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# Evangels of Emancipation

Missionary Activity in Postemancipation Sierra Leone,  
Jamaica, and the United States

Rowan McGarry-Williams

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

History Department, Pomona College, 2020-2021

## *Readers*

Ousmane Traoré, Pomona College

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## INTRODUCTION

John Willis Menard returned to Jamaica shortly before rebellion struck. Born in New Orleans, Menard had spent the Civil War working for the Lincoln administration in the Department of the Interior. In 1863, he travelled to Honduras to explore the potential of African American resettlement in Central America. The first time he went to Jamaica was on his way back to the United States. He came back two years later, in 1865.

Upon his return, Menard tapped into a network of Black radicalism stewarded by the Native Baptists, a Black religious group spread out mainly across the southeastern belt of the island. Their leaders included figures such as George William Gordon and Paul Bogle. A revolutionary strain of anti-colonial thought and racial egalitarianism ran through the Native Baptist ideology, and Bogle's church functioned as an organizing hub of Black politics in Jamaica. That strain culminated in the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, led by Bogle himself.

Menard, too, espoused a radical vision for post-slavery Jamaica, rooted in a conception of education as a means of liberation. "We must be educated," he wrote, or else risk that the "unexplored wealth which has so long been sleeping in the mountains of this island... will still rest undisturbed beneath the sweet, sad chorus of the weeping hills." He attacked "foreign speculators" as plunderers and lambasted the former enslavers whose ruin "has been taken for the ruin of Jamaica."<sup>1</sup> Menard's vision was also explicitly transatlantic. As he laid out his thoughts on Jamaica, Menard criticized Radical Republicans in the United States as frauds uninterested in true racial equality. "I am for Black nationalities," wrote Menard. Further, "most of the [white]

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<sup>1</sup> Clinton A. Hutton, *Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin: Marching with the Ancestral Spirits Into War Oh at Morant Bay* (Ian Randle Publishers, 2015), 87-91.

Republicans, Radicals or Abolitionists, who are the well-wishers of the black man, only sympathize with him in his servile condition.”<sup>2</sup>

Returning to the United States, Menard ran for the U.S. Congress in 1868 and won, becoming the first Black American elected to that body. But he was never seated. His opponent contested the election, and the House voted against admitting him into the chamber. Menard would go on to pursue a career in lower office in Florida. Figures such as Menard were part of a transnational network of Black radicalism and resistance, spurred in part by the movement of Black people across the Atlantic World since the advent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Menard’s experiences are a bridge spanning rebellion in postemancipation Jamaica and Reconstruction in the United States at the scale of a single lifetime.

Black radicals were not the only ones flowing between the United States and Jamaica, however. White American missionaries and abolitionists were also involved in Jamaican emancipation. Beginning in 1837, a group of missionaries travelled to Jamaica from Oberlin College, a “hotbed of radicalism” in Ohio. The Oberlin mission had a dual aim: first, to improve the moral conditions of Jamaica and Black Jamaicans; second, to demonstrate to observers in the U.S. the potential benefits of emancipation. Under the auspices of the American Missionary Association (AMA), they promoted “Christian liberty” to the freedpeople, hoping to “balance freedom and manly independence with strict adherence to evangelical Christian morality.”<sup>3</sup>

Over time, however, Black Jamaicans became frustrated with the Oberlin evangelists. While the missionary “articulation of freedom” stemmed from a particular set of antebellum Northern sensibilities, “black Jamaican Christians practiced a creole religion inflected with

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>3</sup> Gale L. Kenny, *Contentious Liberties: American Abolitionists in Post-Emancipation Jamaica, 1834-1866* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 2.

African, European, and African American beliefs... and shaped by the experience of Jamaican slave culture.”<sup>4</sup> The two groups further differed in their conception of land ownership, with the Americans favoring a more individualistic approach to property rights. Most importantly, the imperious paternalism of the Oberlin missionaries grated on the freedpeople and prevented any enduring alliance.

These two vignettes, Menard on the one hand and the Oberlin mission on the other, offer a window into some of the defining issues in postemancipation societies in the Atlantic World. First, they reveal the extent of international connections between countries and continents in the Age of Revolutions—and of Emancipations. Emancipation was a global phenomenon, both in that it occurred in many places across the world and in that global forces influenced individual emancipations. Second, these episodes speak to the conflict between Black radicalism and white liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights and free commerce, in postemancipation countries. This conflict played out in disputes over land, labor, religion, gender and race.

At the center of this conflict were white missionaries. Among whites, missionaries in postemancipation societies were uniquely proximate to formerly enslaved people. Missionaries preached to, taught, and at times employed freedpeople. In these varied settings, white missionaries attempted to graft their liberal ethic and civilizing mission onto, and over, their subjects. This effort placed them in conflict not only with the freedpeople but with former planters, landing missionaries in an in-between state—not radical, but not traditionalist either.

Missionaries held a deep faith in that effort and in their own abilities. Over time, however, they struggled to implement their ideologies in practice. Ultimately, many admitted failure and abandoned the project of emancipation. The proximity of missionary to the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 3.

freedpeople and the shared nature of their experience on a global scale had dramatic implications for the development of postemancipation societies across the Atlantic World. Missionary failure, along with their shift towards racial hierarchy and laissez-faire economics over the postemancipation period, helps explain why the end of slavery ultimately took such a constrained form—why it gave rise to a form of racial caste embedded in capitalism in lieu of a new form of racial egalitarianism *across the globe*.

### *Emancipation in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States*

The articulation of an Anglo-American missionary sensibility took place most decisively, though not exclusively, in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States. The stories of Menard and the Oberlin missionaries are suggestive of the links between emancipation in Jamaica and Reconstruction in the American South. Prior to emancipation, both of these places were slave societies central to the global economy as well as discourses around issues of enslavement and abolition. Sierra Leone was never a slave society, and its economic productivity was marginal relative to that of the West Indies and the United States. Yet it had an outsized discursive significance, rooted in its symbolism as the birthplace of a particularly British vision of emancipation.

In the late 1780s, English abolitionist Granville Sharp decided to settle London's "Black Poor" in the "Province of Freedom," which was to become Sierra Leone, and begin a utopian society from scratch. Sharp quickly ran into obstacles, including corruption, natural disasters, and, unsurprisingly, indigenous populations in the region. But he had planted the seeds of a venture that would sprout under the supervision of the Clapham Sect, a group of prominent English abolitionists, humanitarians, and social reformers. Members such as Thomas Clarkson,



Henry Thornton, and William Wilberforce picked up where Sharp left off. In 1792, they founded the Freetown Colony and settled approximately 1,000 formerly enslaved people from the U.S. who had been living in Nova Scotia. These settlers were later joined by 500 exiled Jamaican Maroons. Missionary efforts in the colony began with the 1799 establishment of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Their early focus was on preaching to the Black settlers and indigenous groups like the Fula, the Susu, and the Temne.

The hope of the Clapham Sect was to demonstrate the feasibility of an abolitionist society with labor provided by formerly enslaved people. Under the colony's first governor, John Clarkson, Freetown hemorrhaged money and came close to starvation. Clarkson's rigid opposition to the region's powerful slave traders and hostility towards native groups isolated the colony. The next governor, Zachary Macaulay, proved more adaptive. He became familiar with the local slave trade and made concessions to the traders. But resources remained low in spite of Macaulay's relative success, and in 1808 Sierra Leone became a Crown colony.

The final turning point in Sierra Leone's early postemancipation period came in 1815 with British victory over France in the Napoleonic Wars. Under Governor Charles MacCarthy, Sierra Leone transitioned from a military operation focused on capturing rival countries' slave ships into a "civilizing" operation focused on building the "Liberated Africans" taken from those ships into a durable labor force. This period coincided with the 1817 consolidation of missionary operations in Freetown, stemming from the growth of the city's Liberated African population.

Sierra Leone's symbolism as a model, or perhaps cautionary tale, of emancipation came sharply into play in debates over the abolition of slavery in the British empire. The western heart of the empire by this time was the West Indies, and Jamaica was the crown jewel of the region. On Christmas Day, 1831, a Black deacon by the name of Samuel Sharpe led an eleven-day

rebellion in Jamaica. The Baptist War, as it came to be called, accelerated calls for emancipation in the West Indies. In 1833, with the help of agitation from British reformers, the abolition of slavery took effect across the British empire. In Jamaica, a system of apprenticeship replaced that of slavery, but was abandoned by 1838 in favor of full emancipation.

Among English missionary groups in the island, the Baptists were the most powerful. Under the coordination of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), they preached to the freedpeople, founded free villages across Jamaica, and assumed an important role in the governance of the colony. Missionary work took place in conjunction with important political and economic changes. In the postemancipation period, property requirements to vote, British fears of racial polarization, and the virulent racism of Jamaica's white planters combined to limit Black political power, despite Black Jamaicans comprising over 90% of the island's population.

Planters and their allies worked to install strict surveillance and labor laws over the freedpeople while restricting their labor to large estates, many owned by former enslavers. The freedpeople, on the other hand, were open to wage labor and cash crops but tended to prefer autonomous plots of land as long as wages remained low. The continued political, social, and economic oppression of the Black Jamaican population made unrest inevitable, and these forces erupted in 1865 in Morant Bay. Colonial governor Edward Eyre responded by brutally suppressing the revolt, including by hanging George William Gordon. Backlash to the Rebellion and Eyre's response in England ultimately led to the dissolution of the Jamaican Assembly and the island joined Sierra Leone in becoming a Crown colony under direct British authority.

Four years of Civil War in the United States came to a close the very year that rebellion hit Jamaica. Emerging from war in 1865, the United States faced a daunting host of political, social, and economic crises. War had crippled the Southern economy, engendered bitter sectional

antagonism, and reshaped the role of the state in American life. The most fundamental question, however, was the fate of the millions of formerly enslaved people in the South. The decision of vast numbers of enslaved people to abandon Southern plantations in the midst of war—a general strike, in the formulation of W.E.B. Du Bois<sup>5</sup>—had forced the hand of Northern officials and transformed the war into an abolitionist campaign. By 1865, the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment enshrined freedom as the law of the land.

The precise meaning of that freedom remained an open question. What, in other words, was Reconstruction to reconstruct? The first option was the restoration of slavery in all but name, articulated in restrictive labor laws such as the Black Codes and enforced by white supremacist violence. The second prioritized a return to sectional comity and political unity, in part as a step towards rebuilding economic ties between North and South. A third option was to use emancipation as an opportunity to create a more egalitarian nation by provisioning robust political protections and economic stimulus for the freedpeople. The ascendance of Andrew Johnson to the presidency marked a victory for Southern whites. Running counter to this victory were the efforts of Radical Republicans in Congress, the Freedmen’s Bureau along with missionaries in the South, and most of all the freedpeople. These efforts came to fruition with the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, which brought equal protection under the law and the right to vote for Black Americans.

The Reconstruction amendments heralded a “moment in the sun” for racial egalitarianism.<sup>6</sup> This moment was fleeting, however, as Reconstruction crumbled under an alliance of revanchist white supremacists, a staunchly conservative Supreme Court, and

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<sup>5</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (Transaction Publishers, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

moderate elites who overlooked or endorsed the rollback of legal and political protections. The Compromise of 1877 won Republicans the presidency but endorsed “home rule” in the South, starting the path towards disenfranchisement of Black voters and the long career of Jim Crow.

### *Missionaries in Postemancipation Historiography*

Scholarship on abolitionists and emancipations at a global scale has tended to focus on their economic implications and motivations. In particular, a vigorous historiographical debate has concerned the economic nature of slavery and resulting economic nature of emancipation. Historians beginning with Eric Williams have suggested that slavery was ensconced within capitalist, or at least proto-capitalist, global networks. They have also highlighted how the plantation functioned as a capitalist organism internally, with modernizing impulses and brutally efficient methods of labor discipline.<sup>7</sup>

This understanding of slavery contradicts that of anti-slavery actors in the 18th and 19th centuries, including British social reformers like William Wilberforce and American leaders of the Republican Party. These figures believed that slavery was a monopolizing, oligarchic institution that prohibited innovation and entrenched unequal social relations. Abolition, on the other hand, would bring both economic efficiency and social harmony. Abolitionism in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the U.S. was not a purely benevolent or self-sacrificial movement. Abolitionists saw profit in emancipation, and genuinely believed in its productive superiority. This attitude is most relevant for a consideration of missionary ideology; regardless of whether

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Lulu Press, Inc, 2015). For more, see Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, “Cotton, Slavery, and the New History of Capitalism,” *Explorations in Economic History* 67 (January 1, 2018): 1–17; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014); Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development* (LSU Press, 2013); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2016).

slavery was in fact capitalist, abolitionist missionaries *believed* it was antithetical to economic efficiency, and approached emancipation from that perspective.

In recent decades, historians have rescued postemancipation periods from racist caricatures of Black workers and political representatives. The publication of Thomas Holt's *The Problem of Freedom* on Jamaica and Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* on the U.S. reconfigured the scholarly approach to postemancipation societies in those countries. These synthetic works built off of the work of Black scholars such as Williams, C.L.R. James, and Du Bois. In turn, they inspired a raft of modern scholarship that pushed this new consensus in a variety of ways, expanding its timeline and geographic scope, critically analyzing race and gender, and centering the voices of the freedpeople.<sup>8</sup>

Relative to Jamaica and the U.S, the historiography of Sierra Leone has been slow to develop. Christopher Fyfe's *History of Sierra Leone* set the standard for the field, and historians have since considered issues such as Sierra Leone's relationship to abolitionism and West Africa.<sup>9</sup> The implications of events in Sierra Leone on global considerations of emancipation have not been sufficiently scrutinized.

However, the global implications of emancipation are the focus of a burgeoning field of comparative emancipation studies. Under the supervision of scholars such as Holt, Rebecca Scott, and Frederick Cooper, this field has endeavored to approach the idea of freedom as “a totality: a political economy, its ideological legitimization, and its ecological cultural

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (JHU Press, 1992); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Harper Collins, 2011). For scholarship since see, e.g., Elliott West, “Reconstructing Race,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 6–26; Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (NYU Press, 2012); Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Fyfe, *A Short History of Sierra Leone* (Longmans, 1967); Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2017); Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

consequences, all somehow illuminated through and illuminating in turn a particular set of social relations of labor.”<sup>10</sup> Global studies of freedom explain the roots of modern conditions of inequality beyond vague gestures at the “legacy of slavery.”

This body of scholarly work sets the foundation for a comparative analysis of missionary activity in postemancipation societies, highlighting key issues of land, labor, and identity. Yet missionaries themselves have gone understudied in the historiography of emancipations. Only a handful of works have considered their influence in Sierra Leone, while they are mere bit players in most broad considerations of emancipation. Catherine Hall’s work on Jamaica is an exception to this generalization. Similarly, Willie Lee Rose and Lawrence Powell have written impressive accounts of Northern missionaries in Port Royal, South Carolina and humanitarian planters in the South, respectively. But they do not tie their accounts to a more explicit argument about the implications of missionary and Northern activity in the South for the political economy of the Reconstruction period. None of these works, moreover, approach missionary activity from a comparative perspective.<sup>11</sup>

Missionaries in postemancipation societies deserve increased historiographical focus for a wide array of reasons. First, missionaries were powerful actors. Secular authorities gave them remarkable autonomy in their efforts to convert and “civilize” the freedpeople. In villages and plantations run by missionaries, they assumed duties of governance along with their evangelical mandate, tending to the daily requirements of agricultural production as well as weighty matters

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick Cooper, Thomas Cleveland Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (UNC Press Books, 2014), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (University of Chicago Press, 2002); Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Oxford University Press, 1976); Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Fordham University Press, 1998).

of spiritual salvation. Missionaries also had access to influential authorities who could provide them with political backing or, crucially, philanthropic donations when times were hard.

Second, missionaries had a proximity to the freedpeople that was unusual among whites in postemancipation societies. They considered themselves “friends” of the freedpeople, protecting them against the exploitative and pernicious forces of slavery. Daily interactions with the freedpeople in economic, social, and religious settings shaped the missionary ideology while informing the worldviews of the freedpeople as well. Of course, missionaries were not always reliable narrators. At a fundamental level, their texts were apologias for a particular kind of evangelical project. Their portrayals of missionary life, and particularly of Black people, should not be taken at face value. These texts are, however, important windows into the worldview of a crucial and distinct set of actors in postemancipation societies. Moreover, when read against the grain, they can generate insights into a logic of resistance among the freedpeople. Due to their proximity to formerly enslaved people, missionary texts illuminate the contours of postemancipation societies on a day-to-day, human scale.

Third, missionaries in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the U.S. held a particular worldview that distinguished them from secular authorities. Their religious beliefs shaped their ideas about politics, social relations, and the economy. In the minds of missionaries, commerce, civilization, and Christianity were intertwined and even dependent on one another. The languages of religion and labor melted into one another. Many elements of Christianity, as interpreted by these missionaries, lent themselves to an exaltation of industry and hard work. One historian has noted that the theological tenets of “God’s providence, divine contrivance, and benevolent design” communicated values of “duty and self-interest.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Porter, “‘Commerce and Christianity’: The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan,” *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 3 (September 1985), 598.

Central to the missionary ideology was the notion that they alone were truly devout, while the faith of most Englishmen or Northerners was fraudulent. True Christianity, they believed, required exquisite honesty and discipline. In turn, honesty and discipline could be carried over into one's work within a free labor economic system. The Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries further convinced missionaries of their unique devotion and advanced an individualistic relationship with God that transferred comfortably into an exaltation of the individual in political and economic contexts.

Whereas colonial officials devised a complex discursive framework to describe their subjects, missionaries were more likely to locate the inferiority of nonwhite populations in their "heathenism." As Anna Johnston argues, "British missionary commentators sought, by their 'zeal', to remake colonial projects in the image of religious conversion." She describes their positioning within colonial cultures as "ambivalent" and "ambiguous." Certainly, they were engaged in the imperial project. Yet their worldviews and actions on the ground set them apart from, and sometimes at odds with, secular officials.<sup>13</sup>

### *Missionaries in Comparative Perspective*

The context of emancipation in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States differed drastically across an array of variables. For one, abolition arrived in these countries over a time span of over 70 years. During that time period, racial and imperial ideologies rigidified, affecting the discourse on emancipation. The geography and agriculture of these countries ranged from the rice-heavy swamps and mountains of Sierra Leone to the sugar plantations of Jamaica to the cotton-rich Black Belt of the American South. From a demographic perspective, Sierra Leone

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<sup>13</sup> Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-2.



featured a motley combination of African American settlers, Liberated Africans, indigenous groups, and a small white population. Upon emancipation, Jamaica was almost entirely Black with a similarly small white elite, whereas the American South was more evenly split between Black and white populations. Lastly, colonial governance constrained political boundaries in Sierra Leone and Jamaica, while the United States operated independently.

