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## The Preacher and Missionary War: The Political Role of Race and Christianity in the 1831 Baptist War

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The Preacher and Missionary War: The Political Role of  
Race and Christianity in the 1831 Baptist War

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in History

by

Emilee Dale  
University of Arkansas Bachelor of Arts in History, 2018

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## Abstract

Abolitionists from the Eighteenth Century to the mid-Nineteenth Century tended to be remembered by William Wilberforce, Joseph Soul, Thomas Clarkson, Samuel Bowly, and William Lloyd Garrison. All of these men have been extremely well represented throughout scholarship and the archives. The voices that are often left out of the archives are the men and women who fought on the frontlines for their freedom. Enslaved men and women fought to the death for their freedom and are often overshadowed by White missionaries and abolitionists in the archives. Black leaders often have less representation throughout history and scholarship due to the lack of archival sources on these men and women. The Baptist War of 1831 was credited to having started because of the inspirations of Black religious leaders such as Samuel Sharpe and George Taylor; however, the historiography on the Baptist War has an overwhelming amount of information on British missionaries such as William Knibb, Thomas Burchell, Henry Bleby, and James Phillippo. This is due to the overwhelming archival sources on these men and the lack of sources on the Black religious leaders. Black religious leaders used Christianity as a means to organize, inform, inspire, and justify their plans of resistance against slavery. By exploring personal documentation, including diaries, letters, and memories, along with the court cases, testimonies, confessions, and other legal documents directly following the Baptist War of 1831, this thesis will show how Black Baptist leaders in Jamaica used Christianity and other religions to house, organize, justify, and empower their plans for acts of resistance such as the Baptist War. It also will show that following this rebellion, the British officials gave credit and legacy to the British missionaries, thus denying the Black Baptist leaders their agency and causing there to be hardly any archival remembrance of these leaders.

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## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Introduction.....  | 1   |
| Chapter One: Establishing the Foundation for Christianity in Jamaican Enslaved<br>Communities..... | 22  |
| Chapter Two: Spiritual and Social Tensions Plaguing Jamaica.....                                   | 49  |
| Chapter Three: Trial, Death, and Legacy.....   | 76  |
| Conclusion.....  | 103 |
| Bibliography.....  | 109 |

## Introduction

Men create gods after their own image, not only with regard to their form but with regard to their mode of life.(Aristotle)

When Aristotle uttered these famous words in 347 BCE, he was not thinking about enslaved Africans. Considered to be one of the greatest western philosophers, Aristotle was the author behind the philosophy that became the groundwork for Christian scholasticism. Aristotle also believed that slavery was a natural thing and some were born to be enslaved while others were born to rule the enslaved. Aristotle claimed those born as naturally enslaved had incomplete souls, which meant they required masters to guide them through life. To Aristotle, enslaved people were not completely capable of thought. They were more living tools or domestic animals, meant to carry out everyday duties. As he noted, “For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule...”<sup>1</sup> Through the recovery and renewed interest in Greek Classical ideas, Aristotle’s thoughts on slavery were introduced into Christian scholarship and provided a philosophical and theological justification for Christians’ hierarchy. His words later gave them the ultimate justification to enslave Africans.<sup>2</sup>

In years to come, enslaved Africans in Jamaica used Christianity to fight for their freedom, though British officials often shifted credit for that fight from the enslaved to the white missionaries who used Black religious leaders to introduce Christianity to enslaved communities. In reality, Black Baptist leaders in Jamaica used Christianity and other religions to house,

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*(Betascript Publishing, 2011), Book 1.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Wise, “European Christianity and Slavery · African Passages, Lowcountry Adaptations · Lowcountry Digital History Initiative,” Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, 2014, <https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu>

organize, justify, and empower their plans for acts of resistance such as the Baptist War. True to their form, British officials gave credit and legacy to the British missionaries following that war; therefore, denying the Black Baptist leaders their agency and causing there to be hardly any archival remembrance of these leaders.

Using Aristotle's ideas on natural enslaved people, Christians decided that any non-Christians were deemed natural enslaved people. It is interesting that the father of Christian Scholasticism could sum up the horrors the enslaved people of the Caribbean were placed under in the name of a white man's god. The epigraph contradicts other ideas from Aristotle. Elsewhere he notes how man manipulates God to serve his needs versus the reality of natural enslaved people, which justifies Christian social hierarchy and non-Christians as natural enslaved people. The very thing Western colonizers used to justify slavery became their undoing because Black religious leaders used Christianity as a means to justify, organize, and inspire a rebellion.

With the start of the exploration era and venture into the New World, European Christians expanded the idea of the "natural slave." The African slave trade in the sixteenth century stimulated the association of naturally enslaved to become synonymous with the African people enslaved by the European Christians. This introduced a significant shift for the European Christians from the "natural slave" being any non-Christian to the "natural slave" being the enslaved Africans, which shifted the determining factor from religion to race.<sup>3</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this idea of "natural slave" merged with the "curse of Ham" idea many Christians used to further justify slavery in the eyes of their God. This idea gained popularity because it was one of the few ideological ways in which planters could justify slavery.

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Wise, "European Christianity and Slavery."

Genesis 9:25 outlined, “(C)urse be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren, and he said Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.”<sup>4</sup> Many American slaveholders and members of planter societies would later use this quote to justify the enslavement of others. In the actual biblical story, Moses places a curse on Canaan, not Ham, but understanding of the story became muddled and misinterpreted, thus creating the “curse of Ham.” The belief states that Africans are the descendants of Ham whom, along with his descendants, Noah cursed. That Black Africans were the descendants of Ham and therefore “blackened” by their sins justified the right of European Christians to enslave them.

These ideologies and justifications encouraged European Christian colonizers to abduct people from their home and submit them to physical and spiritual torture. Christian colonizers created a god who was evil, cruel, and unforgiving, one who justified slavery and allowed the death and rape of thousands along with many more atrocities. The Atlantic slave trade lasted roughly 300 years and caused hundreds of years of pain to abducted people and their children, who were born into a life of cruelty and slavery. However, this use of ideological justification was not only used by the Christians enslaving the people of Africa. Enslaved African men, women, and children used the ideological justification of slavery to fight through their own interpretations of European religious systems. This is seen through multiple rebellions by enslaved people that took place between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The slave traders may have taken Africans from their home, but they could not steal their captives’ spirituality and the desire that burned inside them to be free. Ironically, religion fueled this fire for freedom. In fact, religious inspiration fueled several rebellions in varying sizes.

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<sup>4</sup> Gen 9:25

Enslaved individuals used religion to rebel in a variety of ways — from practicing their African religions under the guise of Christianity to questioning the morality of slavery by using their captors' own Bible or religion to gather a community of like-minded others willing to wage a war against the tyranny of the colonizers. There is a plethora of fights for freedom that were inspired by religion, whether that be European or African religions.

On the night of April 7, 1760, following Easter Day, a rebellion known as Tacky's Revolt began. Tacky, who was the leader of this rebellion, was originally from West Africa and a part of the Fante ethnic group. Before Tacky became an enslaved man in Jamaica, he was a king of his village on the Gold Coast. During the height of the insurrection, the Obeah men encouraged men to participate in the rebellion. Blood from every man who was involved is said to have been gathered and mixed with gunpowder and grave dirt. Obeah is an Afro-Caribbean religion that is thought of to be a religious practice, a form of resistance, and an area of authority for the enslaved communities in the Caribbean. As for Obeah's role in Tacky's Revolt, Diana Paton states in her journal article "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery" that those involved in Tacky's Rebellion used oaths and spiritually protective rituals to strengthen the most meaningful uprising of the enslaved communities in the British Caribbean during eighteenth-century.<sup>5</sup> Tacky led 150 enslaved people to rebel against their oppressors. The Obeah men rubbed a powder over the rebels that would make them invulnerable in their fight. Tacky was said to have been ritually protected from those they were fighting and would not come to any harm. This helped recruit more people to take part in the revolt. The role religion played in Tacky's rebellion is an

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<sup>5</sup> Diana Paton, "Witchcraft, Poison, Law, and Atlantic Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (April 2012): 235, doi:69.2.0235)

important one. Through the bonding and community Obeah provided, people joined to fight the oppression of slavery they faced in Jamaica. Scholars and historians such as Diana Paton show how Tacky and his Obeah Man mobilized a military operation through the solidarity created by the spiritual power of Obeah.

Similarly, the Haitian Rebellion, which took place from August 1791 to January 1804, was a successful insurrection carried out by the enslaved people of Haiti. This rebellion started with a Vodou ritual at Bois Caïman, presided over by Dutty Boukman, a prominent enslaved African leader and Houngan. This ritual served as a gathering place for a strategic meeting and religious ritual of the enslaved peoples and is often considered the beginning of the rebellion. It is an excellent example of how enslaved people used their own religious systems to fight against the biblical and social justification of slavery by the Christian colonizers. Enslaved people also pushed back on the justification of slavery and questioned the true Christian nature of Christian masters. Mary Prince, a British abolitionist and autobiographer, shows her experience as an enslaved person in Bermuda and the horrors she saw through the name of Christianity when she said, “I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies they forget God and all feelings of shame, I think, since they can see and do such things. They tie up people like hogs – moor them up like cattle, and they lick them, so as hogs, or cattle, or horses never were flogged.”<sup>6</sup>

The Haitian Revolution concluded in 1804 with the Haitian people eventually winning their freedom from France and became the first country founded by former enslaved people.

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave: Related by Herself*(Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2017), 23.

Religious leader Dutty Boukman held a religious gathering, the “Prayer of Boukman,” which many scholars credit for starting the Haitian Revolution. In his book *Haitian Modernity and Liberative Interruptions: Discourse on Race, Religion, and Freedom*, Celucien L. Joseph showed that Boukman was anti-colonial in his use of Black theology in liberation, which directly pushes against white supremacy and their notions on religion and God.<sup>7</sup> This is an interesting aspect, as it shows how scholars interact with religion in rebellions. With the Haitian Revolution, the whole fight for freedom is credited with starting at a Bois Caïman ceremony, a Vodou ritual presided over by Dutty Boukman, who was a Hougan and leader in the Haitian enslaved community.

During the 1820s, anxieties and tensions were high surrounding assemblies of enslaved African Americans in the United States South. Those anxieties were higher if those assemblies were religious. In South Carolina in 1822, there was an impressive act of insurrection that would only cause these tensions to grow. While this act had overtly religious undertones, it aroused long existing fears in Southern people and emphasized the power of enslaved communities’ religion.

In nineteenth century South Carolina, there was a high racial imbalance that led to a heightened level of insecurity among the white population amid a rampant fear of slave insurrection. The scene was one of established tensions and fear of potential slave insurrections. Denmark Vesey was an African American leader born into slavery in St. Thomas Bermuda in 1767. After buying his freedom in 1800, Vesey was a carpenter and became extremely active in the Second Presbyterian Church. He also was the founder of the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston South Carolina in 1817. This church gathered roughly

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<sup>7</sup> Celucien L. Joseph, *Haitian Modernity and Liberative Interruptions: Discourse on Race, Religion, and Freedom*(Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2014), xiii.

1,848 members during its first year, making it the second largest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. This, paired with pre-existing anxieties of the white southerners, caused the City Council to worry about these large gatherings of enslaved people and any violations being made against the “slave code” rules that prevented enslaved people from learning to read or having congregations of enslaved or black people after sunrise. Vesey often preached of hope and freedom, drawing from the Bible to inspire the members of his congregation.

By using stories from the Bible such as Exodus and the story of Moses leading God’s people out of Egypt, Vesey was said to inspire the enslaved community to escape slavery. In 1822, Vesey was credited with attempting to start a slave insurrection that was ultimately unsuccessful because the public and city officials became aware of the plans for the insurrection. Even though this uprising never took place physically, many people who were suspected of planning the insurrection were arrested including Denmark Vesey. Religion played an outstanding role in the case of Denmark Vesey. Access to the African Methodist Episcopal Church allowed African Americans and African American enslaved people to gather for religious sanctuary. It is said that Vesey inspired others to freedom by using the Bible and that he used his study of the Bible to demonstrate how slavery is against the Christian faith. Nicholas May, scholar and author of the journal article “Holy Rebellion: Religious Assembly Laws in Antebellum South Carolina and Virginia,” shows that before this attempted insurrection, the South Carolina religious assembly laws established in 1800 and 1803 were not enforced strictly.

However, after the Vesey attempted rebellion, issues of “slave control” were heightened and the fear of insurrections grew.<sup>8</sup>

Scholar Emilia Viotti da Costa states in her book *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion Of 1823* that British missionaries saw themselves as divine instruments to change Demerara society through the eyes of Christ. She said the missionaries were uneducated in the rules and sanctions that defined the relationship between master and slave. She wrote, “They met a “reality” clothed with signs and symbols to which they were blind, a “reality” they could only assess through their own codes.”<sup>9</sup> These missionaries often broke many social and local rules and provoked a tension between the missionaries and the planters.

John Smith was a missionary who went to Demerara, where he preached at Bethel Chapel. Most of his congregation were enslaved Demerara inhabitants. The average number of participants was 800, though that number sometimes rose as high as 2,000. In August 1823, Quamina Gladstone and his son, Jack Gladstone, who were both enslaved men in Demerara, led other members of the enslaved community against their enslavement and harsh treatment. Quamina was a deacon at John Smith’s church, Bethel Chapel, where rumors that the emancipation of the enslaved people had been granted but was being withheld were rampant. The revolt technically started August 18, 1823. By August 20, authorities had declared martial law, and the revolt had seemed to be under control. There are multiple different roles that religion played in the Demerara Revolt of 1823. First, tensions between the enslaved people and planters

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas May, “Holy Rebellion: Religious Assembly Laws in Antebellum South Carolina and Virginia,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 49, no. 3 (July 2007), [www.jstor.org/stable/25664424](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25664424)

<sup>9</sup> Emilia Viotti Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823*(New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), xvii.

in Demerara were high and continued to grow with the arrival of the British missionaries. Then, John Smith had a large congregation of Black and enslaved Demerara people in his church, and his church provided a space where these men and women could converse and plan was another role of religion. Finally, and most obviously, one of the initial leaders of this revolt, Quamina Gladstone, was a deacon at Smith's church. In the case of the Demerara revolt, religion caused tension, location, and cause for the enslaved people to fight against their oppressors.

The Nat Turner rebellion began in 1831, led by an enslaved African American preacher who had deep religious ties to Christianity, which helped propel his rebellious ideas and ideology. The Richmond Compiler described how Turner's religious beliefs led to the acceleration of the insurrection, stating, "A fanatic preacher, by the name of Nat. Turner [Gen. Nat. Turner!] who had been taught to read and write and permitted to go about preaching in the country, was at the bottom of this infernal brigandage."<sup>10</sup> Sources show Turner had become a religious fanatic by the 1820s and thought of himself as being sent by God to lead the enslaved people to freedom. He gained a lot of influence with local enslaved people, who called him "the Prophet." On February 12, 1830, Turner witnessed a solar eclipse that he took as the sign he needed to start the fight for freedom. Scholars have looked at new interpretations on religious history and the impact it had on this rebellion. Laura Thiemann Scales article "Narrative Revolutions in Nat Turner and Joseph Smith" explains that in the 1830s there was an explosion of religious periodicals and there were thousands of new converts and new denominations throughout the United States. Discourse on Nat Turner's rebellion by recent scholars looks at

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<sup>10</sup> T. Cushing, "Insurrection of the Slaves," *The Salem Gazette*(Salem), September 6, 1831, <https://americanantiquarian.org/NatTurner/items/show/66>)

how Turner used religion to justify and ignite a rebellion. Christopher Tomlins stated *In the Matter of Nat Turner: A Speculative History*, “Nat Turner’s purpose in revealing his life story was to open others’ eyes.”<sup>11</sup>

It has been well established that religion often plays a vital role in the start and continuation of rebellions by enslaved people throughout the United States and the Caribbean. Enslaved people used religion, whether it be African- or European-based, to fight for their freedom and prove the horrors of slavery. Yet, the Baptist War that took place in Jamaica from 1831 to 1832 is a clear example of a fight against the tyranny of Christian planters. The enslaved people of Jamaica used Christianity to justify and fight for their freedom though British officials have often credited British missionaries, denying Black religious leaders of their agency and ultimately leading to an overwhelming amount of archival sources on the missionaries and virtually nothing on the religious leaders who were the backbone of the rebellion. Leaders such as Samuel Sharpe, a freeman and deacon, John Tharp, a doctor who may have been an Obeah priest, and George Taylor, a deacon at the same church as Sharpe, played significant roles in the uprising. The Baptist War was one of the most violent and successful rebellions by enslaved people in the British West Indies, and it eventually led to the Emancipation Act of 1833.

The Emancipation Act of 1833 granted all the enslaved people in the British Empire their eventual freedom, while granting slave owners compensation. Mary Turner, author of *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834*, explained that the rebellion was organized by Christians, those who used the already established mission meetings

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher L. Tomlins, *In the Matter of Nat Turner: A Speculative History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 212.

as networks and connections with other Jamaican Baptists in order to inspire political action. Turner also argued that it was through inspiration from the Bible and assumptions that missionaries were allies, that religious leaders such as Samuel Sharpe and George Taylor were able to promote their movement. The war showed the power Christianity had in the hands of the oppressed. The extent of the power that religion, specifically Christianity, played in the Baptist War of 1831 can be seen by how the colonial officials reacted to this rebellion, who they punished, who they blamed, and who they credited. While the enslaved Jamaicans were jailed and executed for their actions, it was the British missionaries who got the credit as well as the social blame.

The Baptist War was organized as a peaceful labor strike by Samuel Sharpe, albeit one that would strike during a time that would be more than just inconvenient. The intention was to stop work during the height of sugar cultivation in order to demand wages from the planters. Sharpe and other religious leaders used the Bible to pull inspiration and secure allegiance. They also used established religious networks to spread plans and political agenda. Though Sharpe arranged this act of resistance to be peaceful, the British and Jamaican officials' reaction to the enslaved Jamaican's act of resistance shows they placed blame on all Baptist leaders and ministers, both Black and White. British missionaries were punished for participating in the Baptist War even when they had little or no knowledge of the rebellion prior to its start. The fact that the British gave these missionaries the credit for the rebellion despite their lack of knowledge on the act of rebellion discredits the efforts made by the religious leaders of the enslaved Jamaican community, such as Sharpe and George Taylor and placed a bigger blame on

the enslaved Jamaicans access to Christianity, rather than on the work and power of those Black religious leaders.

The legal actions taken against these religious leaders and Baptist ministers show the extent of the blame that the British officials put on the backs of the religious ideals. Even though Christian ideology sought to dehumanize enslaved Africans and made efforts to restrict access to its revolutionary messages, it became the driving force for slave rebellions. Enslaved Africans and their missionary allies used the very Christianity that was used to enslave them to challenge the system of slavery. The enslaved people learned to use the very institution oppressing them to justify their right to freedom and right to fight for that freedom.

