it is hard to measure, it is also possible that the insurrectionary spirit instilled by the Barbados uprising was influential upon the Demerara and

³⁰⁶ Letter from Colonel Codd to James Leith, April 25th 1816, (CO 28/85)

³⁰⁷ Beckles, 'The Slave-Drivers' War' in Howe and Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse*, p.25.

³⁰⁸ Drescher, 'Civilising Insurgency' in Drescher, and Emmer, (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*, p.125.

Davis, 'Slave Revolts and Abolitionism' in Drescher, and Emmer, (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*

Jamaica rebellions of later years. From the proclamations of the governors, and the evidence of how easily news of slave resistance seemed to permeate enslaved communities across the Caribbean, we can assume that the 1823 and 1831 rebels also knew of the events that had befallen their eastern neighbour in 1816. There is some support for this theory in the testimonies from after the Demerara uprising, where a enslaved man named Sandy recalled the rebel leader, Quamina, telling him 'that we must contrive [the revolt] better than the Barbados business,' and that 'the negroes, on rising in Barbados, commenced killing people and then suffered for it.'³⁰⁹ Though slightly misinformed about the actions of the Bajan rebels, Quamina's words illustrate how the news of the 1816 rebellion, and its failure, had influenced their insurrectionary plans. It is interesting that the perceived violence of the Barbados rebels seems to have reinforced the decision to demonstrate against slavery as peacefully as possible. It is debateable whether or not the wave of rebellious discontent that followed the 1816 uprising was contagious enough to have had a great impact upon rebels acting seven years later, but it is true that both the Demerara and Jamaica rebellions were similarly influenced by abolitionist activity in Britain, and as such are marked by significant similarities in their causes and nature. At a time when support for slavery seemed to be weakening, the rebels of Demerara and Jamaica rose in revolt in the knowledge that their neighbouring enslaved communities had also done so, though each time convinced that it was through their blunders alone that their fellow West-Indians had been unsuccessful in their endeavours, and that for them it would be different.

Though each of these uprisings (and Barbados in particular), all mercilessly crushed by the plantocracy, seems to have had marginal impact upon the antislavery movement individually, their collective influence was powerful. Beginning with Barbados, the increasing occurrences of these mass slave risings in the sugar colonies began to illustrate the 'cycle of violence,' inescapably linked with plantation slavery. There was a growing sense of inevitability as news of the slave rebellions reached Britain, each one larger and more economically destructive than the last, and each time an ever-growing slave death-toll mounted against the plantocracy's names. Once the abolitionists had made their peace with emancipation, they began to use this barbarity as one of their most powerful weapons against the inhuman institution,

³⁰⁹ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p.280.

and so 'convinced ever more people... that slavery was a doomed and barbaric institution.'³¹⁰ James Walvin has argued that the frequency and worsening of the late rebellions began to illustrate 'a dreadful spiral of violence and counter violence which increasingly appalled and ashamed observers in Britain.'³¹¹ In the wake of the 1823 uprising, the Governor of Barbados wrote to the Colonial Office, 'now the ball has begun to roll, nobody can say when or where it is to stop,' and it was with this sense of inescapable certainty of more to come that both the fearful plantocracy and the antislavery forces in Britain began to view slave rebellion.³¹²

It was slowly becoming clear that slavery could only exist under absolute oppression and sickening violence, and that an antislavery campaign rooted in gradual amelioration was misguided in their hopes for a peaceful transition to emancipation. It is because of this evolution of abolitionist thought that several historians, like Michael Craton and Hilary Beckles argue that the late slave uprisings were important. In illustrating their discontent the rebels of all three islands refuted planter propaganda that ran contrary to this.³¹³ They both suggest that without the evidence provided by slave rebels, emancipation may have been significantly more delayed, while David Brion Davis has also argued that had the uprisings taken on a far more violent and Haitian flavour, freedom could have been similarly hindered.³¹⁴ It was, therefore, the frequency and non-violent nature of these uprisings that had the most impact upon British abolitionism. Though limited in impact alone, the Barbados rebellion was an important part of this, as the first of these distinct expressions of antislavery activity in the West Indies and a major contributor to the sense of inevitability that began to surround slave resistance by the time the Jamaican rebels took up arms in the winter of 1831.