These vast differences make it all the more remarkable that when examining missionary accounts from these three countries, the primary pattern is not idiosyncrasy but rather similarity and continuity. This continuity across space and time stemmed from a shared language of evangelicalism, liberalism, and internalized white supremacy.

One manifestation of the shared missionary worldview is the presence of a common arc in missionary accounts of postemancipation societies. This arc contained three phases. Phase one was a period of optimism and organizing as missionaries arrived at their destinations. Missionary optimism in the early section of the postemancipation periods stemmed from their belief in the capacity of Christianity, abolition, and wage labor to civilize formerly enslaved people and bring profit to their country. Missionaries were confident in their own abilities to guide the freedpeople into freedom and assimilate them into white social norms as “Evangelists of Civilization,” as missionaries in Port Royal called themselves. Central to both of these beliefs was the notion of their destinations as blank slates that would welcome missionary influence.

The second phase consisted of the missionaries’ efforts to implement their religious, political, and economic visions. Struggle, whining, infighting, and conflict were defining features of this phase, despite earlier optimism. The missionaries generally found their destinations less amenable to influence than they had hoped. They encountered resistance not only from the former planter class but from the freedpeople, whose vision of autonomy and welfare did not

always align with that of the missionaries. Agricultural production in each of the countries failed to meet expectations and emancipation did not often yield the desired profit margins. These struggles played out in the Liberated African villages of Sierra Leone, the free villages of Jamaica, and under humanitarian planters in the United States.

The final phase was one of retrenchment, abandonment, and failure. Contemporaries looked back on the postemancipation periods in these countries as failed experiments, misguided attempts at racial egalitarianism. In Jamaica and the U.S. in particular, the consequence of this failure was a transition to a period of entrenched racial and economic inequality. Authorities, including the missionaries, often identified indolence among the freedpeople as the source of emancipation's disappointments, rather than broad economic forces, poor agricultural conditions, or their own mistakes. In response, the racial and economic ideologies of the missionaries tended to become less egalitarian over time. Increasingly, they came to disavow redistributive policies and sour on continued protections for the freedpeople.

This common arc was not a coincidence. Instead, the approach and initial worldview of the missionaries and their allies were a direct cause of emancipation's supposed failure. That is, their ideological priors could not adjust to the realities of postemancipation societies, particularly with regards to the place of the freedpeople. The places in which they preached were very much *not* blank slates awaiting their arrival, and the missionaries were unprepared for the complexity of preexisting social dynamics. Further, they underestimated the productive efficiency of slavery and overestimated the natural profitability of wage labor. Most of all, they failed to accurately assess the interests and needs of formerly enslaved people. These miscalculations made disappointment almost inevitable; in turn, the deep-seated racism of the missionaries led them to blame the freedpeople for that disappointment. Holes in the very tenets of the missionary

worldview—liberalism, paternalism, individualism, free labor—spelled failure for their own mission and for emancipation more broadly.

This arc also reveals that the ideologies of individual missionaries were not fixed, but rather changed over time. This change tended to resemble a shift towards the status quo prior to emancipation, and an associated disenchantment with racial equality and economic redistribution. The ideological shift of individual missionaries was mirrored on a collective scale, across time and space. Missionaries participated in a global discourse around issues of slavery and emancipation. They observed, read up on, and thought about revolutions and emancipations elsewhere in the Atlantic World. Yet the passage of time did not make missionaries more successful. Missionaries in the U.S. did not necessarily achieve better results than those in Sierra Leone or Jamaica. It would seem, therefore, that missionaries took the wrong lessons from past emancipations, accepting the racist rationales of their earlier counterparts rather than adjusting their own ideologies.

Missionary retrenchment spelled the death of any sort of radical vision of emancipation on a global level. The transatlantic implications here are of particular note. Slavery was a global phenomenon: it happened globally and created global networks of trade and profit. The same was true of emancipation. The end of slavery therefore presented a global “critical juncture.” Political scientists define critical junctures as “times in history when the choices leaders make are dramatically influenced or altered by significant events. These choices then close off paths down the road, making it difficult for society to revert back” to an unchosen path.<sup>14</sup> Empirical research backs up the idea that emancipation represented such a juncture. For instance, areas in the antebellum American South that had higher rates of slaveholding continue to demonstrate

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<sup>14</sup> Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen, *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 25.

increased racial conservatism today, independently of confounding factors. This relationship is due in large part to the incentives and interests that structured the Southern white response to emancipation, as former owners “sought to find new ways to reestablish their control over their mostly black labor force.”<sup>15</sup>

Just as emancipation was a critical juncture for racial hierarchy, it was also a critical juncture for racial egalitarianism. Emancipation presented an opportunity for a radical remaking of racial, economic, political, and social structures and relations at a global scale. More than any group, the freedpeople had the vision for that undertaking, but they did not have the necessary political power. If anyone was going to help guide that vision into reality, it would be the missionaries, who represented the progressive edge of white politics in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the central tenets of the missionary ideology ultimately precluded the realization of that vision. For these missionaries, freedom entailed Christianity and free labor, nothing more. Alternatives to Christian worship and market participation, including those advocated by the freedpeople, were anathema to the missionary worldview. When missionaries across the Atlantic embraced this constrained definition of freedom, it closed off a path of liberation and egalitarianism that emancipation opened, however briefly. In turn, the identification of Black people as culprits in the failure of emancipation was a critical justification for later forms of repression, such as imperial domination in Sierra Leone and Jamaica and Jim Crow in the U.S. South.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 19.

## 1. A FAMILY OF MAN: THE MISSIONARY WORLDVIEW

When white missionaries arrived in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the American South, they brought an agenda rooted in their liberal sensibilities and religious doctrines. The contours of their worldview evolved and differed, but they held in common a political vision informed by evangelical Christianity, a faith in wage labor to bring profit and civilization, a view of their destinations as blank slates awaiting their influence, and an optimistic assessment of their own capacity to affect change. This set of beliefs would set the terms for their approach to missionary work while shaping their interactions with freedpeople, planters, and secular authorities alike.

### *The Political Vision and Motivations of Missionaries*

The development of a political vision among missionaries was gradual. Their primary obligation was to spread Christianity. Evangelical institutions, however, eventually gave way to evangelical networks that overlapped with political organizations, and in particular the abolitionist movement. The Church Missionary Society, for instance, drew from growing evangelical fervor among Britons at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In turn, its foundation was central to the creation of a “network of self-defining ‘Evangelicals’” and associated political offshoots. This network engaged in the rhetorical work of shaping “the popular conception of the ‘heathen’ inhabitants of areas under British influence.”<sup>1</sup> Sierra Leone represented the first large-scale extension of this network into colonial action.

The Clapham Sect began as a movement of “Dissenters” criticizing mainstream believers as fraudulent and inauthentic. Writing about “the bulk of professed Christians,” William

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Elbourne, “The Foundation of the Church Missionary Society: The Anglican Missionary Impulse,” in *The Church of England c.1689–c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. Colin Haydon, John Walsh, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 249.

Wilberforce pointed out “the very inadequate conception which they entertain of the importance of Christianity in general, of its peculiar nature, and superior excellence.”<sup>2</sup> The Sect’s members, including famed abolitionists like Zachary Macaulay and Thomas Clarkson, were a closely knit group of radical Protestants who wedded their religious vision to political activism. This activism centered around abolition, but also included other moral reform efforts, such as temperance.

Like the Clapham Sect before them, many missionaries who arrived in Jamaica shortly before abolition did not immediately wed their religious doctrine to a political vision. Their initial target was sin, not slavery. Looking back on the early 19<sup>th</sup> century from 1865, Jamaican missionary David East argued that “Christian missionaries did not come to abolish slavery or change the political institutions of the country. Their vocation was infinitely higher and holier... because [the enslaved population] was in the darkness of ignorance, and superstition, and sin.”<sup>3</sup> Even as missionaries mobilized politically, religious instruction and conversion was their top priority.

The Baptist Missionary Society, heavily involved in pre- and postemancipation Jamaica, held similar beliefs about the insincerity of dominant Christian groups as the Clapham Sect. Historian Catherine Hall argues that “the BMS had its roots in the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century, that re-emergence of vital, serious or real Christianity, as compared with the nominal forms that had come to dominate Christian worship.”<sup>4</sup> Their movement was, in a sense, a revitalization of Wilberforce’s vision. These groups also viewed their effort as global in scope. As Jamaican missionary James Phillippo put it, “nor is the blessing of God confined to one scene

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<sup>2</sup> William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 1.

<sup>3</sup> John Clark et al., *The Voice of Jubilee: A Narrative of the Baptist Mission, Jamaica, by J. Clark, W. Dendy, and J. M. Phillippo* (John Snow, Paternoster Row, 1865), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 86.

of missionary exertion; it attends his servants wherever they go.”<sup>5</sup> The notion of training Black pastors to initiate a mission in Africa was popular among many of the English Baptists. The vast reach of the British empire aided in this global ambition, connecting missionaries in Jamaica with counterparts as far away as India and China.

The Baptist revival emphasized evangelicalism along with the cultivation of an individual relationship with God. Hall notes that the evangelical fervor that spurred the creation of the BMS put forth an “insistence on the centrality of individual sin and the conversion experience.”<sup>6</sup> The BMS placed an emphasis on one’s personal relationship with God and the capacity of an individual to remake themselves in God’s image. This individualistic mindset seeped into the political economy of the missionaries.

In the United States, missionaries were divided over the extent to which they would pursue an explicit political agenda. In 1862, when Laura Towne—teacher, missionary, and physician—arrived in the South Carolina Sea Islands, the government had not issued a clear statement on the status of the island’s formerly enslaved population. As their former planters had fled the estates, they were functionally free, but not legally free. Towne expressed annoyance that some of the missionaries were reluctant to confirm to the freedpeople that they were no longer enslaved. Of the missionaries and military figures in the region, she wrote, “I wish they would all say out loud... ‘We have come to do anti-slavery work, and we think it noble work and we mean to do it earnestly.’ Instead of this, they do not even tell the slaves that they are free.”<sup>7</sup> Differing opinions over the appropriate treatment of the freedpeople would continue to drive factionalism among missionaries in the South throughout Reconstruction.

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<sup>5</sup> James Mursell Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (John Snow, Paternoster Row, 1843), 450.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Matilda Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne: Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884* (Riverside Press, 1912), 8.

Indeed, motives differed for missionaries in each country. The story of Thomas Burchell is representative of how missionary accounts portrayed the entrance into evangelical activity. According to his memoir, Burchell showed missionary instincts from a young age under the guidance of his family. His mother, observing his interest in religion and skill for mediation, brought him a variety of Baptist and evangelical magazines. Burchell's evangelical zeal accelerated following an episode in which he was struck by a fear of God and hell. As he read, Burchell noted, "I knew I was a sinner, but never till then did I feel the evil of violating God's holy law."<sup>8</sup> As Burchell got older, he began to develop a paternalistic interest in preaching to "heathens" at home and abroad. "I have felt my whole soul interested in behalf of the perishing multitudes," he wrote.<sup>9</sup> Pursuing this interest, he became ensconced within a missionary network, meeting Phillippo in London during his application to the Baptist Missionary Society. Like many British missionaries, Burchell hoped to go to India, the crown jewel of the empire. Instead, he was sent to Jamaica, thus beginning his journey as a Baptist missionary on the island.

W.A. Bernard Johnson of Sierra Leone reported a similar experience. Johnson's introduction to Christian devotion came in 1812 when, "brought very low in temporal circumstances," he became acutely aware of his sinful ways. Soon after, he found himself with a "great desire to convert those who were about" him. This desire soon extended to the "poor benighted heathen" abroad.<sup>10</sup> These "conversion stories" are common in missionary accounts and reveal the emphasis on individual conversion and discipline, the sources of paternalism towards non-Christians abroad, and the influence of missionary networks on evangelical activity.

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<sup>8</sup> William Fitzer Burchell and Thomas Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell, Twenty-Two Years a Missionary in Jamaica. [With a Portrait.]* (B. L. Green, 1849), 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Tyng, *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson, Missionary of the Church Missionary Society, in Regent's Town, Sierra Leone, Africa* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 16-20.



The allure of missionary work had a distinctly masculine flavor. As Anna Johnston argues, “missionary men both discovered and invented their masculinity through their encounter with other, colonised cultures.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, conceptions of gender were at the very center of missionary ideology. This invention of missionary masculinity depended on an equal and opposite emasculation of imperial or missionary subjects. The creation of this binary further justified missionary intervention “on behalf” of the “heathen” masses.

For the Clapham Sect, slavery was a sin and abolition was ordained by God. Samuel Walker, describing abolition, wrote that “through the good hand of her God upon her, England heard the mutterings of the yet distant tempest, and prostrated herself before the majesty of Him whose wrath she had assisted in provoking.”<sup>12</sup> The political effort of abolition was thus wrapped up in the religious language of prostration and sin. Indeed, the connection between slavery and sin on the one hand, and abolition and God on the other, was so strong in the minds of these Europeans that many assumed abolition would inevitably and immediately lead to the rapid spread of the Gospel. “When the salutary effects of the abolition came to be experienced,” Walker continued, “the introduction of the Gospel would be hailed with gratitude and joy.”<sup>13</sup>

Jamaican missionaries shared with the CMS the sentiment that the Bible was an antislavery document. David East wrote in 1865 that “the gospel is the everlasting foe of every kind of bondage.”<sup>14</sup> John Clark echoed this sentiment, arguing that “the gospel of Christ and slavery could not exist together.”<sup>15</sup> In his account of his time in Jamaica, Phillippo attempted to construct an anti-slavery narrative of British history and in the process reconceive of imperial

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<sup>11</sup> Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Abraham Walker, *Missions in Western Africa, Among the Soosooos, Bulloms, &c: Being the First Undertaken by the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East* (William Curry, Jun. and Company, 1845), 179.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>14</sup> John Clark et al., *The Voice of Jubilee*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

identity. That narrative was “not of military conquest but of the conquest by Christianity and the total transformation it had brought to Jamaica.”<sup>16</sup> Missionaries in Jamaica not only rooted their anti-slavery position in the Bible, but used their religious devotion to remake imperial history in their image.

The Clapham Sect connected profit, not just politics, to its humanitarian ventures. The “promotion of legitimate commerce with Africa” was a key justification for the creation of the Sierra Leone Company. In a report on the colony, Thomas Clarkson wrote that “I should not permit anyone to become a purchaser, who would not be better pleased with the good resulting to Africa than from great commercial profits to himself; not that the latter may not be expected.” The humanitarian angle took priority, in other words, but investors still anticipated great profit.<sup>17</sup>

Profit and politics were an easy match in the United States as well. Although the spread of Christianity was a primary objective of many missionaries, the wartime Sea Islands also attracted Northern businessmen looking to prove that free labor could be a profitable venture—more profitable, in fact, than slave labor. Figures like Edward Philbrick, Edward Pierce, William Gannet, and James McKim saw great potential in the Port Royal experiment, though they believed realizing that potential would require great supervision and authority over the freedpeople. “We find the blacks as dependent as children... We must stand in the relation of parents to them until such time as they can be taught to stand alone,” Philbrick wrote to Pierce in a stark example of Northern paternalism.<sup>18</sup> While their assessment of the freedpeople may have

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<sup>16</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur T. Porter, “Religious Affiliation in Freetown, Sierra Leone,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 23, no. 1 (1953), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Demetrius L. Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation in the British Caribbean and the U.S. South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 93.

been harsher than figures like Towne, these businessmen worked closely with the more philanthropic wing of the effort.

Despite that collaboration, Northern missionaries flocked South with a variety of intentions in the Reconstruction period. In the wake of the Civil War, some saw it as a national duty to help the South continue its forward progress. Others simply desired a sense of adventure or wished to revel in the romanticism of the New South. The two primary motives, however, were profit and humanitarianism. If free labor truly was the most efficient way to structure an economy, as many Northerners so avidly believed, they understandably hoped to cash in early on some of the fruits of that efficiency. Meanwhile, many missionaries had organized in opposition to slavery in the antebellum period. They saw a move South as the logical extension of that activism, and believed they were well suited to assisting formerly enslaved people in the transition to free labor. Some missionaries hoped to pursue profit and paternalism at once, believing the two to be mutually reinforcing, while others concerned themselves with only one of the two. The differing priorities of this group at times led to conflict and infighting.

While Port Royal likely represented their greatest concentration, Northern missionaries, political idealists, and humanitarians continued to stream into the South following the war's end and long into Reconstruction. Many ran their own free labor plantations in the South. Lawrence Powell has estimated that approximately five to seven thousand Northerners invested in cotton plantations in the wartime and Reconstruction South.<sup>19</sup> Like their predecessors in the Sea Islands, Northern planters in the South came with a range of intentions, and often wedded their business interests to an ideological agenda. Charles Stearns, a former abolitionist who bought a plantation outside of Augusta, Georgia in 1866, intended to “labor for the accomplishment of *three* things for the colored people. First, their *education* and moral

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<sup>19</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, xiii.

improvement; secondly, their *right to vote*; and thirdly, the making them the *owners of the land* they cultivate.”<sup>20</sup> He viewed plantation ownership as both a reliable source of profit and the best route to achieving his political vision, at least on a small scale.

The lure of profit, masculine adventure, and most of all a paternalistic sense of Christian duty therefore drove white missionaries to Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the American South. The political mobilization of missionary networks was an outgrowth of their religious agenda, both in ideological and organizational terms. But this mobilization quickly made inroads with secular officials and moneyed patrons, who granted missionaries the necessary authority and funding to pursue their religious and political visions in a variety of settings.

#### *Liberalism, Free Labor, and Civilization in Missionary Ideology*

The marriage of humanitarian and business interests among missionaries was in keeping with a broad ideological commitment to the tenets of liberalism and free labor. In short, the theory was that structuring an economy around wage labor rather than slave labor would lead to both an efficient economy and a flourishing society. Free labor principles were the animating ideological foundation of much of the abolitionist movement, including the Republican Party in the U.S. For example, Northerners defined free labor in opposition to the monopolistic “Slave Power” of the antebellum South, located its roots in the virtue of small landownership and commercial competition, and built a political coalition and ultimately a war effort around its maintenance. In Sierra Leone and Jamaica, this ideology went by different names, like liberalism or legitimate trade, and had a more global scope, but the thrust of the argument was the same.