While some European colonies established in the Caribbean took aggressive measures to Christianize their enslaved populations by force, the British did not. The French colonies had Code Noir, which made Roman Catholicism mandatory of all. Law stated that all slaves in the French colonies had to be baptized and instructed in the Catholic religion. According to one passage, “We charge the planters who will buy newly arrived negres to inform the Governor and Intendant of the said islands within a week at the latest or face a discretionary fine, these [officials] will give the necessary orders to have them instructed and baptized within an appropriate time.”<sup>12</sup> The British colonies took no such active measures to Christianize their enslaved populations. The British saw their sole access to Christianity as a way to remain the “natural masters.” Instead, religious leaders, such as George Liele, Moses Baker, Samuel Sharpe and George Taylor, took the teachings of Christianity to those communities and should be

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<sup>12</sup> Louis XIV. “The ‘Code Noir’ (1685).” Trans. Garrigus, John. Web. 13 May 2012. <[http://les.traitesnegrieres.free.fr/39\\_esclavage\\_code\\_noir\\_agl.html](http://les.traitesnegrieres.free.fr/39_esclavage_code_noir_agl.html)>.

credited for the success of spreading Christianity among them. Due to this dynamic, the fight for access to Christianity was complex for the enslaved Jamaican.

There was little or no desire to introduce enslaved communities to Christianity. There were laws preventing enslaved people to have access to Christianity, or the Christianity that they had access to was heavily edited to accommodate the planters and others who justified slavery. However, enslaved people overcame those complexities and gained access to Christianity. They overcame these obstacles by learning to read and spreading their knowledge to the rest of the community and by holding their own religious services. Samuel Sharpe was remembered for traveling throughout Jamaica with his license to travel and preach. The enslaved peoples also created alliances with missionaries. Doing so empowered the enslaved community and allowed them to create a community of those who were oppressed by the planter class. The enslaved people used Christianity to fight back and create a world where they had agency and a reason to fight -- a reason to demand freedom. Enslaved Jamaicans weaponized Christianity to fight the hypocrisy presented in the beliefs of the planter class, which had been forced upon them, and used that ideology as undeniable justification that freedom for the enslaved communities is a God-given right for all men, women, and children.

The history of Black Christianity in Jamaica, including how the religion was introduced to the enslaved communities and the power and shelter that came with it, reveals the beginnings of the role that religion played in starting and fueling a rebellion against slavery. That Christianity was withheld from the enslaved on the British colonies highlighted the belief that gaining access to Christianity would provide the enslaved Jamaicans a fairer playing field in their battle over slavery. By Christianizing themselves, Jamaican slaves found access to power, respect, and

justification. The enslaved peoples' access to Christianity became the central source of tensions with the planter class because it inspired and created leaders who organized movements against their captivity and, eventually, revolution. Christianity provided a reason for the enslaved Jamaicans to organize and meet. That, in turn, provided the ability for the enslaved community to discuss the hypocrisy of the religious beliefs and the actions of the Christian planters who enslaved them. It allowed them to study, discuss, and plan ways to push against the oppressive chains of slavery in a manner that should be undeniable to the planters. These now enslaved Christians used the word of their Christian planter's God to demand their freedom, which they had learned they were as entitled to as their masters.

Samuel Sharpe, the leader of the rebellion, left behind little to no records. This is an unfortunate result of the British officials giving credit to the missionaries which causes the archives to remember the missionaries instead of religious leaders like Sharpe. However, his voice only becomes accessible through transcribed testimonies, reports and speeches of British officials and white missionaries. One such missionary whose work will be explored to access Sharpe's voice is Henry Bleby. The various court cases and legal documents produced following the end of the Baptist War reveal the genuine power of religion held in the hands of enslaved people and abolitionists. These court cases and legal documents do not reveal the voices of those enslaved Jamaicans that pushed for justice, including Sharpe. One way that their voices can be preserved and remembered is through the letters, memoirs, and diaries left by those who were present at the time. However, their voices were not preserved to be as loud as the voices of the missionaries. Documentations of missionaries such as the Rev. William Knibb, Thomas Burchell, Henry Bleby and James Phillippo have survived to keep the silent voices from obscurity in a way

that legal documents and court cases failed to do so. While these memories are not from those leaders themselves, they provide an angle that legal discourse cannot provide.

Christianity gave the enslaved Jamaicans validation for their cause, hope to soothe their worries, and strength to fight against their oppressors. That validation did not come without repercussions for the missionaries who taught enslaved individuals about the intricacies of the religion. Even though the missionaries, like the Rev. William Knibb, had little to no prior knowledge of the insurrection, British officials blamed them for war and punished them for their part. Because they did so, the British officials let it be known how much power they believed Christianity had when wielded by enslaved peoples and abolitionists. Exploring the various court cases that were produced the year following the rebellion reveals the extent of involvement the British missionaries actually played, which was not equal to the credit that British officials and planter society placed on them.

The official reports from a Committee of the House of Assembly, Jamaica, and specific committees created to inquire officially on the cause and damage resulting from the Baptist War show how British officials misplaced the blame or credit of the war. The officials took credit from the enslaved people who increased their knowledge so they could use European Christian religion to promote their cause. Then through their assignation of blame, gave credit to the Baptist missionaries who helped them gain that knowledge. Oaths, confessions, and other documents detailing arrests made after the rebellion further illustrate that mistake. A report recorded on June 27, 1832, at the Colonial Department on Downing Street in Central London seeks to show that the missionaries who were active in Jamaica sought to undermine the enslaved individuals masters' importance by convincing the enslaved communities that they

could not serve both the Spiritual Master, God, and their Temporal Master, their plantation master. This report offers examinations under oath of those present at the rebellion, confessions on oath of those imprisoned or executed because of their involvement in the rebellion, and documents showing financial loss because of the rebellion.

Another official report taken after the rebellion that this project will examine took place on December 15, 1832, nearly a year after the start of the Baptist War on December 15, 1832, and involves the Rev. William Knibb in an official discussion with Mr. P. Borthwick at the Assembly Room in Baths. This report is an examination of Knibb's involvement in the rebellion and what he witnessed leading up to and during the rebellion. Other documents this project pulls from include newspaper articles, memoirs of the rebellion, and decrees to those rebelling. These sources provide a look at how British officials reacted officially to the rebellion. The silent majority also peer between the lines in these sources to tell a hidden history.

The Baptist War was a vital fight of the enslaved communities in their war for freedom. Although conventional history does not show the Baptist War to have been a victory for the enslaved Jamaicans, it paved the way for the British Emancipation Act of 1833. Historians have studied the Baptist War among other rebellions by enslaved people that took place in the Caribbean for a multitude of reasons. Many historians look at the political implications behind the Baptist War, how politics led to the start of the rebellion, and the effects it had on politics following the rebellion. In his article "A Tale of Two Jamaican Rebellions," (1996), Gad Heuman compares the Baptist War of 1831 and the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865. Heuman explores the rebellion from a comparative perspective by outlining the similarities and differences between the Baptist War of 1831 and the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 and shows how the two rebellions

transformed the political constitution of Jamaica. Heuman discusses religious aims in his article but ultimately stresses the importance of political aims in both rebellions. This approach to examine the Baptist War and the Morant Bay rebellion is vital in establishing the political tensions that enabled rebellions under British rule and how the two rebellions shaped the political war to come.

Like Heuman, Abigail Bakan also uses a comparative approach. In *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica: The Politics of Rebellion* (1990), Bakan explores three rebellions that took place in Jamaica -- the Baptist War of 1831, the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, and the Labor Rebellion of 1938. Bakan argues that in all three rebellions, an ideology of class struggle against the planter class defined the labor class in Jamaica from slavery to modernity. She wrote, “.. (P)resented here is a Marxist interpretation of this ideological pattern traced over three formative historical flash points in the history of Jamaican politics and class struggle: the rebellions of 1831, 1865, and 1938.”<sup>13</sup> Bakan defines a recurring pattern among the three rebellions, which is that “Jamaican Society is organized based on class relations and interaction.”<sup>14</sup> Bakan provides an important contribution to Caribbean scholarship, one that engages the debates on Jamaican class and race in the development of Jamaica from the nineteenth century to the present. Both Heuman and Bakan provide imperative looks on these rebellion’s impact on the development of Jamaica through the lens of politics, race, and class.

Other historians look into different explanations for the introduction of resistance by the enslaved people in the Americas and the Caribbean. Historian Thomas Robert Day’s thesis

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<sup>13</sup> A. Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica: The Politics of Rebellion*(Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica*, 8.

“Jamaican Revolts in British Press and Politics, 1760-1865,” published in 2016 examines the three largest rebellions in Jamaica, which occurred in 1760, 1832, and 1865, and how the British newspaper coverage of these rebellions changed over time. Day shows how each of these rebellions caused the British public to change their opinions on slavery, race and citizenship. Day explores how in the 1760 rebellion, the majority of the rebels were non-Christian Africans who sought to overthrow and remove the system of slavery through rebellion. He then points out that in the 1831 Baptist War, most of the players were Christians and sought to gain access to rights already promised to them. Day shows that the Baptist War was a significantly different world than Tacky’s rebellion of 1760, in which the Jamaican rebels were not actively fighting against their enslavement and were non-Christian Africans. He shows the world of the Baptist War was that the enslaved Jamaicans were largely Christians who saw themselves as a different type of subject under the British empire. They fought for what was theirs through the alliances of missionaries and the networks established through religious meetings. Day contributes to the scholarship on the rebellions in the British West Indies by showing how the foundations were completely different in rebellions, the impact that they had on the British public through newspapers, and the changing opinions on slavery and race to the British public.

Scholar Wim Klooster in his article, “Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and a Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolutions,” argues against the concept that Day shows in his thesis “Jamaican Revolts in British Press and Politics, 1760-1865” that the 1760 Tacky’s rebellion world was widely different from the world that was surrounding the Baptist War in 1831. Klooster argues against the idea that rebellions by enslaved people come in stages. Day stated that the first stage of rebellions was the African stage of non-Christian Africans rebelling directly

against slavery. The stage then shifted to rebellions by more “assimilated” enslaved people who were aided by biblical literacy and missionary allies to demand what is rightfully theirs. However, Klooster argues that the power of the rumor greatly helped the power of a rebellion. He stated that it may not have been rumors alone that started any rebellion but rather those who were already convinced of a rebellion taking place being more likely to rebel as well, thus creating a larger rebellion. He states rumors that freedom had already been obtained and that planters were keeping this freedom from enslaved people also led to rebellions. Klooster concluded that it is doubtful that many of the insurrections by the enslaved after 1789 would have even happened without the enslaved believing they were legally free.<sup>15</sup> Klooster builds upon long-standing historiography about slave rebellions by showing the importance that rumor also plays in the instigation of these different rebellions. He shows that on top of the importance of politics, race, and class that both Heuman and Bakan said provide foundations on these rebellion’s impact on the development of Jamaica, rumors also played a role in the instigation of rebellions by enslaved people.

Claudius Fergus states in his book, *Revolutionary emancipation: slavery and abolitionism in the British West Indies*, “(I)t was destined to be a long struggle, punctuated by militancy and occasional violence, as activists pursued cultural equality, social and economic justice, and constitutional advancements.”<sup>16</sup> Scholars have created a solid foundation for the cause of and success of rebellions by enslaved people throughout the Caribbean by looking at class, race,

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<sup>15</sup> Wim Klooster, “Slave Revolts, Royal Justice, and a Ubiquitous Rumor in the Age of Revolutions,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (July 2014): 424, doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.71.3.0401)

<sup>16</sup> Claudius K. Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation: Slavery and Abolitionism in the British West Indies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 202.

politics, economics and phases of rebellions by enslaved people, and the effect of rumors.

Scholarship covering the Baptist War do not follow the British official's way of giving credit and legacy to the missionaries; however, missionaries such as Thomas Burchell, James Phillippo, William Knibb, and Henry Bleby are talked about far more extensively due to the fact that there is more archival sources on the missionaries due to the credit given to the missionaries.

This project attempts to situate itself within this extensive historiography done by these scholars and show the role that religion played in the Baptist War. Religion provided a network Jamaican religious leaders could use to spread ideas and news. Religious leaders could encourage others to join and strike for justice through biblical literature as well as provide space for meeting places and more. While religious leaders such as Samuel Sharpe and George Taylor were able to accomplish their plans through these means, British officials erringly blamed, and thus gave credit, to British missionaries. With this credit to the British missionaries, the British officials were simultaneously denying religious leaders their agency. While this solidifies the officials' blame on Christianity in the hands of the enslaved people of Jamaica, it undermines the effort of the religious leaders of the enslaved community. This project seeks to fill in the importance of religion in Caribbean historiography, specifically the importance of Christianity at the hands of enslaved Jamaicans in their fight for freedom. The Baptist War has been studied on a timeline of the development of Jamaica and the Caribbean. This project provides a more intense look into this timeline to show religious importance in Caribbean society and in the enslaved people's fight for freedom. It also shows how the British officials ultimately gifted the legacy of the rebellion to the British missionaries. In doing so they denied Black religious leaders of their agency and caused an extreme lack of archival sources on these leaders.

The Baptist War has been studied in conjunction with other rebellions, but the religious importance of this single rebellion has room for more research and interpretation. This project seeks to provide satisfactory information regarding the religious significance of the Baptist War by looking at legal reactions and tracing how this insurrection, while not conventionally successful for the enslaved Jamaicans, eventually led to the emancipation of enslaved individuals in British colonies in 1833. That emancipation changed not only life for the people of Jamaica but the entire Atlantic world.

## Chapter One

### **Establishing the Foundation for Christianity in Jamaican Enslaved Communities**

Although England did not receive formal possession of Jamaica from Spain until 1670 with the Treaty of Madrid, the British introduced Anglicanism to the island in 1664.<sup>17</sup> The Anglican church overtaking the pre-existing sixteenth-century Spanish cathedral marked the transition not only to British rule but also to British Christian ideology in Jamaican society. The Caribbean was the heartland of chattel slavery, and after the British colonies lost control of the 13 colonies in the United States, the British West Indies became the home of the majority of British enslaved people. This hub of British enslaved became an issue for the British Christians, but the guilt of enslaving innocent people was quickly explained away when Englishmen saw how lucrative the business of slave trading and slave labor were. Many could easily assuage their guilt by justifying slavery as the will of God. They believed it was the Christians' natural right to enslave non-Christians.

British Christians were at the top of the Christian social hierarchy, and those whom they enslaved from Africa were at the bottom. Prior to this structure of the hierarchy, it was the indentured servants who were at the bottom, the majority being Irish Catholics. Access to Christianity was a marker of higher status, and there was little to no desire by the Jamaican planter class to indoctrinate the African enslaved into their Christian ideology.

This chapter will explore the creation and continuation of tensions between the planter class and a Jamaican enslaved society built on the basis of Christian ideals. When viewed

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<sup>17</sup> “European Christianity and Slavery · African Passages, Lowcountry Adaptations · Lowcountry Digital History Initiative.”

through the lens of the history of British Christianity in enslaved Jamaican societies and the tensions it created, the reasons and justifications for the emergence of the Baptist War of 1831 become more complex. Some thought access to Christianity would be access to freedom for the enslaved individuals, but the path to freedom was much more convoluted. The enslaved used Christianity to justify, organize, and inspire resistance and rebellion, but it was not a direct route.

Who successfully introduced the Christian slave masters' religion to those enslaved in Jamaica? There were efforts by British missionaries to Christianize the enslaved Africans starting with the first large effort in the middle of the eighteenth century, but the success of this process was dismal. The initial introduction of Baptist teaching in Jamaica did not take as well as the Moravian missionaries hoped when they arrived in Jamaica in 1754. The Moravian missionaries only managed to baptize around 1,000 enslaved Jamaicans by the start of the nineteenth century. It was not until the late 1700s, when Black Baptist preachers, Moses Baker, Thomas Gibb, and George Liele, came from the United States to Jamaica, that attempts to bring Christianity to the enslaved communities were successful.<sup>18</sup> Exploring and crediting the Black religious leaders from the American colonies who were the first successful push to bring Christianity to the enslaved communities along with looking at the efforts made by British missionaries to Christianize the enslaved Jamaicans is vital to understanding the eventual importance of Christianity in the enslaved communities.

### **The Arrival of Black Missionaries in Jamaica**

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<sup>18</sup> Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Temple University Press, 2010), 282.

The first man who successfully converted Jamaican Black people to Christianity was George Liele, a freed enslaved person from the United States. Liele was born in Virginia in 1750. As a Black loyalist during the American Revolution, he decided to move his family to Jamaica following the war. He did so by borrowing \$700 from Moses Kirkland, a British loyalist.<sup>19</sup> In the North American colonies, Liele was the founding pastor of two Baptist churches: First Bryan Baptist Church and First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia. Liele later became one of the first Baptist missionaries in Jamaica and is credited with founding the Ethiopian Baptist Church of Jamaica in 1792. Liele had a companion, Moses Baker, who also came to Jamaica from the United States. Baker pursued a more educational approach to Christianize the enslaved community of Jamaica. It is believed Baker was invited onto a plantation owned by a Quaker in hopes that he would educate the plantation's enslaved in moral and religious Christian ideology.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that Baker was invited to live among the enslaved of this plantation presented a fascinating factor on the success of indoctrination of a community into Christianity. Baker was invited into a very personal area and given access to teach the enslaved in the Christian ideology, something many planters were hesitant to do. This was due to the fact that the Quaker who owned the plantation believed Baker would be more successful in instructing the enslaved residents in religious and moral ways because being Black, he would be able to gain trust easier than a white missionary.

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<sup>19</sup> C. S. Reid, *Samuel Sharpe: From Slave to Jamaican National Hero*(Kingston, Jamaica: Bustamante Inst. of Public and International Affairs, 1988), 44.

<sup>20</sup> William Fitzer. Burchell and Thomas Fitzer. Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell, Twenty-two Years a Missionary in Jamaica*.(London: B.L. Green, 1849), 53.

Previous British missionaries were not allowed this type of access. This example shows how Black religious leaders had access to areas that were off-limits to white British missionaries. Missionary James Phillippo explained that planters were against allowing British missionaries into the quarters of the enslaved people. He said, “Owners of slaves will never allow a spy to enter their families under the guise of a protector of the slaves; nor will they allow any public supervision of the punishments it may be necessary to inflict upon them.”<sup>21</sup>

The British missionaries often depended on the Black religious leaders to do their work. Because the missionaries were rarely allowed to go into the plantations to further their movements to Christianize, they needed religious leaders in the enslaved communities to preach, pray, and teach for them. It can be concluded that this role of race in the conversion of enslaved Jamaicans to Christianity was vital. The British thought that the enslaved would be more willing to receive the Christian doctrine from someone who looked like them, which is why the Black missionaries were thought to be more successful in their conversion. This led to a more important leadership role for the men and women who became Black religious leaders. This is one of the reasons the planter class resented the British missionaries’ attempts to Christianize the enslaved Jamaicans. As the Black Baptist leaders continued to gain support and success bringing Christianity to the Jamaican enslaved community, they came more in contact with the British missionaries. George Liele even approached the founder of the British Missionary Society in hopes of securing funds to cover the costs of missionary work.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Bean. Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo, Missionary in Jamaica* (London: Yates & Alexander, 1881), 67.

<sup>22</sup> Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, 283.

Scholars credit the British North American Black loyalists, freed enslaved people coming to the Caribbean from the colonies, with bringing baptism to the Caribbean. After the defeat of the British in the American Revolutionary War, defeated British, accompanied by formerly enslaved, brought a new brand of Baptist preaching to the island. This brand preached against slavery and created anxiety among the planter class. With access to Christianity and support from British missionaries and others, enslaved Jamaicans garnered a new method to fight back against their oppressors. Black religious leaders with their new Baptist preaching provided a new place where the enslaved Jamaican community could commune and create leadership positions for themselves. This chapter argues that the history of British Christianity in enslaved Jamaican societies and the tensions it created made the reasons and justifications for the Baptist War of 1831 more complex.