Another significant and slow-burning effect of the 1816 uprising was that upon British abolitionism. Though the actions of the Barbadian rebels made a

³¹⁰ Walvin, (ed.), *Slavery and British Society*, p.11.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

³¹² E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (North Carolina, 1944), p.205.

³¹³ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 242.

Beckles, *Bussa*, p.41.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Davis, 'Slave Revolts and Abolitionism' in Drescher, and Emmer, (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*, p.167.

comparatively small dent in the progress towards emancipation, they did force the antislavery movement to address slavery and slave revolts, as they had never done before. While they initially tried to distance themselves from the rebel slaves and burning plantations in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, they soon realised that they could not reconcile the images of the enslaved that had characterised their previous campaigns with a dismissal of enslaved uprising. The transition of abolitionist thought and propaganda in the years following the Barbados rebellion is, therefore, an effective way of measuring its influence upon antislavery. Gelien Matthews is the only historian who has conducted a detailed study into this, and she astutely argues that the abolitionist response to the 1816 revolt was 'far more complex' than the dismissal and stagnation described by many other scholars.³¹⁵ Wilberforce and his contemporaries' evolving perception of slavery and enslavement in the context of rebellion would eventually provide a highly effective propaganda campaign by the time the Demerara insurgents revolted in 1823, upon the foundations built in the aftermath of Barbados.

Seymour Drescher argues that, 'in the wake of Barbados, British abolitionists skilfully developed arguments to mitigate and even defend the slaves' resistance,' though their response was still tainted by defensiveness and dismissal.³¹⁶ This would not prove to be an easy transition. The antislavery propaganda campaign had relied heavily on images that portrayed enslaved Africans as passive and docile to counter traditional ideas about black brutality that had prevailed in British popular consciousness. The mass-produced images of a kneeling, chained and pleading enslaved man etched onto the Wedgwood medallion embodied this constructed character, designed to evoke a comfortable and righteous sympathy from the onlooker. It was an image that did not allow room for the destructive agency of slave resistance, or indeed for an enslaved population who would not wait meekly for a slow salvation, delivered from England once the abolitionist movement had finally made their peace with emancipation. It is because of this confliction that the antislavery movement distanced themselves from the 1816 rebels, who they did not believe could fit neatly into their already established ideas of a slave worthy of sympathy and redemption.

³¹⁵ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.3.

³¹⁶ Drescher, 'Civilising Insurgency' in Drescher, and Emmer, (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?*, p.125.

However, this tactic was inherently flawed, as by refusing to acknowledge their influence over the rebels' decision to take up arms and by condemning their resistance, they limited themselves considerably. The links between slave rebellion and British antislavery were undeniable, and when the insurrectionary spirit of the colonies seemed all but quelled the abolitionists were forced to change their position, or otherwise allow the proslavery discourse to dominate the narrative of the uprising and reveal the fault of their movement. Matthews writes how the 1816 revolt 'provided both pro and antislavery advocates with the first concrete basis for examining the issue of servile warfare within the context of abolitionism.'³¹⁷ And so the roots of the transition began with the Bajan rebels, who essentially forced the antislavery movement to address their discontent and create room for their contesting expressions of suffering within the existing abolitionist rhetoric and imagery. They had illustrated quite plainly that amelioration was not working, and dismissed any notion that it was African brutality and volatility that sparked insurrection. While at the same time, the rebels also forced the plantocracy to defend themselves against accusations of barbarity and cruelty, and in this sense, became 'actively involved' in challenging 'articulations of colonial whiteness.'³¹⁸

Matthews argues that, 'faced with a challenge of finding a way to not let slave revolts hinder their campaign against slavery, the abolitionists presented to Parliament and a restricted public the hidden side of slave revolts – a side that was more sympathetic,' and that, beginning with Barbados, 'slaves swung abolitionists' reflections on slave revolts away from a defensive strategy to a concentrated analysis of the revolts themselves.'³¹⁹ This approach began, in part, with the anonymous pamphlet *Remarks*, which emphasised the violence and cruelty of the Barbadian plantocracy and island militia, contrasted against the limited and non-violent nature of the rebellion.³²⁰ The author questioned whether the brutal suppression of the uprising would have ever occurred outside of the barbaric social sphere of a slave colony, writing that, 'it is not so that insurrections are suppressed in England; and yet these are our fellow

³¹⁷ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.21.

