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Slaves and Peasants in the Era of Emancipation

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Abstract:	During the era when British antislavery was ascendant, from the middle of the eighteenth century to the late 1830s, the idea of enslaved people as 'peasants' was a commonplace among defenders of slavery. Concomitantly, antislavery advocates hoped that freedpeople might become a 'peasantry' after the abolition of slavery. This article explores how the idea of slaves-as-peasants, a fantasy of black labour on sugar plantations as simultaneously rural, idyllic, grateful and respectful of hierarchy was co-produced by slave-owners and abolitionists. Ideas about the 'amelioration' of slavery that were prominent in the later eighteenth century overlapped with comparisons between slave labourers and British 'peasants' in an era of widespread crisis for British farm-workers. The institution of the 'provision ground' in Britain's sugar colonies became a basis for imagining enslaved workers as 'peasants.' The slave-as-peasant was invoked by slave-owners to defend slavery and by abolitionists to argue for emancipation. British antislavery, at least in its most prominent and mainstream iterations, adopted ideas promoted by slave-owners about the suitability of black workers for sugar production, and about the necessity of white management over even free black labour.

Slaves and Peasants in the Era of Emancipation

In 1830, a wave of arson, riot and machine-breaking broke across Kent and other centres of British commercial farming. Anxious landlords found poison-pen letters from 'Swing,' demanding relief from rent, access to enclosed waste-lands, and cheaper beer and food. In London, booksellers rushed pamphlets on the 'life of Swing' to press. Radicals blamed the Swing riots on greedy absentee proprietors and on the wild fluctuations in the price of corn during and after the wars with France.[1] Conservatives proposed that 'Swing' had "learned his enmity to thrashing-instruments" from Luddite kin in Lancashire and "took up the dreadful practice of setting fire to hay … from his Irish cousin." However, whether government had ultimately failed the farm-labourers or whether they had failed themselves, no one denied the role industrialisation and enclosure had played in the "sinking of yeomanry into peasantry, and of peasantry into paupers."[2]

In Kent in 1830, cornfields and threshers burned; in Jamaica in 1831, cane-pieces and sugar works. On Christmas Day, tens of thousands of enslaved workers, led by the Baptist deacon Samuel Sharpe, put down their tools. On 27 December, fires were set across Saint James Parish on the north side of the island. After a week of skirmishing, the rebellion was suppressed. The planter-led militia began a bloody reprisal. In addition to several hundred enslaved people executed under martial law, one missionary guessed that militiamen had murdered as many as two thousand more, "shot or hanged in cold blood" in the towns and plantations of northern Jamaica.[3] Soon, a second wave of violence, this time directed at white Baptist and Methodist missionaries and preachers forced Parliament's hand. The planters

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[1] For example, *The Life and History of Swing: The Kent Rickburner* (London: R. Carlile, 1830).
[2] Charles James Blomfield, *A True Account of the Life & Death of Swing, the Rick-Burner*, 19th edition (London: Roake and Varty, 1831), 6–9, 10.
[3] *Speech of Rev. Henry Bleby, Missionary from Barbadoes, on the Results of Emancipation in the British W.I. Colonies: Delivered at the Celebration of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Held at Island Grove, Abington, July 31st, 1858* (Boston, 1858), 8.

could not be trusted, and Jamaica was a powder-keg. In 1833, Parliament passed legislation to abolish slavery in Britain's colonial empire, effective 1 August 1834.

At the beginning of the 1830s, industrialisation in England and emancipation in Jamaica were transforming British imperial political economy, and reordering society on the two islands, stitched together by slavery and the fortunes that it had helped to build. Neither island had a peasant economy. Enslaved labourers in Britain's Caribbean colonies, and particularly in land-rich colonies like Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana, often had access to provision grounds, parcels of land where they grew food for their own subsistence. Historians of Brazil debate whether or not smallholdings and provision grounds led to a 'peasant breach' in the vast hinterlands of Brazilian slave society.[4] Historians and anthropologists interested in the British world speculate that provision grounds allowed enslaved people to lead economic lives independent enough from planter control that they *might* be considered 'proto-peasants.'[5] Fully independent peasant cultivation under slavery was, however, virtually impossible in Britain's Caribbean colonies, where even the most successful enslaved market-gardener lived in the shadow of the sugar industry. In Britain itself, as Eric Hobsbawm put it, by the nineteenth century, "only the pedant can speak of a British peasantry in the continental sense" as a mere four thousand landowners owned nearly sixty percent of Britain's cultivated land, and rented it out to commercial farmers who employed nearly 1.25 million hired hands.[6] Economic historians conclude that from 1825 to 1850, the proportion of the British economy devoted to agriculture shrank from a quarter to

[4] For a broad discussion, see Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996).
[5] Sidney W. Mintz, "The Jamaican Internal Marketing Pattern: Some Notes And Hypotheses," *Social and Economic Studies* 4, no. 1 (1955): 95–103; Sidney Wilfred Mintz and Douglas Hall, *The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System*, Yale University Publications in Anthropology 57 (New Haven: Department of Anthropology, Yale University, 1960); Michael Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts? The Late Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1816-1832," *Past & Present*, no. 85 (November 1, 1979).
[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), 150.

roughly a fifth.[7] There were no 'peasants' in Britain or Jamaica. Why, then, did so many pro-slavery and abolitionist writers and policy-makers presume that enslaved people were, or could be, 'peasants'?