While Black Baptist leaders, such as George Liele and Moses Baker, were extremely successful in the introduction of a new brand of Baptist preaching in Jamaica, British missionaries continued to further Christianize the Jamaican enslaved, much to the disdain of the planter class. Although Black religious leaders saw more success in bringing Christianity into enslaved communities, the planter class was hesitant of the process because they did not want any shift in the well-established Jamaican social hierarchy. Christianity was seen as a way to justify their status above those who were enslaved. There were British missionaries who went against the wishes of the planter class, and studying some of these missionaries brings understanding of the blame placed upon the British missionaries at the end of the Baptist War.

### **The Work of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in Jamaica**

Three of the most successful British missionaries came to Jamaica in the early 19th century. They were the Rev. William Knibb, James Phillippo, and Thomas Burchell. James Phillippo was a British missionary stationed in Jamaica, best known for his work for abolition of slavery. These men were part of a small group of missionaries assigned by the Baptist Missionary Society from England to go to Jamaica in the 1820s. While they were instructed to go and preach and bring a stronger Christian community, they were also instructed not to mention the situation of slavery in public because of the importance of the sugarcane economy and the backlash they would receive from the planters. Phillippo was part of the Baptist Missionary Society. Even though he was told to not preach to the Jamaican enslaved, he did. He went so far as setting up new chapels, teaching classes on the Bible, and starting Sunday schools.<sup>23</sup> Phillippo was granted permission in 1825 to preach to the enslaved Jamaicans, and in 1827, he built Phillippo Baptist Church in Spanish Town Jamaica. Thomas Burchell was another Baptist missionary who was stationed in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Like Phillippo, Burchell established his own church, The Burchell Baptist Church, where he worked alongside Samuel Sharpe, who is arguably the most remembered Black religious leader of the Baptist War.

The Rev. William Knibb is one of the most remembered British missionaries when it comes to the Baptist War. In this quote from Knibb's 1832 defense, he shows his hatred towards the institution of slavery and how it is evil:

The cursed blast of slavery has, like a pestilence, withered almost every moral bloom. I know not how any person can feel a union with such a monster, such a child of hell. I feel a burning hatred against it and look upon it as one of the most odious monsters that ever disgraced the earth. The

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<sup>23</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 38.

iron hand of oppression daily endeavors to keep the slaves in the ignorance to which it has reduced them.<sup>24</sup>

Knibb was a British Baptist missionary who became popular in Jamaica because of his disdain of slavery. This disdain developed once he arrived in Jamaica and witnessed all the sin and horrible acts committed against the enslaved people. He noted in his writing that the enslaved people wanted to learn from his preaching and more about Christianity, something in great contrast to how the planters did not care for him or his work.

During his time in Jamaica, Knibb founded six Baptist missions following the work pioneered by George Liele. Knibb assisted Black Baptist leaders and enslaved Jamaicans, giving them validation -- both moral and religious -- they needed to act out against the oppression they faced. In 1830, Knibb served as the minister of the Baptist Church in Falmouth, which had a congregation of over 500. This was one of the churches where Samuel Sharpe started his movement for resistance that would later turn into the Baptist War. Because of Knibb's antislavery rhetoric, he was blamed by Jamaican planters for encouraging the rebellion. Government officials soon saw Knibb as a "troublemaker." Knibb also received condemnation for his open admiration and respect of religious leader Samuel Sharpe. In his 1832 defense, Knibb said Sharpe had been treated unfairly. He noted that if Sharpe had been an European white man, he would have been memorialized with a statue rather than condemned to die.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Howard Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb, Missionary in Jamaica* (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1849), 48.

<sup>25</sup> United Kingdom, The Tourist Office, *Defense of the Baptist Missionaries from the Charge of Inciting the Late Rebellion in Jamaica; in a Discussion between the Rev. William Knibb and Mr. P. Borthwick at the Assembly Rooms, Bath on Saturday, December 15, 1832.*, by T. Oxford (London: Tourist Office, 1832), 4, accessed October 27, 2020, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/CA01000012/00001>)

Knibb was arrested for his supposed involvement in the rebellion and taken to court, thus becoming an example of how the British officials gave credit to the missionaries, despite all of the work done by the Black religious leaders. Knibb demanded change in the most peaceful way possible -- by showing his congregation of enslaved Jamaicans respect and revealing the justice they could seek within the Bible. Knibb's works in helping to create a safe Christian community for the enslaved Jamaicans led them to seek a justice long hidden by the slave masters, who used the Bible to justify keeping enslaved Caribbeans in chains.

The successful introduction of Christianity into the enslaved Jamaican communities led to a shift in tension between the planters and the enslaved people of Jamaica. Men such as George Liele and Moses Baker paved a road for British missionaries to follow. The flourishing of Christian ideology and rhetoric spread. Robert Worthington Smith, scholar and author of "Slavery and Christianity in the British West Indies," said of the effect of churches in the enslaved community, "When inside a Methodist or Baptist chapel, the slave had a momentary feeling of independence both of thinking and acting. Within the chapel there was no reminder of slavery."<sup>26</sup> The Jamaican enslaved began to question the biblical justification of enslavement by the plantation owners. The success of Christianity among the enslavement sparked an anxiety that was lingering just under the surface of the planter class of Jamaica. These anxieties created immense tensions between the planter class and the Jamaican enslaved community and even between the planter class and the British missionaries. Because of the work of Liele, Baker, Knibb, Phillippo, and Burchell, the opinion in Jamaica surrounding the notion of slavery was

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Worthington Smith, "Slavery and Christianity in the British West Indies," *Church History* 19, no. 3 (September 1950): 174, doi:3161292)

starting to shift. The shift led the planter class to worry because now the enslaved Jamaicans and Black religious leaders had Biblical understanding and justification for equality.

Those who benefitted from the slave trade and slave labor had gone to great lengths to justify the enslavement of Africans. They argued that the enslavement of non-Christians was morally acceptable. Some Christian colonizers thought the enslavement of Black Africans was a righteous act and salvation could be found in the hands of enslavement. The most common step on the part of the Anglican church within the British West Indies was to simply ignore the evils of slavery. The Anglican church managed to do this because the Anglicans in England were disinterested in spreading the gospel at all, let alone to the enslaved. There were no complaints made by Anglican clergymen on the treatment of the enslaved Jamaicans. Because the Anglican Church in England did not make complaints on slavery in Jamaica, the Anglican church in Jamaica was allowed to ignore any issues involving slavery. However, with the growth of Christianization of the enslaved Jamaican community, the planters had to look at slavery in a different regard. Though slavery was unchristian, they justified it by viewing it as a way of civilizing “heathens.”

### **Planters’ Anxiety on Conversion to Christianity by the Enslaved**

The tension between the planter class and enslaved Christians in Jamaicans grew with the continued association of the enslaved with Christian values. By the end of 1831, there were nearly 20,000 members throughout all the Jamaican parishes, and that growth led to much stress among the planter class. From the beginning of its control in Jamaica, the British empire did not want to bring Christianity to the enslaved communities. Christianity was seen as a way to justify their status above the enslaved people. The lack of Christian believers among the enslaved

Jamaicans was used as a way to prove these men, women and children were not equal to the free white citizens. One argument used by planters before the 1808 abolishment of slave trade was that because enslaved Africans were uncivilized and non-Christians, they had no sexual morals, which prevented the natural growth of the population. Scholar Robert Smith wrote because the enslaved were not Christians, their women were often barren, had frequent abortions, and had a lack of affection for their children.<sup>27</sup> It was eventually understood that the lack of population growth among the enslaved was due to the institution of slavery that involved working people to their deaths and the brutal murder and assault of the enslaved people.

Believing that lack of Christian believers in the enslaved community proved those people were inferior to the planters allowed the planters to justify the slave trade. They simply believed they were more civilized than Africans. Their beliefs tended to ignore the evil acts they justified that were noted in the same Bible they used to say they were superior. Another reason the planters did not wish the enslaved to have any access to Christianity was that they wanted the enslaved to remain completely dependent on the masters, which they hoped would keep rebellious acts at bay. Scholar Robert Smith said that one principle of West Indian slavery was that the enslaved should be completely dependent on their masters. He noted the idea was that the enslaved would have to rely on plantation owners for clothing and food and thus for orders, rewards and punishments.<sup>28</sup> Smith showed that white planters desired the least amount of government interference when it came to the relationship of the enslaved and the master. By introducing Christian ideology, religious leaders threatened this desired dependent relationship.

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, "Slavery and Christianity," 176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 183.

The planter class held a strong belief that converting enslaved Jamaicans to Christians would ultimately lead to their freedom, which created extensive worry. Plantation owners believed conversion could imply freedom, so they stated in their earliest slave code that baptism could not lead to freedom.<sup>29</sup> This need to make it clear that an enslaved person gaining access to Christianity, or converting to Christianity, would not grant them their freedom shows how highly the planter class held their access to Christianity. It also demonstrates the idea that Christians were the natural masters and non-Christians were the naturally enslaved. A non-Christian becoming a Christian would, in theory, remove them from the naturally enslaved order and move them to the natural master category. The aggressive need to separate white Christians and the Black enslaved in Jamaica was extremely important. It became so important that the planter's arguments and justifications became twisted, convoluted, and contradictory in the same way that the idea that being a Christian allows one to enslave those who are not Christians became distorted. Christianity also gave the enslaved Jamaicans a way to commune and discuss the injustice of slavery and their lives.

### **Laws and Restrictions against Religious Practices**

It was never uncommon for colonial officials to use laws and restrictions on religious practices in order to further control enslaved people. This was explicitly seen after Tacky's Revolt in 1760. The rebels who participated in the revolt were bonded together through rituals of bonding and spiritual protections casted by the Obeah man's oaths. It was said that Tacky was advised by an Obeah man throughout the revolt. The planters were appalled that this rebellion took place. After suppressing the rebels, the officials published the "Act to Remedy the Evils

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 172.

arising from Irregular Assemblies of Slaves,” which limited the actions of enslaved people severely, prohibited enslaved people from owning weapons, and made Obeah a crime. The act stated that it was to prevent Obeah men and women from having any communication with the devil, hoping to prevent any future rebellion. Jamaican officials had a history of criminalizing Obeah to further control and restrict the enslaved community. The natural progression was for the enslaved community to become further engrossed in Christianity. This led officials to issue laws and restrictions to remain in control of religious practices in hopes they would not have to relive a rebellious history.

In 1826, colonial officials made laws forbidding any missionaries from holding meetings for the enslaved people after sunset. They claimed conspiracies could too easily be formed at such meets and that the travel to and from late meetings was harmful to the health.<sup>30</sup> The legislators claimed they were looking out for the enslaved Jamaicans and their best interest, as well as keeping any potential rebellions at bay. In reality, the clause kept the enslaved from going anywhere after their work was finished because they typically worked until sundown.

The Baptist chapel provided a sanctuary for the enslaved person, one where there was no reminder of the institution of slavery that plagued Jamaica. The Jamaican enslaved also began to question the biblical justification of slavery used by the plantation owners. Those considered by plantation owners to be the lowest on the run of the social ladder, the enslaved, began to question the actions of their masters by using the most powerful weapon used against non-Christians. As a result, the planter class decided there had to be aggressive policing of the religious meetings of enslaved Jamaicans. The Consolidated Slave Law act, passed on Dec. 22, 1826, through the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 184.

House of Assembly, had many clauses restricting the gathering of enslaved Jamaicans in the name of Christianity. The Rev. William Knibb said of the law, “(S)laves found guilty of preaching and teaching, as anabaptists or otherwise, without a permission from their owner and the quarter sessions for the parish, should be punished by whipping or imprisonment in the workhouse to hard labour.”<sup>31</sup>

British missionaries continued their efforts to bring Christianity to more areas of the island even though it was against the wishes of the planter class and the British government. Legislation attempted to dissuade missionaries from teaching the enslaved community because doing so was considered dangerous to the peace and safety of Jamaica. An example of the legislation working against the British missionaries was a law made in 1802 requiring a license in order to preach or teach in Jamaica. Five years after the 1802 legislation, there was another made to dissuade the further instruction of the enslaved in the Christian ways. Lawmakers eradicated the initial clause in the Jamaican slave code, which stated only one clergy could instruct enslaved people in the Christian teachings. The same Consolidated Slave Law act placed limitations on the British missionaries, stating that no minister or religious teacher could hold a meeting between sunset and sunrise. It also said that religious leaders taking money from slaves had to pay twenty pounds to the government or be jailed for a month.<sup>32</sup>

The planter class reacted negatively to the missionaries’ teachings of Christianity. They also reacted negatively to the missionaries advocating against slavery in England. Jamaican planters were protective of their livelihood, which they saw threatened by the British

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<sup>31</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 87.

missionaries' actions. There was an overall idea by the planters that enslaved Jamaicans were docile and would never rise up in arms against their masters prior to being educated as Christians. They believed the missionaries who came to Jamaica to teach the slaves Christianity inherently corrupted the once "innocent" enslaved individuals. William Smith said the planters believed Christianizing the enslaved took their feelings of inferiority, which would lead to problems.<sup>33</sup> The planter class took their aggressions out on British missionaries. Those specifically important for this project included James Ramsay, Thomas Burchell, James Phillippo, and the Rev. William Knibb. The Rev. James Ramsay made it clear that a man must have rights to be capable of religion and thus become a part of society when he said, "To make a man capable of religion, we must endow him with the rights and privileges of man; we must teach him to feel his weight in society, and set a value on himself, as a member of the community..."<sup>34</sup>

The violent aggressiveness the missionaries faced on the Jamaican colony was not lost on those stationed in England. They said the laws created to prohibit religious activity by any man was a restriction on the religious liberties of which his Majesty's subjects were entitled, regardless of their civil standing. In his biography, Phillippo specifically said the purpose of the government was to not make laws that infringe on religious liberty of any class of subject.<sup>35</sup> He said that included the people of Jamaica. It was decided that the governor of Jamaica could not pass any legislation that would restrict religious toleration unless approved by the king. As

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<sup>33</sup> Smith, "Slavery and Christianity," 182.

<sup>34</sup> James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: James Phillips, 1784), 153.

<sup>35</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 66.

expected, there was a violent outrage to this, and many criticized the king and his lack of knowledge on the true character of the “African slave.”

The planters were in a tizzy. They believed they could not allow any missionary to come to their property and mingle with the enslaved. Many planters saw missionaries such as Burchell and Phillippo as spies who conspired to take away their enslaved people, and thus, their livelihood.<sup>36</sup> The stories taken from the life of Phillippo show how paranoid the planters were when it came to the enslaved population having access to the missionaries’ teachings and to Christianity. Even after a decree from the King, the anger and anxiety felt from the planters was enough to cause continued harassment of the British missionaries and the enslaved Jamaicans who interacted with them.

### **Religion and Whiteness**

Along with the growing tension between the planter class and the enslaved communities of Jamaica, there was an ever-growing tension among the planter class and the British missionaries. This tension dated back to the beginning of the creation of “whiteness” through alliances between European indentured servants and African enslaved people in acts of revolt. According to historians, it was Bacon’s rebellion in 1675 that led to the creation of “whiteness.” To prevent more acts of resistance between the allied two, which would be detrimental, European indentured servants were given the honor of “whiteness.” This classification allied them with more prominent and successful white colonizers than to the enslaved Africans, even though they were still on the bottom rung of the social ladder. Because of this bond among white people, it

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<sup>36</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 67.

was seen as a betrayal by the planter class that the British missionaries were taking even basic action to help the enslaved Jamaicans.

Unlike William Knibb, James Phillippo, and Thomas Burchell, James Ramsay was an Anglican priest as well as an abolitionist. He arrived in Jamaica in 1763 and welcomed both white and Black individuals into his parish. His goal was to convert the enslaved Jamaicans to Christianity. Ramsay quickly saw the harsh and dangerous treatment of the enslaved at the hands of the plantation class and aggressively made clear his disgust for slavery and the treatment of Jamaican slaves. Ramsay thought that religion was important to all men in the regards that it instructs them how to act morally in society. “An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies,” written by the Rev. James Ramsay, showed how important he believed it was to instruct every man in Christian ideology. Ramsay that missionaries and abolitionists thought introducing enslaved people to Christianity was imperative and allows them to claim the right of justice and freedom. He said that instructing them in Christianity along with teaching them the original circumstances of enslavement gave them strong encouragement for the fight against their circumstances.<sup>37</sup>

Ramsay’s strong opinion that the enslaved should be instructed in Christian ideology and his hatred for the institution of slavery lead to his involvement in local government. He hoped he could improve the treatment of enslaved Jamaicans. He quickly became a target of personal attacks from the planter class.<sup>38</sup> In his essay, Ramsay critiques the planter class in Jamaica for their treatment of enslaved Jamaicans and their lack of educating them in Christian ideologies. In

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<sup>37</sup> Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion*, 152.

<sup>38</sup> Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion*, 201.

particular, Ramsay called out Robertson, a minister in Nevis, who spoke at length on the conversion of the enslaved people in the Nevis community and even converted some but who made no attempts to change laws towards better treatment of or freedom for the enslaved.<sup>39</sup> Ramsay proposed the government should keep a number of missionaries, whose entire job would be to focus on the instruction of the enslaved communities, on rotation in the colonies. He said this must be done because the planters had done so little in this department because of their own ignorance.<sup>40</sup> The planters came to resent his involvement in their affairs. They made multiple personal attacks on his character. Though Ramsay left the British West Indies and returned to Britain in 1777, he continued to write about and petition for the ending of slavery.

#### **Thomas Burchell: British Missionary & Experience in Jamaica**

“But let man, whatever be his situation, be the object of your regard... You are going amongst a people in a state of slavery, and require to beware lest your feelings for them should lead you to say or do anything inconsistent with Christian duty.”<sup>41</sup> Thomas Burchell came to Montego Bay in Jamaica in the early nineteenth century with a letter warning him to not get involved in the political conditions of slavery. When Burchell arrived in Jamaica, the tension between the planters and the British missionaries had long been established. He wrote in his memoir, “The minds of the colonists were kindled into resentment by the vigorous action of philanthropists at home, and were warped by the most violent prejudices against resident

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>41</sup> G. A. Catherall, “Thomas Burchell, Gentle Rebel,” *Baptist Quarterly* 21, no. 8 (1965): 351, doi:10.1080/0005576x.1965.11751210)

missionaries.”<sup>42</sup> Looking at the letter that Burchell received upon his arrival to Jamaica and the attitudes of the planters at the time, it would have made sense for Burchell to keep his head down and go about his life. That is not what Burchell did. Beginning with his arrival in Montego Bay, Burchell heavily criticized the planters for their disinterest in the Jamaican Christian missions. In Burchell’s memoir, he wrote of a conversation between himself and a Mr. Coates on the issue of baptizing an enslaved individual. Burchell showed through this conversation how difficult it was to get permission to baptize any enslaved persons. Burchell argued with Mr. Coates that although he did not have papers of permission from the enslaved person’s masters, there was technically no law preventing him from baptizing the enslaved person.<sup>43</sup> This exchange between Burchell and a member of the planter class demonstrates how the planters did not want the enslaved Jamaicans to be converted while also showing the tension between the planters and the missionaries.