³¹⁸ See Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee...*, for planter defenses.

Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.139.

³¹⁹ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.95.

³²⁰ Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados*.

subjects.³²¹ David Lambert argues that this last line referred to the unrestrained violence of the militia that served 'as a marker of their 'un-Englishness'.³²² He continues that 'such representations of the revolt mapped a spatial imaginary in which Barbados's aberrant status was emphasised and members of its white population were portrayed as violent, sadistic creoles.'³²³ Though the pamphlet adopted a similar defensive strategy of abolitionist distancing, and they presented local causes and planter cruelty as the catalysts for rebellion, rather than slavery itself, they were not so quick to dismiss the actions of the rebels, but instead condemned the plantocracy's brutality as the true crime of the uprising.

Wilberforce, too, began to echo similar sentiments. He argued that the, 'degraded race [was] pressed by a weight which they felt intolerable' and that the catalyst had been 'impatience under suffering' more than anything else.³²⁴ Though he reiterated that it was cruel enslavement, rather than enslavement itself that provided the main stimulus to action, this was still by far the most sympathetic depiction of slave rebellion to have ever been expressed in the halls of Parliament. The abolitionist movement began to tentatively employ some of the propaganda techniques that would characterise the aftermaths of the Demerara and Jamaica uprisings. They used the pain of the convicted rebels as ammunition against the plantocracy, and as Matthews argues, their writings 'attacked the excessive vindictiveness of the planters' initial moves to crush the revolt and emphasised the pitiable position of the slaves.'³²⁵ Abolitionist Thomas Fowell Buxton described to Parliament, the wake of the insurrection, marked by 'blood not of whites but of blacks in abundance.'³²⁶

Though this approach would become far more effective after the 1823 and 1831 risings, the influence the Barbadian rebels had upon this shift was significant. They had forced the abolitionists to redefine the *object* of their sympathy, from a docile and hardworking slave to one brutally executed for resisting the unendurable burden of a cruel enslavement. However, this narrative of sympathy, rather than empathy, did nothing to elevate the conscious participation of the rebel slaves in their attempt to effect their own

³²¹ Ibid., p.8.

³²² Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, p.117.

³²³ Ibid., p.118.

³²⁴ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.68.

³²⁵ Ibid., p.105.

³²⁶ Ibid.

emancipation. In order for the abolitionists to *use* the insurrection in their propaganda the rebel slave had to be depicted in absolute oppression and degradation, where their blood was their most powerful symbol of the inhumanity of slavery. Matthews describes this removal of agency, arguing that 'to elevate the slaves they had first to be pictured in the most miserable terms. In their absolute suffering they attained a purity that was beyond reproach. It was a purity earned by being outside of power and the victims of power.'³²⁷

Despite the problematic nature of this approach, the Barbadian rebels had still succeeded in turning the focus of the abolitionist movement towards slavery itself. For the first time, the antislavery lobby was compelled to address the endemic, everyday cruelty and inhumanity that reigned in the slave-societies of the West Indies, rather than aboard the slave ships that had delivered the rebel's ancestors to their fates before the 1807 abolition. Though Wilberforce and Buxton's cautious reflections on the uprising were relatively conservative compared to the whole-hearted utilisation of the Jamaican rebellion by 1831, their reactions to the events in Barbados served as a kind of turning point in antislavery rhetoric. By focussing on the suffering of the executed rebels and condemning the viciousness of the plantocracy, they began to paint slave rebellion as a kind of necessary evil, where the true savages were not the enslaved setting their plantations alight, but the men punishing fires and looting with murder on a unprecedented scale. Historians David Eltis and Stanley Engerman have described the progress towards emancipation as the 'continual shrinking of the eligibility criteria for enslavement as well as major shifts in what was considered to be acceptable levels of cruelty,' and though at first glance the 1816 uprising may have been a setback for abolitionism, it is arguable that the long-term response to this rebellion illustrated a remarkable transition in both categories.³²⁸

The most lasting, and often most neglected effect of the 1816 uprising is that which still resonates in the present day. Bussa and his fellow rebels did not just instil a spirit of resistance in the working population in the immediate aftermath of the revolt, or even until the end of slavery on the island in the 1830s, but came to represent defiant Barbadian agency throughout the nation's progress

³²⁷ Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts*, p.133.