Nineteenth-century British colonial officials, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, reclassified rural cultivators of all kinds as 'peasants' in order to rationalise colonial governance.[8] British officials conceived of peasants in India as the substrate of an economy that they imagined to static and feudal. Neither antislavery nor pro-slavery thinkers considered enslaved people in the Caribbean empire to be part of an archaic political economy. And yet, throughout the era of the antislavery campaigns against the British slave trade and colonial slavery, from roughly the 1780s to the end of the era of 'apprenticeship' in 1838, writers on both sides of the slavery debate compared enslaved workers to 'peasants.' The comparison seems to have been first made by slave-owners hoping to blunt critiques of the hardships of slavery. The parlous lives of many British farm-labourers were a foil for slave-owners to cast the regimented and pseudo-industrial work of sugar production as Arcadian. The comparison, however, was soon absorbed into antislavery rhetoric. Enslaved people were not 'peasants,' abolitionist writers argued, but they *ought* to be. Few abolitionists actually wanted to see Britain's sugar colonies become genuine peasant economies. However, the state of British agricultural labour – fractious, prone to arson and alcoholism – made the idea of an obedient 'peasantry' that accepted emancipation as gradual, and accepted the guidance of well-meaning white missionaries and officials very appealing to antislavery Britons. The abolitionist leaders Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, for example, hoped to see former slaves emerge as a landless or land-poor class of agricultural workers. In a state of

[7] Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 203–18; Arthur Redford, *Labour Migration in England, 1800-1850*, ed. W.H. Chaloner, 3rd edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).
[8] See, for example Eric. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

freedom," they wrote, "it may be anticipated, that the condition and resources of an agricultural laborer, working for regular wages, will be, as they are in England, superior to those of the petty agriculturist" – that is to say, the peasant smallholder.[9]

The history of slaves-as-peasants fractures influential arguments about the ascendant liberalism of the 1830s. Thomas Holt made the influential argument that liberalism on the eve of the end of slavery was largely neutral on race. Officials in the Colonial Office, he suggested, imagined that black slaves and white wage-workers were motivated in similar and predictable ways by market forces. When the 'great experiment' failed to preserve the sugar economy, Holt argued, officials invoked racist ideas of black incapacity to explain the rupture.[10] The history of slaves-as-peasants shows something more complicated, and perhaps more sinister, bred into the bones of British liberalism. Theorists like Cedric Robinson have suggested that the very idea of a peasantry was by definition racialized; in feudal Europe, peasants were conceived of as having different blood than the ruling class.[11] The idea of the slave-as-peasant was explicitly racial, and posited a particular future for the sugar colonies after emancipation long before the Emancipation Act. Slaves-as-peasants did not represent a return to a pre-capitalist way of organising agriculture. Instead, they combined the idyllic aesthetic of smallholding with the discipline and regimentation of wage-labour. The idea evoked an emancipation that would place former slaves between the past and the future, and firmly under white control.

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[9] Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837: Being the Journal of a Visit to Antigua, Monsterrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, Barbadoes, and Jamaica; Undertaken for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Actual Condition of the Negro Population of Those Islands* (London, 1838), 377.

[10] See Thomas C. Holt, "The Essence of the Contract: The Articulation of Race, Gender, and Political Economy in British Emancipation Policy, 1838-1866," in *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*, by Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 33–59; Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[11] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd edition (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 26; 9–28.

Industrial capitalism and antislavery matured at the same time, in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Historians have struggled to explain precisely how these two incandescent historical processes – the furnaces and boilers, the fires in Kent and Saint James Parish – were connected to one another. Seymour Drescher divides the arguments into two camps, the 'sympathetic' and the 'critical.' 'Sympathetic' historians, Drescher among them, argue that capitalism had a positive moral valence, that it encouraged Britons to think more deeply about distant imperial markets, and that antislavery was a mass movement whose most fervent adherents lived in places animated by new capital, like Manchester.[12] 'Critical' historians, guided by Eric Williams' indelible *Capitalism & Slavery*, argue that the rise of industrial capitalism made antislavery possible by giving wealthy Britons a source of capital independent of plantation crops.[13] 'Peasants' don't seem to a have a place in either camp; they seem like atavisms in emerging capitalist modernity. And yet, the 'peasant' was ubiquitous in the antislavery debate. The debate about the relationship of capitalism to slavery and to antislavery presumes that slavery and antislavery in British policy and politics were fundamentally opposed to each other. In fact, official antislavery borrowed more from the rhetoric and practice of plantation slavery than is comfortable to admit.

Finally, the history of idea of slaves-as-peasants troubles an emerging thread in the historiography of antislavery and abolitionism. In our current political moment,

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[12] Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986), 135, and passim; Seymour Drescher, "Whose Abolition? Popular Pressure and the Ending of the British Slave Trade," *Past & Present* 143, no. 1 (May 1994): 136–66; Seymour Drescher, "The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism," *Slavery & Abolition* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 571–93; Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1975); Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 339–61; Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1, 1985): 547–66.

[13] Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, New edition (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). David Brion Davis offers a more nuanced account of the relationship between emerging capitalism and antislavery, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975). For a survey of this rich historiography, see Padraic X. Scanlan, "Blood, Money and Endless Paper: Slavery and Capital in British Imperial History," *History Compass* 14, no. 5 (May 1, 2016): 218–30.