Burchell was called to the local courthouse many times because of his Christian practices with the enslaved, practices which planters and other members of the community did not appreciate nor understand. In a letter to a Mr. Dyer, Burchell said that the only Englishmen treated with as much contempt as the enslaved when called to appear before a court of magistrates were missionaries.<sup>44</sup> Besides comparing his treatment to that of enslaved people, which can be questionable, this obvious hostility between the planters and missionaries caused a

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<sup>42</sup> Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

rift between the two and made certain that anything negative that happened in the eyes of the planters would be blamed on the missionaries.

In Burchell's memoir, he mentions the abuse that missionaries faced at the hands of the journalists. He described weekly columns published stating the missionaries should be banned from Jamaican shores. A Montego Bay Gazette article said, "Allow no evangelical preaching, and we shall fear no further rebellions."<sup>45</sup> The article basically called an insignificant act of insubordination within the parish a rebellion. That word choice brings to light the most severe reasoning behind the tension between the planters and the missionaries -- the fear of a rebellion. Burchell arrived in Jamaica 1824, twenty years after the end of Haitian Revolution, which began in 1791 and was the first major uprising by enslaved people that the modern world had seen. That rebellion sent a wave of anxiety throughout the Caribbean as well as the Americas. Burchell noted that some of the planters even insinuated that the reason Burchell's parish had more Black and enslaved Jamaicans than white Jamaicans was because he instilled ideologies that encouraged insurrections and rebellious acts.<sup>46</sup> Burchell showed how skittish the planters were of the enslaved being taught and converted to Christianity and how the planters took out those anxieties on the British missionaries and their works.

Burchell faced an intense amount of negative attention from the planters, officials, and journalists in Jamaica. He was severely restricted in what he was allowed to do when in communication with enslaved people. He also was constantly harassed. Burchell dealt with this

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 71.

harassment by saying it was a reflection of planters anxieties towards missionaries and enslaved peoples religious relationships.

### **James Mursell Phillippo: Journey as British Missionary in Jamaica**

Like James Burchell, James Mursell Phillippo was a prominent missionary in Jamaica in the 1820s. Phillippo arrived in Jamaica in 1823, and also like Burchell, was instructed to not involve himself in enslaved peoples' affairs. A common theme among missionaries migrating to Jamaica seems to be that they were warned not to get involved in the affairs involving planters and the enslaved Jamaicans. It can be surmised that the majority of the British missionaries coming to Jamaica were either instructed or warned to not get involved in the politics of the enslaved population in Jamaica. It was during this time in Jamaica, roughly the early nineteenth century, that a rising number of British missionaries came to Jamaica, and the colony experienced rapid growth of missionary churches.

This growth of missionaries and their places of worship brought rampant critique of the missionaries. Inhabitants of the colonies warned the enslaved people that these missionaries were con men. The enslaved were told if they gave the missionaries any money, they would be prosecuted. The *Life of James Mursell Phillippo: Missionary in Jamaica* written by Edward Bean Underhill shows a clause that was created to dissuade enslaved people from attending these missionaries churches. The clause said the missionaries had swindled large sums of money from the enslaved by preying on the "ignorance and superstition of the negroes in this island, to their great loss and impoverishment..."<sup>47</sup> This act was passed in December 1826 but would not become active until the following May. The purpose of the act was to break up any religious

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<sup>47</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 58.

organization that profited from the enslaved community. The planters went to great lengths to keep the enslaved community of Jamaica away from the British missionaries because they saw the missionaries as a potentially encouraging insurrection.

James Phillippo had a hard time with his religious teachings in Jamaica. The many acts and laws passed made it harder for the enslaved and missionaries to interact, and Phillippo quickly realized that his pursuit of missionary work in peace would not be allowed. On June 11, 1826, Phillippo discovered that a police report had been filed against him on the ground that he broke the clause that said no preacher or missionary could keep his church open between sunset and sunrise.<sup>48</sup> The report against him claimed Phillippo held an illegal meeting the night before the allegation. It had been common practice for those who were enslaved in Jamaica to meet at night for prayer or other religious meetings because it was the only personal time they had at their disposal. Thomas Burchell had been in trouble with the law often for disobeying this law. Phillippo breaking this 1826 law constituted a serious offense for both himself and those who were meeting with them, whether they were enslaved or free. Phillippo, being aware of the legislation, cancelled the night meeting for that particular night. A few of the enslaved who had travelled long distances to attend the meetings did, however, decide to stay and take shelter in the chapel for the night.<sup>49</sup> It was these people the officers saw and thus filed the charges against Phillippo. While neither he nor anyone else broke any rules, the fear that there would be an illegal meeting caused legal action to be taken against the missionary. When Phillippo arrived at the courthouse for his hearing with the magistrate, the discussion consisted of the magistrate

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<sup>48</sup> Underhill, *Life of James Mursell Phillippo*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

admitting that there was no singing, praying, teaching, or preaching and no one saw Phillippo there personally. However, the magistrates said that Phillippo was to blame even if the events did not occur. Following this hearing, Phillippo was accosted with more accusations that he encouraged a mob to gather before sunrise. Even with no proof of the meeting taking place, a warden told Phillippo, “I hope we shall not see you here again, sir, on a similar business. If we do, we must enforce the law with the utmost rigour.”<sup>50</sup>

Phillippo’s story is not an isolated incident. Many planters and government officials sought to not only charge British missionaries with crimes to dissuade their interactions with the enslaved, but also to ruin their reputation in the eyes of the public. Burchell and Phillippo both received unwanted attention from the planters and officials and were among a particularly targeted group of missionaries throughout their time in Jamaica.

### **William Knibb: Life & Hardships as a Missionary in Jamaica**

Without a doubt, one of the most famous British missionaries in Jamaican is the Rev. William Knibb. Knibb is infamous for his rhetoric on slavery and his work to free enslaved Jamaicans. He is greatly credited with the start of the Baptist war of 1831 even though he had little to no involvement in the insurrection. The tension between Knibb and the planters in the time leading up to the insurrection foreshadowed how officials would blame him with the organization of the rebellion rather than the Black religious leaders, such as Samuel Sharpe, who planned the labor strike that started the revolt. As with Burchell and Phillippo, Knibb arrived in Jamaica in the 1820s. He too received warnings about getting involved in any political affairs that dealt with slavery. Following the theme of Burchell and Phillippo, Knibb also faced constant

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 62.

negative interactions with the planters and officials regarding his religious relationship with the enslaved people of Jamaica.

William Knibb never made it a secret how much he disliked Jamaica when he first arrived in Kingston in March 1825. Soon upon his arrival, he said, “I have now reached the land of sin, disease, and death, where Satan reigns with awful power, and carries multitudes captive at his will. True religion is scoffed at, and those who profess it are ridiculed and insulted.”<sup>51</sup> Knibb drew a stark contrast between the colonists’ feelings towards Christianity and the feelings of the Black population of Jamaica. In a letter to Mr. S. Nichols, he said that enslaved Jamaicans were eager to learn the gospel.<sup>52</sup> Knibb wrote how these people were often moved to tears by his sermons and sobbing was constantly heard throughout his chapel.

Recorded accounts show that although Knibb became one of the most infamous missionaries in the eyes of the Jamaican planters, he tried to hold favor with the planters at least in the beginning. He was adamant in his early writings that he often instructed the enslaved who attended his chapel that they were to go home and pray for the well-being of their “masters.” As time persisted, Knibb was forced to look at the horrors of slavery. He wrote to his mother about his experiences in the colony, saying he was ashamed to be of the same race as those who heaped such atrocities upon the enslaved. He said, “It is in the immorality of slavery that the evil chiefly consists.”<sup>53</sup> He added that all he had witnessed in Jamaica led to support the complete abolition of slavery. His aggressive and blatant hatred for the institution of slavery stayed with Knibb

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<sup>51</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 46.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

throughout his life. He often wrote to his mother and brother of the horrors of slavery and his hatred for any who participated in the institution.

Knibb spent a majority of his early time in Jamaica preaching Christian ideology in his parish as well as being in charge of the school in Kingston. He received responsibility for the school after the death of his brother. Through his efforts, he improved the physical condition of the school and expanded the members of the school to over 220 pupils.<sup>54</sup> Knibb, like Phillip, felt it was extremely important to educate the poor and the enslaved communities. He did much to better the community in many different ways, not just religiously. He did much to benefit men, women and children, whether they were free or not. When asked why he worked so hard in his parish and schoolhouse, he said, “‘Tis for the poor benighted slave I plead, and for those who were so and have been freed by their owners. Mind, ‘tis universal education.”<sup>55</sup> Knibb was forced to abandon his charge over the school house due to his health, but he was in charge for more than two years and accomplished much during that time.

Although the Consolidated Slave Law act passed in December 1826 caused great distress among most missionaries in Jamaica, Knibb was not deterred. King William IV’s response to the local laws created to keep the missionaries from completing their work angered a great deal of the planters, and because the planters could no longer take legal action against the missionaries, they turned to other ways to hurt them and their cause. In an effort to curb the actions of the missionaries, the planters set about ruining the missionaries’ reputations. They believed this would teach the missionaries a lesson and stop their interference with the enslaved community of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 56.

Jamaica. Knibb wrote in a letter to his mother on Sept. 9, 1828, the newspapers were filled with lies about the missionaries, saying they were liars, pickpockets, vagabonds, scoundrels, and more. He said all of this was because the government had said it would protect the missionaries.<sup>56</sup> Burchell also had issues with the newspapers painting the missionaries as the villains in society. Knibb was just more outspoken on the matter. He constantly referred to magistrates as “lying scoundrels” whom he did not like. He declared he did not care what they wrote about him.<sup>57</sup>

One of the most vital moments of Knibbs’ time in Jamaica was the trial of Sam Swiney, who was a deacon at his parish. Swiney was convicted of a minor crime and eventually lashed. Knibb spoke on his behalf at court, stating the man was only charged for his love of Jesus. By doing so, Knibb showed how the magistrates dealt with enslaved people and their involvement with the missionaries. Because Swiney was a Black Baptist religious leader, a deacon in Knibb’s parish, and an enslaved person, the planters and local magistrates considered him a threat. His extreme punishment was predictable considering the hostility toward the missionaries. Knibb told Swiney he would help him in whatever way needed. He stated publicly that he considered Swiney a persecuted Christian.<sup>58</sup>

Regardless of all the things that Knibb did to help the community in his parish or at the schoolhouse, Knibb was a threat to the planters. He represented fears deeply held by the planters that they would lose their livelihood because enslaved people receiving instruction in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>58</sup> Hinton, 96.

Christianity would lead to an insurrection. Knibb's attitude towards slavery was well known. That disdain made him popular among the enslaved Jamaican and unpopular among the planters. Knibb contributed by being a constant and strong voice for the enslaved in the British colonies and speaking out on the injustices they encountered daily. He gave enslaved Jamaicans the validation they needed to act out against the oppression they faced.

### **Missionaries Cause a Growing Tension**

There was without a doubt extreme tension between the planters and the missionaries and between the enslaved peoples and the planters in Jamaica around 1830. The way of life in Jamaica was such that the planters were living a fruitful and productive life built on the backs of those enslaved Africans abducted from their homes and stripped of any agency. However, this easy and morally bleak lifestyle was put on the line. The one thing that once determined their superiority, Christianity, threatened the very life they had come to depend on and enjoy.

White planters used Christianity to justify their position at the top of the food chain as the unquestionable natural masters of the non-Christians. Christianity was their justification for enslaving Africans. Then Black religious leaders such as George Liele and Mason Baker brought the Baptist Christian ideology to enslaved Jamaicans communities and developed a new Christian community where enslaved people discovered new power. The introduction of the Methodist and Baptist church to the enslaved Caribbean gave the enslaved people an avenue to leadership positions in their communities along with opportunities to discuss the injustices they faced. It also led to religion becoming an important shelter for the enslaved Jamaicans.

The introduction of Baptist ideology caused tension between the enslaved and planters to grow. The planters wanted to keep the enslaved Africans completely dependent on them and to

not question the hypocrisy. Legislation was passed to keep the Black community from gathering in religious meetings or prayer. More laws were created, and missionaries were attacked in the newspapers, in court, and in public. Planters and other inhabitants of Jamaica saw missionaries as a threat to their way of life. The planters seemed to overlook the power that Black religious leaders had in Jamaica and thought these missionaries were the sole threat. British missionaries were aggressively attacked to the full extent of the law, and their reputations were tarnished.

The many different cogs in the clock of Jamaica were turning, pumping, moving, and creating the groundwork of a colony full of tension, talk of freedom, anger, resentment, religious justification, and power. Some planters and other officials used Black religious leaders to help convert the enslaved Jamaicans because they believed these leaders would have a better connection to the enslaved Jamaicans because of their race. Unfortunately, little is remembered about these leaders compared to the documentation on the British missionaries because of the habit of taking away power from the Black religious leaders once the planters deemed them no longer useful. This is represented in the little archival remembrance of these leaders, which shows that the archives are still a safe haven for white supremacist. This chapter has set up the background of the Baptist War of 1831. All of these independent social factors merged and paired with the scalding hot religious justification for freedom, forged a new society where the enslaved Jamaicans found power in the religion that had stripped them of their humanity and imprisoned them. They formed an atmosphere where there could be no question among the enslaved of their freedom or their right to fight for it.

## Chapter Two

### **Spiritual and Social Tensions Plaguing Jamaica**

There are many forms of freedom, and those forms are obtained in many ways. There are seemingly insignificant freedoms, such as having the ability to choose what color socks to wear on any particular day. Then here are more essential freedoms, such as freedom of the press and freedom of speech. In the British West Indies in the Age of Revolution, religion was a tool used by enslaved Africans who had been taken to the Caribbean to gain freedom. It also was used as a form of suppression to keep them enslaved.

To the planter class, access to Christianity by the enslaved through education was deemed potentially dangerous for all. Christianity was a way for the plantocracy to maintain their superiority over their enslaved Africans. As a result, there was little to no effort to Christianize the enslaved people in Jamaica. The credit of successfully bringing Baptist ideology to the Jamaican enslaved community instead goes to freed enslaved African Americans coming to the Caribbean following the American Revolutionary War. Those included George Liele, Moses Baker, and George Gibb. Gibb once spoke of George Liele's success in Jamaica, saying, "I have inquired of those, who, I thought could give me an account of Mr. Liele's conduct, and I can say, with pleasure, what Pilate said, 'I can find no fault in this man.' The Baptist church thrives abundantly among the Negroes, more than any denomination in Jamaica..."<sup>59</sup>

This success in introducing Christianity into the enslaved communities brought with it the powerful realization that the enslaved were creating and understanding an extremely useful

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<sup>59</sup> Carter Godwin Woodson, *Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing the Records of the Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1925), 85.

argument against the evils that defined slavery in the Caribbean. Through merely becoming a Christian and attending a church, one was able to gain social respect and define their own self-worth by the standards the planters placed before them. If nothing else, the enslaved peoples of the Caribbean were able to humanize themselves based on the rules the planters created, rules that were created to keep themselves higher up than the enslaved community. With their access to Christianity, the enslaved were able to define their own humanity.

There was more to be gained from Christianity than just social respect. There was a new community being created -- one where enslaved Jamaicans could determine the rules, where there were leadership positions available, where there was access to the material and support to fight back against oppression, and where the playing fields could be leveled slightly. Christianity created a new type of society that was not created and controlled by the planters, but rather, one where creativity and questioning could begin. These small freedoms the enslaved communities were able to gain also caused the Jamaican planters to grow nervous because Christianity gave the enslaved people a common ground. The planters feared this would lead to talks of insurrection. They also feared Christianity would allow the enslaved to understand their humanity. Enslaved people understanding Christianity could learn the religion used by the plantocracy to justify dehumanizing enslaved people actually condemned slavery. The planters were also nervous because this Christianization appealed to the British missionaries, summoning them to Jamaica only to reporting back to Britain the horrors of slavery.

This chapter explores the result of Christianity's successful introduction into the enslaved communities in Jamaica by looking at how members of the enslaved communities, most notably Samuel Sharpe, were able to gain positions of religious leadership through Christianity. It also

explores the freedom tensions that were felt as a result of these new Black religious leaders and the push for freedom and how all of this tension came to a head in the form of rebellion. It should be considered criminal how little is remembered about Samuel Sharpe, especially considering he is a national hero in Jamaica. Because the Baptist War was so important and well documented, there should be more archival sources from or about Sharpe and the other Black religious leaders. Arguably the most successful rebellion in the British West Indies, the Baptist War was built on the justification that Christianity provided the Black religious leaders and their supporters. It shook the plantocracy to its core and sent shock waves throughout the western world. These enslaved Africans used the very religion that once justified their being the naturally enslaved to the Christians plantation owners and planters to justify their freedom and the means needed to gain that freedom.

### **The life of Samuel Sharpe & Religious Leadership**

Black religious leaders practiced their new Baptist preaching and provided a new place where the Jamaican enslaved community could commune and create leadership positions for themselves. Black Baptist preachers who came to Jamaica from what is now the United States joined Black Jamaicans to stimulate a new religious consciousness that was critical in the fight of the enslaved for freedom.<sup>60</sup>

Samuel Sharpe, an enslaved Jamaican, was one of those who earned a position of leadership through Christianity. A religious leader for his community prior to the rebellion, Sharpe was one of the most famous leaders of the Baptist War. Despite his birth into slavery, Sharpe worked to become well-educated and well-respected by both enslaved Jamaicans and

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<sup>60</sup> Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, 282.

white Jamaicans. He was such a charismatic and well-loved individual that he became known as “Daddy” to many of the natives of Montego Bay.

It is assumed that Sharpe was a part of the Croydon estate and lived an essentially freedman’s life in Jamaica.<sup>61</sup> One of the most noted parts of Sharpe’s life prior to the Baptist War was that he was educated, despite his enslavement, and was a naturally charismatic leader. Due to his education and charisma, Sharpe quickly became a deacon after his baptism and rose to prominence as a Black religious leader in the enslaved community. He educated himself through many means, most reportedly through reading newspapers. It can be inferred that it was through reading these newspapers that Sharpe became aware of the political situations taking place in Jamaica and England. The conversation on the abolishment of slave trading in the British colonies had been a point of discussion for British politicians since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The official abolishment of the slave trade in British colonies was March 25, 1807. Samuel Sharpe practically grew up with conversation and debates about ending slavery, so it is no surprise that he became outspoken on the topic and inspired many with his words.

It is vital to note that in the chapter over his experience with the insurrection, commonly known as the Baptist War of 1831, in *Memoir of Thomas Burchell, Twenty-Two Years a Missionary in Jamaica*, Burchell wrote mainly on how he and many other British missionaries were imprisoned during the rebellion while making no mention of Sharpe or his role in the insurrection. It is unclear if this was done in an attempt to further remove himself from Sharpe because he was the religious leader behind the insurrection or if there was other cause. Burchell’s

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<sup>61</sup> Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 299.

lack of discussion of Sharpe is confounding because Sharpe worked with Burchell the most out of all the British missionaries. Sharpe was also a deacon at Burchell's chapel, Burchell's Baptist Church. Burchell also appears to be the one pursued with the most anger by the local planters because of his proximity to either Sharpe or the location of the start of the rebellion. This could perhaps explain his reluctance to write more about Sharp in his musings on the Baptist War.