³²⁸ D. Eltis, and S. L. Engerman in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010), p.148.

towards freedom and independence. It does not matter to the majority of modern Barbadians that the uprising was unsuccessful, and indeed the deaths of the rebels has served only to create martyrs for emancipation and, more broadly, the development of national autonomy. What matters to those whose history exists in the shadow of two hundred years of enslavement is that there are moments of light and rebellion amidst the darkness. With the Emancipation Statue colloquially renamed after Bussa, the rebel leader has come to personify freedom itself, and as David Lambert argues, symbolise 'the struggle against slavery, colonialism and white domination.'³²⁹ Modern Bajans are under no impression that emancipation was achieved through the actions of the 1816 rebels alone, but it is significant that they have chosen that moment in their history to revere and remember above all others. It is revealing of the importance of the uprising in the forging of national identity and pride that Barbados' most significant memorial to slavery has been reclaimed and redeemed as a symbol of resistance.

I have argued in a previous chapter that one of the most powerful catalysts in sparking the rebellion was a growing sense of nationalism and cultural identity amongst the enslaved in Barbados. It is unsurprising, therefore, that this trend continued in the wake of the uprising, intensified by the discontent and insurrectionary spirit of the failed revolt. The sense of ownership and community that had proved so important in drumming up support for the rebel cause was not extinguished by the violent retribution of the plantocracy, but instead the two became inextricably linked as rebellion became symbolic in the struggle for national and cultural identity outside of the constraints of colonialism and enslavement. We can see the influence of the uprising in the reports of the 1876 labour riots, when fears abounded that slavery might be reinstated, and the protestors recalled Bussa's name in their threats of violent rebellion.³³⁰ Though sixty years and emancipation had passed since the slave rising, the rebels had lived on in the oral histories of the island, and had come to represent defiance in the face of oppression. Similarly we can also nationalistic echoes of the uprising in the endurance of the rebel slogan 'endeavour' in the popular culture of the island, as a 'favourite' house name for working class

³²⁹ Lambert, *White Creole Culture*, pp. 110-11.

³³⁰ British Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence and Papers Relating to the Federation of the Leeward Islands...*

Bajans in the late 1800s.³³¹ Karl Watson's describes how, 'the continuity is evident in the process from emancipation of self to ownership of property, especially one that is so meaningful to the Barbadian, house ownership.'³³²

Hilary Beckles has argued that Bussa has emerged 'within the folk tradition as a fighter for liberty and champion of humanism.'³³³ While Michael Craton has likewise described how 'today it is the name of Bussa, not those of Governor Leith, Colonel Codd, or even Joseph Franklin, which is remembered by ordinary Barbadians.'³³⁴ Though the focus on Bussa is perhaps damaging to the preservation of an accurate and inclusive memory of the uprising, as it distorts the narrative of the rebellion from a truly collective and community-driven affair, it seems as though he has come to personify historical Barbadian resistance. His immortalisation, in the renaming of the Emancipation Statue and National Hero status, has ensured that the memory of the 1816 rebellion has been preserved in the popular historical consciousness of the island. The bicentenary celebrations of the rebellion illustrated this elevation of Bussa as much as it demonstrated the importance of the uprising to ordinary Barbadians. In particular, the performance on the last evening of the events, 'From Bussa to Barrow and Beyond,' which was designed to celebrate both the bicentenary as well as fifty years of Barbadian independence, illuminated the cultural significance of the 1816 uprising on the island. The play, in which the Easter rebellion was marked as the first step towards independence and personal, cultural and political emancipation, was revealing of the importance of Bussa and his fellow rebels to the sense of national identity and pride in its content, and its overwhelming attendance.

Conclusion

It is understandable, considering the deep ties that have formed between the 1816 uprising and a popular sense of national and cultural identity, that the historiography of the rebellion is marked by a kind of emotional ideology. When the events of three days, two hundred years ago, have come to represent the beginnings of a national history instilled with agency to counter the generations

³³¹ Watson, 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt and Some Brief Comments', p.45.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Beckles, *Bussa*, p.2.