'abolitionism' has been reconstituted by some historians of slavery and emancipation working primarily on the history of the United States as a progressive movement and a usable past for a bleak present.[14] "In prioritizing the abolition of slavery," Manisha Sinha writes, abolitionists "did not ignore and certainly did not legitimize other forms of oppression in the modern world. Only by conflating the state with the social movement can historians view abolition as the progenitor of European imperialism."[15] The history of slaves-as-peasants shows that this position – although politically seductive – cuts out vast swathes of the cultural, intellectual and social history of the end of slavery in the British world. By Sinha's definition, William Wilberforce was not an 'abolitionist.' Wilberforce was reactionary on most social issues, and his support for antislavery was rooted in a belief in the necessity of gradual emancipation. As he declared in Parliament, "The immediate emancipation of the Negroes in the West Indies could not be expected, (for that, before they could be fit to receive freedom, it would be madness to give it them)." However, he did hope for eventual emancipation, "when the Negroes in the West Indies should have the full enjoyment of a free, moral, industrious and happy peasantry."[16] It is telling that Wilberforce's speeches were quoted with approval by a pro-slavery speaker in May 1833. "Men," the speaker declared, "Must be found ready to obey and to conform" before emancipation could occur.[17]

The idea of the slave-as-peasant was fluid. Its history resists a straightforward narrative, as the idea drew force from several overlapping debates about slavery and antislavery in Britain and the British world from roughly the 1760s until the end of the period

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[14] See, notably Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2016); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Mia Bay's review of Stauffer's work has helped to put my own arguments into focus. See Mia Bay, "Abolition and the Color Line," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2003): 103–12.

[15] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 3.

[16] House of Commons Debates, 28 February 1805, volume 3, cc. 673.

[17] *The Speeches of Mr. Barrett and Mr. Burge at a General Meeting of Planters, Merchants, and Others, Interested in the West-India Colonies, Assembled at the Thatched-House Tavern on the 18th of May, 1833* (London, 1833), 97.

of apprenticeship in the former slave colonies in 1838. First, the question of whether or not slavery could be 'improved' or 'ameliorated' set out some of the basic vernacular for imagining what the life of a slave-as-peasant might resemble. Second, comparisons between poor Irish and English labourers, and especially farm-labourers, gave impetus to slave-owners to argue that enslaved people were already effectively peasants. Third, both antislavery and pro-slavery writers became fascinated with the institution of the provision ground in many of the sugar colonies. The blend of self-sufficiency and servitude it seemed to represent delighted slave-owners, and their enthusiasm spread to antislavery writers and policy-makers, who emphasised provision grounds in plans for implementing the Emancipation Act.

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The idea of the slave-as-peasant was partly rooted in eighteenth-century programs for the 'amelioration' of slavery. The related idea of 'improvement' was important to British imperial ambitions in the eighteenth century, particularly after the Seven Years War. In its original sense among political economists, to 'improve' land meant simply to increase its profitability. However, 'improvement' was a flexible and promiscuous concept, and British officials soon came to see people, and particularly colonised people, as open to 'improvement.'[18] Antislavery activists portrayed slave-owners as backward and philistine, but many West Indian planters considered themselves to be enlightened men. Planters joined agricultural societies, eagerly adopted new technologies for sugar-planting, and introduced new cultivars of sugarcane.[19] 'Improvement' shaded into the related idea that slavery could

[18] See Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
[19] Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 9–84.

be ‘ameliorated,’ that slave labour was perfectly compatible with scientific approaches to farming.[20]

Amelioration-minded planters intended to prove that their business was modern and productive; to counteract, for example, demographic data that showed that the population of Britain’s slave colonies was barely increasing, despite the arrival of huge numbers of enslaved people via the Middle Passage.[21] And yet, for planters, the project of remaking slavery in the image of enlightened modernity often fell back on classical allusion. As Britain’s empire grew, many Britons compared it, explicitly and implicitly, with ancient Rome. In *Essay upon Plantership*, an early guide to plantation management, Samuel Martin compared a sugar planter to a Roman dictator, “resigning, with pleasure, all the pomp of a triumph to till his little farm; as if Agriculture was the only genuine parent of ease, innocence, temperance, health, wisdom and fortitude.”[22] Imperial noblesse required slave-owners to consider amelioration. Or, as Martin put it, “Every man who then wishes to grow rich with ease, must be a good oeconomist; must feed his negroes the most wholesome food.” He also recommended that enslaved people have access to provision grounds.[23]

Plantations were, per Sidney Mintz, “an unusual combination of agricultural and industrial forms,” of sugar-cane fields worked by enslaved labourers organised into highly regimented ‘gangs’ and centred around the proto-industrial grinders, boiling houses and

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[20] On the era of amelioration, see J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Robert E. Luster, *The Amelioration of the Slaves in the British Empire, 1790-1833* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Melanie J. Newton, “The King v. Robert James, a Slave, for Rape: Inequality, Gender, and British Slave Amelioration, 1823-1834,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 3 (2005): 583–610; Christa Dierksheide, *Amelioration and Empire: Progress and Slavery in the Plantation Americas* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014); Caroline Quarrier Spence, “Ameliorating Empire: Slavery and Protection in the British Colonies, 1783-1865” (Ph.D., Harvard University, 2014); Trevor Burnard and Kit Candlin, “Sir John Gladstone and the Debate over the Amelioration of Slavery in the British West Indies in the 1820s,” *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 4 (October 2018): 760–82.

[21] On amelioration, gender and child-bearing, see especially Katherine Paugh, “The Politics of Childbearing in the British Caribbean and the Atlantic World during the Age of Abolition, 1776–1838,” *Past & Present* 221, no. 1 (November 1, 2013): 119–60.

[22] Samuel Martin, *An Essay upon Plantership*, 4th edition (Antigua & London: Samuel Clapham & A. Millar, 1765), viii.