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<sup>20</sup> Stearns, Charles, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels. Or, the Characteristics of the Former, and the Recent Outrages of the Latter* (American News Company, 1872), 28.

As Eric Foner puts it, the free labor ideology was “more than the sum of its parts”<sup>21</sup>—for many missionaries, it was not just an economic theory, but a totalizing worldview. In their formulation, free labor was civilizing. They believed it could uplift formerly enslaved people by incentivizing them to participate in the economy and thus in the nation, all while instilling Christian values. It was also negotiated. They viewed free labor as the cumulative product of contractual agreements forged between rational individuals. Lastly, free labor was profitable. Whereas slave labor was inherently monopolistic and static, free labor incentivized innovation and was therefore the most efficient route to profit. These tenets of free labor were central to the development of the political economy of the postemancipation period in each country, and of missionary activity across the Atlantic World.

Officials in Sierra Leone believed abolition would bring windfall profits and went about securing those profits as quickly as possible. Padraic Scanlan argues that “British abolitionism was acquisitive. It was not selfless, or self-sacrificing, except in its rhetoric. Whatever replaced slave trading and slavery was expected to be profitable.”<sup>22</sup> In Sierra Leone, this profit could come through the capture of rival countries’ slave ships, crop cultivation, and “legitimate” trade.

Their counterparts in Jamaica viewed freedom as an introduction and induction to the logic of capitalism. In 1833, English statesman Henry George Grey wrote to Lord John Russell that “emancipation, properly understood, does not imply the right to be indolent when profitable labour is to be had, but only the right to labour moderately in obedience to a general law for a fair compensation.”<sup>23</sup> In an address to a group of freedpeople, missionary William Knibb laid out his free labor principles in explicit terms. “You must work for money,” he told the freedpeople.

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<sup>21</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 12.

“A fair scale of wages must be established, and you must be entirely independent. If you continue to receive those allowances which have been given during slavery... it will go abroad that you are not able to take care of yourselves.”<sup>24</sup> Central to Knibb’s understanding of free labor was the idea of wages negotiated between worker and planter. Also fundamental to his worldview was the paternalistic assumption that the freedpeople would be unable to experience independence until they embraced free labor.

Knibb went as far as to wager his reputation on the profitability of freedom. “I am quite willing to be judged by the results, being fully convinced that, in those parishes where ‘the infernal baptists’ are most numerous, there will be more sugar made, and at a cheaper rate, than in the other parts of the island.”<sup>25</sup> That is, Knibb believed the missionaries would have more success at growing cash crops than the former planters, a common belief among missionaries across all three countries.

Concern over Black capacity for free labor at times threatened this missionary optimism. The missionaries, like the former planters, believed formerly enslaved people to be fundamentally degraded. They also dabbled in racial essentialism, though their understanding of race was not quite as deterministic as that of more overt white supremacists. Missionaries tended to locate at least part of the degradation of formerly enslaved people in the degradation of slavery. Missionary influence and free labor, they thought, might lead to improvements in character and behavior among Black workers. In other words, the missionaries took racial hierarchy as a given, but believed that Black people at the bottom of that hierarchy might manage to earn better treatment under conditions of freedom.

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<sup>24</sup> John Howard Hinton and William Knibb, *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica* (Houlston and Stoneman, 1849), 289.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 315.

Early impressions of Sierra Leone stemmed from two basic assumptions: first, that the Africans represented a degraded and incapacitated race; second, that the missionaries, acting on behalf of God, could elevate them into civilized Christians. “Who knows whether the Lord will not make his power known among these poor depraved people—with Him nothing is impossible,” wrote W.A.B. Johnson of the Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone.<sup>26</sup> The same two assumptions were at play in Jamaica. Catherine Hall identifies a racial hierarchy in missionary rhetoric, an “evolutionary ladder... at the top of which were Europeans, and up which freed black people would climb,” under the guidance and tutelage of the missionaries.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the Jamaican missionaries, and in particular Knibb, embraced the idea of a “family of man,” into which English missionaries would bring the African. “All I ask,” said Knibb in a speech at Exeter Hall, “is that my African brother may stand in the family of man.”<sup>28</sup> The presence of a racial hierarchy combined with the idea of a family of man reveals that missionaries intended elevate formerly enslaved people from their inferior status to a race assimilated into Christian norms. That said, assimilation would not necessarily abolish racial and economic caste; the paternalism of Knibb and his fellow missionaries rarely viewed formerly enslaved people as anything more than a laboring class.

Missionaries therefore believed wage labor to be civilizing as well as profitable. To civilize in this case was to assimilate the freedpeople into white, Western social and economic norms. For Phillippo, these norms included “honesty, industry, economy in domestic expenditure” and “discharge of... the evils of idleness.”<sup>29</sup> Religion was the ultimate marker of

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<sup>26</sup> Maria Louisa Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley; Or The Church in Regent's Town, West Africa* (Seeley, 1856), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 98.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

civilization. Therefore, the entrance into civilization was baptism. CMS missionary Peter Wenzel wrote approvingly that baptism would instill a “willing and loving submission” in the baptized.<sup>30</sup> The civilizing mission of missionaries concerned behavior in the fields, at home, and in church.

The exaltation of Christianity stood in contrast to a deep prejudice against traditional Black religious practices among white missionaries. The consensus among Jamaican missionaries was that the existing religious practices of the freedpeople were superstition, witchcraft, and a mix of norms inherited from Africa. Black religious systems, in particular Obeahism and Myalism, were a looming threat for these missionaries. David East warned of the “cunning fables of the Obeah man” and the “wild orgies of wandering bands of (so-called) Revivalists.”<sup>31</sup> Phillippo fretted in 1842 that Myalism was undergoing a revival, and expressed his hope that “in a very short period... few vestiges of the superstition will remain.”<sup>32</sup> In the minds of missionaries, Black religious practices were both a hindrance and a mark of inferiority.

As for the U.S., the condescending attitude of the American Missionary Association with regards to the religious character of the freedpeople is best characterized in a retrospective report published by the Association in 1891:

The Freedmen are neither heathen nor infidel. They believe in Christ, but often their faith is without works... They have churches and ministers, but both ministers and people are ignorant, and, in too many cases, immoral. Their great need, therefore, is *Christian knowledge*, leading to an intelligent faith and a practical morality.<sup>33</sup>

The acknowledgment of Christianity’s prevalence in Black communities coupled with a criticism of how those communities practiced Christianity was a common trope among Northern missionaries. So too was the emphasis on a didactic form of missionary activity, reflected in

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<sup>30</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors*, 152.

<sup>31</sup> Clark et al., *The Voice of Jubilee*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 187.

<sup>33</sup> American Missionary Association, *History of the American Missionary Association: With Illustrative Facts and Anecdotes* (Bible House, 1891), 47.



tactics such as teaching freedpeople their letters by reading Bible passages. Christianity in this context was not simply a set of religious doctrines but a route to assimilation and upward mobility—a decidedly “practical” morality.

In none of these countries did “assimilation” imply “equality” or “integration.” Granville Sharp started Sierra Leone as a harbor for poor Black people unwanted in London; few whites went to Jamaica at all, and the ones who did kept Black society at an arm’s length; the long history of failed colonization schemes coming out of the United States indicated a similar discomfort with coexistence with Black people. Instead, assimilation was a matter of power and profit. Missionaries and allied secular authorities hoped to extend the reach of their religious institutions and envisioned Black workers as the productive cogs of a free labor system.

The missionary critique of Black religion was indicative of a general investment in white supremacy and the missionaries’ ideological position between the freedpeople and their former enslavers. On the one hand, missionary ideology differed in notable ways from that of overtly and violently white supremacist planters. Missionaries were often supportive of higher wages and land ownership for the freedpeople, whom they saw as future members of the “family of man.” That advocacy meant that they faced repeated hostility from the planter class.

On the other hand, missionaries frequently disparaged the freedpeople and were careful to avoid affiliation with Black radical movements. The missionary response to the 1831 Baptist War in Jamaica, also known as the Christmas Rebellion, typifies this balancing act. In the wake of the war, the missionaries distanced themselves from the rebellion and disavowed its violent nature. Knibb responded to the charge that “the whole of the insurrection was planned in a Baptist chapel, and by a Baptist leader” with the assertion: “This is a FALSEHOOD.”<sup>34</sup> Despite

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<sup>34</sup> Hinton and Knibb, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 3.

Knibb's efforts, Jamaican whites came to associate the Baptist missionaries with events in 1831, leading to the christening of that year's uprising as the Baptist War.

As a result, they were punished and subjected to constant hostility. Phillippo described the "most wanton and horrible cruelties perpetrated by the whites, accompanied by outrages on the Baptist missionaries," including the destruction of their chapels.<sup>35</sup> Knibb found himself imprisoned for insurrection upon his return to Jamaica. The missionaries had attempted to distance themselves from violent insurrection, but planter backlash came nonetheless.

Ultimately, the Christmas Rebellion accelerated emancipation in two ways. First, whites became increasingly fearful of an even more widespread revolution. Second, a violent white counterinsurgency engendered considerable backlash in England.

Missionaries thus engaged in a delicate balancing act in an attempt to avoid conflict with either the freedpeople or the former planters. This balance involved maintaining a distance from radical Black political movements while nonetheless asserting that the missionaries held the key to Black freedom. Central to that assertion was the missionary embrace of free labor, legitimate trade, and liberalism. Missionaries believed that wage labor, augmented by religious instruction, could transform societies and usher in an era of prosperity. Further, missionaries hoped that their economic and religious efforts would "civilize" formerly enslaved people, a term that denoted their negative and racist assessments of the work ethic and spiritual practices of Black people.

### *The Cooperative Principle: Radicalism & Redistribution in Free Labor Thinking*

Not all missionaries, however, distanced themselves from radical politics, at least at the outset of their evangelical activity. This was especially true in the United States, as Marxist ideas

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<sup>35</sup> Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 165.

(and Marxist immigrants) and other leftist elements arrived in North America in the antebellum period, and maintained some influence into the beginning of Reconstruction.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1866, Charles Stearns received approval from the Freedmen's Bureau to transfer the contract between a former plantation owner and his "hands" to Stearns' name. The plot of land, which he named Hope on Hope Ever Plantation, was located in Columbia County, Georgia, a short trip from Augusta. It was accessible only through "one of the worst roads of Christendom," whose state of disrepair he considered "another fruit of the all pervading evil-genius of Slavery."<sup>36</sup> This assessment of slavery's negative effects on Southern development was indicative of the former abolitionist's valorization of free labor as the most moral and efficient way to structure an economy. Stearns, who hailed from Massachusetts, espoused a typically Northern economic vision that valorized small, independent landowners. He condemned the system of "gentlemen farmers" for its tendency... not to elevate the blacks"<sup>37</sup> and hoped that abolition would "result in the destruction of the landed aristocracy."<sup>38</sup>

Yet Stearns had plans beyond simply establishing free labor through the regular process of contracts and wages. "It was our purpose," he writes, "to test the practicability of the co-operative principle," with the intention of decreasing "the vast discrepancy between the profits of labor, and of capital... so as to allow labor its legitimate share." Recognizing that the establishment of a co-op may have seemed a "Eutopian idea," Stearns sought to prove "by actual experiment" its merits.<sup>39</sup> Hope on Hope Ever Plantation, then, was to be a staging ground in implementing Stearns' vision of a more equitable economy that would at once provide for the freedpeople, reduce class division, and bring profit to its backers. As he considered himself a

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<sup>36</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 31-32.

teacher and a missionary, Stearns would also provide the freedpeople on the plantation with schooling and religious instruction.

Stearns upheld many of the convictions of the typical free labor advocate, including a devout belief in independent proprietorship, negotiated wage contracts, and the inefficiencies of slavery. Yet in his critique of the “vast discrepancy” within the economic system, he dissented from the prevailing free labor position that labor and capital coexisted harmoniously in pursuit of shared interests. Free labor, in other words, was a big tent, and Stearns was by no means alone in his interest in a more extensive redistribution of land and profit. A variety of redistributive proposals gained significant traction in the early years of Reconstruction. Such proposals included the provision of a robust welfare system, increased state intervention in the economy on behalf of the disadvantaged and poor, small-scale ventures such as Stearns’, and, most prominently, the redistribution of land formerly owned by enslavers to formerly enslaved people.

The freedpeople were at the forefront of advocacy and collective action for land ownership and labor rights. They consistently asserted that “the political freedom granted as a consequence of the abolition of slavery needed to have an economic foundation, which usually meant facilitating access to land.”<sup>40</sup> In a response to General Oliver Otis Howard’s announcement of the revocation of land redistribution, a committee representing the freedpeople stated the issue clearly enough: “General, we want Homesteads, we were promised Homesteads by the government.”<sup>41</sup> Black land ownership was also a relatively popular proposal among the Port Royal missionaries. “Hurrah! Jubilee! Lands are to be set apart for the people so they cannot be oppressed, or driven to work for speculators, or ejected from their homesteads,” Laura Towne

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<sup>40</sup> Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major-General, United States Army; Volume 2* (Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2018), 237-239.

remarked in February of 1863.<sup>42</sup> A sizable contingent of the missionaries joined Towne in expressing strong support for the confiscation of land from the former planters.

Redistributive policies even had a significant constituency among Northern political elites. Among abolitionists and within the emerging Republican party, anti-capitalist sentiment and advocacy of government intervention and land grants were commonplace. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln and Horace Greeley, editor of the enormously influential *New York Tribune*, strongly endorsed the interests of labor over capitalists and even trafficked in Marxist political theory. Greeley pledged that his paper was “ready to expose and reprove the crimes whereby wealth is amassed and luxury enjoyed in our own country.”<sup>43</sup> Greeley and Lincoln both were heavily influenced by a network of German radicals who had arrived in Illinois and across the U.S. following the 1848 revolutions in Europe, including Carl Schurz, a German revolutionary who helped form the Republican Party. The *Tribune* went as far as to publish 350 articles under the byline of Karl Marx himself. There was broad-based support for radicalism and redistribution among not only the freedpeople but Northern missionaries and political elites as well.<sup>44</sup> This support would be greatly tested as Reconstruction unfolded.

### *Evangelizing in the Wilderness: Emancipation as an Experiment*

Implicit in the missionary ambition of “civilizing” their subjects was the idea that the places where they preached and the people to whom they preached had not developed sufficiently to be considered civilized. These missionaries tended to be well educated and members of a relatively elite social class, but they were often ignorant of the long and complex

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<sup>42</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 103.

<sup>43</sup> John Nichols, *The “S” Word: A Short History of an American Tradition...Socialism* (Verso, 2011), 67.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 61-101.

histories of their eventual destinations. As a result, they tended to view those destinations as wildernesses—societies in a natural or primitive state.

Missionaries in Sierra Leone, engaging in an imperial tick present since Columbus touched down in the Americas, juxtaposed the country's natural beauty with the "primitive" character of its natives. Mary Charlesworth juxtaposed the colony's danger—"Tornados rage in fury; and a poisonous wind sweeps over the dark forests, breathing disease and death"—with its beauty—"the land itself has scenes of nature, grand and beautiful."<sup>45</sup> Likewise, missionaries in Jamaica romanticized the wilderness and natural beauty of their new homes while presenting the native population as simple and uncivilized. "Half discovered amidst the thick foliage of the cocoa-nut groves which marked their site, and the purple darkness of the inland hills, appear groups of smiling villages."<sup>46</sup> The villagers blended into their surroundings, absorbed into nature.

The romanticization of the Jamaican landscape stood in sharp contrast to missionaries' assessment of its population. Thomas Burchell believed that "the moral and social condition of the vari-coloured population of this island, contrasted strongly and most affectingly with its natural scenery." While the island was beautiful, "the imported Africans were abandoned to obeah and myalism, and other gross superstitions; and... victims of the lowest vices."<sup>47</sup> This contrast allowed missionaries to assert their own indispensability in civilizing Black Jamaicans while maintaining hope in the productive capacity of their destinations.

Missionaries in Sierra Leone saw the colony as a blank slate awaiting the arrival of civilization. Padraic Scanlan has argued that "anti-slavery activists in London assumed that the West African societies involved in the slave trade had been so debased by it that they had

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<sup>45</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*, 43.

virtually no ‘civilization’ to speak of.”<sup>48</sup> This attitude carried over to the missionaries. W.A.B. Johnson repeatedly conceived of the land on which Regent, the Liberated African village he ran from 1816 to 1823, was built as “what I may call a complete wilderness.” But, he wrote, “God says, ‘that in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.’”<sup>49</sup> Johnson, then, would bring the waters of Christianity to the parched wilderness of Sierra Leone.

In Jamaica, missionaries associated wilderness with “uncivilized” portions of the Black population. The Reverend Henry Dutton lamented the state of the “wilderness of Clarendon,” a parish in the South of the island, where “the native Baptists flourish and exert an influence prejudicial, I believe, to the welfare of man and the glory of God.”<sup>50</sup> In 1835, Phillippo founded the first Jamaican free village, known as Sligoville. Edward Underhill’s description of the land that became Sligoville echoes Johnson’s earlier description of the land that became Regent. The town, he wrote, arose “on the ruins of slavery. When purchased, the land was an unreclaimed wilderness.”<sup>51</sup> Like Johnson, Phillippo and his colleagues believed they were arriving in a colony stuck in a state of nature. Their chapels and villages would be built atop ruins and wilderness rather than a preexisting society.

When missionaries in the United States went South, they brought along with them a set of preconceptions about the region, fashioned by Northern politicians and newspapers. The Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, completed by a group of Republican members of Congress, aptly summarized the state of the former Confederacy immediately following wartime.

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<sup>48</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors*, 1087.

<sup>49</sup> Tyng, *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 165-166.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Bean Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo: Missionary in Jamaica* (Yates & Alexander, 1881), 184.