³³⁴ Craton, 'Proto-Peasant Revolts?', p.124.

of oppression, it is easy to see how historians would search for meaning and impact from the uprising that would elevate it even further. However, this national importance is impact in itself. The weight of the 1816 rebellion needn't only be measured in its tangible effect upon the British abolitionist movement and therefore upon emancipation itself. It is equally significant that the actions of Bussa, Franklin, Jackey, Grigg, Davis and others still resonate so powerfully to modern day Barbadians, and have come to represent defiance in the face of subjugation and oppression throughout modern history of the island.

While the immediate impact of the insurrection upon British abolitionism came in the form of distancing and dismissal, prompting many historians to themselves dismiss the events as counterproductive to the antislavery cause, focussing on this response alone is arguably too simplistic. It is revealing of their perceptions of enslaved people, and slavery itself, that a relatively small and non-violent rebellion initially elicited such a reaction from the abolitionists, who became faced with the problem of reconciling these views and their conflicting propaganda images with that of a slave in revolt. Forced to accommodate enslaved resistance into their campaign by the actions of the Bajan rebels, the transition of antislavery thought in the intervening years between Barbados and Demerara is illuminating of the subtle shift from condemnation to sympathy. And despite the fact that the new images of executed rebels were just as stripped of agency as the passive slaves of previous years, the actions of the enslaved Barbadians were behind these changes. They had forced the abolitionist movement to acknowledge their enslavement and lay the foundations for the realisations that the cruelty of slavery could not be improved or ameliorated by small acts of legislation.

The immediate, local effects of the uprising were far more obvious. The obscene violence of the plantocracy in their punishing of the rebels did not just reveal the inhumanity of slavery, but also the intense and mass insecurity unearthed by the revolt. The white elite became obsessed with what could have happened, and the terrors awaiting them if they did not act quickly to stamp out the insurrectionary spirit that was intensifying amongst the enslaved. The Easter uprising had confirmed their worst fears about the volatility of their society, and the contagion of anxiety soon spread throughout the Caribbean as news of mass resistance travelled to the neighbouring islands. Quite as contagious was the resistant and discontent mood of the enslaved, which

manifested itself in several small plots throughout the year. While it is debatable just how much influence the 1816 rebellion had upon the Demerara and Jamaica risings of later years, the Bajan rebels were the first to illustrate a new kind of enslaved insurrection, instilled as they were with antislavery ideology, that would come to characterise all of the late West Indian slave revolts.

Appendix I


This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Emancipation Statue of Barbados

(Source: <http://mapio.net/o/890728/>)

Appendix II

FREEDOM FIGHTER BUSSA & THE 1816 REBELLION



This year, 2016, marks the bicentenary of an uprising in Barbados which sent shock waves throughout the island and which has been recorded as a significant historic event in the history of Barbados. The 1816 insurrection, widely known as the Bussa Rebellion was a catalyst which prompted the stakeholders to pay attention to the plight of the enslaved population whose rights and freedom were suppressed by the institution of slavery.

Throughout the Caribbean, the enslaved Africans resisted slavery at all costs. Even though there were pockets of resistance on several sugar plantations, the 1816 insurrection was the first slave uprising in Barbados for 124 years. It was an attempt by the enslaved population to militarily defeat the plantocracy and destroy the slave system. They seized the opportunity to accomplish their goal following the passage of a Registry Bill in Great Britain in 1815. This Bill, which was sent to the Barbados Assembly provided for the registration of all West Indian enslaved workers in an attempt to prevent any illegal importation into the colonies. The Bill was discussed and rejected by the plantocracy who interpreted it as part of William Wilberforce's emancipation plan. On the other hand, the elite slaves viewed the Bill as their 'freedom paper'. They believed that rejection of the Bill by the planter class meant that freedom had eluded them; hence, self-liberation was the only avenue to obtain their independence from the oppression of slavery.