[23] Martin, 3–4.

distilleries that produced sugar and rum.[24] Amelioration-minded planters emphasised the rural over the industrial. *The Sugar-Cane* (1764), a long pastoral poem by James Grainger was a deliberate attempt to paint sugar-planting in Georgic aesthetics.[25] However, the poem tells on itself, showing the tension between the industrial scale of sugar production and planters' stylised rural idyll. Across four books, *The Sugar-Cane* apostrophises Roman gods and leading European agriculturalists, and offers advice on every aspect of plantation management, from cane cleaning to boiling syrup to controlling enslaved workers. Grainger argued for amelioration, urging planters to offer enslaved workers access to medical care, food, provision grounds, adequate rest and labour-saving technology. "Might not the plough that rolls on rapid wheels," Grainger rhapsodised, "Save no small labour to the hoe-arm'd gang?"[26] Claire Midgley argues that this pastoral vision of plantation slavery was intended to reconcile eighteenth-century ideas about commerce as a force for "progress, culture and civilization" with the violence of slave-ownership.[27] It did more than that; the rural aesthetic promoted by planters placed enslaved people between the past and future, classical peasants working in gruellingly modern conditions.

In *History of Jamaica*, perhaps the most widely-read eighteenth-century book written about the colony, Edward Long looked with envy at the 'improved' colonies of the French empire. "The French," Long wrote, "are such formidable competitors, and our own colonies so ill regulated in many respects."[28] Long hoped to imitate the scientific experimentation and

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[24] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 48.
[25] *The Sugar-Cane* has perhaps had a larger impact in studies of eighteenth-century Caribbean literature. See John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger's The Sugar Cane* (London & New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press, 2000); Cristobal Silva, "Georgic Fantasies: James Grainger and the Poetry of Colonial Dislocation," *ELH* 83, no. 1 (March 15, 2016): 127–56.
[26] James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane, a Poem: In Four Books* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1764), 23.
[27] Clare Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti- slavery Culture," *Slavery & Abolition* 17, no. 3 (December 1, 1996): 141, https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399608575190.
[28] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island, With Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, vol. 1 (London, 1774), 402. NEW WORK FROM CATHERINE HALL

adoption of new technologies among French planters. He was a member of several agricultural societies, and an active proponent of "grounding this science [of agriculture] upon actual experiment."[29] Long also admired France's slave empire for its legal code, the *code noir*, which provided enslaved people with limited legal rights, and – in theory – some recourse in cases of abuse. Early promoters of antislavery, including James Ramsay and Beilby Porteus, as well as Adam Smith and Edmund Burke also admired the French *code noir*. In the Spanish slave colonies, the office of the *procurador*, who was responsible for hearing the complaints of the enslaved against slave-owners, also appealed to many proponents of amelioration. In the era of the American Revolution, the earliest British plans for emancipation drew inspiration from another Spanish colonial custom, *coartación*, which permitted enslaved people to earn money in order to purchase their own manumission.[30] Britain's annexation of Trinidad in 1802 made the island into a kind of natural experiment in legal amelioration in the three decades before emancipation; the office of the *procurador* became the office of the Protector of Slaves, and the island became the focus of attention from policy-makers hoping to prove the worth of amelioration policies.[31]

Amelioration policies presumed that enslaved people would respond to improved working conditions with more, and more reliable, labour. And yet, another thread in Enlightenment political economy worried planters and abolitionists. The question of how to motivate people to work was a practical and philosophical problem among eighteenth-century political economists. Northern Europeans, in particular, wondered why they worked so much 'harder' than anybody else. In Chapter 14 of the *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu speculated that people from colder climates were larger and more vigorous than people from warmer

[29] Long, 1:436.
[30] Matthew Wyman-McCarthy, "Perceptions of French and Spanish Slave Law in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 1 (January 2018): 29–52, https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.179; Christopher L. Brown, "Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 56, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 273–306.
[31] Spence, "Ameliorating Empire."

climates. This, he argued, was because the action of nerves was delayed by cold temperatures. He tested this theory by examining a sheep's tongue before and after freezing, and observing the changes that cold seemed to cause to nerve fibres. "In cold countries," he concluded, "the nervous glands are less expanded: they sink deeper into their sheaths …consequently they have not such lively sensations."[32] People in cold countries, he concluded, must work harder to be satisfied and are less sensitive to pleasure and pain, while people from warmer climates can work less to achieve the same degree of happiness, and are more acutely sensitive (and averse) to the pain associated with physical labour. Concomitant with the variable effects of climate on the capacity for work was the idea that northern bodies were unsuitable for labour in hot climates; that lighter and darker skin was a kind of geographic destiny. These two ideas, that climate shaped the capacity for labour and that darker-skinned people were better-adapted to working in the tropics dovetailed neatly with the expansion of African slavery in the Caribbean. No leading British abolitionist seriously considered the possibility that the end of slavery would mean the end of some system of coercion; without one, emancipated people might not work at all.[33]

As planters offered a stylised, pseudo-classical vision of 'improved' slavery and abolitionists searched for legal models for gradual emancipation, other Enlightenment figures turned their attention to the Irish, the largest body of peasant cultivators in the British archipelago. The Irish became a template for a colonised people who were vigorous at play and lazy at work. The prominent agriculturist Arthur Young was perhaps the most influential ethnographer of the Irish peasantry, a people he characterised as charitable and friendly, hospitable and talkative, "lazy to an excess at work, but so spiritedly active at play."[34]

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[32] Charles de Secondat Montesquieu Baron de, *The Spirit of Laws, with d'Alembert's Analysis of the Work*, trans. Thomas Nugent, New edition, vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 240.
[33] Climatological thinking also applied to schemes for free black settlers across the British empire and in the United States. See Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[34] Arthur Young, *A Tour in Ireland, 1776-1779*, ed. Henry Morley, Cassell & Company (London, 1897), 181.