“They were in a state of utter exhaustion,” the Report says of the Southern states. “The people of those States were left bankrupt... They were also necessarily in a state of complete anarchy.”<sup>52</sup>

Northern preconceptions of a war torn South contributed to an image of the region as a *tabula rasa* awaiting the civilizing force of a free labor system. Among Northern elites, the vision “of a new free labor society in the South was based on a picture of the South as an undeveloped wilderness waiting for the efficient labor of free people to bring forth wealth.”<sup>53</sup>

In other words, for missionaries, wilderness meant opportunity. Their goal was to foster civilization and to spread the Gospel, and a society without deeply rooted or extensively developed social and religious norms would be most conducive to that goal. To missionaries in Sierra Leone, the region was a wilderness that they were there to tame and populate. Missionary Peter Hartwig argued that, compared to “the Mohammedans,” a Susu man “will listen to what is said to him, and acknowledge that he stands in need of a religion.”<sup>54</sup> Muslims, that is, were harder to convert to Christianity because they already held a belief system. On the other hand, Hartwig believed that the Susu lacked any religion, and were therefore more amenable to conversion. That Sierra Leone was, according to the missionaries, populated by pagans in a wilderness gave those missionaries the chance to instill their own values in the colony.

In the U.S., the South’s underdevelopment was a prerequisite for Northerners to do the kind of work in the South that they wanted to do. This meant enacting a sort of transposition, grafting their conceptions of Northern exceptionalism onto the waiting South and their religious dogma and exaltation of work onto the freedpeople. This could not happen *unless* conditions in the South made it receptive to their influence, and Northerners were led to believe that they

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<sup>52</sup> Thaddeus Stevens, et al. “Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction” (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1866), vii.

<sup>53</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>54</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 203.



would. A similar dynamic was at play with Northern settlement of the West. The common portrayal of the region as “virgin land” untouched and ready to be cultivated by Northern whites provided rhetorical justification for the expansion of the settler state and removal of Native populations.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the perception that the West could act as a release valve and a source of economic opportunity for Northern whites was at the foundation of the anti-slavery movement. Ensuring the free status of newly admitted states would allow Northerners to take advantage of American expansion without the competition of slave labor.

The notion of Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the South as wilderness was implicit in the parlance of “experiment” to describe various economic and social ventures among formerly enslaved people—a term that has remained common in the historiography of emancipations.<sup>56</sup> From this perspective, missionary destinations operated as laboratories meant to demonstrate the applicability of a free labor system in a new, unexplored context. To create an experiment, one must have control over the conditions and relevant variables. Missionaries and their allies believed they did have this control, despite the wishes of former planters on the one hand, and more often than not, the freedpeople on the other.

In this experiment, the behavior of Black laborers, and their capacity for hard work, was the primary independent variable. Instilling those workers with the economic and social sensibilities of British or Northern whites was the top priority. As John Clarkson, then Governor of Sierra Leone, put it in 1792: “the character of the black people for ever after will depend on the manner they conduct themselves, and that the fate of millions of their complexion will partly be affected by it.”<sup>57</sup> Clarkson’s statement reveals that Black capacity for labor was an open

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<sup>55</sup> Francis Jennings, “Virgin Land and Savage People,” *American Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1971): 519–41.

<sup>56</sup> Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation*, 197.

<sup>57</sup> Z. Wai, *Epistemologies of African Conflicts: Violence, Evolutionism, and the War in Sierra Leone* (Springer, 2012), 59.

question for many whites, and that the course of future emancipations would depend on the answer to that question.

In Sierra Leone, missionaries and secular officials alike were acutely aware of the region's status as an experiment in emancipation and a potential model for the broader British public and the Atlantic World. "Many eyes are upon us," noted Edward Bickersteth, who travelled to Sierra Leone in 1816 to assess the work of the CMS.<sup>58</sup> Governor MacCarthy described Sierra Leone as a sort of "great door," a point of no return, through which the European would enter and ultimately transform Africa.<sup>59</sup> The stakes, therefore, were high. Sierra Leone was to be the proving ground for the viability of emancipation. Indeed, the colony's experiences with emancipation would become a flashpoint in the debate over emancipation in 1820s England.

Missionaries also viewed Jamaica as a sort of social laboratory. In the words of David East, "small and insignificant as is our sea-girt isle, during the past fifty years, God has been working out in it some of the most interesting moral and social problems."<sup>60</sup> East's consideration of Jamaica's role is indicative of the global stakes of abolition in Jamaica and the missionary faith in God to guide emancipation. Missionaries in Jamaica felt the eyes of the world upon them and felt a divine mandate to prove that the experiment of emancipation could be successful on a large scale.

In the long term, however, the missionary view of their destinations as wildernesses and their efforts as an experiment proved ignorant of social dynamics that predated their arrival,

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Rawson Birks and Edward Bickersteth, *Memoirs of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth* (London: Seeleys, 1852), 267.

<sup>59</sup> Bruce L. Mouser, "Origins of Church Missionary Society Accommodation to Imperial Policy: The Sierra Leone Quagmire and the Closing of the Susu Mission, 1804-17," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, no. 4 (2009), 375.

<sup>60</sup> Clark et al., *The Voice of Jubilee*, 14.

leading to frustration in their evangelical efforts. Moreover, by placing the source of emancipation's success on the backs of Black workers, they set the stage for racist backlash. For the time being, however, missionaries held an inflated perception of their own capacity to transform postemancipation societies that they believed would prove compliant and malleable to their worldview.

### *An Article of Faith: Missionary Optimism*

A firm belief in the superiority of their religious, economic, and social ideologies along with a conception of Jamaica, Sierra Leone, and the South as undeveloped depositories for evangelical influence combined to foster an initial attitude of nearly unchecked optimism among missionary groups.

The Clapham Sect, for example, blindly yet vigorously put its faith into the transformative power of legitimate trade in Sierra Leone. Though they knew little about the details of crop production and the contours of trade in Africa, they viewed legitimate trade as a “panacea.”<sup>61</sup> This attitude elided the deep roots of African slave labor in the cultivation and movement of “legitimate goods.” Similarly, liberalism was an article of faith for abolitionists, officials, and missionaries in Jamaica. Thomas Holt has asserted that the liberal belief in emancipation's profitability was “a conclusion arrived at by deduction... In truth it was a ‘faith’ just as powerful, perhaps, as the belief in Providence's immanent designs.”<sup>62</sup> Missionary optimism stemmed from the tautology of the liberal worldview. Wage labor *must* be profitable because it was wage labor, and that liberal worldview had decided wage labor was profitable.

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<sup>61</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 50.

For Knibb, that optimism gave way to a vision for Jamaica that was nearly utopian in its ambitions. As Catherine Hall writes, Knibb believed in “the possibility of a new world... where black freedmen and white missionaries could build a new society, one with which he could powerfully identify.”<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, early reports from missionaries in postemancipation Jamaica were hopeful. Knibb expressed approval of the religious fervor and reading abilities of the freedpeople. Missionaries were also pleasantly surprised by the political acumen and enthusiasm of the freedpeople. Most critically, they seemed to be working to the satisfaction of the missionaries.<sup>64</sup>

In his biography of Phillippo, Underhill described the early years of emancipation in sunny terms: “it was evident that the enjoyment of freedom was acting as a stimulus to industry and enterprise... The happy effects of the change surpassed the hopes of their friends, while many opponents to freedom became converts to its advantages.”<sup>65</sup> Emancipation, then, was on an upward trajectory, and Jamaica was a model for its advantages.

Writing in 1843, Phillippo laid out a wide range of virulently racist critiques of the enslaved Black population before emancipation. Their dancing was licentious, their language foul, their religion mere superstition; they tended towards drunkenness and theft. But emancipation had cured all of these failings. The postemancipation freedperson, in Phillippo’s telling, was far more civilized, broken of the spell of Obeahism, and free of degrading social rituals. This dramatic shift in attitude reflects Phillippo’s deep seated racism as well as his ardent belief in emancipation in and of itself as a panacea.

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<sup>63</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 136.

<sup>64</sup> Hinton and Knibb, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 210; Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 200.

<sup>65</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 169.

A similar attitude was present in the U.S. In the early days of Port Royal, the missionaries held a deep optimism in the promise of their labors and of Reconstruction in general. In 1862, towards the beginning of the experiment, Towne contentedly surveyed the state of their progress. When they arrived, the freedpeople were “afraid and discontented... and now they are jolly and happy and decently fed and dressed, and so full of affection and gratitude” for the Northern transplants.<sup>66</sup> The trajectory of the freedpeople pointed firmly upward.

The missionaries, however, overestimated their importance and their abilities. The places they had arrived were very much *not* clean slates awaiting their influence. The failure of missionaries, businessmen, and secular officials alike to fully consider the extent and complexity of preexisting relations of race and labor contributed greatly to their continued frustrations and ultimate failure. Further, racist and paternalistic assumptions among the missionaries fomented conflict and limited their political imagination. Upon arrival, though, missionaries did not foresee this eventual failure. Despite some internal factionalism and skepticism regarding the labor capacity of formerly enslaved people, they were emphatically optimistic in their ability to reshape the religious and economic landscape of the South through religious instruction of the freedpeople and free labor entrepreneurialism.

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<sup>66</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 68.

## 2. FREE LABORING: THE MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

As time wore on, missionaries struggled in the tasks of actually spreading Christianity and profiting from the cultivation of crops. In some ventures, particularly the education and political mobilization of the freedpeople, missionaries had consistent success. But in others, particularly the profitable implementation of a free labor system, missionaries and humanitarian planters struggled to break through. These struggles stemmed in part from a misinformed and overly optimistic conception of preexisting dynamics of race and labor.

Both the breakthroughs and the struggles of missionary work in these countries were also the result of Black resistance and influence. The freedpeople were collectively eager to obtain at least a basic education, regardless of age, and to get involved within newly accessible political systems. But they were far more skeptical of efforts to reintroduce any form of labor coercion and advocated strongly for material freedoms. Meanwhile, hostility from white planters and political conservatives continued to complicate efforts to enact reform on a meaningful scale.

In particular, conflicts over land and labor emerged as missionaries attempted to implement their worldviews. Black land ownership proved especially polarizing in Jamaica and the United States. Missionaries dealt with Black resistance in disparate ways, sometimes resorting to physical discipline but often attempting to use religious discipline instead as a rhetorical cudgel. In all three countries, villages or plantations run by missionaries acted as sites for, and microcosms of, the development of these conflicts.

### *Warning Signs*

As missionaries settled in, the register of their accounts shifted from optimism to complaint. Missionaries were angry at the freedpeople for their perceived idleness, afraid of the

violent planter class, unsatisfied with the efforts of secular authorities, and frequently short of necessary funds. Their general inability to grow crops at a rate equivalent to that prior to their arrival further exacerbated their frustrations. Nonetheless, they remained committed to the execution of their “civilizing mission.”

In Sierra Leone, signs of trouble emerged early with the creation of the Church Missionary Society in 1799. Despite their grand hopes, the CMS proved unable to recruit any British missionaries. One factor in recruitment failures was the negative reputation of Sierra Leone in Europe. “The reputed fatality of the African climate to European constitutions, and the savage character of the natives of Africa... operated to discourage Englishmen from enlisting,” wrote Samuel Walker in 1845.<sup>1</sup> Scrambling for backups, the Society came to an agreement with a seminary in Berlin for the provision of missionaries to be sent overseas.

Further struggles developed quickly from there. Events in 1807 marked an important shift in the objectives and affiliations of the missionaries. These included the establishment of the Susu Mission in the Rio Pongo, the expulsion of Peter Hartwig for alleged ties to the slave trade and, crucially, the formalization of the Society’s relationship with secular officials. This formalization culminated in Sierra Leone’s admission as a Crown colony in 1808.

The colonial government marshalled significant resources towards the mission among the Susu in the Rio Pongo region. The venture proved a massive disappointment. For one, the rate of conversion was low. “There was no church, no proper public worship... Not a single Native under their care had been admitted to the Holy Communion,” noted a historian of the CMS.<sup>2</sup> Linguistic barriers hamstrung schooling. Classes were taught in English, meaning that the Susu

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<sup>1</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 186.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hole, *The Early History of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East to the End of A.D. 1814* (Church Missionary Society, 1896), 139.

struggled at times to understand the lessons and the missionaries had little opportunity to learn the Susu language. As long as the Susu could not receive religious instruction in their own tongue, opined Charles Hole, “the Society’s main purpose was not being accomplished.”<sup>3</sup>

Edward Bickersteth, an English Baptist, went to Sierra Leone in 1816 on behalf of the CMS to identify the challenges facing missionaries in the colony. In his report, Bickersteth complained that missionaries such as Leopold Butscher had focused on schooling children but struggled to make inroads among adults. Bickersteth summarized the “impediments to preaching” as “ignorance of the language—want of interpreters—the slave traders—sickness—the climate... and, especially, the care of the children, which takes up the whole time of the missionary”<sup>4</sup> After facing criticism from Bickersteth for the lack of adult converts, Butscher penned an apology to Governor MacCarthy.

Other missionary expeditions proved similarly frustrating. On his mission to the Bulloms north of Freetown, Gustavus Nylander struggled to convert the native Africans and adapt to local customs. Jonathan Klein and his wife moved to Bramia to establish the Gambier settlement, optimistic that they would inherit a flourishing school. Their hopes were quickly dashed. They struggled to recruit teachers and wound up with only 34 pupils. Melchoir Renner, posted in the outlying settlement of Bashia, complained of a lack of financial and industrial investment from the colonial government.<sup>5</sup>

The slave trade was a near-constant thorn in the side of the Sierra Leone missionaries. “The influence which the traders have over the Soosoos is greater than can well be imagined,”

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 451.

<sup>5</sup> W. A. Hart, “A West African Masquerade in 1815,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23, no. 1–4 (January 1, 1993), 136–139; Katrina Keefer, “The First Missionaries of The Church Missionary Society in Sierra Leone, 1804–1816: A Biographical Approach,” *History in Africa* 44 (June 2017), 210–214.



wrote Hartwig, connecting that influence to “indolence” among the Susu.<sup>6</sup> Native groups that benefited from the economy of the slave trade also intervened against missionary efforts. The trade remained an obstacle for missionaries even after its putative abolition in 1808, as traders remained unusually powerful along the Rio Pongo at least through 1814.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, missionaries and colonial officials often ran into difficulties when it came to dealing with the native African groups living in the region. Contentions arose most often over issues of land and slave trading. The Temne, for instance, perceived land rights and property “ownership” differently than the British, complicating efforts to establish an agreement for settlement.<sup>8</sup> Klein, for one, left repeated accounts of Fula attacks on the Rio Pongo settlement. Stationed in Regent, Johnson fretted that colonial expansion would jeopardize relations between missionaries and natives: “making more towns and taking lands which did not belong to the Colony... will more and more prejudice the minds of the natives against the spread of the gospel of our God.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Johnson’s recognition of the negative influence of imperial conquest on the European reputation went unacknowledged by secular authorities.

Johnson encountered other difficulties as well. Settling into his work in Regent, he complained of a lack of resources for his many responsibilities and lamented the state of the Liberated Africans. “I am again without any assistance,” he wrote in 1817. “The people with whom I have to do, are as *babes in Christ*.”<sup>10</sup> Around the same time, Johnson entered into a crisis of spiritual self-doubt, “much distressed in mind.... *Oh that I were as in months past, as in the*

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<sup>6</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 198.

<sup>7</sup> Mouser, “Origins of Church Missionary Society Accommodation to Imperial Policy,” 388.

<sup>8</sup> Katrina Keefer, *Children, Education and Empire in Early Sierra Leone: Left in Our Hands* (Routledge, 2018), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Tyng, *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson*, 204.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

*days when God preserved me,*” he lamented.<sup>11</sup> In short, the missionaries in Sierra Leone were in a state of consistent crisis, both internal and external.

After a fruitful first postemancipation decade, missionaries in Jamaica faced a similarly dire situation. Much of their consternation concerned the Native Baptists, a radical Black religious group that predated the arrival of the European missionaries. The Native Baptists had formed their own organization by 1840, though it had extensive links to a wide array of religious institutions in the colony. One historian has described George William Gordon as “the most popular leader and the only truly national figure in post-emancipation society.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the Native Baptists and their affiliated leaders could boast of considerable national popularity.

From the beginning of their arrival, the English Baptists maintained a studious distance from the Native Baptists. “We have no connexion with them,” insisted Knibb; “they hate us with the most perfect Hatred.”<sup>13</sup> Relations between the two groups were strained. One Native Baptist preacher complained that, after an attempt to work with Phillippo, the English missionary had “severely rebuked” him and withheld travelling expenses.<sup>14</sup> For his part, Phillippo decried the “pernicious follies” of the Native Baptists during an 1842 outbreak of Myalism on the island.<sup>15</sup> While missionaries in Sierra Leone struggled to convert the colony’s inhabitants, Christianity already had a strong foothold in Jamaica and the United States. The issue, then, was that Black Christianity looked quite different from white Christianity. Missionaries in Jamaica were anxious to limit the power of leaders such as Gordon and Bogle who had created parallel religious networks with appeal to many Black Jamaicans.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Hutton, *Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 113.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 187.

Beyond religious conflict, financial troubles were a defining feature of many Northern missionaries' experience in the American South. The 1862 cotton crop was a particular disappointment for many of the ministers in Port Royal. Under Northern supervision, the region's plantations yielded an average of under 26 pounds of lint cotton per acre, down dramatically from the average antebellum year. In Port Royal, one historian argues, "the agricultural and industrial wing of the experiment was at best inconclusive." When Congress inquired about the returns for their investment in Port Royal, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase fudged the numbers, combining the yield from 1862 with the larger 1861 returns.<sup>16</sup> Bad crop years in 1866 and 1867, as well, increased tensions between Northern and Southern businessmen who had found some semblance of harmony in their pursuit of profit during more productive years.<sup>17</sup>

Some of these financial struggles were the result of unfortunate weather cycles or broad patterns of economic development. But Northern missionaries and planters were also prone to flawed business decisions. Foremost among these was their ardent devotion to cotton plantations at the expense of a more diverse crop yield. The freedpeople lamented that "The Yankees preach nothing but cotton, cotton."<sup>18</sup> They had a point. The cotton frenzy created something of a speculative bubble in the South. While some found immense profit in high inflation, war contracts, and gold prices, "the prosperity of the period was largely artificial," as growth and real wages fell.<sup>19</sup> In their dangerous attachment to cotton speculation, these Northerners mirrored antebellum Southern enslavers, a fact that did not escape the notice of formerly enslaved people.

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<sup>16</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 204-205.

<sup>17</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 150.

<sup>18</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 19.