The planter class of Jamaica was anxious of a rebellion by the enslaved community, like the one that had occurred in Haiti, This led them to make many restrictions on the enslaved community. The only place where the enslaved were allowed to commune was at religious meetings. Ironically, it was at these religious meetings that Black religious leaders, such as Sharpe, were able to express their ideas and concerns about their current standing and the moral and religious issues with slavery. Because Sharpe was literate, he became a well-respected religious leader in Jamaica and eventually gained charge of a missionary chapel in Montego Bay. He used the Bible to preach to people throughout his parish, to speak against the injustices of slavery, and to promote white people deserved no more than Black people.

Sharpe's experience shows how the Baptist way of preaching made popular by other Black religious leaders was a vital aspect of individuality for the enslaved Jamaicans. It was a mode in which these enslaved people could have an identity outside of the role of the enslaved and a way to find social validity in a manner the planter class could not deny. The British missionaries often depended on these Black religious leaders to do their work for them. Because the missionaries were rarely allowed to go onto the plantations to further their Christianizing movements, they depended on religious leaders in the enslaved communities to preach, pray, and teach for them. This, in turn, solidified a more important leadership role for these men and

women. This is one of the reasons why the planter class resented the British missionaries' attempts to Christianize the enslaved Jamaicans.

Sharpe had a practical license that allowed him to travel to different locations and parishes between Montego Bay and St. James. In his confession, Thomas Dove said that the enslaved believed everything Sharpe told them.<sup>62</sup> Dove says that Sharpe was extremely intelligent and was able to sway the enslaved peoples who lived far away from other parishes or missionaries. It was often said that those who listened to Sharpe's sermons or prayers were "fascinated and spellbound."

Christianity gave the enslaved Jamaicans a way to commune and discuss the unjustness of slavery and their lives. As a leader in the religious communities, Sharpe led discussions at his gatherings on the happenings in England that dealt with the decision of ending slavery. Because Sharpe was constantly aware of the abolition movement in England, it was natural for him to share the movement with his parish. He read the local and international newspapers covering the movement, and he provided his parish with continued information. Sharpe relayed his thoughts on politics, especially his thoughts on the conversations taking place in Britain over the emancipation of the enslaved throughout the British colonies, at the religious gatherings he oversaw. In the book *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, historian Michael Craton explained the tension revolving the discussion of freedom in Jamaica and Sharpe. He said Sharpe was vigilant in his awareness of the progress of the anti-slavery cause in England. He also noted that Sharpe was equally diligent in following the proceedings

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<sup>62</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 299.

and meetings of planters at the time.<sup>63</sup> It was clear emancipation was a major concern for the enslaved Jamaicans during this time.

In November 1831, a law was placed that planters could no longer flog women and children. This decree stirred excitement throughout Jamaica. The planter class feared loss of their workforce, and the enslaved community were excited for a chance at freedom. During the time before this November decree and shortly following, there was a flurry of excitement, gossip, and misinformation that spread throughout the colony. During this time, Sharpe decided to plan an act of resistance against the planter class. He did not plan a rebellion. He never wanted or promoted violence. Sharpe planned a peaceful act of labor resistance that involved the refusal to work by the enslaved on the western Jamaican estates. The timing coincided with the time of harvest on these plantations. The refusal of work was meant to communicate the enslaved people's unhappiness with the forced work, especially on a religious holiday. This act of resistance was not initially planned to harm anyone. The labor strike was only meant to show the power and discontent of those trapped in slavery. As the plan of this resistance became a reality, Sharpe made his supporters kiss the Bible to prove loyalty at their religious meetings. In historical texts, it is documented that a Mr. Gardner relayed that Sharpe told those in attendance that they must sit down. He told the enslaved gathered that they were free and should not work unless they received pay. Gardner said, "He took a Bible out of his pocket. Made me swear that I would not work again until we got half pay."<sup>64</sup> It is said that all who Sharpe or other leaders of

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<sup>63</sup> Henry Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being a Narrative of Facts and Incidents, Which Occurred in a British Colony, during the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*(London: Hamilton, Adams and, 1853), 130.

<sup>64</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 300.

the labor strike told of the plans were also sworn into secrecy by kissing the Bible. This act of kissing the Bible as the highest act of promise further solidified the power Christianity held in legitimizing the act of resistance.

The Rev. William Knibb wrote in his memoir that Sharpe completely believed that the king had emancipated the enslaved in the colony and therefore, they should not work after Christmas without wages.<sup>65</sup> Knibb was one of Sharpe's greatest defenders after the rebellion, as was the Rev. Henry Bleby. Both went to lengths to show that it was never Sharpe's intention to start a violent rebellion. They said he merely organized a refusal to work until wages were promised. However his labor strike was carefully planned. Sharpe did not pick a random time for the refusal of work. He chose the height of the harvest season for sugar on Jamaican plantations. If all the labor stopped at once, it would leave the planters without a sugar product, and the harvest would quickly spoil. The strike also coincided with Christmas, which gave the enslaved community a religious justification to refuse to work. It was an active agent of both economics and religion that caused the tensions between the planters and the enslaved protesters to rise.

Samuel Sharpe was many things to many people. To the planter class, Sharpe was a rebel, an enslaved leader that refused to obey the normalcy of plantation life. In the eyes of the planters, his rebellion to the norms coupled with his corruption by the British missionaries caused one of the deadliest, most successful, rebellions by the enslaved in the British West Indies. This action confirmed their fears of an insurrection by the enslaved, similar to Haitian Revolution. To the missionaries, Samuel Sharpe was a man who was moved by Baptist ideology and a great deacon and leader, who led a labor strike that quickly turned to something more. Both

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<sup>65</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 116.

Knibb and Bleby noted that it was not Sharpe's initial intention to start a violent revolution, but miscommunication and rising tensions lit the spark of rebellion. To the enslaved community of Jamaica, Sharpe was a religious hero who gave them hope, passion, and determination to demand equality, freedom and, even more unheard of, a wage for their work. Bleby wrote in his memoir that the enslaved men would be killed at the time if they did not stand up for themselves and demand freedom.<sup>66</sup> The enslaved Jamaicans were energized by Sharpe's sermons, prayers, and speeches. It is a travesty that not more is known about Samuel Sharpe, colonial officials chose to give credit for the Baptist War to the British missionaries, and while Sharpe was sentenced to death, his efforts were greatly overlooked by officials and some historians. Remembering Sharpe and his efforts as a religious leader for the enslaved Jamaicans, would help understanding the Baptist war immensely.

It is no surprise that Sharpe's words, paired with freedom tensions felt throughout the island, instigated one of the largest enslaved insurrections of the Caribbean. These enslaved people were faced with an important decision: A certain death as an enslaved person, never having fought for freedom and a better life or fighting for freedom for themselves and their people. They knew the latter would perhaps lead to death but it would be a death suffered while fighting for what was rightfully theirs in the eye of the Christian God. It is of no surprise that many chose the fire of rebellion, fueled by years of oppression, murder, rape, violence, and kidnapping, and allowed the sparks to fly.

### **Freedom Tensions throughout Jamaica**

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<sup>66</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 133.

Before the start of the Baptist War in 1831, there was a steady rise of tension between the enslaved Jamaican community and the planters, born from a few different sources. There was the tension that was born from the harsh treatment of enslaved Jamaicans at the hands of the planters. There was the tension created due to the introduction of Christianity, especially Baptist ideology to the enslaved communities. There also was tension that developed in the nineteenth century from the spread of rumors that the enslaved were going to be freed. It all came to a head in 1831 when the enslaved Jamaicans were under the impression that freedom had been granted to them but the planters refused to free them because of their own selfish gain. Looking at the rising tensions between these two groups reveals how a simple miscommunication lit the match to ignite the Baptist War. The planter class had extreme anxieties of an enslaved insurrection like the Haitian Revolution that ended in 1804 and affected all colonies. The planter class in Jamaica depended on the labor of the enslaved Jamaicans, and any threat to that labor caused the planters to react. This can be seen explicitly in how the planters treated the British missionaries, whom they believed were teaching rebellious ideals.

The relationship between the English and enslaved Africans was a toxic and abusive one, especially in Jamaica. Between 1655 and 1658 during the English invasion of the Spanish colony in Jamaica, the Spanish freed and recruited many enslaved Africans. Many of these recruits or freed people fled and created their own communities, the maroon communities. The relationship between the maroons and the English was tense. The maroons fought for the freedom of enslaved Africans and often revolted against the English in a variety of ways. They were fond of using guerrilla warfare, and they became masters at camouflage in order to remain free. Apart from the maroons, the other enslaved Africans, who did not fight or find their way to freedom,

experienced hell on earth at the hands of the English colonizers. This hell started the moment one was captured, put into chains, and shoved onto a ship for months of a journey known as the middle passage. Once reaching the Caribbean, the Africans faced a life of, violence, torture, sexual abuse, and murder.

Many say that economics had an important role in the development of slavery, slave trade, and treatment of the enslaved. In the 18th century, the sugar world boomed, and sugar production and distribution quickly became Jamaica's main source of capital. The process of harvesting sugar and preparing it to be shipped was extremely difficult and required a vast amount of labor. As a result of this need for labor, the British abducted even more people from Africa. Hundreds of thousands are believed to have been taken from their homes and forced into slavery because of the British sugar industry. Along with harvesting the sugar cane, the process of preparing sugar required a mill and curing and boiling the sugar so it was ready for production. The enslaved were charged with cutting down the sugar cane once it was ripe with machetes, which were not kind to human error and left many injured or dead. In the mill, the enslaved had to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week to get out the sugar in a reasonable time. The mill house was extremely dangerous, and due to continuous overworking, many enslaved fell victim to the mill because of exhaustion. Some accounts note that if a person was caught barely by the finger or clothing, they could be sucked in and lose a limb or their life in the mill. Many enslaved Jamaicans were worked to either death or until they physically could not work anymore. This created a constant need for new enslaved people to be brought to Jamaica from Africa, which is why the planters fought so hard for the continuation of the slave trade. To the planters' dismay, slave trade was abolished in 1807.

This horrific treatment of enslaved Africans at the hands of Jamaican planters is one major instigator of the rising tension in the nineteenth century. The planters nurtured extreme anxieties that if they did not have complete control over the enslaved, there would be a rebellion and their way of life would be threatened. Any threat to this complete control over the Jamaican enslaved people was a direct threat to the planters way of life. This is why the enslaved having access to Christianity was terrifying to the planter. That fear is why the planters went out of their way to prevent British missionaries access to enslaved Jamaicans. It is also why they prevented enslaved Jamaicans from meeting in any matter. The planters saw Christianity something that would bring all the enslaved communities together with the opportunity to plot against them, and their anxiety grew.

As a Baptist missionary stationed in Jamaica before and during the Baptist War, Bleby was able to witness much of what happened on the island. He recorded the horrors he witnessed prior to the rebellion and the actions that took place after its end. Along with executions, the enslaved were punished for seemingly mundane mishaps. Bleby witnessed an enslaved Jamaican flogged for allowing a mule to run away. Of the incident, he said, “When I first saw this spectacle, now for the first time before my eyes and saw the degraded and mangled victim writhing and groaning, I felt horror-struck. I trembled and felt sick. As soon as the scene was over the overseer came into the hall and asked me to drink some rum with him.”<sup>67</sup> Bleby’s recordings illustrated the extreme abuse that was a norm for the planter society and how that society saw no wrong in their doings. In his book, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative*

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<sup>67</sup> “1831 The Jamaica Slave Rebellion,” Libcom.org, 1, accessed June 2, 2021, <http://libcom.org/history/1831-jamaica-slave-rebellion>)

*of Facts and Incidents Which Occurred in a British Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*, Bleby wrote how the planters saw politics heading in favor of the abolishment of slavery. When the 1823 anti-slavery movement passed the House of Commons, the planters did everything in their power to prevent abolishment of slavery in Jamaica. Many British missionaries recorded the horrors they faced when they arrived in Jamaica and on how the enslaved were treated. Bleby also noted that it was not just those who partook in the rebellion who were punished for the rebellion. The parishes that had congregations that were majority Black were burned, he said.

Knibb also explained in his memoir the horrors that the enslaved Jamaicans faced. He said oppression worked to keep the enslaved ignorant of their lot in hopes it would keep them controllable and the reality of it was very distressing. Knibb said, “When contemplating the withering scene my heart sickens, and I feel ashamed that I belong to a race that can indulge in such atrocities.”<sup>68</sup> Knibb’s feelings were mirrored by the majority of British missionaries who saw the horrors of slavery firsthand. It was this disgust and hatred of slavery and those who enslave others was exactly why the planters did not want the missionaries to teach the enslaved Jamaicans. However, the planters should not have worried so much about the missionaries teaching the enslaved of the evils of slavery, the enslaved were well aware.

Though the enslaved people of Jamaica were aware of the horrors they faced, they found evidence of how evil slavery was in the Baptist ideology. They used that same ideology to justify their fight for freedom. Black religious leaders were able to inspire their community to fight for what was fair. This painful tension between the planters and the Jamaican enslaved created an

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<sup>68</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 49.

atmosphere ripe for rebellion. Pairing these negative feelings with the continued talk of abolishing slavery taking place in Britain merely created the perfect environment for rebellions. Looking at the information being transported from Britain to Jamaica about the political discussion on the abolishment of slavery pushed Samuel Sharpe himself to take action and demand freedom, a demand that spiraled into much more.

In *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative of Facts and Incidents Which Occurred in a British Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*, published in 1853, the Rev. Henry Bleby discussed the causes, events, and results of the Baptist War in 1831. The majority of Bleby's work looked at how the enslaved people of Jamaica were under the impression they would soon get their freedom. Bleby wrote that in the final months of 1831, the majority of the enslaved members of the parishes in Jamaica whom he had visited were convinced they would be granted their freedom by Christmas of that year. He wrote that the talk of this freedom had been going on for several months and had been extremely popular among many enslaved Jamaicans.<sup>69</sup> During this time, Bleby noted that he heard the name of Thomas Burchell often and how Burchell was in London, fighting for the enslaved individuals' freedom. He said that he was told many times that the slaves at Baptist Mission were under the impression that Burchell had gone to Europe to obtain their freedom and by Christmas, would return with their papers of freedom.<sup>70</sup> Bleby said conversations about Burchell that he heard were conspiracies and noted that when he overheard anyone discussing the topic, he would aggressively deny its accuracy. He also noted that no one believed his denials.

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<sup>69</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 2.

The truth was Burchell was in England. However, he was there discussing the need for more missionaries in Jamaica and how things were going as far as missions were concerned. Burchell returned to England due to his rapidly failing health in the colony. There, he was set with the task of defending his own religious character and the religious character of the other British missionaries that were stationed in Jamaica. This was due to the immense attack that the missionaries had been facing in Jamaica on behalf of the planters. The rumors, newspaper publications, and other negative conversations about the missionaries made it across the ocean and to England, where the character of the missionaries was put to the test. It was decided during these trials on the missionaries' religious character that anything negative that had been reported back to England was due to the lack of numbers. Burchell said, "I am fully confident, double the number of your missionaries, provide an adequate number of places of worship, and the day will soon arrive when it will be impossible to discover even the shadow of an abuse."<sup>71</sup>

The fact was that Burchell was not in England to negotiate the freedom of the enslaved Jamaicans and to return on Christmas day with their freedom. He was only in England to defend his character and the character of the other British missionaries and to successfully petition for more missionaries to be sent to the colony. This tiny act of miscommunication led many enslaved Jamaicans to believe they would gain their freedom by Christmas or that they had already been granted their freedom by the King and the planters were actively refusing to set them free. This assumption was dangerous to many based on how high the tensions had been rising between the planters and the enslaved Jamaicans. On one side, were planters realizing there was talk of the abolishment of slavery and doing everything in their power to prevent it. On the other side, were

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<sup>71</sup> Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*, 168.

the enslaved believing that freedom had come or was coming and the planters were in the way of that freedom. The enslaved believed not only that slavery was abolished by the King but also that God declared slavery an act of sin in the Bible the planters held so dear and used to assert their superiority.

In his work, Bleby discussed how in the last few months of 1831, the tensions were rising and the assumption that freedom was coming by Christmas led the enslaved people to act differently. Bleby wrote specifically on a small act of insubordination that happened between a Mr. William Grignon, who was the attorney for the Salt Spring plantation, and an enslaved woman, who had reportedly stolen a piece of sugarcane from the Salt Spring plantation. Mr. Grignon decided the sugarcane she held in her hand had been stolen, and he immediately punished her and then took her back to his driver to be flogged. Mr. Grignon's head driver was the husband of the woman to be punished, and the driver at first hesitated and then flat-out denied the order to flog the woman. When Mr. Grignon called upon another driver to punish the woman, he also refused due to the head driver's refusal. This started a chain reaction among the enslaved who were present, and Mr. Grignon was unable to have the woman punished as he saw fit.<sup>72</sup> This small act of resistance was monumental in the Jamaican society. Not only did the woman's husband refuse an order by Mr. Grignon, but that act inspired others to resist as well.

This story shows the turning of the tide between the planters and the enslaved Jamaicans. It shows how the assumed promise of freedom gave the enslaved people confidence to refuse to do unjust acts demanded by the planters. Mr. Grignon was so horrified by this act of defiance that he rode to the local police and had them dispatched to apprehend the enslaved offenders.

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<sup>72</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 3.

Bleby wrote, “(B)ut the whole body of slaves on the plantation resisted the constables, menacing them with their cutlasses; and one of the officials, it is said, narrowly escaped being thrown into boiling sugar by the exasperated negroes.”<sup>73</sup> Bleby writes that after this successful act of resistance and the polices’ failure to capture the apprehended, they dispatched the militia but by the time they arrived the enslaved people had successfully escaped the plantation.

The extent of the truth of this story can be debated, but it provides an interesting anecdote about the anxieties among the planters. Small acts of resistance such as this were not rare occurrences, in fact in the few years leading up to the rebellion they had seemed to become far more common to the dismay of the planters. There were supposed reports traveling among the planters that isolated acts of rebellion were breaking out throughout Jamaica due to this promise of freedom by Christmas, and the story of Mr. Grignon and the rebellious few was the final nail in the coffin of the planters’ worst fears coming true. As the holidays drew near, the planters’ anxieties continued to grow, and the rumor that more and more rebellious acts would break out during the holidays caused the existing tensions between the enslaved and planters to grow.

### **From Resistance to Rebellion: The Baptist War of 1831**

Pairing the constant but smaller acts of resistance with the enslaved’s assumption that they would be gaining their freedom was shook to its core when it was announced the freedom the enslaved community assumed they would be getting would not happen. The colonial secretary was forced to make a proclamation throughout the British West Indies that freedom had not been granted by the king. The proclamation was officially made in Jamaica on Dec. 22, 1831. Great speculation followed to the extent of the unease that would come from the enslaved people

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<sup>73</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 4.

once they heard the announcement. As a result the Jamaican governor, Belmore added more soldiers to the Jamaican garrison, which was normally 1,700 men.<sup>74</sup> It is also speculated that the official efforts to have more militia in Jamaica caused the enslaved to become more tense.

Tensions continued to rise and by Christmas, a confrontation seemed inevitable.