Young's published *Tour in Ireland* was also clear-eyed about the reality of coercion and power even among nominally free people. Young was struck by the impunity and arbitrary power of the Roman Catholic Church and of Irish landlords, Catholic and Protestant. "To discover what the liberty of the people is," Young wrote, "we must live among them, and not look for it in the statutes of the realm: the language of written law may be that of liberty, but the situation of the poor may speak no language but that of slavery."[35] Young was repelled by the power of landlords to beat their tenants, to demand sex with their wives, and to seize their livestock and goods without consequence. He did not, however, object in principle to the basic structure of landholding in Ireland. The bred-in-the-bone laziness of Irish workers required some sort of coercion, but one that was strictly regulated by imperial authorities.

The admixture of respect for science and progress and comfort with the exercise of authority over people judged to be on a lower social stratum that characterised the Enlightened pursuit of amelioration leached into the earliest plans for emancipation in the British world, written in the wake of the American Revolution and pivoting on the reassertion of imperial power over the British Atlantic empire.[36] James Ramsay made an explicit argument for amelioration as a path to distant emancipation in his *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves* (1784), concluding the book with a plan that would promote marriage and protect family life, standardise the distribution of provision grounds, food and clothing, add legal protections for enslaved people, and create an office for an official 'protector or judge.' Amelioration, Ramsay wrote, would "by slow and sure steps," lead to enslaved people enjoying "the full participation of every social privilege."[37] In the meantime, Ramsay imagined that the slave trade itself could become a pipeline to the

[35] Young, 165–66.
[36] See Brown, "Empire without Slaves"; Christopher Leslie Brown, "From Slaves to Subjects: Envisioning an Empire without Slavery, 1772-1834," in *Black Experience and the Empire [OHBE Companion Series]*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–40.
[37] James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: John Phillips, 1784), 290.

improved West Indies, "ultimately a blessing to thousands of wretches, who, left in their native country, would dragged out a life of miserable ignorance."[38] As the campaign to abolish the slave trade gained ground, antislavery Britons no longer imagined the slave trade as at least potentially a positive good for enslaved people. However, the idea of the slave trade as a force for amelioration carried over into defences of slavery. Bryan Edwards, who after Edward Long was perhaps the most prominent British writer on the British West Indies, claimed that slaves were primarily recruited from among criminals, who would otherwise be executed. "Africa," Edwards wrote, "is not only one hundred, but perhaps one thousand time larger and more populous than Great Britain," and so the slave trade represented "just so many lives saved."[39]

In the 1790s and early 1800s, emancipation seemed practically impossible to most prominent British abolitionists. As the French Revolution accelerated, and as revolutionary war erupted in Saint-Domingue, culminating in Haitian independence in 1804, gradual emancipation solidified as the consensus among the leaders of Parliamentary and public antislavery. Ending the slave trade, however, could be framed as a way of forcing West Indian planters to treat enslaved people with more 'humanity' and as a way of rescuing African 'fellow creatures' from the physical torment of the Middle Passage. By design, the 1807 Slave Trade Act harnessed the naval war effort by offering incentives to Royal Navy officers to capture slave ships.[40] The West Indian colonies coped with the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 by encouraging 'improvement' schemes for sugar planting, by experimenting with new ways of coercing more, and more productive, labour out of enslaved

[38] Ramsay, 292–93.
[39] Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 4th edition, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1806), 391.
[40] See Padraic X. Scanlan, "The Rewards of Their Exertions: Prize Money and British Abolitionism in Sierra Leone, 1808–1823," *Past & Present* 225, no. 1 (November 1, 2014): 113–42; Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom's Debtors: British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

people, by promoting child-bearing among enslaved women and introducing nominal protection for expectant mothers and mothers of young children – and, presumably, by taking every opportunity to purchase enslaved people from smugglers.

In the 1820s, as the British antislavery movement gained new momentum, the aesthetic of amelioration re-emerged in beautifully-illustrated books like James Hakewill's *Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica*, portraying plantation slavery as primarily rural and rooted in an organic social order.[41] Jeffrey Auerbach argues that the particular tropes of the picturesque – the dark foreground, the bright middle-ground, the honeyed lighting effects – smoothed over the often hostile and monotonous aspects of most imperial landscapes. "The artists who produced these works," he writes, "should be thought of as publicists for the idea of empire."[42] The art historian Sarah Thomas has shown that planters actively patronised artists like the Anglo-Italian Agostino Brunias, whose paintings summoned "a vision of contented and well-appointed slaves dancing, selling produce at market, leisurely washing clothes in luxuriant tropical landscapes." Thomas argues that this aesthetic appealed to early antislavery leaders nearly as much as to planters, and affirms that by the turn of the nineteenth century, "amelioration was not only being advocated by planters but by leading abolitionists too."[43] The fundamental difference between slave-owning and antislavery amelioration was the expected outcome of amelioration policies: For antislavery writers, amelioration would lead to gradual emancipation. For slave-owners, it would preserve the institution of slavery and forestall emancipation, perhaps indefinitely.