One of the major freedom fighters was Bussa, an African who arrived in Barbados before the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807. According to Sir Hilary Beckles, Bussa, a head ranger at Bayley's Plantation in St. Philip, enjoyed privileges which corresponded with his rank. Additionally, he was entrusted with great authority by the manager over his fellow blacks. No doubt in his role as head ranger, he would have interacted with persons from neighbouring estates to organise and execute his plan. Names such as Joseph Pitt Washington Franklin, Jackey, the driver at Simmons' estate, King Wiltshire, a carpenter at Bayley's and Nanny Grigg, a domestic at Simmons are mentioned in the literature as Bussa's co-conspirators, who played major roles in the rebellion which began on Easter Sunday, April 14, 1816. This uprising was not spontaneous; it was planned, organised and executed by approximately 5000 slaves on several estates. The outbreak of extensive arson started at Bayley's plantation before spreading to neighbouring St. John, St. George, St. Thomas, Christ Church and parts of St. Michael.

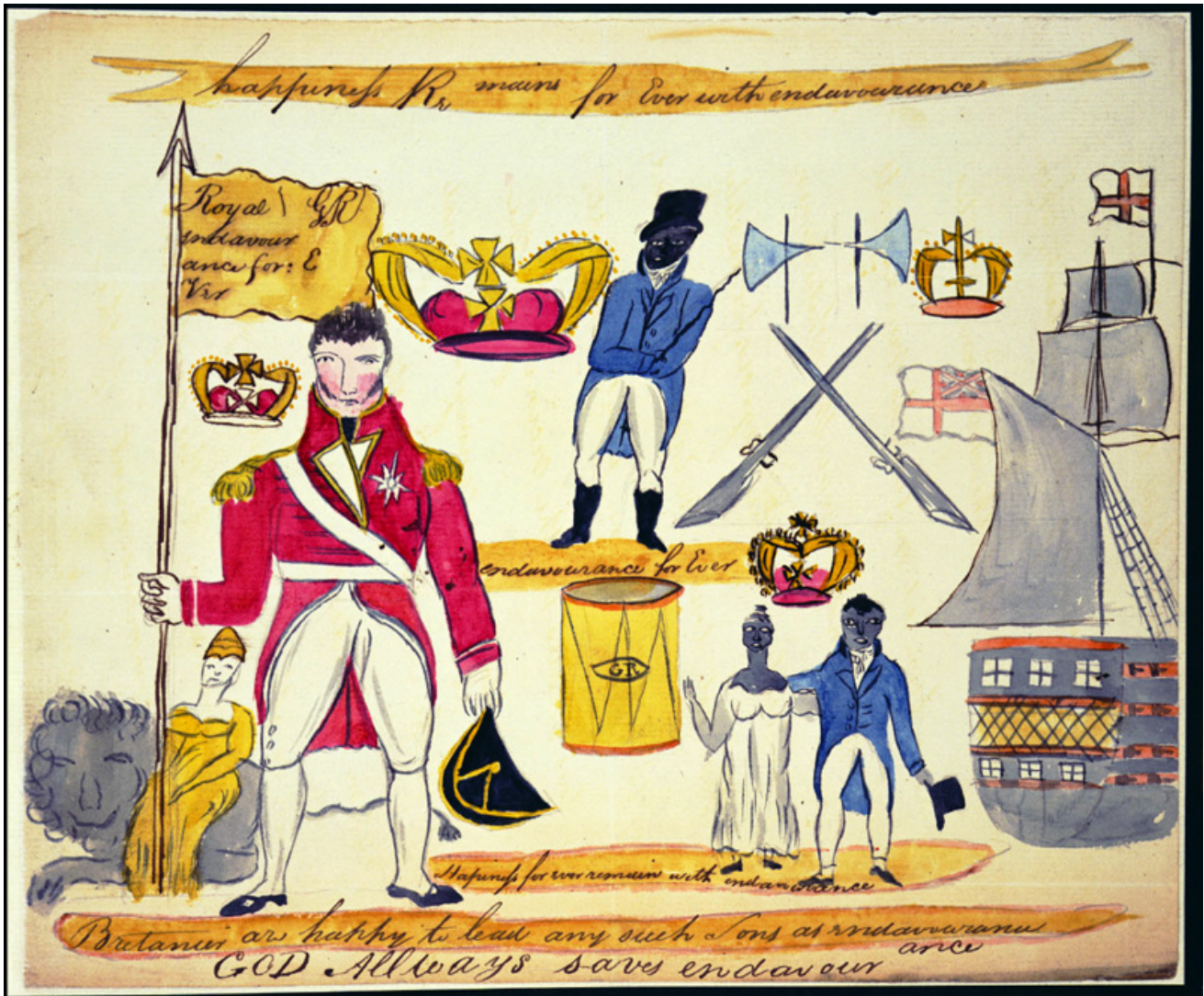
Bussa led approximately 400 men against the troops of the First West India Regiment who were deployed on the morning of Monday, April 15 when Martial Law was declared. The weaponry used by the slaves was no match for the superior fire power of the militia forces and it was probably during this battle that Bussa was killed. Nonetheless, the rebels from the various estates continued to fight for their freedom until they were eventually defeated by the militia forces. Though the rebellion was short-lived (4 days), the consequences were severe. Approximately 50 enslaved persons died in battle, 70 were sentenced to death and 144 were executed under Martial Law. In January 1817, prisoners who participated in the rebellion were transported to Honduras and later to Africa. Damages to property were estimated by the Assembly's investigative committee at £175,000 and approximately 25 % of the year's sugar crop was burnt. Even though the rebels had lost the battle, the 1816 Rebellion can be categorised as a significant landmark in the fight against the institution of slavery in Barbados.