In Sierra Leone and Jamaica, too, the postemancipation period was not as profitable as the optimistic missionaries had envisioned. The agricultural viability of Sierra Leone was in question from the very beginning of the venture. A visitor to Granville Town in 1788 remarked that “the soil of the region was poor for the intended plantation crops, and that disease was prevalent.”<sup>20</sup> This observation proved prescient: The colony never produced enough rice even to satisfy internal demand. Like Salmon Chase after them, members of the Liberated African Department thus resorted to manipulating production numbers. They created a calculation that loosely (and favorably) converted all crops grown in the Liberated African villages into “an equivalent value of rice in order to demonstrate increasing productivity.”<sup>21</sup> The unchecked missionary faith in the profitability of wage labor created incentives to lie when that faith proved hollow. Missionaries had over-promised and under-delivered.

The productivity of free labor in postemancipation Jamaica was similarly disappointing. To their credit, missionaries in Jamaica avoided the fascination with the slavery-era crop, in this case sugar, that doomed their counterparts in the United States. While the planters believed Jamaica’s future “depended entirely on the estates and sugar production,” the missionaries envisioned “a more mixed economy.”<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, free labor rarely worked as smoothly in practice as it did in theory. Planters desired a captive workforce and attempted to prevent workers from relocating to missionary villages. They refused to pay wages they had promised, with missionary Walter Dendy reporting that weeks could go by without workers receiving payment. The wages the freedpeople did receive were inconsistent from employer to employer, as were work hours. Planters even

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<sup>20</sup> Keefer, *Children, Education, and Empire in Early Sierra Leone*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors*, 185.

<sup>22</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 136.

relocated estates in order to prevent their workers from cultivating provision or subsistence crops.<sup>23</sup> These issues revealed holes in the missionary vision of a perfectly rational and consistent free labor system while also interfering with missionary efforts to construct effective labor regimes in their own villages.

As a result of all these struggles, missionaries repeatedly found themselves needing to be bailed out by moneyed patrons in the North or in London. The London Evangelicals behind the CMS were affluent and “linked in the most intimate way to men of significant governmental and imperial experience.”<sup>24</sup> The largesse of these men was both seed money for missionary activity in Sierra Leone and a source of credit in times of distress. Butscher went to England in 1812 to report on the colony’s progress and request further funds. In Regent, Johnson received repeated infusions of capital from the Liberated African Department, along with “slate, lead, bells, clocks, and weathervanes” for his schools and churches.<sup>25</sup> The missionaries were not self-sustaining.

Similarly, Phillippo relied on the British to pay off debts incurred in the expansion of the free villages. Edward Underhill described Phillippo as involved in “large pecuniary liabilities, so that we find him constantly appealing to friends in England for aid.”<sup>26</sup> Knibb also found it necessary to petition supporters back in England for funds in order to found the free village of Birmingham.<sup>27</sup> The free villages, then, were not so much profitable and productive investments as they were the beneficiaries of increasingly reluctant charitable donors.

In Georgia, Charles Stearns grimly reported “pecuniary troubles” in early 1868. Stearns had been soliciting loans from Augustus businessmen and a Boston friend to “keep the ship

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<sup>23</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Elbourne, “The Foundation of the Church Missionary Society,” 250.

<sup>25</sup> Padraic X. Scanlan, “The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815–1824,” *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (October 1, 2016), 1102.

<sup>26</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 170.

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 125.

afloat” until finally a New York investor provided him with \$1,000 to make it through to harvest. It was a divine intervention. “Who but God,” Stearns wondered, “could have persuaded this man to have performed a deed so entirely uncommon in the annals of benevolence?”<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the North was never far away from the Port Royal experiment; a variety of Northern organizations underwrote much of the effort. Their names suggest an emphasis on welfare, aid, and teaching: The Education Commission, the National Freedmen’s Relief Association, the Freedmen’s Aid Society, and the Philadelphia Port Royal Relief Committee prominent among them. While not all of the missionaries in the South Carolina Sea Islands received money for the entire duration of their stay, money from these groups was essential to recruiting and maintaining missionary involvement. Beyond bankrolling individuals, they also acted as hubs of coordination—middlemen, of a sort, connecting individual benefactors with the evangelical effort and communicating with the missionaries to identify key needs and points of success.

Reliance on donors worked for a time, but it was not a sustainable model for missionary work. Missionaries knew that the conditions that necessitated charitable loans and donations—in particular, a lack of profit from missionary villages and plantations—threatened to become the basis of donor retrenchment, as philanthropists would sour on free labor if it did not, in fact, deliver financial gains. For all their talk of cultivating independence among the freedpeople, missionaries remained dependents themselves.

Rhetorically, missionaries may have prioritized their humanitarian ambitions over their commercial intentions. But when it came to implementing their vision, financial struggles proved a primary, and endemic, constraint. Missionaries encountered unfortunate agricultural

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<sup>28</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 201-202.

conditions, planter resistance, and their own inexperience with crop cultivation. Yet the most poignant source of frustration was usually the freedpeople, whom they found resistant to the economic side of their agenda. This frustration foreshadowed the missionary turn against formerly enslaved people. It stemmed not only from the white supremacy of many missionaries, but from a strain of resistant and radical politics among the freedpeople.

### *Religion, Land Ownership and Black Emancipationist Politics*

The freedpeople initially lacked social power and capital, but they managed to advance a political agenda that historian David Blight has termed “emancipationist.”<sup>29</sup> In short, the goal was to use emancipation as an opportunity to create a more egalitarian nation by provisioning robust political protections and economic stimulus for the freedpeople.

In Jamaica, that vision found its champion among the Native Baptists. Many Native Baptists harbored a radical politics rooted in a vision of resistance and racial equality. “Not as long as I live shall the white man trample me under foot,” wrote Samuel Clarke, a Black politician connected to the Native Baptist network.<sup>30</sup> While English missionaries to Jamaica interpreted the Bible as an antislavery document justifying their civilizing mission, Native Baptists cultivated a political interpretation of Christianity rooted in justice, human dignity and overthrow of oppressors. Paul Bogle’s hymn book had marked a series of verses with themes of “hope, fortitude and perseverance; composure and dignity; justice and the inevitable triumph of right over wrong.”<sup>31</sup> The eventual rebellion in Morant Bay was an extension of these spiritual themes into the political domain.

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<sup>29</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Hutton, *Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

Bogle's counterpart George William Gordon leveraged the language of the Enlightenment towards his political agenda. He cited popular revolutions in England and France as justification for revolt in Jamaica, asking presciently in April of 1865, "how long may good order be expected to continue?"<sup>32</sup> Like Menard, Gordon conceived of education as a tool of liberation. He expressed support for government funding of the education system, arguing that "with the abolition of slavery they should have had an educational measure."<sup>33</sup> Freedom was thus bound up with education. The Native Baptists focused on similar themes as the English Baptists—biblical interpretation, Enlightenment values, the necessity of schooling—but took those themes in different directions and used them for purposes of revolution, egalitarianism, and justice.

The Native Baptist Church functioned as an organizing hub of Black resistance and politics. For the freedpeople, according to Thomas Holt, "churches were venues for fostering community, legitimizing alternative world-views, and articulating political solidarity."<sup>34</sup> Native Baptist churches were not tied to any political machine, but were instead a site of world-building, syncretic religious practices, and resistance. Newspapers that reported on international events were also crucial in the spread and formation of Native Baptist ideology. Black Jamaicans learned of revolution in France, Civil War in the United States, and mutiny in India, and appropriated those historical events for their own worldview. White missionaries were not the only ones watching rebellions and emancipations across the Atlantic.

Black politics during American Reconstruction were similarly oriented. In Port Royal, the freedpeople repeatedly lobbied for an increase in corn cultivation in place of a myopic

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 291.



interest in selling cotton. Edward Pierce noted that the freedpeople “were beginning to plant corn in their patches, but were disinclined to plant cotton, regarding it as a badge of servitude.”<sup>35</sup>

Laura Towne noticed the same dynamic, writing in 1862 that the freedpeople resented that they “must work at cotton again this year, especially as it must be to the neglect of their corn, upon which they have these to feel that their next winter’s food depends.”<sup>36</sup>

Resistance to Northern coercion and encroachment among the freedpeople also took subtler, everyday forms. The voices of formerly enslaved people often emerge most acutely in missionary accounts when the missionary expresses doubt or displeasure over a point of conflict with the freedpeople. Stearns complained of the “systematic disobedience” of the freedpeople on his plantation.<sup>37</sup> The cook was a particular source of conflict, as she staunchly resisted working on Sundays, cooking with Northern recipes, and cleaning according to Stearns’ wife’s preferences. Stearns eventually took to calling her the “evil one” and suspected that Satan had some role in her defiance.<sup>38</sup> If missionaries were the messengers of God, resistance to their efforts must have been indicative of the devil’s influence. The cook was not the only recipient of Stearns’ ire. He reported constant stealing on the plantation and complained that “when some of my men would chafe at the strictness of some of my regulations, they would attempt to divert me from my purpose” by comparing him unfavorably to their former enslavers.<sup>39</sup>

Read against the grain, these complaints reveal a logic of resistance among formerly enslaved people. The workers on the plantation were insistent on their freedom and its accompanying privileges, resistant to any order resembling the dynamics of slavery, and cherishing of free time

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Pierce, “The Negroes at Port Royal. Report of E. L. Pierce, Government Agent, to the Hon. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury.,” Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, September 1863.

<sup>36</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

and social connections. Sundays off of work, holidays, and individually owned plots of land were jealously guarded. The perspective of the freedpeople, located in the subtext of Stearns' dialogue, serves as the most powerful counter to his racist judgment of their intellectual and moral character.

In postemancipation societies, Black land ownership was among the most critical political issues under debate. Advocacy among the freedpeople for corn production in the U.S. was an offshoot of their interest in subsistence, rather than cash crop, farming practices. Pursuing subsistence farming on small, individually owned plots was one reason that many formerly enslaved people advocated strongly for land redistribution. Providing land formerly owned by enslavers to the freedpeople was a primary political objective of many missionaries as well as the freedpeople themselves.

Yet in Port Royal, as in the rest of the South, this objective was never realized. In the South Carolina Sea Islands, government officials disagreed on the proportion of confiscated land that would be offered to the freedpeople at a discounted price rather than made available to land speculators at market rate. Secretary Chase suggested in December of 1863 that the government would allow the freedpeople to “preempt” the public sale. But in February of 1864, “the news came that Chase had reversed himself, had withdrawn the December pre-emption instructions, and wanted the public sale to go forward,” allowing the freedpeople access only to a small portion of land kept for “charitable purposes.”<sup>40</sup> A similar cycle of promise followed by betrayal occurred regionwide. In the summer of 1865, Oliver Howard instructed the Freedmen’s Bureau to set aside 40 forty-acre plots of land for the freedpeople. President Andrew Johnson, however, quickly ordered Howard to walk back the order.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 272-292.

<sup>41</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction [Updated Edition]* (Harper Collins, 2015), 72.

Of the many injustices levied against the freedpeople in the postemancipation period, the betrayal of land reform was perhaps the most acutely felt. The government's reversal engendered bitter resentment, resistance, and protest. Laura Towne was devastated, predicting that the denial of land to the freedpeople would "create great ill-feeling towards the Northerners."<sup>42</sup> She was right. In the South Carolina Sea Islands, the freedpeople protested "by planting their corn in the cotton fields, and they refused to pull it out." When one Port Royal teacher scolded them for this act of defiance, they responded that Northern planters had "no right" to the land.<sup>43</sup> When President Johnson decided to return land to Southern planters, on "more than one occasion freemen armed themselves, barricaded plantations, and drove off owners attempting to dispossess them."<sup>44</sup>

In Sierra Leone, due in part to distinct local customs, the desire for individual land ownership was not so strong among Africans. Because many Liberated Africans came from "societies where slaves did most of the farming," they "cleaved to their own understandings of the meaning of farmwork, and rejected it." Their conception of agricultural work did not necessarily align with those of the missionaries.

The scene was different in Jamaica, where the freedpeople expressed an ardent desire for land ownership. "I was surprised to find how general was the desire among the negroes to become possessed of a little land," wrote an American visitor to the island in 1850, "and upon what sound principles that desire was based."<sup>45</sup> Demand for land among the freedpeople was enough to push land prices up dramatically. Thomas Holt estimates that "more than 21 percent of

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<sup>42</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 139.

<sup>43</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 313.

<sup>44</sup> Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 74.

<sup>45</sup> John Bigelow, *Jamaica in 1850: Or, the Effects of Sixteen Years of Freedom on a Slave Colony* (G.P. Putnam, 1851), 115.

the apprentice population of 1838 had become residents on peasant freeholds” by 1845.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the postemancipation Jamaican economy moved towards smaller landholdings.

This astounding demand reflected the strong desire of formerly enslaved Jamaicans to establish autonomy from the estates through individual proprietorship and the cultivation of both subsistence and cash crops. The freedpeople did grow some sugar on their own land, along with food for their own consumption. Their productivity contradicted prevailing stereotypes of Black workers as prejudiced against the sugar crop and unwilling to provide for themselves.

Across the three countries, missionary approaches to Black radicalism and land ownership were variant, dynamic, and contingent. Black political mobilization was least developed in Sierra Leone, but missionaries repeatedly ran up against the customs and social structures of indigenous groups in their evangelical efforts. In Jamaica, the missionaries were most invested in Black land ownership, but also most eager to distance themselves from Black politics and religious practices, and in particular the Native Baptists. Finally, in the United States, Northern missionaries were more likely to embrace some forms of redistribution and radicalism, but less likely to implement systematic policies of Black land ownership. In each country, Black politics reshaped missionary attitudes, sometimes in support and sometimes in opposition. The pursuit of education, political rights, and labor protections among Black people won them broad victories, along with smaller sites of autonomy and safety.

### *The Free Villages*

Villages run by missionaries and worked by formerly enslaved people were a key site in which the political economy of postemancipation societies played out on the ground. In Sierra

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<sup>46</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 144.

Leone, these took the form of Liberated African villages, whereas in Jamaica they were known as free villages; they were not a formal institution in the U.S., but a similar structure was common, for instance in Port Royal or under missionary planters like Stearns. Many of these villages were plantations, and their structure was similar to that of plantations prior to slavery, but worked by wage labor and, theoretically, with limits on physical discipline. Further, these villages combined agricultural work with religious instruction. They included buildings that could serve as churches and schoolhouses, where missionaries would preach to the residents and teach numbers and letters, often through scripture. Lastly, some of these villages included or were adjacent to plots of land owned by Black workers, who used those plots to grow both subsistence and cash crops. Missionaries assumed secular and religious duties in their free villages, combining economic management with spiritual guidance.

In Sierra Leone and Jamaica, the names of these villages reflected their British influence. They included Regent, Waterloo, Wilberforce, and Hasting in Sierra Leone, and Clarksonville, Birmingham, Victoria, and Wilberforce (again) in Jamaica.

Liberated African villages reached their greatest influence beginning in 1817 and lasted for roughly a decade. Following British victory in Waterloo and the defeat of Napoleonic France, MacCarthy's priorities in Sierra Leone shifted from military conquest to expanding the colony by "civilizing" Liberated Africans and profiting from their labor.

In 1817, MacCarthy made the decision to consolidate missionary work in Freetown, thereby shutting down the Rio Pongo mission and other satellite efforts. Consolidation stemmed in part from the rapid growth of the Liberated African population in Freetown. Missionary work was now to "follow the flag rather than anticipate it," and to take place "within the context and

protection of British imperial policy.”<sup>47</sup> Further, consolidation greatly increased the number of pupils under each missionary in Freetown while requiring a more “structured and codified CMS.”<sup>48</sup> Consolidation indicated the increasing ties between the colonial agenda and the missionary agenda.

The struggles of the Rio Pongo mission themselves contributed to consolidation by bolstering the perspective that the satellite missions were not self-sustaining. Officials believed the native groups in surrounding areas were hostile towards the missionaries and increasingly under the influence of Islam. Another factor pushing MacCarthy towards consolidation was Bickersteth’s strong support for the transition. “The settling of the captured negroes in the colony is likely to promote its rapid improvement; and, probably, will ultimately prove greatly subservient to the extension of the Gospel,” Bickersteth wrote.<sup>49</sup> Relatedly, consolidation indicated the extent to which emphasis had moved from the early Black settlers to Liberated Africans taken from European slave ships.

While the primary objective of the missionaries was conversions, secular duties occupied much of their day-to-day work in these villages. One historian has even argued that the CMS following consolidation was not just a church but, “for all practical purposes, the Government” from 1816 to 1827.<sup>50</sup> As head of Regent, Johnson carried out both religious and secular duties, acting as a town manager as well as a missionary. He regulated the housing system and land ownership, oversaw “public works” and trade, gave out food and clothing, dealt with disease

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<sup>47</sup> Mouser, “Origins of Church Missionary Society Accommodation to Imperial Policy,” 393.

<sup>48</sup> Keefer, “The First Missionaries of The Church Missionary Society in Sierra Leone,” 201.

<sup>49</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 397.

<sup>50</sup> Porter, “Religious Affiliation in Freetown,” 8.

among the town's population, and mediated conflict.<sup>51</sup> Missionaries sometimes complained about the distraction of such duties, but they were a central part of their civilizing mission.

Among post-consolidation Liberated African villages, Regent was unique in its financial and agricultural production. Yet Johnson, unlike missionaries such as Nylander and Renner, did not convert the villagers at the rate MacCarthy desired, leading to conflict. "The Governor came here on Wednesday, and said a good deal about baptizing all the people, which I refused," Johnson noted in his diary in December 1818. Johnson also rejected MacCarthy's mandate to sing "God Save the King" with the villagers and "serve the king next to God." Johnson "told him we did so, and Christians in my opinion were the best subjects of King George," but MacCarthy remained unsatisfied.<sup>52</sup> This disagreement reflected a simmering tension between imperial motives and the missionary agenda in Sierra Leone that consolidation did not fully mitigate.

One key reason for Johnson's relative success was that he ceded significant power to Black pastors, against the wishes of British donors. One historian has argued that "Regent prospered less because of Johnson's particular skill as a missionary, and more because he allowed a group of elite Liberated Africans access to considerable power."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Johnson indicated a willingness to train and work with African pastors that was not shared by the CMS. He noted that the CMS felt it "would not be advisable to send native Christians alone [to Africa] until they should... be tolerably well grounded in enlarged views of Christianity."<sup>54</sup> Yet Johnson submitted applications to the CMS on behalf of his two closest Black assistants, William Davis and William Tamba, nevertheless. In both Sierra Leone and Jamaica, missionaries struggled to balance the need for Black preachers who could connect with the freedpeople with their fear of

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<sup>51</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley*, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Tyng, *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson*, 121.

<sup>53</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors*, 196.