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[41] James Hakewill, *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica* (London: Hurst and Robinson, 1825); William Clark, *Ten Views in the Island of Antigua: In Which Are Represented the Process of Sugar Making, and the Employment of the Negroes in the Field, Boiling-House, and Distillery.* (London: Thomas Clay, 1823).
[42] Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 61.
[43] Sarah Thomas, "Envisaging a Future for Slavery: Agostino Brunias and the Imperial Politics of Labor and Reproduction," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 52, no. 1 (October 24, 2018): 115–16; See also Paugh, "The Politics of Childbearing in the British Caribbean and the Atlantic World during the Age of Abolition, 1776–1838"; Burnard and Candlin, "Sir John Gladstone and the Debate over the Amelioration of Slavery in the British West Indies in the 1820s."

The preoccupation with regulating and controlling bodily harm was a central preoccupation of the movement to end the slave trade. Thomas Clarkson's *Summary View of the Slave Trade*, a widely-read and inexpensive pamphlet summarising the case for abolition, emphasised the physical cruelties of the Middle Passage, the wasted potential of West Africa as a market for British goods, and as a source of sugar, cotton and other tropical commodities, and the unfairness of Africans being falsely accused of crimes and pushed into slavery.[44] In response to lobbying by the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the Lords' Committee of the Privy Council produced a report examining the state of the trade. The planters and managers the Privy Council interviewed agreed that slave labour was absolutely necessary for growing sugar. The Council and Assembly of Montserrat, for example, replied to queries from London that "no European Constitution could subsist under the Labour necessary" for sugar planting in the West Indies, "neither could it be done by Free Negroes." The work was too demanding, and would require "the strictest military Discipline to enforce Obedience to Orders." Free white labourers were climactically incapable, and free black labourers were of "an idle Habit and Disposition."[45] Other West Indian officials were more circumspect. The Agent for Barbados told the Committee that freedom for enslaved people in the colony "would not alter the Condition of the Negroes … until they are brought to have artificial Wants … they would not, were they left to themselves, work for Pay, but be idle and vicious." He did, however, recommend that the "Rigours of Slavery" be softened.[46] Ideas of amelioration, passed between slave-owners and abolitionists, always presumed that whether slavery persisted or ended, people of African descent would need some form of

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[44] Thomas Clarkson, *A Summary View of the Slave Trade and of the Probable Consequences of Its Abolition* (London: John Phillips, 1787).

[45] *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council Appointed for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations; Submitting to His Majesty's Consideration the Evidence and Information They Have Collected in Consequence of His Majesty's Order in Council, Dated the 11th of February 1788, Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa, and Particularly the Trade in Slaves; and Concerning the Effects and Consequences of This Trade, as Well in Africa and the West Indies, as to the General Commerce of This Kingdom.* (London, 1789), pts. III, Montserrat, A. no. 39.

[46] *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council [1789]*, pt. III. Barbados, A. No. 2.

coercion to keep them bound to the sugar industry. The slave-as-peasant came to embody this tension.

2.

Progressive slave-owners and defenders of slavery appealed to amelioration to justify slave-ownership, while abolitionists imagined amelioration to be a safe and slow pathway to emancipation. Comparisons between enslaved workers and poor British workers were another source for the idea of the slave-as-peasant. Partly, the aesthetic of planter amelioration relied on the idea of the oppressed white worker to conjure the happy 'peasant' enslaved worker. Grainger's *Sugar-Cane*, for example apostrophised an enslaved worker and asked, "How far more pleasant is thy rural task … / Hath the afflicted muse, in Scotia, seen / The miners rack'd, who toil for fatal lead? / …Yet white men these!"[47] Bryan Edwards went further, at the turn of the nineteenth century, mooting the idea of binding enslaved workers to the land, like peasants living under serfdom. "Let the negroes be attached to the land," he wrote, "and sold with it. The good effect of a similar regulation in the system of ancient villanage has been pointed out and illustrated."[48] Throughout his *History*, Edwards emphasised that enslaved people lived under better conditions than most wage-workers. "On the whole," Edwards wrote, "if human life, in its best state, is a combination of happiness and misery, and we are to consider that condition of political society as relatively good, in which, notwithstanding many disadvantages, the lower classes are easily supplied with the means of healthy subsistence," then slave societies were actually more morally upright than free-labour societies.[49] Amelioration policies had emphasised improving the material conditions of slavery; the logical next step was to compare those conditions to those of British workers.

[47] Grainger, *Sugar-Cane*, 169–70.
[48] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, 1806, 2:369–70.
[49] Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 4th ed., vol. 4 (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1806), 15.

Enslaved people, Edwards wrote, did not need to worry about the future in the way that, for example, landless English agricultural labourers had to. "They well know," Edward wrote, "that moderate labour, unaccompanied with that wretched anxiety to which the poor of England are subject in making provision for the day that is passing over them, is a state of comparative felicity."[50]

As abolitionists denied that wage workers could be compared to slaves, more and more Britons were turning their attention to the parlous living conditions of farm workers. The beginning of the wars with Revolutionary France, and news of the uprising in the Vendée drew the attention of the public to the British 'peasantry.' In the midst of a war that redefined what it meant to be British, and particularly after the French Revolution, radical organisations devoted to expanding the franchise like the London Corresponding Society traded pamphlets with Tory stalwarts like Hannah More, whose Cheap Repository Tracts, intended to inculcate respect for the British constitution and good order among poor rural Britons, sold close to 2 million copies between 1792 and 1796.[51] George Crabbe's poem "The Village," a mock-pastoral poem that contrasts with the earnest *Sugar-Cane*, evokes pathos with classical metre portraying the reality of rural life where an old cottager "journeys to his grave in pain" as "alternate masters now their slave command, / And urge the efforts of his feeble hand" [52] Throughout the last decade of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, dozens and dozens of pamphlets, books and Parliamentary Papers were published on what was generally called 'agricultural distress.' An 1807 tract summarised one way of thinking about the problem. "The welfare of the Peasant," James Brewer wrote, "is the object ever nearest the heart of the Patriot. If the natural wealth of a country consist in the produce of its soil, its natural strength equally rests on those who cultivate its bosom." But the English