Bussa's fight for freedom and his self-sacrifice has been recognised by the government of Barbados. In April 1998, he was one of ten persons accorded the status of "National Hero".

The main display at the Barbados Public Library to accompany a lecture on the revolt

(Source: personal photo)

Appendix III



Sketch of the rebel flag

Housed in the British National Archives (MFQ 1/112)

Appendix V

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

An example of the Josiah Wedgwood slave medallion, inscribed with the words 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' (1787)

Taken from the British Museum website:

(Source:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_mla/a/anti-slavery_medallion_by_jos.aspx)

Bibliography

Primary

Collections: CO 28/85 British National Archives

CO 28/87 British National Archives

MFQ 1/112 British National Archives

Anonymous, *Remarks on the Insurrection in Barbados and the Bill for the Registration of Slaves* (London, 1816)

Barbados House of Assembly, *The report from a select committee of the House of Assembly, appointed to enquire into the origin, causes, and progresses of the late insurrection* (Barbados, 1818)

Barbados Mercury and Bridgetown Gazette, November 1815 – August 1816
(Barbados Public Library)

British Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence and Papers Relating to the Federation of the Leeward Islands of the West Indies and Recent Disturbances in Barbados 1871-76*, vol. 9 (1971)

Daily Nation, 18 April 2016.

Hansard. 13 June 1815.

Jordan, G. W. 'An Examination of the Principles of the Slave Registry Bill and the Means of Emancipation' in *West Indian Slavery: Selected Pamphlets* (London, 1816)

Sinkler, G. E. *Handbook of Barbados* (London, 1912)

Schomburgh, R. H. *The History of Barbados: A Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island* (London, 1848)

Stark, J. *Stark's History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands* (London, 1903)

The Times, 5 June 1816.

Can access baptism record here: <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QJ8R-F2Y3>

Secondary

Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities* (1983)

Beckles, H. *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market* (Cambridge, 2006)

Beckles, H. 'All Salute General Bussa,' *Sunday Sun*, 9 April 2000.

Beckles, H. *Bussa: The 1816 Revolution in Barbados* (Barbados, 1998)

Beckles, H. 'General Bussa,' *Daily Nation*, 5 April 2000.

Beckles, H. 'Hard Labour: Women, Childbirth and Resistance in British Caribbean Slave Societies', *History Workshop Journal* 36 (1993)

Beckles, H. 'João Pedro Marques, Slave Revolts and the Abolition of Slavery: A Misinterpretation' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010)

Beckles, H. and Shepherd, V. *Liberties Lost: Caribbean Indigenous Societies and Slave Systems* (Cambridge, 2004)

Beckles, H. 'The Slave-Drivers' War: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion' in G. D. Howe and D. D. Marshall (eds.) *The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (Jamaica, 2001)

Blackburn, R. *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London, 1988)

Carey, B. Ellis, M. and Salih, S (eds.) *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its colonies, 1760-1838* (Basingstoke, 2004)

Craton, M. *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Jamaica, 1997)

Craton, M. 'Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816-1832', *Past and Present* 85 (1979)

Craton, M. 'Slave Culture, Resistance and Emancipation' in Walvin, J. (ed.) *Slavery and British Society* (London, 1982)