<sup>54</sup> Tyng, *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson*, 139.

granting power to a Black elite whose interests might diverge from those of the white missionaries.

Black agency and autonomy were also key to the development of the free villages in Jamaica. Historians have repeatedly positioned the Jamaican free village as a site of community, autonomy, resistance, and human flourishing. Sidney Mintz was the first to approach the phenomenon of the free village in a systematic manner, outlining several key and common sociological characteristics. He argued that free villages were “geographically definable... socially definable... religiously homogeneous... isolated... [and] under relatively strong church control.”<sup>55</sup> Karla Slocum has given attention to Mintz’s conception of the free villages as “a form of resistance to the plantation by people who had been enslaved on it and who had learned smallholder skills within the very production system that oppressed them.”<sup>56</sup>

Scholarship on the free villages has argued that they were essential in the creation of the institution of “family land.” Jean Besson has described family land as “a creole institution created by the peasantries themselves through Caribbean culture-building in the face of Euro-American land monopoly.”<sup>57</sup> In Slocum’s words, these “communal land-tenure forms... were a means of adaptation and resistance” that granted “a wide range of kin access to land in a context of land scarcity and economic fragility.”<sup>58</sup> This access gave the freedpeople distance from the oppressive labor regime of the plantation estates.

As part of their pursuit of autonomy, many Black Jamaicans simply laid claim to land owned by the Crown. They assumed that abandoned estates of former enslavers were now owned

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<sup>55</sup> Sidney Mintz, “Historical Sociology of the Jamaican Church-Founded Free Village System,” *De West-Indische Gids* 38, no. 1/2 (1958), 59.

<sup>56</sup> Karla Slocum, “Caribbean Free Villages: Toward an Anthropology of Blackness, Place, and Freedom,” *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 3 (2017), 428.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>58</sup> Slocum, “Caribbean Free Villages,” 429.



by the Queen and were therefore returned to the public domain. British and Jamaican authorities believed otherwise, leading to a series of showdowns that rarely ended in favor of the freedpeople. For white missionaries, however, the sad state of many estates provided an opportunity for land purchases that often became free villages. Black workers were generally happy to use the free villages as a way to advance their pursuit of land ownership. Many laborers who spent the day working on nearby estates or in other wage labor cultivated their own plots of land in the free villages. “On returning from their daily labour the men almost uniformly employ themselves in cultivating their own grounds or in improving their own little freeholds,” Phillippo observed.<sup>59</sup>

This autonomy was constrained, however. Slocum characterizes the free villages as a “buffer” from violent economic structures.<sup>60</sup> But that buffer was not impermeable. For one, the missionaries who often oversaw Black land ownership embraced their own distinct yet still oppressive labor regime, complete with supervision, coercion, and discipline in both economic and social spaces. Further, though it was loosening, the estates maintained a grip over the laboring class. Wage labor on plantations remained a substantial source of employment for most freedpeople. Even those that had their own plots or worked in the free villages often moved between those plots and the estates. Many missionaries endorsed this movement, and their conception of free villages at times facilitated a combination of autonomous and plantation labor for the freedpeople.

Free villages were also central to a gendered project of civilizing the freedpeople in the missionary image. As Catherine Hall suggests, “threaded through missionary discourse on the free village was the vision of a new set of relations between men and women” rooted in “a

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<sup>59</sup> Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 235.

<sup>60</sup> Slocum, “Caribbean Free Villages,” 430.

proper appreciation of the division of labor between the sexes.”<sup>61</sup> This thread was apparent in each of Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the U.S.

Missionaries and officials in Sierra Leone fretted about the low rate of marriages among Black settlers and Liberated Africans. Concern over the marriage rate stemmed from a specific set of gendered political values and social norms. As missionary Melchoir Renner put it, marriage among Africans in Sierra Leone “set a good example in living together according to God’s holy ordinance, so that many may follow their pattern, and learn to abhor the deep-rooted and abominable practice of polygamy.”<sup>62</sup> Marriage was not only a model for British domestic norms, but a divine mandate. It was also an economic necessity, as emancipation prohibited the artificial or coerced means of population growth favored under slavery. The missionaries believed marriage was the best way to produce not only domestic norms but the next generation of free laborers.

Missionaries in Jamaica were likewise concerned with the policing of sexuality and gender boundaries. Phillippo, for instance, lamented that “the sanctities of marriage were almost unknown” among the freedpeople.<sup>63</sup> Scandal broke out when missionary Samuel Oughton accused a plantation attorney of having same-sex intercourse with enslaved and apprenticed men. After the attorney sued the Oughton for slander, the missionaries used the ensuing trials to demonstrate their moral righteousness and accuse their planter opponents of licentiousness.<sup>64</sup>

The missionaries themselves relied on marriage, specifically the labor and company of their wives, for social support and the success of their evangelical efforts. Yet they understood

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<sup>61</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 134.

<sup>62</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 279.

<sup>63</sup> Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 218.

<sup>64</sup> Adam Thomas, “‘Outcasts from the World’: Same-Sex Sexuality, Authority, and Belonging in Post-Emancipation Jamaica,” *Slavery & Abolition* 40, no. 3 (July 3, 2019), 424.

masculinity to convey independence and individuality. A central plank of the missionary project was to make freedmen adopt their understanding of what it meant to be a man. The ideal postemancipation worker would embrace a sort of rugged individualism and independence. This was a gendered ideal, and one that intersected with the missionaries' economic vision.

Missionaries and allied officials hoped that male workers would fuel the postemancipation economy, with women holding a domestic role. In some circumstances, emancipation did lead to a decline in female participation in the workforce, particularly on the estates. Yet many women continued to work in order to provide for their families amidst enduring poverty.

Eric Foner argues that in the United States, “with freedom came developments that strengthened patriarchy within the black family and consigned men and women to separate spheres.”<sup>65</sup> Some scholarship has challenged this consensus, noting the political mobilization of Black women and their involvement in the Reconstruction public sphere.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, Northern missionaries tended to equate hard work and land with masculinity and lamented nontraditional family structures among the freedpeople. Edward Pierce, for one, advocated for Black land ownership on the grounds that it would spur “the development of manhood.”<sup>67</sup> Towne fretted that “the men and women living together on this place are not all of them married,”<sup>68</sup> and Stearns worried that “husband and wife with them, simply means a man and woman, who feel inclined to live with each other for the time being.”<sup>69</sup> Rev. Mansfield French became a strong advocate of marriage “from the standpoint of morality.”<sup>70</sup> Northern missionaries viewed the extension of traditional gender roles as one plank of their civilizing mission.

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<sup>65</sup> Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 139.

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Elsa Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (October 1, 1994): 107–46.

<sup>67</sup> Pierce, “The Negroes at Port Royal.”

<sup>68</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 24.

<sup>69</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 388.

<sup>70</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 89.

The history and historiography of the free villages in Jamaica suggests a tension between the villages as a site of Black flourishing and a site of missionary exploitation of the freedpeople. On the one hand, missionaries in Jamaica were stronger supporters of Black land ownership than their American counterparts. The few whites on the island did not have the thirst for new land characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century Northerners and Southerners alike. So long as Black land ownership could accrue profit to English coffers, it received approval. On the other hand, liberal British norms constrained the “freedom” envisioned by the missionaries. The most important objective of the free villages was to prepare the freedpeople for life in a free society by cultivating values of hard work and industriousness. John Bigelow, a New Yorker visiting Jamaica in 1850, wrote of the freedpeople that “the practice of planning their own labor, encouraged by the privilege of reaping its rewards themselves, exerts upon them the most important educational influence.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Phillippo expressed his conviction that land ownership gave the freedpeople “a relish for the comfort and conveniences of civilized life.”<sup>72</sup> For Bigelow and Phillippo, land ownership would civilize the freedpeople by instilling liberal economic values and a consumerist impulse.

Secular officials, meanwhile, embraced a more constrained and disciplining vision of Black proprietorship. In 1836, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Lord Glenelg issued a letter laying out his vision for selling land to the freedpeople. Glenelg proposed that Jamaican officials limit Black access to land “by fixing the price of fresh land so high as to place it above the reach of the poorest class of settlers, to keep the labour market in its most prosperous state... Society, being thus kept together, is more open to civilizing influences.”<sup>73</sup> This logic gave lie to

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<sup>71</sup> Bigelow, *Jamaica in 1850*, 117.

<sup>72</sup> Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 431.

<sup>73</sup> Eudell, *The Political Languages of Emancipation*, 80.

visions of free labor as natural or rational. Instead, a free labor system would still necessarily rely on a dependent and exploited class of Black laborers.

Pressure to leave the plantation estates accelerated the growth of free villages. Mintz estimates that 19,000 freedpeople moved from estates to settle in free villages between 1838 and 1844.<sup>74</sup> The missionaries often located the free villages strategically nearby estates offering wage labor. “The new village system,” Phillippo argued, “not only added to... general prosperity, but rendered labour more available for the properties near which settlements were located.”<sup>75</sup> In that sense, the missionaries viewed the free villages as a supplement to, not necessarily a replacement of, labor on estates.

The liminal status of the Jamaican free villages, somewhere between self-sustaining and supplemental, is indicative of their ambivalent and even contradictory legacy. In practice, the villages and plantations run by missionaries were decidedly not the utopias of free labor and religious instruction that missionaries had expected. Instead, they were spaces in which the missionary vision came into tension, reconciliation, and confrontation with the emancipationist vision of the freedpeople.

### *Coerced Freedom: Missionary Discipline & Religious Instruction*

Beyond issues of labor, religious instruction was central to the missionary role. The American Missionary Association provided key organizational infrastructure for the diffusion of this instruction in the American South. In 1846, a group of Protestants founded the Association in New York in an effort to join their religious beliefs with a commitment to anti-slavery. Following abolition, the AMA transitioned into the provision of schools and churches meant for

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<sup>74</sup> Mintz, “Historical Sociology of the Jamaican Church-Founded Free Village System,” 50.

<sup>75</sup> Phillippo, *Jamaica*, 430.

the freedpeople. This effort combined religion and politics into a vision for the moral, social, and economic elevation of formerly enslaved people.

In Port Royal, the educational wing of the missionary effort saw significant success. Towne managed to start up a thriving school, though funds were at times hard to come by. The missionaries set up schools providing instruction for approximately 2,500 children. The Jamaican missionaries also had relative success schooling the freedpeople, with Phillippo pointing to “the proficiency that is being made by these children of Ethiopia in the various branches of learning taught in these institutions.”<sup>76</sup> There, as in the U.S., the teaching of scripture comprised the bulk of lessons.

Schools were central to the civilizing mission of the missionaries. In Sierra Leone, mission schools were a tool of assimilation into British societal norms and a mechanism for the creation of an educated elite. Following consolidation, a key justification of the education system was its supposedly acculturating effects on the growing Liberated African population. In Jamaica, too, schools were intended to have a civilizing effect on the freedpeople. Phillippo, continuing his endorsement of Christian schooling, noted that it “inspired feelings of self-respect... gave them a taste for the enjoyment of domestic life, and created a relish for those pleasures or acquirements which stimulate the industry” of Jamaica.<sup>77</sup> As always, the missionary’s civilizing mission combined both moral and economic virtues.

For the missionaries, one critical, if unpleasant, aspect of “civilizing” the freedpeople was disciplining them when they stepped out of line. At times, schools themselves were a site of discipline in Sierra Leone. More often, though, discipline was meted out in response to conflict over labor. In particular, charges of indolence and idleness were common, and had to be

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 421.

punished. In the Liberated African villages of Sierra Leone, officials and missionaries accused laborers of idleness when production quotas went unmet or African workers expressed a reluctance to grow plantation crops. In response, missionaries were liable to withhold wages or even lock villagers in makeshift prisons overnight. Clearly, missionaries viewed discipline as a necessary response to idleness. Sometimes, this discipline took violent form. Johnson, for example, engaged in violent discipline of Africans he deemed disorderly or out of line. When a fight broke out between two female pupils, Johnson's diary reports that he "took the whip from the hand of the school-mistress, and gave the girl a few strokes over her back."<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the missionaries were not so unlike the former planters after all.

Sometimes, however, Johnson chose religious instruction, rather than violence, as his means of punishment. After another fight in school, Johnson put the "offender" into "a corner of my room" and gave her a story based on "a fact related in the Missionary Register." After she read it, Johnson reports, "she at once burst into a flood of tears," told him that the story had made her feel "so wicked," and ultimately begged for his forgiveness. Johnson replied that she should instead be begging "to Christ for forgiveness of sin."<sup>79</sup>

Johnson's dramatic invocation of religion as a means of discipline speaks to the ways in which the religious values of the missionaries lent themselves to a free labor vision. The Reverend Josiah Pratt of Sierra Leone told a group of Africans in 1807 that "the grace of your Master" is dependent on the formation of "a holy, patient, industrious, loving, meek, and heavenly Society."<sup>80</sup> God's approval would come with "industrious" profit.

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<sup>78</sup> Tyng, *A Memoir of the Rev. W.A.B. Johnson*, 91.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-329.

<sup>80</sup> Josiah Pratt and John Henry Pratt, *Memoir of the Rev. Josiah Pratt* (Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1859), 40.

In other words, the missionaries hoped to preach a form of Christianity that would convey values of independence and hard work to the freedpeople. The work of missionaries and planters was intended to be symbiotic—or, in the case of a teacher and plantation owner like Charles Stearns, one and the same. Hard work would inevitably inculcate Christian values, while religious instruction could function as a tool of labor discipline. Edward Everett Hale wrote to two Boston teachers in Port Royal that “you are to teach them everything which it is proper for free men to know,” which extended to values of hard work, integrity, and industriousness.

At times, the metaphor of religion as labor and labor as religion was explicit. Johnson reported that one resident of Regent told him, “you preach and you say, Suppose somebody beat rice, when he done beat, he take the fan and fan it, and then all the chaff fly away, and the rice get clean. So God do Him people—He fan the chaff away.”<sup>81</sup> In his sermons, then, Johnson was using descriptions of the cultivation of rice as a way of understanding the ways of God.

Stationed in Georgia, Stearns structured his religious teachings with an eye towards discipline. As he believed the freedpeople practiced an overly forgiving and flexible form of Christianity, he strove to “represent God to them as a *father* and *friend* who loved them far more than the kindest parent loved his children, and was grieved beyond measure at their sinfulness.”<sup>82</sup> God’s judgement of the freedpeople’s sins stood in for Stearns’ anger at their disobedience, and religion became a paternalistic and disciplinary tool.

In sum, religious instruction and discipline were crucial ingredients in the missionary effort to “civilize” their subjects. In the words of John T. Brown of Jamaica, missionaries believed they were turning “*things* into *persons*.”<sup>83</sup> If the cost of that supposed transformation

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<sup>81</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa’s Mountain Valley*, 160.

<sup>82</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 380.

<sup>83</sup> Edward Bean Underhill and J. T. Brown, *Emancipation in the West Indies* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1861), 25.



was physical punishment, they thought, so be it. It was in punishing the freedpeople that missionaries most thoroughly embraced a paternalistic understanding of Christianity. That punishment, moreover, revealed a fissure in the early expectation of a harmonious and productive relationship between missionary and worker—a fissure that widened as time wore on.

The development of free labor in postemancipation societies was halting and frustrating to the optimistic missionaries who had overseen its implementation. Agricultural conditions were not as conducive to profit as had been expected. Further, the freedpeople pursued their own, liberatory set of political, economic, and social objectives that often went contrary to the wishes of the missionaries who had initially seen them as willing, if uncivilized, subjects. The clash between missionary control and Black autonomy played out in missionary-led free villages and plantations, where missionaries tried—and usually failed—to strike a balance between labor coercion and social assimilation. Free labor was a contested ideal, far more contested than the missionaries had anticipated, and its emergence engendered conflict, violence, and division.

### 3. UNTIL THEY ARE ENLIGHTENED: THE MISSIONARY RETREAT

Missionary faith in free labor and their own transformative power went unfulfilled more often than not. Missionaries faced declining congregations, hostile planters, and disappointing crop yields. As they soured on the “experiment” of emancipation, they identified Black workers as culprits. Yet it was their own ideology, along with a stubborn inability to adapt that ideology to conditions on the ground, that made frustration and failure inevitable.

In the United States, missionary abandonment of the freedpeople was an early warning sign of Reconstruction’s eventual collapse. In Sierra Leone and Jamaica, that abandonment was a death knell, as the missionaries were among the few potential allies of the freedpeople. In all three locations, though, the pinning of postemancipation failures on Black workers gave way to entrenched racism and exploitation. Over time, missionaries abandoned policies that would further redistribution or racial equality, shifted towards more modest objectives, and reluctantly embraced the view that emancipation had proven a failed venture.

#### *Failed Experiments and Atlantic Connections*

As the postemancipation period continued in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States, a new consensus began to replace the heady combination of evangelical fervor and free labor optimism that characterized the early stage of emancipation. Whites still tended to view emancipation as an experiment in new relations between Black and white, employer and worker. But whereas missionaries had once thought that their experiment was destined for inevitable success, it increasingly came to resemble one whose designers had lost control. Informed by years of frustration in their attempts to implement their religious and economic vision, missionaries slowly accepted that their efforts had been a failure, or at least a disappointment.

Looking back on the first two decades of missionaries in Sierra Leone, commentators tended to portray the exercise as arduous and precarious, if not futile. This tendency was particularly acute with regards to the missionary endeavor prior to consolidation. Thomas Birks, in his 1852 memoir of Edward Bickersteth, wrote that “these years had been a season of trial and disappointment.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Samuel Walker mourned “the failure of our first Missionary efforts in Africa” in 1845. Sierra Leone’s reputation in the mid-19th century as a place of disease and death further colored retrospective assessments of the missionary effort in West Africa. The title of F. Harrison Rankin’s 1836 book *The White Man’s Grave* perhaps best epitomizes the unfortunate status of the colony by the mid-19th century. Rankin lays out the popular conception of Sierra Leone in the European mind as a “land of miasma, contagion, and death.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in the 1820s, Sierra Leone was at the center of a “war of representation” in which both pro-slavery and anti-slavery figures used the colony as fuel for their activism. This was a key decade in Sierra Leone, as well as for the debate over the abolition of slavery in England. The colony therefore had an outsized international significance that echoed across the Atlantic World. Americans interested in Black emigration and colonization closely followed events in Sierra Leone and drew conclusions about emancipation based on those events. In 1810, American abolitionist Paul Cuffe visited Sierra Leone to learn about the colony. Ties between the United States, Sierra Leone, and the American Colonization Society (ACS) were ubiquitous. In 1821, for example, two of Johnson’s closest advisors accompanied ACS agents as translators while examining the British colony.