[50] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, 1806, 2:237.
[51] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), 468.
[52] George Crabbe, *The Village: A Poem. In Two Books* (London: J. Dodsley, 1783), 13–14.

peasant was in decline. Where "in the times of the preceding generation," English peasants had been "blest with content and manly independence," now they pushed onto the parish rolls and into the streets.[53] The British virtue of 'independence' was under threat. As one clergyman and poet wrote, "Behold our peasantry! Britannia's pride … / A pittance from the tyrant of the soil / Is all that pays him for his dismal toil; / Then home he wanders to a cheerless shed, / With discontented heart and aching head."[54]

The decline of the English peasantry as a consequence of the convulsions of the age of revolutions did not deter British slave-owners in the West Indies from invoking British peasants as equivalent to enslaved people. In 1808 in Demerara, the Dutch sugar colony on the Caribbean coast of South America (formally ceded to Britain in 1815), a British visitor noted that British-owned slaves seemed to be taking on some of the characteristics of their putative owners. "A certain erect carriage in John Bull imperceptibly introduces itself into the address of the English negroes," he wrote, and their influence "may in the course of time bring the slaves in the West Indies on a level with the English peasantry of the day."[55] Historians have noticed the deep connections between ideas of poverty and ideas of slavery.[56] As Edmund Morgan argued in *American Slavery, American Freedom*, Thomas Jefferson's conscience-stricken desire to end slavery in Virginia was checked by his fear that enslaved people would be set free into landless vagrancy.[57] Indeed, Edward Long defended slavery as a solution to poverty, as a way of keeping people safely in place. "The rich," Long wrote,

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[53] James Norris Brewer, *Some Thoughts on the Present State of the English Peasantry: Written in Consequence of Mr. Whitbread's Motion, in the House of Commons, Feb. 19, 1807; Relative to an Amendment of the Poor Laws* (London: H.D. Symonds, 1807), 3,7.
[54] Robert Montgomery, *Selections from the Poetical Works of Robert Montgomery, with Intr. Remarks and an Appendix* (London: E. Churton, 1835), 296–97.
[55] Henry Bolingbroke, *A Voyage to the Demerary: Containing a Statistical Account of the Settlements There, and of Those on the Essequebo, the Berbice, and Other Contiguous Rivers of Guyana* (London: Richard Phillips, 1809), 48.
[56] See Christopher M. Florio, "From Poverty to Slavery: Abolitionists, Overseers, and the Global Struggle for Labor in India," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 4 (March 1, 2016): 1005–24.
[57] Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).

"are the natural enemies of the poor; and the poor, of the rich; like the ingredients of a boiling cauldron, they seem to be in perpetual warfare … yet, if both parties could compose themselves, the *faeces* would remain peaceably at the bottom."[58] Antislavery writers in Britain were also uncomfortable with the poor. In his heavily didactic novel of the conversion of a British-educated sugar planter to Christianity and patriarchal humanitarianism, John Riland's West Indian narrator comments on the impecuniousness of working-class weavers in Lancashire: "Families which to-day might be seen gnawing a decayed cabbage-stalk to sustain life, would tomorrow be drenched in their former sins; provided tomorrow brought them the means of renewed sensuality."[59] Paupers were dangerous; but 'peasants' seemed less so.

As David Brion Davis dryly put it, "The constant comparisons in abolitionist literature between the agony of black slaves and the smiling, contented life of English husbandmen was not fortuitous."[60] In order to shield their movement from accusations of radicalism or Jacobitism, leading antislavery writers emphasised the harmonious world of labour in Britain and the physical pain of slavery. Antislavery writers who made this rhetorical move tacitly accepted the idea framed by Bryan Edwards in defence of slavery, that the measure of a society could be taken based on the material conditions of life of its lowest classes. This was not the only argument presented by abolitionists, but the visibility of images like the famous print of the slave ship *Brookes* crammed with enslaved people made it particularly prominent. The argument also seemed to have logical implications which advocates for slavery leapt upon. If it could be proved that slavery was less painful than industrial work, it might imply that it was less pernicious, or even a positive good. Alternatively, if slavery wasn't physically painful, it might not even be as immoral as

[58] Long, *History of Jamaica*, 1774, 1:25.
[59] John Riland, *Memoirs of a West-India Planter* (London, 1827), 80.
[60] David Brion Davis, "Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (October 1, 1987): 803.

exploitative industrial work. Throughout the 1790s, as the slave trade was scrutinised more carefully in Parliament and British readers worried about the state of British agricultural labourers, slave-owners struggled to claim the high ground of amelioration, and latched onto a comparison between white poverty and black slavery as a way of framing antislavery as hypocrisy. "Let the legislature look if there be no slaves of their own religion, and colour in England" wrote one pamphleteer.[61]