Craton, M. *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Cornell, 2009)

Davis, D. B. *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, 2006)

Davis, D. B. 'The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Anti-Slavery Thought', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (1962)

Davis, D. B. 'Slave Revolts and Abolitionism' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010)

Davis, D. B. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (2006)

Davis, D. B. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (1999)

Drescher, S. *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009)

Drescher, S. 'Antislavery Debates: Tides of Historiography in Slavery and Antislavery', *European Review* 68 (1995)

Drescher, S. 'Civilising Insurgency: Two Variants of Slave Revolts in the Age of Revolution' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010)

Drescher, S. *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977)

Drescher, S. 'Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade', *Past and Present* 143 (1994)

Faulkner, C. 'The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860', *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007)

Geggus, D. 'Slave Resistance and Emancipation: The Case of Saint-Domingue' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010)

Guyatt, M. 'The Wedgewood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-century Design', *Journal of Design History* 13 (2000)

Handler, J. 'Evidence and Dogma,' *Sunday Advocate*, 16 April 2000.

Beckles, H. 'Handler's Property, Part 1,' *Sunday Nation*. 23 April 2000.

Beckles, H. 'Handlers Property, Part 2,' *Sunday Nation*. 30 April 2000.

Handler, J. 'More on the 1816 Revolt,' *Sunday Advocate*, 30 April 2000.

- Handler, J. 'Plantation Slave Settlements in Barbados, 1650s to 1834' in A. O. Thompson (ed.) *In the Shadow of the Plantation* (Jamaica, 2002)
- Handler, J. 'Slave Revolts and Conspiracies in Seventeenth-Century Barbados', *New West Indian Guide* 56 (1982)
- Handler, J. 'The Barbados Slave Insurrection of 1816: Can it be properly Called 'Bussa's Rebellion?'' *Sunday Advocate*, 26 March 2000.
- Hochschild, A. *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (New York, 2005)
- Matthews, G. *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Louisiana, 2012)
- Marques, J. P. 'Four Examples of a New Equation' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010)
- Morris, R. 'The 1816 Uprising – A Hell Broth', *Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society* 46 (2000)
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins* (1938)
- Kadish, D. Y. 'The Black Terror: Women's Responses to Slave Revolts in Haiti', *The French Review* 19 (1995)
- Lambert, D. *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (New York, 2005)
- Lumsden, D. 'Bussa 'Hero of All Heroes,' *Daily Nation*. 15 April 2000.
- Midgely, Clare, 'Antislavery and Feminism in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Gender and History* 5 (2007)
- Miller, J. *The Problem of Slavery as History* (Yale, 2012)
- Morgan, K. *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford, 2007)
- Pennell, C. 'Believing the Unbelievable: The Myth of the Russians "With Snow on their Boots" in the United Kingdom, 1914', *Cultural and Social History* 11 (2015)
- Petley, C. 'British links and the West Indian proslavery argument', <http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/petley.html>

- Petley, C. 'New Perspectives on Slavery and Emancipation in the British Caribbean', *Historical Journal* 54 (2011)
- Rycenga, J. 'A Greater Awakening: Women's intellect as a factor in Early Abolitionist Movements, 1824-1834', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 21 (2005)
- Thornton, J. 'Africa and Abolitionism' in Drescher, S. and Emmer, P. (eds.) *Who Abolished Slavery?* (2010)
- Walvin, J. *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (New York, 1992)
- Walvin, J. (ed.), *Slavery and British Society* (London 1982)
- Watson, K. 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt and Some Brief Comments', *The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society* 46 (2000)
- Watson, K. 'The Iconography of the 1816 Slave Revolt Revisited', *The Journal of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society* 57 (2011)
- Welch, P. 'Forging a Barbadian Identity: Lessons from the 1816 'Bussa' Slave Rebellion' in G. D. Howe and D. D. Marshall (eds.) *The Empowering Impulse: The Nationalist Tradition of Barbados* (Jamaica, 2001)
- Williams, Carolyn, "'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' 'Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?': The trans-Atlantic Crusade against the Slave Trade and Slavery', *Caribbean Quarterly* 56 (2010)
- Williams, E. *Capitalism and Slavery* (North Carolina, 1944)
- White, D. G. *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985)