A debate in 1826 and 1827 between Kenneth Macaulay, cousin of Zachary, and former planter James McQueen epitomized the battle over the lessons of Sierra Leone. In his essays,

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<sup>1</sup> Birks, *Memoirs of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth*, 237.

<sup>2</sup> F. Harrison Rankin, *The White Man’s Grave: A Visit to Sierra Leone, in 1834* (R. Bentley, 1836), viii.

Macaulay stressed his personal experience, and thus greater credibility, in West Africa. Anti-slavery activists characterized Sierra Leone as a “free African labour experiment and an anti-slavery colony.”<sup>3</sup> This characterization valorized the colony in sharp contrast to popular conceptions of the West Indies. Pro-slavery voices in the West Indies argued that Sierra Leone was beset by corruption and financial distress to prove that emancipation would have a deleterious effect on the regional character and economy. McQueen portrayed the leaders of Sierra Leone as self-interested paragons of corruption and hypocrisy. He explicitly targeted the missionaries as culprits of Sierra Leone’s failure, referencing the 1817 consolidation of CMS in Freetown. “Not a SINGLE MISSIONARY,” he wrote, was stationed outside of the colony, and near Freetown were “*several native villages*, in a PECULIARLY DEPLORABLE STATE of barbarism, which had never had the advantage of EVEN BEHOLDING a Missionary.”<sup>4</sup> Beyond his reference to the failure of missionaries to “civilize” these villages, McQueen also staked his proslavery case on the prevalence of disease and the failure of plantation crops in the colony.

Though they marshalled their argument for evil means, the proslavery voices were right, at least in part: the free labor utopia populated by devout Christians envisioned by the Clapham Sect and the Church Missionary Society never materialized. These organizations had explicitly framed their ambitions in global terms, foreseeing the colony as a model of abolition’s virtues. Yet this “war of representation” indicated that this ambition was at the very least contested, if not fully abandoned by the 1820s.

In Jamaica, too, commentators tended to retrospectively view emancipation as a failed experiment. Bigelow, for instance, hoped that the United States would use the example of failure

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<sup>3</sup> David Lambert, “Sierra Leone and Other Sites in the War of Representation over Slavery,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 64 (2007), 103.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

in Jamaica for its own purposes. Having noticed “the lively curiosity which pervades the public mind of America” for information on Jamaica, he endeavored to produce an “intelligible analysis of the causes which have reduced Jamaica to her present deplorable condition.”<sup>5</sup> The negative assessment of that condition was taken as a given.

Bigelow’s premise also suggests that events in Jamaica were of great interest to stakeholders in the United States, both anti-slavery and pro-slavery alike. Indeed, while many observers in England and Jamaica saw Sierra Leone as a test case for abolition in the West Indies, the West Indies often served as a model or a cautionary tale for the United States. Edward Rugemer has argued that, on the one hand, “the antislavery spectrum in the North broadened, as new voices representing the emergent Republican Party emphasized the benefits of free labor they saw in the postemancipation West Indies.”<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, pro-slavery figures such as John Calhoun favored representations of Jamaica and the Caribbean as economically and socially declining as evidence that emancipation would bring ruin to the American economy. Rugemer argues that Calhoun’s push to annex Texas as a new slave state, for instance, stemmed from an “interpretation of British abolitionism that synthesized a decade of southern commentary on Britain’s act of emancipation in the West Indies.” This commentary suggested to Calhoun that “emancipation had been a disaster that had left Britain economically disadvantaged.”<sup>7</sup>

Emancipation in Jamaica polarized the debate over slavery in the United States.

Northern missionaries and planters who went South during Reconstruction were also attentive to the development of emancipation in the West Indies. Some believed there was little to be gained from comparing the two. “The insular and contracted life of the colonies... has no

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<sup>5</sup> Bigelow, *Jamaica in 1850*, ii.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (LSU Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

parallel in the grand currents of thought ever sweeping through” the United States, mused Edward Pierce.<sup>8</sup> Yet others directly applied lessons from British emancipation to the U.S., with the Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission arguing that “extensive experience in the West Indies has proved that emancipation, when it takes place, should be unconditional and absolute.”<sup>9</sup> This reference to the failure of Jamaican apprenticeship indicates a straight line between West Indian developments and American policy recommendations.

Consistent with their anti-slavery viewpoint, missionaries in the United States generally attempted to portray the emancipated West Indies in a positive light. At an anti-slavery meeting in 1862, Wendell Phillipps argued that the American freedpeople under emancipation “will accomplish books, and education, and work. They have done so in the West Indies.”<sup>10</sup> Central to this positive portrayal was a view of Jamaican policy as particularly generous to the freedpeople. Stearns, remarking on the ebullient reaction of enslaved Americans to abolition, noted that “it is not surprising that they committed some excesses,” as “unlike as it was when emancipation was conferred upon the West Indian slaves, there was no friendly hand stretched forth to guide them.”<sup>11</sup> That is, Stearns viewed the postemancipation West Indies as more “friendly” than the postemancipation U.S.

Positive portrayals of Jamaican generosity set the stage for advocacy of abolition and welfare among American missionaries. Yet the fact that these Northern missionaries viewed Jamaican (and West Indian) policy as generous, when in reality state policy was punitive and

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<sup>8</sup> Pierce, “The Negroes at Port Royal.”

<sup>9</sup> Robert Dale Owen, James McKaye, and Howe, Samuel Gridley, “Final Report of the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission to the Secretary of War” (Official Records of the War of the Revellion, 1864).

<sup>10</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 112.

frequently racist, indicates that they had a low bar when it came to what generosity entailed. That is, their view of generous policy for the freedpeople was highly constrained.

Indeed, discourse among Jamaican whites shortly before the American Civil War was especially racist and pessimistic. Thomas Carlyle's "Occasional Discourses on the Negro Question" indicated a hardening white supremacy in British discourse concerning Jamaica as well as an emerging consensus among British and Jamaican whites that emancipation had been a misguided experiment. Carlyle's 1849 tract represented the purest distillation of the "Quashee" stereotype, though he was by no means alone in its invocation. According to this stereotype, the freedpeople were "lazy, morally degenerate, licentious, and heedless of the future."<sup>12</sup> Carlyle repeatedly invoked the racist image of the freedperson who had decided to forsake work on the estate to spend the day lounging and eating pumpkins.

Even staunch British liberals ceded Carlyle's central thesis of Black incapacity for hard work in a free labor system, though they may have disagreed with his more graphically racist caricatures and attacks on abolitionists. John Stuart Mill, normally a steadfast humanitarian, admitted that, in his view, Black people "can exist in comfort on the wages of a comparatively small quantity of work."<sup>13</sup> This admission reflected a broader convergence of previously liberal figures with their more reactionary counterparts, a convergence that included the missionaries.

Fueling this negative assessment of the freedpeople was the uncomfortable fact that sugar production and economic productivity fell sharply after emancipation. Thomas Holt has estimated that during the period of apprenticeship from 1833 to 1838, sugar output nationally declined more than 10% from the last four years of slavery. Over the following decade, however,

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<sup>12</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 167.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 283.

that output declined another 25%, even as global production spiked.<sup>14</sup> This decline caused great agitation among missionaries and imperiled the entire free labor worldview; recall, for instance, that Knibb had bet his reputation not only on free labor's morality but its superior efficiency.

Explanations for the decline varied and continue to vary among economists. According to Holt, these explanations include that the decline was already in progress before emancipation, that "free labor was cheaper and more flexible than slave labor," that credit and capital flows were insufficient, and that the loss of monopoly protection represented the nail in the coffin.<sup>15</sup> Economic historians have suggested that higher labor costs were a key factor in the decline of sugar profitability, as "wages bore down much more heavily on estate budgets than had slave maintenance."<sup>16</sup> Contrary to free labor doctrine, in other words, nothing about wage labor could magically offset the decreased savings accrued to planters relative to the era of slavery. This stubborn fact, not a lack of work ethic among sugar laborers, drove economic decline.

A similar set of factors also resulted in declining production and productivity in the postemancipation United States, prompting labor conflict and strife among the missionaries. In the South, as fiscal burdens piled up and the scope of Reconstruction's challenges came into view, a sense of frustration, regret, and anger set in for many Northern missionaries and planters in the South. "Plantation bitters," as Willie Lee Rose puts it, were widespread. Superintendents in Port Royal tired of what they perceived as the constant "complaints, faithlessness, and general rascality of the 'poor negroes.'"<sup>17</sup> Austerity set in for many. "I am having a tight time to get along, of course, with our diminished income," Towne wrote in 1877, with aid from the North

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 366.



dwindling.<sup>18</sup> Stearns fell sick, prompting a rash of whining about the “execrable” Black nurses tending to him. “No one to see, or to do anything for you, but ignorant, stupid blacks.”<sup>19</sup> The “evangels of civilization” began to see failure on the horizon.

In all, the Northern effort to implement an efficient and profitable free labor system in the Reconstruction South *was* a failed experiment, both socially and financially. Cotton production in the South declined sharply after the Civil War and then stagnated until the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> One of the reasons for this decline was simply that formerly enslaved people were not compelled to work as much as they did prior to abolition. Many economists argue that decreasing production “was attributable largely to a shrinkage in the South’s effective labor supply as African-American women stayed at home and men chose to spend less of their time in the fields.”<sup>21</sup> The growth of cotton cultivation in countries like India that had taken advantage of the Civil War’s negative effect on American exports further exacerbated market decline in the United States.

Recent years have seen historians strike up a vigorous debate over whether slavery did, in fact, derive incredible efficiency, productivity, and profit from its brutal exploitation of Black workers. Without wading too deeply into that discourse, it is telling that historians of Northerners in the Reconstruction South such as Rose and Powell foreshadowed much of the current debate decades ago. Edward Philbrick, Rose writes of the prominent Boston planter, “did not comprehend the efficiency of slavery as a system of extractive labor, nor did he realize how important the element of compulsion could be when exercised at crucial points in the planting and harvesting season.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Powell notes that “many historians and free-soil critics alike

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<sup>18</sup> Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 260.

<sup>19</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> John Clegg, “Credit, Collateral and Class Power: Growth and Stagnation in the Cotton South,” 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 304.

have greatly underestimated the efficiency of the agricultural routine under slavery.”<sup>23</sup> This shared perception likely stems from their deep knowledge of the extent to which Northerners struggled to compel and enforce labor discipline under “free labor” conditions.

Economic historians have proposed a variety of other theories to explain low cotton production. Some have located its roots in a lack of technological development or limited fertile land, though the antebellum period demonstrated that productivity growth was possible even in the face of difficult ecological conditions.<sup>24</sup> One compelling narrative is that Southern planters in the Reconstruction period faced a credit shortage. Enslaved people were a key form of collateral in the antebellum economic system, allowing Southern planters to borrow large sums of money and giving them incentive to produce cotton to repay their debts.<sup>25</sup> In the postemancipation period, however, the crop-lein became the primary form of collateral. In this system, future crop yields effectively functioned as collateral in order to procure the money necessary to grow those future crops. This was a risky bet for investors, meaning interest rates were unusually high. Moreover, the crop-lein was subject to a far more restricted and local circulation. The overall effect of these conditions was that borrowing decreased, innovation and productivity plummeted, and Southern planters increasingly shifted their debt burdens onto sharecroppers and tenants.

Whatever the primary reason for declining cotton yields, it is evident that the Reconstruction South by no means resembled a flourishing free labor economy. The rise of sharecropping after abolition in some ways allowed the freedpeople to carve out limited economic autonomy. However, it consistently subjected them to exploitation not too unlike that of slavery and forced them into a form of debt peonage. As Alex Lichtenstein points out, “labor

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<sup>23</sup> Powell, *New Masters*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> Clegg, “Credit, Collateral, and Class Power,” 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

power that could only be sold once annually, on the pain of criminal prosecution, that was compensated in kind rather than cash, at a rate not fixed but determined by future commodity prices, and paid for long after it had been conveyed to the purchaser,” was a far cry from the virtuous system of small landownership and negotiated wages that many Northerners had envisioned.<sup>26</sup>

As for Sierra Leone, the Liberated African Department hemorrhaged revenue during MacCarthy’s tenure. It functioned mostly as a funnel for grant money and a vehicle for MacCarthy to exercise control over the colony.<sup>27</sup> Like earlier missions, the Liberated African villages faced unideal agricultural conditions and hostile native groups. Historians note that “much of the Freetown Peninsula was jungle, growing out of thin, rocky soil.” Later, the Department transitioned to building villages in the “swampy coastal lowlands.”<sup>28</sup> Neither terrain was conducive to agriculture, and England ultimately used Sierra Leone as a base of territorial expansion rather than a productive center itself.

In all three countries, then, economic historians have found that the free labor system envisioned by missionaries and many secular officials wasn’t actually more productive than the preceding period. In retrospect, this is not surprising given the brutal efficiency of slavery on the one hand and the general agricultural incompetence of many missionaries on the other. Beyond their own mistakes, missionaries were negatively affected by broad economic structures like capital flows and uncontrollable factors like weather patterns. But the missionaries were not willing to critically interrogate the economic system that they had attempted to bring into existence. If anything, they leaned even further into laissez-faire economics and soured on

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<sup>26</sup> Alex Lichtenstein, “Was the Emancipated Slave a Proletarian?,” *Reviews in American History* 26, no. 1 (1998), 132.

<sup>27</sup> Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors*, 180-182.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

redistribution. In other words, instead of reexamining their own beliefs or reinvigorating calls for economic stimulus, they entered a state of constant agitation and frustration while holding Black workers responsible for trends they had no control over.

### *Shaken Confidence: Missionary Decline and Economic Collapse*

Disappointing crop yields and missionary frustrations heralded the gradual decline of the “experiment” of emancipation. On top of their financial troubles, missionaries faced personal tragedy, found themselves beset by conflict from rival congregations, Black workers, and former planters, and began to look for a way out of the problems they had created.

In 1824, with the CMS facing yet another shortage of recruits, the colonial government initiated the secularization of the Liberated African villages. Officials known as “Managers” replaced the missionaries in their roles as village heads. But Black efforts to secure a level of autonomy in the villages continued into the secular era. Many of the Liberated Africans began a sort of mutual aid system through the creation of “benevolent societies whose members looked after one another in sickness... They also helped one another build houses and make farms.”<sup>29</sup> The missionaries may have been gone, but their successors inherited the tensions and dynamics that the missionaries had created.

Following W.A.B. Johnson’s death of yellow fever in 1823, Regent entered a gradual state of economic and Christian decline. “The public works were stopped... and the poor people, unable to obtain work, were scattered like sheep without a shepherd; the population rapidly diminished,” wrote Johnson’s biographer of this period.<sup>30</sup> Reflecting the broader dynamics of the colony, many of the villagers sought work in Freetown. A new pastor arrived in Regent in 1825,

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<sup>29</sup> Fyfe, *A Short History of Sierra Leone*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Charlesworth, *Africa’s Mountain Valley*, 253.

and promptly died a few short weeks after. The town “sank lower than before; who could expect it to be otherwise?” Charlesworth asked.<sup>31</sup> The supply of missionaries and colonial officials dwindled, and Regent, lamented Charlesworth, returned to a state of “heathenism.”<sup>32</sup> The town was unable to find a missionary who could replicate Johnson’s charisma, effective collaboration with Liberated African elites, and close relations with secular officials.

Developments within the colonial government accelerated the decline of Regent and the Liberated African villages. By the middle of the century, the Liberated African Department as a whole was in shambles. The Department’s budget had been slashed in half between 1823 and 1825, and MacCarthy’s 1824 death in the Anglo-Asante War spelled its demise.<sup>33</sup> The death of MacCarthy had broader implications as well. Sierra Leone had remained the seat of British West Africa through much of the early 19th century. This status died with MacCarthy at the hands of the Asante, as London chose to divide the colonies once again in 1827.<sup>34</sup>

Decline came quickly for Jamaican missionaries as well, with the closing of the 1840s representing a demoralizing turning point. As John Clarke mused:

How different now is the life of a Minister in Jamaica to that of a Missionary a few years ago. Then it was all happiness - almost unmingled joy... Now... Baptisms are few and far between - cases of discipline are numerous and painful, and our missionary band is rent asunder.<sup>35</sup>

The decade had begun with the missionaries in Jamaica formally splitting off from the BMS, a controversial decision made based on the diminished revenues of the BMS in London and the (temporary) financial health of the Jamaican Baptists. Underhill, looking back at the split in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>33</sup> Scanlan, “The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery,” 1112.

<sup>34</sup> Fyfe, *A Short History of Sierra Leone*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> S. D. Gordon and Shirley C. Gordon, *Our Cause for His Glory: Christianisation and Emancipation in Jamaica* (University of the West Indies Press, 1998), 29.

1862, noted the unfortunate economic implications of independence, as the Jamaican missionaries became increasingly severed from British funds. “This source of supply” was, he wrote, “closed, when the mission churches declared themselves independent.”<sup>36</sup>

To make matters worse, scandal stalked the missionaries. In 1844, Phillippo returned to Jamaica to find that the pastor with whom he had left his church had ousted him. His racist portrayals of the freedpeople in his book—his description, typical of the English Baptists, of their “superstition” and “licentious” behavior in times of slavery—had gotten around to the freedpeople themselves, and his support among the population plummeted, prompting a years-long struggle to regain control over the congregation. Similarly, in 1845, missionary Samuel Oughton got into a fight with a group of Native Baptists over ownership of a church property.<sup>37</sup>

Rival denominations accused the English Baptists of being overly accommodating of the Native Baptists, despite the studious distance they had maintained. The missionaries also came under fire, again from rival denominations, for their comparatively lavish lifestyle, prompting a vigorous defense. As Catherine Hall describes it, the houses of the English Baptists were “a far cry from the small houses in which artisans... or impecunious dissenting ministers could expect to live... undoubtedly a source of hostility and envy.”<sup>38</sup> On the defensive, Knibb remarked that “neither riches nor poverty marks the dwellings or the diet of your missionaries.”<sup>39</sup> But their comfortable accommodations and lifestyle reinforced a sense of superiority over the freedpeople, not to mention many Jamaican whites, that was met with suspicion.

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Bean Underhill, *The West Indies: Their Social and Religious Condition* (Jackson, Walford, and Hodder, 1862), 293.

<sup>37</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 246.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>39</sup> Hinton and Knibb, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 214.