Bleby wrote that Christmas Day passed with nothing remarkable occurring. Bleby states he had no worries of an insurrection by enslaved people on Christmas day and it was not until the day following Christmas that he first heard of Sharpe's resistance plan. It was known and well established that the enslaved Jamaicans were allowed Christmas Day and the two days following off work. Some of the missionaries learned that there were a few enslaved who were planning to not return to work after these vacation days. This realization awoke a type of fear in Bleby and the other missionaries. Until that moment, the missionaries were quick to disregard the enslaved Jamaicans plans and communications. Bleby said the information about the strike was a wake-up call because it told the missionaries how serious the enslaved were. He said he and his fellow missionaries then expressed their hopes that none of their enslaved members would take part in the planned events.<sup>75</sup> Bleby wrote that he as well as other missionaries were aware they would be blamed along with enslaved peoples with religious connections. He also noted how religious leaders such as Samuel Sharpe were using Christianity to justify their claims for equality and how it was such a sound justification that Christianity also would be punished for any rebellious acts.

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<sup>74</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 296.

<sup>75</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 5.

When Bleby discovered this resistance plan, he implored about 400 church members to not take up arms and take part in this labor resistance. On the evening of Dec. 26, 1831, the tensions that had been long growing finally came to a peak. Bleby said that if the abolition of slavery was not quickly granted by legislation, the enslaved would take matters into their own hands.<sup>76</sup> Although Sharpe's labor strike was not created for violence, the long-standing tensions and anxieties quickly fueled the actions and started the rebellion.

The plan for resistance quickly spread through local areas to other parishes through word of mouth outside of religious meetings. Because of the nature of such things, the plan reached the planters and plantation owners, who saw it as a violent act of resistance. The anxieties of the planter societies over fear of a rebellion of enslaved people following the recent successful insurrection by enslaved people in Haiti caused planters to react dramatically and violently to what was supposed to be a peaceful act of resistance. As word of mouth spread news of the rebellion, planters' anxieties escalated, which turned this refusal to work into one of the most successful and largest insurrections in Jamaica.

With the consistently rising tensions between the planters and the enslaved Jamaicans, there was very little push needed to start a revolution. The revolution was literally lit by a fire that took place on Dec. 27, 1831. That fire eventually caused the whole colony of Jamaica, and the institution of slavery in the British West Indies, to go up in flames. Tuesday, Dec. 27, 1831, saw a formal dedication of a chapel at Salter's Hill. This formal dedication covered the growing congregation of assumed rebellious people. Some of the men in charge of the rebellion were Samuel Sharpe, Thomas Dove, a literate enslaved man from the Belvedere estate, and George

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<sup>76</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 2.

Taylor, another well-known deacon at Burchell's chapel. The majority of Sharpe's fellow commanders were literate enslaved Jamaicans, including Robert Gardner, who was the head waggoner of Greenwich estate, and Johnson Campbell, who was carpenter at the York estate in Jamaica. Sharpe's initial plan was a simple labor strike and work resistance, but it is also considered that while this was his main plan, the threat of an enslaved person's resistance behind the strike was hoped to get the desired outcome. The dedication was just three miles from the Kensington estate, the site of a fire that would indicate the start of a revolution.

After it was officially announced that enslaved people would participate in a strike and not return to work until there was a wage distributed, fires were set to some trash houses to warn other enslaved people and hopefully scare off any aggressive whites and planters. The fires that were lit were seen as both a self-defense mechanism and beacons for other rebels to know of what was happening. The first fires were lit around the Kensington Estate Great House on Dec. 27, 1831. The fire spread awareness and panic all the way to Montego Bay. Beacons spread across the island, dotting the night sky like a symbolic constellation showing the way to freedom. The burning of the Kensington Estate Great House signaled the start of the Baptist War and the eventual emancipation of the enslaved in the British colonies. The initial fire led to other fires that burned planters' property along with the original plan from Sharpe for a peaceful resistance.

The many fires that first night are well documented, it is not known whether they were lit for self-defense, as a beacon, or as an act of rebellion against the planters. It is also remembered by Reverend Hope Waddell, that alongside the many fires of the night, there was a feeling of immense dread due to constantly listening for the sounds of rebel cries, conch shells, bugles, and

gunshots.<sup>77</sup> At the Cornwall estate, there rebels broke into and plundered storage and stores, and the owner of the Cornwall great house, Samuel Moulton Barrett, was harassed that night by a rebel messenger calling for the house to be burnt down seeing that there were no watchmen there to protect it.

It is important to note as well that while all of this excitement and frenzy was taking place on the first night, not one freedman's life had been taken. This further proves that Sharp's initial plan was not to injure or cause violence and pain but rather to demand a wage for the labor performed by the enslaved. By the next morning, there was little to no new activity among the enslaved community. The only main action was that the enslaved Jamaicans were refusing to go to work. As the days continued, the aggression and violence during the rebellion grew. By New Year's Day 1832, martial law had been proclaimed throughout Jamaica, a proclamation that was declared on the sabbath, the Lord's day. In St. James two important battles had been fought, and the rebelling enslaved Jamaicans held the line for victory. On Jan. 2, 1832, the major general commander of the British forces, Gen. Willoughby Cotton, called for an end to the rebellion. Cotton said those who had not participated in the burnings would receive pardons from the king, while any who continued to fight would be executed.<sup>78</sup>

In the beginning, it looked as if the rebels would be successful in their attack against Jamaica and their British overlords. Then, Cotton announced his arrival and overtook the leadership for the militia against the rebels, and the tides began to change in favor of the British militia. Along with the arrival of more militia, there were Naval vessels arriving at Port Royal

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<sup>77</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 304.

<sup>78</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 304.

bringing in sailors and marines to help in the rebellion. Cotton's militia was more classically trained, and they were constantly under the threat of guerrilla ambush. It was said that after an ambush, the rebels would disappear into thin air.

Around the same time that martial law was declared, General Cotton called on the Jamaican Maroons, who were established in Accompong Town, to help assist in suppressing the rebels. Henry Bleby defined the maroons as a race of free Blacks, who lived in the mountains and who were employed as a type of rural police sanctioned with capturing enslaved who escaped. They were hired as these forces following a time of fighting with British officials.<sup>79</sup> The first interaction between the rebels and the Maroons was at Catadupa, where the Maroons attacked but eventually had to withdraw because of the sheer force of the rebels. The tides eventually turned, and the Accompong Maroons defeated the rebels at Maroon town.

Once British forces arrived, the rebellion was quickly and violently put to bed. What was once Sharpe's plan for a peaceful resistance turned into the largest insurrection that Jamaica had seen. Yet of the assumed 300,000 enslaved in Jamaica at the time, only about 60,000 participated in the rebellion. It is not clear why not more of the enslaved community felt the need to rebel. The confusion that surrounded the resistance could have contributed to the lack of numbers. The original plan of refusing to work could have led many to feel no need to participate. Once word of the plan spread across the island, the planters' anxieties probably kept others away from the action.

The rebellion was short-lived and only lasted around 11 days, starting on Dec. 25, 1831. It ended Jan. 4, 1832, but it took months for the British officials to regain absolute control. The

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<sup>79</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 20.

conflict continued in Jamaica for many months following the rebellion and then even more months following the legal actions of the British empire. The Baptist War instantly became the biggest uprising by enslaved people that the British West Indies had witnessed.

In the beginning of the rebellion, the frenzy and the sudden start caused a great amount of confusion among all parties involved -- the planters, the enslaved community and the British officials. The British missionaries were seemingly oblivious to the brewing of this act of resistance, and when the simple labor strike turned into a violent rebellion, the missionaries scrambled to get things under control and stop the violence. In his book *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*, Michael Craton said if any whites were told beforehand of the coming uprising. He also said that did not happen, noting the missionaries were much like “betrayed husbands” and were the last to know.<sup>80</sup>

It is quite remarkable that the missionaries were completely oblivious to the plans and actions discussed by the enslaved members of their communities or parishes. The question remains whether the missionaries were completely left in the dark or whether they underestimated the capability of the enslaved Jamaicans to plan something like this rebellion or to have enough passion to fuel this rebellion. The Rev. Henry Bleby wrote in his book, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative of Facts and Incidents Which Occurred in a British Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*, that he as well as the other Baptist missionaries spent the day before the rebellion preaching sermons to the enslaved communities to not take up arms against their masters or commit acts of violence. At the dedication of the Salter’s Hill chapel, which was attended by many British missionaries, the Rev.

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<sup>80</sup> Craton, *Testing the Chains*, 296.

William Knibb turned the conversation towards the rumors of rebellion that had been brewing throughout the island. Knibb said, "I spent the whole of the time, with the exception of that part which was devoted to the public worship of God, in speaking to the people, assuring them that no free paper had arrived, begging them to go to their work on the morrow, and not to be led away into sin and violence."<sup>81</sup> Bleby wrote that although Knibb spoke harshly against the acts of rebellion and violence against the planter class, the enslaved people present did not heed the advice. He wrote that the spirit among the members of the parish was alarming to the missionaries, showing a gloomy and painful foreboding.

The actions of the missionaries during the actual rebellion can only be described as frenzied. The different missionaries are remembered as riding to different estates and plantations and parishes to dissuade the destruction and violence. Knibb told of his experience riding through Montego Bay during the rebellion attempting to stop the events. He said he encountered a few enslaved people -- Joseph Henry, James Virgo, and Cameron -- from Green Park estate in Trelawney and specifically told them to protect their masters' property.<sup>82</sup> Knibb was distressed over the rebellion and over the labor strike. He spoke of how it was a wicked person who convinced all the enslaved people that the King had already set them free. Knibb tried to dissuade any act of resistance among the enslaved, saying "If you have any love to Jesus Christ, to religion, to your ministers, or to those kind friends in England who have helped you to build

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<sup>81</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 118.

<sup>82</sup> Oxford, "Defence of the Baptist Missionaries," 5.

this chapel... do not be led away. God commands to be obedient; if you ask he commands you, you may expect his blessing, but if you do not, he will not do you good.”<sup>83</sup>

The ministers whom the planters feared having communication with the enslaved because they might install rebellious ideals in their minds were the ones who were the most out of touch when it came to the rebellion and labor strike. The missionaries’ aggressive attempts to stop the rebellion can be questioned on whether they wanted the safety of all people to be protected or were attempting to protect their own self interests. Bleby’s writings show the missionaries were worried about their own persecution and oppression following any rebellious attempts.

Though short-lived, the rebellion was violent with 14 white Jamaicans and 207 rebels killed. Even more rebels lost their lives due to the trials following the war. Total enslaved casualties of the war and ensuing prosecution was 500, including Samuel Sharpe. Reports that came out during the enslaved destroyed property, and to a much lesser extent, attacked individuals, such as planters and masters. The reports said these rebelling enslaved attacked estates like the Montpelier Old Works Estate in St. James Parish.<sup>84</sup> The reports said the rebelling enslaved destroyed Roehampton Estate, a plantation, also in St. James Parish, which was one of the sites that felt a substantial amount of damage during the Baptist War.<sup>85</sup> It is estimated that the

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<sup>83</sup> Hinton, *Memoir of William Knibb*, 119.

<sup>84</sup> Adolphe Duperly, “Rebellion in the Island of Jamaica : The Attack of the Rebels on Montpelier Old Works Estate in the Parish of St. James,” digital image, 1832, accessed November 20, 2020, <https://www.dloc.com/CA01099992/00001/citation?n=ufdc>)

<sup>85</sup> Adolphe Duperly, “The Destruction of Roehampton Estate,” digital image, 1832, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/CA01099988/00001>)

rebellion cost Jamaica around £1 million in property damage, which would equal roughly £52,000,000 in modern terms.<sup>86</sup>

The high anxieties of the planter class in the years following the Haiti rebellion in 1804 somewhat explain the quick and violent reaction by the British government to the insurrection. Still, not all condoned such a response. Knibb said in his that if Sharpe was a white man he would be praised instead of condemned. He said, “I believe I stated in Edinburgh that if Samuel Sharp had been a Polish nobleman, and had taken the same measures to free the Poles from the grasp of the Russians... many in England would have said that instead of being considered a rebel, he deserved an imperishable monument.”<sup>87</sup>

The effects of the short-lived rebellion were as immense as the damages and significantly long-lasting as the insurrection eventually led to the emancipation of the enslaved throughout the British colonies in 1833. The Baptist War of 1831 showed that any improvements, restrictions, or acts in the name of slavery would be in vain. It was time for action. The tensions had grown too much for nothing to come from them. The actual start and progression of the Baptist War demonstrated how successful Christianity was in uniting the Jamaican enslaved people in a justifiable cause recognized throughout the world. The Baptist War also showed a vital shift in the power struggle among the planters, the enslaved, and missionaries, a power struggle that came to blows after years of tension and anxiety felt by all.

As it may be called, 1831 was the year of resistance in the eyes of the Jamaican enslaved communities. The Baptist War of 1831 was the largest and most successful rebellion by enslaved

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<sup>86</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, by Burge (London: House of Commons, 1832),4, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/CA01000014/00001>)

<sup>87</sup> Oxford, “Defence of the Baptist Missionaries,” 4.

people in the British West Indies, and religion was the driving factor that lit the flame for its actions. This rebellion was felt throughout the world and changed the course of history for not only the British West Indies but also for multiple different colonies and locations. There were many gears working in the background for the clock of rebellion, but when the final chime was heard, history was on a new course, a course dictated by the actions of the Black enslaved communities in the colony.

## Chapter Three

### **Trial, Death, and Legacy**

It is evident that the Baptist War was the largest and most successful enslaved rebellion in the British West Indies, unequivocally leading to the emancipation of the enslaved in 1833. What started as a peaceful workers' strike implemented by Samuel Sharpe and his devoted church community became a violent rebellion fueled by Christian ideals. Although Sharpe died enslaved, his preaching and planning spurred enslaved Jamaicans to freedom.

Though short-lived, the rebellion was violent. There were 14 white Jamaican casualties and 207 rebel enslaved. Even more rebels lost their lives due to the trials following the war. Total enslaved casualties of the war and ensuing prosecution was 500, including Sharpe. Henry Bleby remembered Samuel Sharpe's last words. Bleby wrote Sharpe's words as, "Minister, he said, I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery. He expressed deep regret that such extensive destruction of property and life had resulted from the conspiracy he promoted. His only object was to obtain freedom,"<sup>88</sup> Sharpe merely wanted freedom and equality for himself and his people.

It also is evident that religion was the driving factor for the rebellion, in the minds of the enslaved who gained power, influence and knowledge from their learnings of Christianity and the Bible and in the minds of the British officials who grasped that Christianity influenced the uprising. However, rather than crediting the enslaved who organized and carried out the insurrection, the British and Jamaican officials' reaction to this enslaved rebellion show they placed the blame, and therefore the credit, squarely on Baptist leaders and ministers. The various

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<sup>88</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 116.

court cases and legal documents produced following the end of the Baptist War reveal the true power religion held in the hands of the enslaved and abolitionists. Christianity gave the enslaved validation for their cause, hope to soothe their worries, and strength to fight against their oppressors. That was not how the British officials looked on the events. The legal actions taken against religious leaders and Baptist ministers shows the extent of the blame that the British officials put on the backs of the religious ideals.

The majority of the information on the inner workings and cause of the rebellion came from the trials and court cases following the rebellion. Unfortunately, these trials are quite unreliable seeing that they were biased and the confessions tended to be manipulated. The accounts and trials by the missionaries are shown to be better represented and their memories better preserved in the archives. This chapter explores the trials and executions of religious leaders of the Baptist war, other rebel enslaved confessions or trials, the planters violent reaction to the missionaries, and Knibb's defense in 1832. Through this examination the opinions of the British officials are shown, showing that they give the British missionaries the credit for the Baptist War, despite the fact that the enslaved religious leaders overcame many hardships and used their relationship with Christianity to justify and promote their cause. The Baptist War of 1831 was a relatively short rebellion, but the lasting effects of the rebellion was felt not only throughout the British empire but throughout the world. The rebellion was inspired by men who demanded equality and justice. Their voices were heard even if the aggression, violence, and tension that stemmed from it was vast.

### **Trials, Oaths, and Confessions**

Official reports from a Committee of the House of Assembly Jamaica and specific committees created to officially inquire on the cause and damage resulting from the Baptist War examine the oaths, confessions, and other documents that resulted from arrests made after the rebellion. A report recorded on June 27, 1832, at the Colonial Department on Downing Street in Central London states that one of the main causes of the rebellion was that enslaved Jamaicans took advantage of the excitement that came from the false information saying they would gain their freedom after Christmas and they must be prepared to fight for the freedom.<sup>89</sup> This report said it would cover the damages sustained by the rebellion, showing the damages were a result of the enslaved “willfully” setting buildings on fire, destroying fields and plantations, destroying crops, plundering and stealing. The account also stated that the loss of labor from the enslaved people was a huge financial loss. Damages that occurred when officials were attempting to squash the rebellion added to the financial loss of the rebellion. This account blamed the enslaved Jamaicans for the mischievous abuse that they committed while participating in activity in conjunction with religious sects throughout the colony, specifically the Baptist religion, and the missionaries for “allowing” the enslaved to gain leadership positions in the church and use that influence to sway others towards a rebellious cause.

Roughly six months after the war, there was another report from the Committee of the House of Assembly Jamaica that contained oaths taken after the end of the rebellion and leftover documents needed to be discussed by the committee. The majority of these oaths were from prisoners. There is no recorded interference from colonial officials or planters. Unlike the earlier examinations, these have little to do with any of the preparations for the rebellion. They focused

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<sup>89</sup> Burge, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, 3.

on events that transpired during the rebellion and contained the names of many prominent members and leaders of the rebellion. The majority of these prisoners were sentenced to death before their confessions, and colonial officials used the names they provided to make other arrests. Still, the ever familiar word “Baptist” was present throughout, mostly in reference to Samuel Sharpe and where meetings took place prior to rebellion.

These confessions focus more on how the cause of the rebellion was built largely on newspapers from Britain and the use of the parishes for community meetings. One of the most damning mentions of the Baptist leaders comes from a prisoner referred to as Robert, who was known under the alias of Colonel Gardner. When asked if the Baptist classes persuaded the slaves in the rebellion, Gardner explained that most of the “captains” were leaders of church classes. Their duties were to go to the estates in the church’s area, check on the enslaved and report back to the minister.<sup>90</sup> This is the only account in the confessions included in the report that specifically mentions Baptist leaders having any responsibility in the Baptist War. At the end of each confession was a statement by John M’Intyre that induces questions of the validity of the confessions, “These are, as nearly as possible, the words used by the prisoner in answer to the questions written.”<sup>91</sup> The confessions by the rebel prisoners give a telling look into the minds and opinions of the British officials. They already knew who they wanted to blame for the rebellion, so the questions asked and answers recorded in the report are biased for this agenda.

On the sixth page of the report, the committee examines an enslaved man by the name of Richard Flemoe. The examination records Flemoe’s answers about the rumor that spread

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<sup>90</sup> Burge, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, 38.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

throughout Jamaica that enslaved people would gain their freedom following Christmas. Flemoe said he heard from a fellow enslaved man, John Lewis, that they would no longer be working for the planters as they were now free. Lewis was hanged before this examination for his involvement in the rebellion. Flemoe also identified the other men he heard talk about this freedom -- Adam Bayley, Jacob Tanner, and George Afflock. He said all these men attend the same church as Lewis, Bell Castle. It would be safe to presume that it was at this church where these men were able to exchange information on the impending freedom and actions such as the labor resistance planned by leader Samuel Sharpe.