Hall describes the resulting scene for missionaries in the 1850s as “a different political culture, a more defensive relationship to the world outside, a bleaker view of racial others” than in the 1830s following abolition.<sup>40</sup> In 1862, Edward Underhill took stock of emancipation in Jamaica. The social effects, he opined, were satisfactory. “Social order everywhere prevails,” he wrote—though Morant Bay would change that three years later. Economic conditions, on the other hand, left much to be desired: “Emancipation did not indeed bring wealth to the planter... it did not give wisdom to planters, nor skill to agriculturalists and manufacturers, but it has brought an amount of happiness... to the enfranchised slave.”<sup>41</sup> Here was a far more modest assessment of emancipation’s effects than the one that characterized the early phase of missionary optimism. Where emancipation was once seen as a magical, near-immediate harbinger of shared prosperity, it was now the subject of some ambivalence among missionaries.

By the 1860s the missionaries agreed that progress was slowing or even reversing course. In a letter signed by a group of prominent missionaries and written shortly before the Morant Bay Rebellion, they complained of deep and enduring poverty among the general population, a rise in larceny, and indolence rearing its head once more among the freedpeople. Underhill repeatedly noted declining wages on estates in 1862. This poverty set the stage for the revolt that would soon overtake much of the island. In 1861, Underhill and John T. Brown acknowledged the decline in enthusiasm among missionaries and the general public. “There can be no question that in the minds of many in this country confidence in the great Act of Emancipation has to some extent been shaken,” Underhill admitted,<sup>42</sup> with Brown echoing the description of “disheartened Missionaries.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> Underhill, *The West Indies*, 455.

<sup>42</sup> Underhill and Brown, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

Religious fervor was down in the colony, along with financial contributions to churches from congregation members. Underhill mourned that the poverty of the freedpeople and island as a whole meant that “there has been a contemporaneous reduction in the amount contributed for the support of the means of grace by our Churches.”<sup>44</sup> Just as poor crop yields had exacerbated political tensions for Stearns in the American South, a general context of poverty imperiled missionaries in Jamaica.

Missionary Walter Dendy was nearly apoplectic, predicting “the breaking up of Churches, and to a great extent the overthrow of the Baptist Mission in this island.”<sup>45</sup> In 1862, Samuel Oughton wrote a bitter letter reflecting the disillusionment of Jamaican missionaries and the rigidification of racial thinking among whites on the island. Unlike earlier missionary accounts, his rhetoric abandoned visions of a family of man in favor of a rigidly capitalist critique of the freedpeople. Underhill disagreed with Oughton’s characterization, but other missionaries’ thinking aligned with the letter. “Their confidence in ‘the African’ was no longer secure, and their sense of their own role in relation to that imagined figure correspondingly troubled,” Catherine Hall observes.<sup>46</sup>

The slow pace of the effort to train native pastors in Jamaica frustrated the missionaries, complicated by many Black ministers’ preference for the Native Baptists and similar groups. “There appears to be going on a gradual drifting away of the black population from the European clergy and ministers, to the ministry of men of their own colour,” Underhill noticed, though he nonetheless endorsed their continued training.<sup>47</sup> By this time, however, the idea was less a gateway to a global evangelical project and more a potential way out for the English

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<sup>44</sup> Underhill, *The West Indies*, 329.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 207.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-252.

<sup>47</sup> Underhill, *The West Indies*, 192.



missionaries. With the missionaries' vision of the future narrowing, perhaps they could leave the work of evangelicalism to Black successors. Yet their hesitancy to leave the island to the control of Black ministers was the primary obstacle to realizing their own stated objective.

Overall, the faltering labor market and the surge of social strife in Jamaica paved the way for revolution in Morant Bay in 1865. The promise of emancipation had proved hollow for the freedpeople who, with the influence of groups such as the Native Baptists, began to see the established political system as insufficient in resolving the problems they faced.

### *The Turn Against the Freedpeople*

The missionary turn against Black workers occurred over a backdrop of declining social and economic conditions. Considering the disarray and eventual fall of the Rio Pongo mission, the CMS and many of its missionaries pointed to the recalcitrance and incapacity of the Susu people. When it came to the low rate of conversions, for example, Samuel Walker resorted to the typical explanation that it was a tall task to “bring up the degraded natives from the gulph in which British cruelty had entombed them.”<sup>48</sup> Nylander echoed this sentiment, writing that he was disappointed after low attendance at his preaching “because the people are careless about their eternal welfare.”<sup>49</sup> Never did they consider that the missionary message was simply unappealing to many Susu for long-standing cultural and social reasons.

Explanations varied for emancipation's failures in Jamaica. John Bigelow identified abolition, faulty governance, and the absence of independent proprietors, reflecting his Northern sensibilities. For his part, Underhill blamed waning production on the loss of monopoly protection with the 1846 Sugar Duties Act, calling it “the greatest cause of all” for “the ruins” of

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<sup>48</sup> Walker, *Missions in Western Africa*, 325.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 525.

the island.<sup>50</sup> When it came to high rates of poverty among Black Jamaicans, Underhill blamed the freedpeople's lack of numeracy along with the low wages paid by planters. "The negro is a bad arithmetician," he offered by way of explanation.<sup>51</sup> This diagnosis was compatible with caricatures of the freedpeople as uncivilized; of course, the missionaries had promised to "civilize" them and teach them math and letters, so their own failure was implicit.

British officials, along with many white Jamaicans, came to see Black workers as the cause of economic decline. Thomas Holt argues that "more and more, black workers, or rather nonworkers, became the villains of the piece."<sup>52</sup> In this line of reasoning, Black people's reluctance to work for near-slavery wages and their efforts to secure small landholdings was reframed as laziness and an incapacity for wage labor.

In response to the widespread poverty afflicting Jamaica in the 1860s, under-secretary of the West Indian Department Henry Taylor penned a letter representing official British policy that came to be known as "The Queen's Advice." The letter fell short of proposing any long-term solutions to the problems facing the island, while essentially recommending that its residents adopt an austerity mindset and work harder to make it through economic decline. Relying on tired free labor doctrine, the letter advised that if only the "Labouring Classes... would use this industry, and thereby render the Plantations productive, they would enable the Planters to pay them higher Wages for the same hours of work."<sup>53</sup> The letter therefore dismissed the recalcitrance of the planter class while speculating that everything would be improved if the freedpeople simply applied themselves to their labor. Missionaries, too, increasingly embraced this rhetoric, though they were skeptical of the letter itself.

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<sup>50</sup> Underhill and Brown, *Emancipation in the West Indies*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Underhill, *The West Indies*, 235.

<sup>52</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 280.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

In the United States, Northern missionaries were right to see Reconstruction as a failed venture, at least in economic terms. But when it came to identifying the roots of that failure, they did not blame agricultural conditions, credit systems, or even hostile Southerners. They certainly did not blame themselves for unwise cotton speculation or, for those who went South, an inability to sufficiently incentivize the freedpeople to work happily on their plantations. Instead, like their counterparts in Sierra Leone and Jamaica, they blamed the freedpeople. Increasingly, they retreated from their support of state intervention on behalf of the poor and soured on the Radical Republican agenda. This process prefigured the North's ultimate turn towards reconciliation with Southern whites and abandonment of protections for formerly enslaved people.

Edward Philbrick, who had been a fervent believer in the potential profitability of Northern-led plantations in the South, wrote in 1865 that "I don't believe myself that the present generation of negroes will ever work as they were formerly obliged to."<sup>54</sup> By 1870, the amount of cultivated land had decreased by more than 100,000 acres from the decade before. A process of reconciliation began, as Northern whites in Port Royal joined the segregated Southern church in the area and Northern newspapers made favorable overtures to the former rebels. Northern organizations providing aid to the missionaries gradually moved on. A group of secular aid societies watered down their support, fearing that it was counterproductive to "press the cause of the black man before the public, because pressure might hasten a reaction against him."<sup>55</sup> Most of the vast organizational and political infrastructure marshalled towards Port Royal was dismantled before Radical Republicanism truly kicked into gear at the federal level—before even the passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

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<sup>54</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 365.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 387.

*Shoulders to the Wheel: Rebellion, Retrenchment & Retreat*

The decline of the Liberated African villages in Sierra Leone gave way to a period of dramatic colonial expansion. Through the 19th century, English officials engaged in trade with and, increasingly, conquest of the surrounding native populations in Freetown's hinterlands. Missionaries remained in the colony, but their influence waned as the colonial government gave top priority to Sierra Leone's role as a gateway to West Africa and the continent's interior. By the end of the 19th century, with Africa as a whole under European control to an unprecedented degree, Sierra Leone functioned primarily as an educational center for the African elite, a seat of regional influence, and a site of repeated conflict between English officials and native groups.

In Jamaica, declining conditions and mounting frustration resulted in an intensification of anti-Black rhetoric among missionaries in Jamaica. Underhill, usually steadfast in his support of the freedpeople, reported that missionary sentiment had shifted towards a vision of the freedpeople as "rude and superstitious to a degree... [and] generally great thieves."<sup>56</sup> Black religion remained the subject of deep suspicion, with Underhill casually noting that one islander had been jailed "for the practice of Obeah."<sup>57</sup>

The Morant Bay rebellion dramatically accelerated missionary retrenchment. Starting with the 1831 Baptist War, missionaries in Jamaica had committed to a delicate balancing act, condemning both violent revolution and violent white backlash to revolution. A similar dynamic was at play in the wake of Morant Bay.

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<sup>56</sup> Underhill, *The West Indies*, 206.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 370.

Thomas Holt describes the rebellion as a “peasant war,” with freeholders in Black settlements leading the violence.<sup>58</sup> Here were the contours of an alliance between the peasant and proletarian classes. Holt argues that the rebellion’s “rapid spread among resident sugar workers suggests a broad base of support.”<sup>59</sup> Bogle, in a petition to the Queen following the uprising, explained his actions as the result of decades of frustration and rights denied. Though he had long been respectful of the Queen’s authority, he wrote, for three decades the freedpeople had “been imposed upon,” and there was no option left other than putting their “shoulders to the wheel.”<sup>60</sup> The Morant Bay Rebellion therefore emerged out of the same strains of resistance and Black solidarity that had long fueled the Native Baptists.

Missionary opinion was split in reaction to Morant Bay. In general, they attempted to distance themselves from Eyre’s violent response yet distance themselves even more convincingly from the Native Baptist rebels. Underhill thought the ruling classes and Jamaican government were at fault. Samuel Oughton, on the other hand, wrote a letter thanking Eyre for his brutal retaliation and supported a bill limiting the power of native preachers. David East, too, expressed appreciation for the Governor’s counterinsurgency and strong distaste for the rebels, though he was skeptical of Eyre himself.<sup>61</sup> Typical of his general moderation, Phillippo reacted with disappointment in both sides of the conflict. He was unhappy with the actions of the “misguided mass” but suggested that “their spirit of revenge was not aroused until fired upon by the volunteers of the police.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 300.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Edward Bean Underhill, *The Tragedy of Morant Bay: A Narrative of the Disturbances in the Island of Jamaica in 1865* (Alexander & Shephard, 1895), 60.

<sup>61</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 258-261.

<sup>62</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 338.

A speech delivered by David East is suggestive of a reactionary shift among Jamaican missionaries in the wake of developments at Morant Bay. In a speech to his congregation, he asked, “what is it but the force of the law and Government... that restrains these evil passions from overleaping all bounds?”<sup>63</sup> Missionaries were more eager than in the past to express support for further British state intervention against the Jamaican freedpeople.

As with the 1831 rebellion, the violent backlash to the Morant Bay Rebellion engendered at least as much consternation in England as the rebellion itself. “The outbreak was indeed awful... but it would be hard to find words to express the terribleness of the retribution with which it was visited,” Underhill acknowledged.<sup>64</sup> Eyre’s overly brutal response was a key factor in the eventual dissolution of the Jamaican Assembly. The Governor was responsible for the death of over 400 Jamaicans and the burning of over 1,000 houses. Abolitionists mobilized against him and in favor of increased British control.

Many of the missionaries, including John Clark, David East, Walter Dendy, and the Henderson brothers, supported Jamaica’s transition to a Crown colony. “Under present circumstances,” one congregation argued, “this part of Your Majesty’s dominions is not in a condition to be governed by representative institutions.”<sup>65</sup> The actions of the Jamaican authorities and the freedpeople alike had rendered them unfit for self-governance.

The retreat from radicalism was, if anything, even more thorough in the United States. Charles Stearns left his Hope on Hope Ever plantation to a new group of Northern whites after six years in Georgia. He still held out hope that, someday, his co-op model could work. But, he wrote, “my experience is, that although co-operation is the grand remedy for the ills complained

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<sup>63</sup> Hutton, *Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin*, 143.

<sup>64</sup> Underhill, *The Tragedy of Morant Bay*, 51.

<sup>65</sup> Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 263.

of by workingmen, yet the freedmen are not sufficiently advanced, intellectually, or morally, to render its adoption among them, a practicable thing.”<sup>66</sup> He lamented that he never managed to secure the “fundamental principle of harmony” between himself and the freedpeople that was necessary to a functioning cooperative. With his experience in mind, he was “inclined to think that if the blacks should obtain power in this country, they would prove more tyrannical than the whites,” and recommended limiting their power “until they become enlightened.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, Stearns returned North considerably more skeptical of Black land ownership and political involvement than he was when he left.

Stearns’ reconsideration of radicalism was mirrored by Northern elites over the course of Reconstruction. These elites came to conflate the agitations of black people during Reconstruction with a rejection of the free labor model, and “an attempt to subvert the American way”<sup>68</sup> in favor of European-style communism and class warfare. In this conflation of race and class, anti-blackness among elites implied an increasingly laissez-faire conception of American political economy. Carl Schurz, despite his radical bona fides, was pessimistic about the odds of helping the freedpeople through government action: “there are many social disorders which are very difficult to cure by laws,” he told the Senate. Horace Greeley, not so far removed from his antebellum flirtation with Marxism, became a prominent ambassador of reconciliation with Southern whites. In 1867, he helped pay Jefferson Davis’ bond. He complained about high taxes and the incapacity of the freedpeople. He called for Americans to “clasp hands across the bloody chasm” of sectional conflict. And in 1872, he ran as the Liberal Republican Party’s presidential candidate against Republican Ulysses Grant on a platform of sectional unity.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Stearns, *The Black Man of the South, and the Rebels*, 170.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, xiv.

<sup>69</sup> Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 212-214.

The fading Northern commitment to the freedpeople spelled the death knell for Reconstruction. Further still, the notion of Reconstruction as a failed experiment was ingrained within the white psyche long into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The propensity of Northerners to find Black laborers fundamentally lacking and therefore blameworthy of economic failure was thus a key justification in the ultimate segregation of the workforce and American society. “Redemption” governments sprung up across the South on a platform of violent white supremacy. Many Northerners considered the job done in 1870, with the passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, despite continued political violence against and economic exploitation of formerly enslaved people. In 1876, Democrats conceded the election to Republican Rutherford Hayes in exchange for “home rule” over the South. Segregation, lynchings, and disenfranchisement spread across the region.

The long-term impact of blaming the freedpeople for the failure of postemancipation societies was to render them political, economic, and social outcasts. As Thomas Holt puts it, “former slaves in the nineteenth century who failed to respond to the market as they were supposed to were relegated to the status of wards of a superior civilization.”<sup>70</sup> As for Jamaica, the long history of Black land ownership on the island meant that formerly enslaved people were able to maintain some semblance of economic autonomy in some cases. Politically, though, the freedpeople were disenfranchised and blocked from access to state power. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even that minimal economic autonomy was dwindling. Planters increasingly sold their land not to independent peasant proprietors but to large “agrarian capitalists investing in the booming fruit trade.”<sup>71</sup> In Jamaica, then, the colonial period after the dissolution of the Assembly followed a logic of racial exclusion and imperial domination.

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<sup>70</sup> Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, xix.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 339.



So it was that the status of the freedpeople in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States entered a period of decline and exploitation. They found themselves with vanishingly few political allies, as missionaries and associated authorities demobilized and retreated from their postemancipation efforts. This isolation gave way to economic extraction and overt white supremacy across the Atlantic World.

## CONCLUSION

In the arc of emancipations, missionaries were central characters. They pushed a distinct vision of freedom rooted in Christian doctrine and anti-slavery activism. They viewed emancipation as an experiment in abolition that would vindicate their political positions; they viewed postemancipation societies as blank slates awaiting their guiding hand. They were powerful figures in these societies, with proximity both to the freedpeople and to secular authorities. Their liberal worldview put them into conflict with strains of radicalism and traditionalism that they were never able to reconcile. Nor were they able to accurately identify or address the root causes of social upheaval and economic decline, as doing so would have required an ideological transformation for which they were not prepared. Instead, they located the source of failure in the alleged incapacity of formerly enslaved people to conduct free labor and participate in a civilized society. They distanced themselves from emancipationist visions of abolition and retreated from redistributive policies, signaling and even accelerating the emergence of coercive political systems structured on racial hierarchy and economic exploitation.

This chronology of the missionary experience holds true in the Anglo-American and Atlantic worlds of Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States. Of course, there were also key differences between these postemancipation societies, separated not only by ocean but by more than six decades. Over the course of those decades, white supremacist discourse became more sophisticated, colonial predation advanced across the globe, and international connections expanded with trade and war. Moreover, each of these three countries were home to specific, internal dynamics that informed the development of political attitudes over the course of emancipation.

Comparing missionary activity in each of these postemancipation societies gives weight to these broad trends while highlighting the shared tenets of a religious and economic worldview that was both enduring and global in scope. Further, such a comparison prompts consideration of the global formation of the meaning of freedom. Emancipation was a critical juncture, a turning point, in which societies fashioned relations putatively governed by freedom rather than slavery. Scholars of emancipations have noted that, while the meaning of slavery was agreed upon, the concept of freedom held within it remarkable variation—was it anything other than slavery? Was it the exact opposite of slavery? Something else altogether? Missionaries engaged in this fraught debate, putting forth, in general, an answer that was not so constrained as that of many planters but not so expansive as that of many freedpeople.

For missionaries in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and the United States, freedom meant the ability to engage in Christian worship and market relations. Freedom *from* Christianity, freedom *from* the market, however—these concepts did not factor into the missionary idea of what freedom meant. In the wake of slavery, the missionary vision of freedom proved durable. Indeed, this vision continues to shape political, economic, and social structures across the globe. In many ways, then, we are living in the world these missionaries made.

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