On the 10th page of the same report, there was an examination of Daniel Beckford, another enslaved man. Authorities were quick to note Beckford was a Christian and understood the oath he took. This examination covers the topic of a Mr. Beaumont and his encounters with Beckford. Beckford explained that he had only been in the company of Mr. Beaumont twice. The first time, he was asleep, and the second, Mr. Beaumont was questioning Beckford about hitting his wife and money. Beckford mentions this exchange was after the new law that stated enslaved women could no longer be flogged. The examiners ask Beckford if Beaumont ever talked about the impending freedom for the enslaved Jamaicans. Beckford responded, saying, "He did not call free out of his mouth, but he tell me he heard after Christmas the negroes were going to take the country; he did not say 'free,' but he said 'take the country.'"<sup>92</sup> Beckford ended his examination stating that he did not take any part in the rebellion and that he spent his time looking for the owner of Roxbro Castle.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 10.

On the 23 page of the report, there is an examination of an enslaved woman named Jane Tomkinson, who was also a Christian. This examination is quite short compared to the men who were examined but also covered the topic of Mr. Beaumont. Tomkinson was asked how long she had known Beaumont. She replied she had known him for seven years and he had been a patron of the tavern. Tomkinson told how Beaumont brought a newspaper to the tavern and said females would no longer be flogged. Beaumont then told the patrons at the tavern that Jamaica would soon be free. Tomkinson reported Beaumonts words as, “(A)ll the browns were free already; blacks they would soon be free after that.”<sup>93</sup> Tomkinson finishes her examination by stating that Beaumont talked about the enslaved people becoming free more than once. Tomkinson said that Beaumont asked to speak to her, presumably about freedom, but she adamantly denied him. All of these examinations make clear the British officials narrative and their goals.

Following the examinations in the report, there were confessions on oath taken from enslaved prisoners who were thought to have participated in the rebellion. The number of these confessions greatly outnumber the examinations conducted. Confessions included ones by some of the leaders of the rebellion and those who were close to Samuel Sharpe, including Thomas Dove, Robert Gardner, and others who knew men such as George Taylor, John Tharp and Sharpe. The first confession was by John Davis, a prisoner who discussed the different leaders of the rebellion. Davis said that Taylor was the lead man of the rebellion and that he heard Taylor say that he was the “head man.” Davis said in his confession that Sharpe, Taylor, Gardner and Dove,

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<sup>93</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, by Burge (London: House of Commons, 1831), 23.

as well as all the other leaders had been at the Baptist church in Montego Bay on Christmas.<sup>94</sup> He then explained how these headmen came together and planned the act of resistance at the church.

Prisoner Edward Morrice shed more light on his relationship with George Taylor as well as John Davis' relationship with George Taylor. George Taylor was a religious leader among the enslaved communities and had baptized both Morrice and Davis. Morrice also defined the hierarchy among the leaders of the rebellion, stating that Robert Gardner would not do anything without consulting George Taylor first. Both Davis and Morrice said that while Samuel Sharpe was responsible for organizing the labor resistance, when the rebellion broke out it was Taylor and Gardner who were the leaders in charge of the actual fighting and organizing.

In his confession, James Fray explained that he and other rebels were told that the British missionary Thomas Burchell was supposed to bring them arms and that there were two mule loads of weapons coming from Greenwich. This is interesting to note because the British officials were very quick to arrest and question Thomas Burchell for his involvement in the rebellion, even though he had nothing to do with it. Apparently, the rebels were also under the impression that Burchell was to be involved.

Prisoner William Binham confessed about the Baptists' understanding of the rebellion. He said, "The Baptists all believe that they are to be freed; they say, the Lord and the King have given them free...if they did not fight for freedom they would never get it."<sup>95</sup> In doing so, Binham illustrated how some blame is placed on Christianity for the rebellion, specifically the Baptists. The majority of these confessions involved descriptions of what George Taylor and

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 32.

Gardner did throughout the duration of the rebellion and what commands they gave. These passages described what the prisoners witnessed when it came to destruction by the rebels. They included how John Bull was seen burning down Endeavour and George Campbell and William Miles set fire to the trash house in Dean's Valley.

In comparison, Thomas Dove said in his confession that Samuel Sharpe was the leader of all the enslaved at the commencement of the rebellion and was the only instigator as far as he knows. Dove further explained that Sharpe had promised the enslaved that they had freedom since the prior March. Dove explained that due to Sharpe's intelligence, charisma and religious leadership, he was able to sway other enslaved people to help in the rebellion. Dove explained that George Taylor was the one who advised Sharpe to wait and to not start a rebellion until he knew if the rumor of freedom was true. Dove's narrative was vastly different from the others who told that Taylor was the headman in the rebellion and despite the initial organization of the labor resistance, Sharpe was not nearly as active as Taylor or Gardner.

Other confessions also stated that Gardner was a big player in leading the rebellion, but in his own confession, he paints a different picture. Gardner said while the main leaders were gathered at the church on the morning after Christmas, Samuel Sharpe told those in attendance that the enslaved had been promised their freedom by the King and that they needed to rise up and fight for that freedom. Gardner said that after Sharp stoked the emotions of those at the church, he stood up and said, "Sharpe, I do not like this business at all; let us done away with it."<sup>96</sup> After Gardner questioned Sharpe, he said that Sharpe became furious with him and made everyone drink a toast to the fight for freedom. Gardner said he did not participate in the toast or

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 35.

have anything to do with the plan for rebellion. Gardner also said that George Taylor was very adamant that there should be no blood spilled.

In his narrative, Gardner said that Sharpe sent him a large number of men to command and lead into rebellion. He said he wanted no part of the action and tried to hide from the men, but eventually became too hungry, realized the men were not going to leave and acquiesced. Gardner said his objections to the rebellion were completely overruled, but that he ordered his men to not take anyone's life. Gardner described his time during the rebellion as well as his eventual surrender to his opposers. About his imprisonment, Gardner said, "I feel that I deserve all that I now suffer; and I feel it more from the kind of master in which all the white gentlemen have treated me since I gave myself up."<sup>97</sup> It is not clear if Gardner was coerced to give this confession in order to further demonize Samuel Sharpe, if he gave this confession to try to lessen his own punishment, or if this confession was edited after he gave it.

Other accounts contradicted Gardner, saying that Sharpe demanded that no blood be spilled and that he planned a labor resistance and nothing else. It is interesting that Dove and Gardner tried to place the majority of the blame on Sharpe and clear their own names as well as George Taylor's name while the other confessions adamantly state that Taylor and Gardner were the two main leaders in the rebellion. This raises questions on how much the British officials shaped these confessions and whether there were other conditions that might have led to the discrepancies.

Henry Bleby did not trust the confessions from the rebel prisoners. In his book, *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative of Facts and Incidents Which Occurred in a British*

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 35.

*Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*, he stated that he was going to make it his business to carefully interrogate all that he could. Bleby had the opportunity to interview Samuel Sharpe, Thomas Dove, Robert Gardner, and Edward Hylton. Bleby was more concerned with the fact that many prisoners had agreed to falsify their confessions in order to incriminate the British missionaries, so his motives do not portray the whole truth. When interrogating Hylton, Bleby learned that the night everyone was gathered to talk about their resistance, they only discussed that they would not work past Christmas day. He also learned that Sharpe encouraged everyone to kiss a Bible to pledge their loyalty. This is vastly different from the picture Gardner painted in his confession. Hylton also said that Sharpe was acting with passive resistance and did not want to actively fight or harm anyone in his plan for labor resistance. Bleby showed that Sharpe did not want active violence when he said, “The burning of the plantations, and the violence offered to the whites, were no part of his design...”<sup>98</sup>

Apparently when the first fires were lit, one thing after another happened in such a quick succession that Sharpe knew that his original plan had been abandoned. When Bleby had conversations with Samuel Sharpe, he found him to be the most intelligent and remarkable enslaved man he had ever met. Bleby said that he witnessed Sharpe give two or three spur of the moment speeches to his fellow inmates on religious topics. When Sharpe talked about his life, he said that he was treated very well by the family in which he was enslaved. However, Bleby also said, “But he thought, and he learnt from his Bible, that the whites had no more right to hold black people in slavery than the black people had to make the white people slaves...”<sup>99</sup> Bleby

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<sup>98</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 113.

<sup>99</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 116.

remembered that Sharpe expressed a deep regret for the damages, violence, and deaths that occurred during the rebellion and that it was not part of his original plan. Sharp merely wanted freedom.

On May 23, 1832, Samuel Sharpe was the last victim to be punished for taking part in the insurrection. At 28 years of age, Sharpe stood before the magistrates and was said to be calm. Bleby described the scene, saying that Sharpe went to his death honorably. He then noted that he was moved to tears by the execution.

There are many reasons why these examinations, confessions and oaths must be addressed. The main reason is what they say about the British officials and their agenda. It is clear that the examinations and the confessions that were included in the report recorded on June 27, 1832, at the Colonial Department on Downing Street in Central London were heavily biased towards the story the British officials wanted to tell. The enslaved men and women who were imprisoned due to their involvement or suspected involvement in the rebellion told the truths the British officials wanted to hear. The British officials were determined to demonize the enslaved religious leaders while also incriminating the British missionaries for their involvement in the rebellion.

### **Aggression Towards the Missionaries**

It is evident that the Baptist War was the largest and most successful rebellion in the British West Indies and religion was the driving factor for these actions. The British and Jamaican officials' reaction to this rebellion is a tell-tale sign of where the blame was placed, immensely on Baptist leaders and ministers. The various court cases and legal documents produced following the end of the Baptist War reveal the true power religion held in the hands of

the enslaved and abolitionists. Some missionaries were punished though they had little or no prior knowledge of the rebellion. This blame and punishment shows just how much power the British officials believed Christianity had in the hands of the enslaved and abolitionists. The legal actions taken against these religious leaders and Baptist ministers shows the extent of the blame the British officials put on religious ideals.

The enslaved, however, were not the only ones to suffer. The immediate aftermath of the rebellion sets the scene for the legal actions in the years following the Baptist War. The court cases following the war show the British government placed the full extent of the blame of the uprising on the backs of Christianity. The planters in Jamaica largely blamed Baptist missionaries for creating an atmosphere of rebellion. The planters believed the revolt was caused by reports circulated by the Anti-Slavery Society, which they considered seditious, and the misuse of religion by missionaries.<sup>100</sup> As such, most of the missionaries were imprisoned. Some missionaries were tarred and feathered. Mobs took it upon themselves to go into the streets and destroy the chapels. Reports show angry mobs burned fourteen Baptist chapels and about six Methodist chapels while officials did little to nothing to stop the attacks.<sup>101</sup> This anger and out-lash against the British missionaries in Jamaica led to numerous arrests and interrogations along with multiple reports and discussions in England. The legal reports from these meetings provide rich evidence concerning how the British officials blamed these missionaries.

Official reports from a Committee of the House of Assembly Jamaica and specific committees created to officially inquire on the cause and damage resulting from the Baptist War

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<sup>100</sup> Smith, "Slavery and Christianity," 181.

<sup>101</sup> John Clarke, *Memoir of Richard Merrick, Missionary in Jamaica* (London, 1850), 72.

examine the oaths, confessions, and other documents that resulted from arrests made after the rebellion. A report recorded on June 27, 1832, at the Colonial Department on Downing Street in Central London said, “The primary and most powerful cause arose from an evil excitement created in the minds of our Slaves generally, by the unceasing and unconstitutional interference of His Majesty’s Ministers with our Local Legislature...”<sup>102</sup> Reports such as these show the colonial officials put the blame of the rebellion on the ministers rather than the enslaved. This particular report seeks to show that the missionaries who were active in Jamaica sought to undermine the importance of the enslaved individuals’ masters by convincing the enslaved that they could not serve both the Spiritual Master (God) and their Temporal Master, their plantation master.

Officials faulted these missionaries for the cost of the destruction of property as well as the loss of the enslaved. The loss of the enslaved was counted whether the person perished in the rebellion or in executions following the rebellion. Officials denounced Missionaries for educating the enslaved Jamaican in improper language, language that would allow these enslaved people to question their place in society as well as become involved with the politics happening in England.

There was an overall idea from the planters that enslaved were docile and would never rise up in arms against their masters before they were educated as Christians. They believed the missionaries who came to Jamaica to teach the enslaved Christianity inherently corrupted the once “innocent” enslaved. This is a confusing narrative. The planters and white residents used the sophistication and civility that came with being a Christians as justification for their

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<sup>102</sup> Burge, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, 3.

superiority over enslaved. Their Christianity was a key for social inclusion, and the lack of this characteristic by the enslaved was a key for social exclusion. Once the enslaved were educated religiously by these British missionaries, it upset the planters because it corrupted the enslaved, allowing them to follow a higher power than their masters. This idea showcases how complex and completely interconnected the notion of religion was in the foundation and formation of the tensions between the enslaved and planters. It also shows that while religion was an important way to fuel the Baptist War, the momentum building for this rebellion began long before Sharpe discussed religious concepts with his community.

This long-building tension paired with the information provided from the legal reports shows that even before the Baptist War, planters and plantation owners blamed the ministers for providing the enslaved with dangerous information. There is a popular notion that “knowledge is power.” In this case, religious knowledge was the power of the slave owners. In their minds, this religious knowledge by the enslaved was dangerous, and they damned the British missionaries for unlocking that danger. The problem and the drama that unfolded between the planters and missionaries were described by Smith, who said the planters believed the missionaries were renegades. The planters worked hard to form a strong front against an overwhelming growing number of enslaved. They believed the missionaries broke that social solidarity of white society, Smith said.<sup>103</sup>

The British missionaries did the unspeakable. They broke the social inclusion circle created by the planters, masters, white citizens, and British colonials. Because they committed this unspeakable crime, missionaries became the subject of all blame in the Baptist War. It is

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<sup>103</sup> Smith, “Slavery and Christianity,” 184.

undeniable that religion was the biggest player when it came to this enslaved insurrection, but was the implication of the missionaries due to the social aspect or the religious aspect?

A specific committee was created to officially inquire about the cause of and damage from the Baptist War -- the Committee of the House of Assembly of Jamaica. This report, dated June 27, 1832, examined the oaths, confessions, and other documents that resulted from the arrests made after the rebellion. It provides much information on the role of religion in the Baptist War. It did not necessarily show the concise involvement of these British missionaries, but the report did show how the colonial officials viewed these missionaries and the bias against them. George Codrington, who was a member of the East St. Thomas parish and a lieutenant colonel in the east regiment, was examined during the meetings of the Committee of the House of Assembly Jamaica on June 27, 1832. Codrington explained in his examination that the cause of the rebellion was the agitation English newspapers caused in the slaves. He stated the uprising was spurred on "... by the imprudence of the sectarians in their language addressed to the slaves."<sup>104</sup> The sectarians referred to the ministers who taught the enslaved Christianity.

Another examination within the same report was of Samuel Carson, who was part of the Clarendou parish, a planter in Jamaica, and overseer of the Whitney Estate. Unlike Codrington, Carson was appointed by the committee to inquire about his own parish and then examined by the committee. Carson was asked if any inappropriate conversation took place between the enslaved in his parish and the missionaries. Carson noted on multiple occasions that this did not happen. Examiners asked Carson of conversations with the enslaved in the Clarendou Parish in Jamaica, specifically asking if the enslaved had been told they were free or had no master.

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<sup>104</sup> Burge, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, 5.

Carson said that had never happened.<sup>105</sup> The questions in this examination searched for a specific answer. The committee wanted examples of inappropriate language used by missionaries.

Thomas M'Neal, a member of Westmorland Parish, believed differently. He said, "I cannot positively state what might have been the cause of the rebellion; but it is my opinion that the interference of the mother country, coupled with that of the sectarian preachers, and particularly those of the Baptist persuasion, have been the primary causes,"<sup>106</sup> It is vital to understand that these are extremely biased sources. Committee members not only led these inquiries, they appointed people to inquire within their own parish. Those steps mean the answers were bound to be biased toward the colonial official's narrative. One of the most common answers to the question of blame was from Fredrick H. Thompson. He was asked to state what religious belief was held by the enslaved under his charge. He answered, "Principally Baptists, many of whom took an active part in the late rebellion."<sup>107</sup> What these examinations tell is that the colonial officials had a preconceived mindset of who was to blame for instigating the Baptist War. Although both Baptist and Methodist missionaries are blamed for informing the enslaved and enticing the rebellion, the overwhelming evidence against the missionaries is heaped on the Baptists. The examinations show just the extent to which the post-rebellion witch hunt the court proceedings were.

### **Missionary Treatment**

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<sup>105</sup> Burge, *Jamaica: Slave Insurrection*, 9.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

Bleby spoke of his attack in *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative of Facts and Incidents which Occurred in a British Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*. One of the chapters in this book is devoted strictly to the anger and violence directed at the “devil preachers,” whom the planter society members saw as the cause of the rebellion. Bleby wrote, “Whilst several men held me firmly by the arms and collar against the window-frame, others brought a keg of tar into the room... and plastered it all over my head and face..rubbing it into my eyes..”<sup>108</sup> Bleby described the mob rubbing tar all over his person and one member reaching for a candle, which would have combusted with the tar and ended his life. If it was not for Bleby’s wife fighting her way through the mob, Bleby would have died. This narrative is a horrific example of how the missionaries were blamed to the extent that the mobs attempted to punish them for their actions. In Knibb’s accounts, he showed that the House of Assembly initially blamed the Baptists and Methodists and that the missionaries and their families faced terrible violence because of it. This violence proves the responsibility that religion was forced to assume following the Baptist War, a responsibility that caused a great deal of harm to many innocent people.

Bleby, unlike Knibb, remained in Jamaica after the rebellion and faced a great deal of violence. While Knibb’s discussion at the House of Assembly provided clear examples of how the Baptists were being persecuted on a legal standing, Bleby’s book provides a first-hand look at the violence missionaries faced after the rebellion. This book was published in 1853 and follows life in Jamaica before the Baptist War, during the rebellion, and in the years after the rebellion. Bleby was tarred and feathered because he was a missionary in Jamaica during this time. His

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<sup>108</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 199.

wife and five-month-old child were also victims of the mob's anger. The mob threatened to throw Bleby's infant son out the window. When his wife resisted fervently to save her son and her husband, she was accosted even further. Bleby wrote of when he was saved, saying, "... Several black and coloured men came to my rescue; and arming themselves... they commenced a vigorous attack upon those of the white ruffians..."<sup>109</sup> In his book, Bleby mentions that he had a loaded pistol in his hand during the time of the attack but was too afraid to act out of the fear of further harm to his family. Missionaries and their families were attacked in their homes, and they were charged with crimes they did not commit simply because they taught the enslaved Jamaican community Christianity.

*Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative of Facts and Incidents which Occurred in a British Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation* starts with Bleby's experience of his time right before the start of the Baptist War in 1831. In his description, he showed where tensions thrived. Bleby explained that many of the enslaved residing in Jamaica were preoccupied with the idea that they were to be emancipated. This was something Knibb also addressed. However, Bleby proved a direct source to the information. To summarize the point, there is an account of Mr. Burchell, a Baptist missionary who was in England at the time. The enslaved who were part of the Baptist community were under the impression that Burchell was in England to secure their freedom. In this instance, the two biggest causes that have been blamed for the rebellion combine into one religion and the anticipation of freedom coming from England.

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<sup>109</sup> Bleby, *Death Struggles of Slavery*, 200.

Religion had a complex hold in Jamaica before, during, and after the Baptist War, and this information tells of that complex role. This information specifically shows that the enslaved of the Baptist community trusted Burchell to secure their freedom because of his position as a leader within the Baptist community. Bleby's account shows how religion was responsible through indirect ways. The missionaries were not trying to start an insurrection by enslaved people. There are multiple accounts that prove that. However, Baptist teachings were an integral catalyst in Sharpe forming the initial plan for a strike. Although the missionaries were not directly responsible for the Baptist War, they were punished both by the law and by the mobs as if they were.

There are other contributing factors that Bleby stated helped instigate rebellion. In his book, Bleby discussed the severe and harsh treatment the enslaved would often face for only minor mishaps. He told of the planters' desire for the enslaved to not go to Baptist or Methodist parishes because they did not want them instructed in Christian ways. This also caused tensions between enslaved and master and planters and missionaries. On top of this, Bleby mentions that the planter society in Jamaica was terrified of a violent and successful rebellion, like the one in Haiti. These tensions and anxieties came to a head when Sam Sharpe's docile work strike started, and this is how a peaceful strike turned to burning estates and a rebellion.

Bleby's work also supported the facts Knibb presented during his discussion at the House of Assembly in 1832. Bleby said Knibb had tried correcting misinformation of freedom or impending freedom that was circulating at the time.<sup>110</sup> Instead of trying to fuel a rebellion, missionaries attempted to calm the enslaved aggressions and convince them to work, rather than

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 7.

strike. It is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that these men were the saviors of these enslaved Africans. That is simply not the case.

The enslaved Jamaicans were responsible for every action they took in securing their own freedom. The efforts of the missionaries was to preach to the enslaved. They did not encourage rebellion. They tried to keep them from even conducting a peaceful strike. These sources are used to not mark these men as heroes. Though their efforts are noble, these sources are used to the importance of religion in the Baptist War. Baptist parishes were a safe haven for the enslaved like Samuel Sharpe to question their slavery. The Bible and other teachings provided validation for their quest for freedom. Religious leaders used Christianity as a means to travel around Jamaica and spread the ideals to spark resistance. Sharpe and other religious leaders used religious buildings and churches to hold meetings with the enslaved Jamaicans. These accounts show how the colonial officials blamed religion and religious officials for this rebellion. They show how legal actions and colonial decisions proved religion's vital role in the endeavor.

Thomas Burchell noted that the presence of British missionaries was no small annoyance to the planter society in Jamaica. To the planters, the missionaries were the only ones who could and would call them out on their tyranny and evils they executed. Another source of annoyance for the planters was the missionaries' influence over the enslaved community in Jamaica.

Burchell left Jamaica during the rise of tensions between the enslaved and the planters following the assumption that the enslaved had already been promised their freedom. Burchell eventually came back to Jamaica on Jan. 7, 1832. Before his ship could drop anchor, he was approached by Lieutenant Usher and asked to come to his boat. When Burchell, in dismay, asked why he was being handled this way, he was informed that the colony was under martial law. He was made a

prisoner on the boat at that time. Burchell remained a prisoner for many weeks without any clue as to why he was being detained. When he finally asked a magistrate what charges were being placed against him, the magistrate responded by saying there were no charges.

Captain Pengelly went through all of Burchell's belongings, including his letters and papers upon discovering that there was nothing incriminating against Burchell. However, he advised Burchell to leave the island for his own safety. The planters were enraged with the missionaries following the insurrection, and many blamed Burchell. As such, his life would surely be in danger if he remained, he was told. However, Burchell was denied access to leave the island and was kept in confinement for many more days still in ignorance as to why he was detained.

Burchell eventually learned that during some of the confessions and examinations of the enslaved people who had been imprisoned, it was said that he told the enslaved people that freedom was already theirs and that they needed to fight for it. When Burchell was finally removed from the boat, he was met with an angry mob of planters. One lashed out at Burchell with a dagger. Others hissed at him and spit water on him all while yelling. Burchell wrote, "Some cried out, 'Have his blood!' Others, 'Soot him!' and others, 'Hang him!'"<sup>111</sup> Burchell had to go before a jury to proclaim his innocence. While he did, a large mob of planters destroyed his chapel. After being detained for 67 days, Burchell was able to leave Jamaica, but not without the hatred of the planters following him the entire journey.

Burchell and Bleby's stories tell how the planters' anxieties, tension, and annoyances grew towards the British missionaries. The Baptist War was the final straw. It caused the planters

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<sup>111</sup> Burchell, *Memoir of Thomas Burchell*, 197.

to erupt. The anger that was shown through violence, property damage, and vocal outrage show that regardless of the fact that the Baptist War was started by the enslaved religious leaders in Jamaica, its legacy was credited to the British missionaries by the planters and the British officials. The confessions, examinations, and testimonials that have been covered show the world surrounding Jamaica immediately following the rebellion.

### **Reverend William Knibb**

On Dec. 15, 1832, nearly a year after the start of the Baptist War on Dec. 15, 1832, the Rev. William Knibb was at the Assembly Room in Baths and took part in an official discussion with Mr. P. Borthwick. The purpose of this discussion was in part to allow Knibb to defend himself against multiple accusations he faced at the start of the insurrection. It also served as an avenue for Knibb to advocate for emancipation and to reveal to those in Britain the horrors that occurred in the Caribbean. The assembly between Borthwick and Knibb started off with both men describing why they were having the meeting. Knibb defended himself against accusations Borthwick made, specifically that Knibb was dodging the claims against him and refusing to appear before the assembly to face his accusations. Knibb addressed that this was not the case, and then he began to seek justice for Africa and enslaved Africans.

Knibb spoke of the things he witnessed in Jamaica that would make angels weep and devils shudder, things that no living man, woman, or child should ever face. Knibb explained the harsh treatment the enslaved faced over seemingly small mishaps before the start of the rebellion. He told how the enslaved were lashed unconscious or to near death and hung without any trial. The advocacy efforts Knibb took upon before the rebellion were at least doubled if not tripled after the Baptist War. He was arrested immediately following the end of the rebellion.

Once he was released, he had to leave Jamaica and flee to Scotland for his own safety because of anger and unrest from the planter society.

Discussions like the one between Knibb and Borthwick provide a more rounded understanding of the tensions between the ministers and the colonial officials. However, because the views portrayed are those of British white men, there is a vital aspect missing in the narrative, that of the enslaved. The perspective is still important because it shows the tension between the missionary efforts in the British colonies and the colonial officials paired with the planter class. These discussions also prove the notion of the role religion held in this rebellion and that it continued to hold after the rebellion because Knibb continued to advocate on behalf of those suffering in Jamaica. He described the horrors he witnessed during his time in Jamaica, and through advocacy, he kept the relevance of the Baptist War alive in a way that made the British people pay attention.

One of the biggest instigators of the Baptist War was not just religion but the fact that religion provided validation for the enslaved wanting to be free and to question the hell in which they lived. There was a spread of misinformation that officials in England freed the enslaved but the planters refused to comply. This lit the match that took this peaceful strike to a full rebellion. After the rebellion, the blame for the spread of this misinformation was put on the missionaries. Many of those in the planter society and members of the colonial officials blamed the missionaries, saying that they spread these ideas to provide the enslaved with hope and worked them up into a frenzy which is what started the rebellion

Knibb spoke to these accusations in his discussion. He recalled what he said to the enslaved once he found out that they had received this information, attempting to calm their

anxieties. He told the enslaved to use their love for Jesus Christ to guide them from reacting out of hate. Knibb also warned the enslaved that if they refused to go back to work and participated in the strike, they would be greatly punished. Knibb told of what happened once the rebellion started. He said he went to all the estates under attack and attempted to stop the rebels from destroying any more property. When Joseph Henry, James Virgo, and Cameron from the Green Park estate in Trelawney asked Knibb if they should defend their master's estate from the rebels, Knibb encouraged them to do so.<sup>112</sup> Knibb was faced with countless accusations of his involvement. He told how he not was not involved in the rebellion and had actively tried to sway the enslaved from participating as well. He used the Bible to stop the rebellion. While it did not work in the end, this shows that religion was used on all ends of this rebellion.

On all sides of this rebellion, religion was one of the most important factors. It was used to validate the rebellion, to prevent the rebellion, and to justify slavery. It was also used as a criteria of persecution. Knibb said of the 983 members in his church, only three were court-martialed at Falmouth.<sup>113</sup> None of Knibb's congregation were executed. This allows room for speculation that since none of the three men tried were put to death, their chances of being part of the rebellion was extremely low. Knibb said, "You see that not one of the members of my church, when brought even before a court-martial, could be found guilty of a crime for which they could hang him; though I assure you that very little guilt was sufficient to hang a Baptist under the iron hand of martial law."<sup>114</sup> This statement earned Knibb several hisses from the

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<sup>112</sup> Oxford, "Defence of the Baptist Missionaries," 5.

<sup>113</sup> Oxford, "Defence of the Baptist Missionaries," 5.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 5.

assembly because he stated that the Baptists were being persecuted for the rebellion at the hands of the colonial officials, at the hands of the law, and at the hands of the planter society. Even during this time when it took very little convincing to order a Baptist to death, none of the members of Knibb's congregation received a death sentence. The vocal reactions that Knibb received to his statements show how the men of this assembly had already condemned Knibb for the rebellion.

Within his discussion, Knibb noted that if Samuel Sharpe was born a Polish nobleman instead of an enslaved African and tried to free his Polish people from the control of the Russians, the English would build him a monument rather than remember him as a rebel. This comment became the basis for the most severe accusations placed on Knibb, treason. However, Knibb was not tried for treason because of the severe actions that the colonial officials had taken against Baptist missionaries.

Officials had been so severe and ruthless in blaming the Baptists for the rebellion that they were starting to receive criticism. This led to assembly members having to officially renounce their accusations against the Baptist missionaries. Knibb's response to this reversal indicated he did not believe their renunciation. He said, "If Wesleyan missionaries were innocent, why were they tarred and feathered? If Wesleyan missionaries were innocent, why were their chapels pulled to the ground? If Wesleyan missionaries were innocent, why did the House of Assembly declare that they were guilty?"<sup>115</sup> To further prove his point, Knibb produced a handkerchief with tar on it, showing that missionaries were indeed tarred and feathered. Knibb mentions specifically Henry Bleby, who had been tarred and feathered.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 4.

Through legal documents much can be discovered about the political and social climate immediately following the Baptist War of 1831. However, it is imperative to be cautious when studying these documents because they provide the view of the British officials and planters and often overlook or ignore the voices of the enslaved and the enslaved religious leaders who led the acts of resistance. One way that these voices can be heard is through their own trials or confessions and in the interviews missionaries and others conducted with enslaved prisoners and religious leaders that are included in Henry Bleby's book *Death Struggles of Slavery: Being A Narrative of Facts and Incidents Which Occurred in a British Colony, During the Two Years Immediately Preceding Negro Emancipation*.

The legal documents that this chapter has examined -- whether they be examinations, trials, official discussions, confessions, or interviews -- all show the various ways that the British officials attempted to place the blame of the rebellion on the British missionaries such as Henry Bleby, William Knibb, and Thomas Burchell. By doing this the British officials essentially overlooked the enslaved religious leaders who took the risks, started a labor resistance, and eventually guided a rebellion that would one day change the world and lead to emancipation in 1833. As a result, they took away the agency of the Black religious leaders. Samuel Sharpe, George Taylor, Robert Gardner, and many others used Christianity as a means to communicate, organize, and inspire others to resist slavery and act for freedom, whether that be a labor resistance or a rebellion. However, the British officials chose to push the blame onto the British missionaries, ultimately giving them the credit and essentially disregarding the agency of the Black religious leaders. An unfortunate result of this act by the British officials leads there to be an impressive amount of documentation of the voices, testimonies, and lives of the British

missionaries but an extremely lacking representation of the voices of the Black religious leaders. The voices that would best inform the world as to what truly transpired during the rebellion would be that of the Black Baptist leaders such as Samuel Sharpe and George Taylor as well as the rest of the enslaved Jamaicans that participated in or witnessed the rebellion.

## Conclusion

The Age of Revolutions lasted from the late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. It was during this time that numerous important revolutionary actions took place throughout Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean. The start of this era is credited to the American Revolutionary War, which took place between 1765 and 1783. Directly following the American Revolutionary War was the French Revolution of 1789. The Haitian Revolution followed quickly, starting in 1791 and ending in 1804. The world was consumed by an air of revolution, one that obviously made its way to the minds and hearts of the enslaved people throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. Within the United States, there was Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831. This rebellion was heavily influenced by Turner who was an African American preacher with deep roots in Christianity, which helped promote and inspire his actions of rebellion. In the same year there was the biggest rebellion by enslaved people in Jamaica -- the Baptist War. Like the many others preceding and following it, the Baptist War was heavily influenced by many different factors, but the main stimulus for the rebellion was the Black religious leaders in Jamaica and the way that they used Christianity as a means to house, inform, organize, justify, and inspire an act of resistance.

Slavery and Christianity have always had a complicated relationship. This can be represented by the fact of the "natural slave," the notion by European Christians that anyone who was not a Christian was naturally to be enslaved. With the colonization of the Caribbean and the move of European Christians to the Atlantic world, the understanding of who was to be "naturally enslaved" slowly started to shift. Spain landed in the Caribbean during the fifteenth century and were able to lay claim to most of the area during the sixteenth century. However,

during the seventeenth century, other European players started to venture through the Atlantic World.

Christopher Columbus believed that the natives from the Caribbean and the Americas would make ideal slaves, especially for the sugarcane plantations. However, the practice of transporting captured Africans to the Caribbean and the Americas in order for them to be enslaved and work on plantations quickly began. It is estimated there were around 10 to 15 million Africans transported across the Atlantic and forced into slavery. Of that, around five million of these men, women, and children were taken to the Caribbean. In the early eras of slavery and forced labor, there were also European indentured servants who lived throughout the Caribbean. However, these people were eventually able to obtain their freedom, unlike the enslaved Africans taken to the Caribbean. With the enslaved Africans quickly becoming the main source of labor for plantations throughout the Caribbean, the idea of the “natural slave” shifted from not only the “non Christian” being the “natural slave” to the African, ergo Black individual, being the ‘natural slave.’

The European colonizers and planters who enslaved Africans clearly believed the captured Africans were the “natural slave.” They did so for two reasons -- the Africans were “non Christian” and their different race also made them a “natural slave.” Those who justified slavery did so by also saying that Africans were the cursed descendants of Ham from the Bible. Slavery defenders strongest argument was Christianity, which gave Christians the right to enslave others, and that Africans were destined to be enslaved.

This narrative would come to be challenged by enslaved people throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. Enslaved Africans used not only their own religious institutions but also

Christianity as a way to prove the “natural slave” narrative was contradictory and false. Knowing that full knowledge of their religion would work to the enslaved’s benefit, planters and other officials tried to limit their access to Christianity. They did this in a few different ways. The British empire limited the enslaved Caribbeans access to Christianity by not taking aggressive efforts to instruct the enslaved in Christian doctrine. When missionaries or others in the British West Indies attempted to instruct the enslaved in Christianity, They most often omitted the majority of the Old Testament and large parts of the New Testament from their Bibles. The full title of this bible was *Select Parts of the Holy Bible, for the use of the Negro Slaves, in the British West-India Islands*<sup>116</sup> This was done so that enslaved Africans living in the British West Indies would not read anything in the bible that would encourage them to rebel. One of the passages that was often used to justify slavery, and was kept in the bible was from Ephesians 6:5 which stated: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ.”<sup>117</sup> It was the passages that promoted equality, and stated that there were no differences between groups that were omitted, such as this verse from Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>118</sup> Verses that involved slavery, bondage, and obedience were kept in, while verses on equality and freedom were taken out.

Despite all of these efforts taken in order to keep enslaved Africans from Christianity, this did not stop the many rebellions by enslaved individuals from having heavy religious roots,

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<sup>116</sup> *Select Parts of the Holy Bible, for the Use of the Negro Slaves, in the British West-India Islands.*

<sup>117</sup> Eph 6:5

<sup>118</sup> Gal 3:28

whether those roots were in their own religious systems or in Christian religious systems. Enslaved or freed Black religious leaders have used their religion in order to promote, and encourage acts of resistance all throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. Tacky the leader of the Tacky's Revolt of 1760 used the Afro-Caribbean religion known as Obeah, to bond and encourage the enslaved to rebel. Dutty Boukman leader and Houngan presided over a Vodou ritual at Bois Caïman that started the Haitian Revolution of 1791. John Smith was a missionary who went to Demerara seemingly inspiring Quamina Gladstone and his son, Jack Gladstone, to rebel against their rough treatment as enslaved men in Demerara during 1823. In the case of the Baptist War; Samuel Sharpe and George Taylor used Christianity as a means to house, organize, inspire, and justify an act of resistance.

However, Christianity had a more prominent role throughout the Baptist War of 1831. British missionaries were blamed by the British officials for being the true cause of the rebellion, due to their roles of trying to help bring Christianity to the enslaved communities throughout Jamaica, despite being against the obvious issues that the planters had against enslaved Jamaicans having access to Christianity. In the hands of the enslaved religious leaders in Jamaica, Christianity was used to not only question the justification of slavery by the planters, but to prove by using the planters own religion that they are entitled to be equal and free. Samuel Sharpe used Christianity to gather enslaved people and discuss the contradictory nature of the planters justification of slavery, used religious systems and parishes to house meetings on potential freedom to be given from the King. Christianity proved to be a reason for enslaved Jamaicans to meet and organize, under the guise of religious meetings.

While Samuel Sharpe used Christianity to organize meetings, develop a plan, inspire and bond others to resist, this act was not originally planned to be the huge rebellion it eventually became. The initial plan was just a peaceful labor strike but quickly turned into a full blown rebellion due to the pre existing tensions between the planters, enslaved Jamaicans, and missionaries. A rebellion did break out, and it is the following events of that rebellion that show how the British officials, blamed different individuals for the rebellion, and as a result gave credit to those who ultimately did not deserve it.

This thesis has shown that the enslaved people of Jamaica used Christianity to justify and fight for their freedom, but British officials often credited British missionaries. In doing so, the British officials denied Black religious leaders of their agency, which ultimately led to an overwhelming amount of archival sources on the missionaries yet virtually nothing on the religious leaders who were the backbone of the rebellion. Throughout the research done for this thesis, there has been an underwhelming amount of archival sources regarding the Black religious leaders such as Samuel Sharpe. Sharpe is considered one of Jamaica's heroes, and is credited for inspiring the Baptist War which led to the 1833 Emancipation Act, however the archives remember the British missionaries such as: Thomas Burchell, James Phillippo, Henry Bleby and William Knibb. Due to there being an extreme lack of voices from Black religious leaders in the archives, the main way that these leaders were remembered were from court cases, testimonies, confessions, and personal accounts from the missionaries themselves. These religious leaders deserve proper recognition throughout all media, especially the archives, by the British officials giving credit to the missionaries they denied the agency of the Black religious

leaders and led to a habit of the archives lacking the voices of the Black men and women who shaped history and the world.

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