Moreover, as Justin Roberts comments, in the eighteenth century, many Anglo-American reformers "insisted on the morally redemptive and socially useful potential of work and the need for discipline and even coerced labor to inculcate habits of industry among the able-bodied poor, slaves, and criminals."[62] Antislavery reformers worried often about potential connections between English labourers and colonial slaves. The end of the slave trade and the end of slavery were intended to bring freedpeople into the light of British liberty and social order. Consequently, it was important for antislavery reformers to insist on both the integrity and comity of British rural society and on the rigid distinction between the enslaved colonies and free Britain. Thomas Clarkson, in an 1823 essay, insisted that he could not allow "that *soft lodging*, or *good eating and drinking*, or *fine clothing*, form the *principal enjoyments of a human being* … Indeed what is it that constitutes the best part of a man's happiness? It is liberty."[63] Henry Whiteley, the author of an 1833 pamphlet, *Three Months in Jamaica*, that was written to expose the depredations of slave-owners toward both enslaved people and missionaries, and of which 200,000 copies were printed and distributed in just two weeks by anti-slavery campaigners, also emphasised the bright line between slavery and

[61] William Beckford, *Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica: Impartially Made from a Local Experience of Nearly Thirteen Years in That Island* (London: T. and J. Egerton, Military Library, Whitehall, 1788), 56.
[62] Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment*, 51.
[63] Thomas Clarkson, *Negro Slavery: The Argument "That the Colonial Slaves Are Better Off than the British Peasantry," Answered, From the Jamaica Royal Gazette of June 21, 1823* (London, 1823), 99.

wage work.[64] "The condition of the factory children is certainly very deplorable, and calls loudly for amelioration," Whiteley wrote, urging cooperation between the antislavery campaign and the movement for factory reform. However, in comparison with slavery, "the former is very bad: the latter is INFINITELY WORSE."[65] And yet, by emphasising the differences between British rural poverty and colonial slavery, antislavery reformers reinforced the comparison. 'Emancipation' proved to be as promiscuous an idea in the liberal 1830s as 'amelioration' and 'improvement' had been in the Enlightened 1780s and 1790s. By 1834, reformers framed the New Poor Law as the 'emancipation' of the British poor from the 'false charity' of the Elizabethan poor rolls and the 1795 Speenhamland system of guaranteed income.[66] After British emancipation, American arguments for slavery also often hinged on comparisons with British wage-workers. In 1836, the pro-slavery writer James Paulding insisted, "Among the slaves of the United States are neither paupers or beggars … and of all the labouring men of this world, they are the most free from the besetting evils of laborious poverty."[67] Years of amelioration policies that emphasised material improvement made it harder to claim that the argument over slavery hadn't, in some sense, been framed as a comparison between the lives of wage workers and the lives of enslaved workers.

The end of the slave trade opened space for antislavery activists to press their attack on slavery by demanding the registration of all enslaved people in British colonies, and by imposing more and more regulations on slave-ownership. But slave-owners also took up this idea. Under amelioration, slave-owners adopted the image of the enslaved person as a happy peasant to stall emancipation for as long as possible. Amelioration policies, land out in Parliament by George Canning in 1823, were a compromise between a slave-owning class

[64] Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, 147.
[65] Henry Whiteley, *Three Months in Jamaica, in 1832: Comprising a Residence of Seven Weeks on a Sugar Plantation* (London, 1833), 22.
[66] Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, 357–85; Davis, "Reflections on Abolitionism and Ideological Hegemony."
[67] James Kirke Paulding, *Slavery in the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), 265.

that remained politically powerful and an antislavery movement that feared the consequences of immediate and unconditional emancipation. In the 1820s, Henry Coleridge rejected the idea of parity between enslaved people and English peasants. "I scorn with an English scorn the creole thought that the West Indian slaves are better off than the poor peasantry of Britain," he wrote. However, he averred that "it is nevertheless a certain truth that the slaves in general do labor much less, do eat and drink much more, have much more ready money, dress much more gaily, and are treated with more kindness and attention, when sick, than nine-tenths of all the people of Great Britain under the condition of tradesmen, farmers and domestic servants."[68] The English poor were free and unhappy; willing to work for their keep no matter the circumstances. "We must bring the motives which induce an English rustic to labor to bear upon the negro; when the negro peasant will work regularly like the white peasant, then he ought to be as free."[69] In his memoirs of his time visiting his plantations in Jamaica, the absentee slave-owner and popular novelist Matthew Gregory Lewis described a village of enslaved people in Jamaica, and commented, ""I believe their condition to be much more comfortable than that of the labourers of Great Britain; and, after all, slavery, in *their* case, is but another name for servitude."[70]

Writing in 1826 in supported of a revivified British antislavery movement, Wilberforce regretted not including provisions for eventual emancipation in the legislation that abolished the slave trade in 1807. He wrote that he had always imagined that the end of the slave trade would set the slave colonies on the path to emancipation. Without a reliable supply of enslaved labour, Wilberforce had imagined, planters would be forced to treat enslaved people with more consideration, by introducing religious instruction and eliminating the use of corporal punishment. In due course, "the slaves would have become qualified for

[68] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies, in 1825* (London: John Murray, 1826), 313.
[69] Coleridge, 319.
[70] Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor : Kept during a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London: John Murray, 1834), 62, http://archive.org/details/journalofwestind00lewiuoft.

the enjoyment of liberty," which would have been a "blessed transmutation … of a degraded slave population into a free and industrious peasantry."[71] The entanglement of slavery with poverty and peasantry was as much a feature of antislavery thought as it was a feature of cynical defences of slavery itself.

3.

Historians interested in the emergence of the post-emancipation agricultural life of the British West Indies, and particularly of Jamaica, have long been interested in whether or not enslaved people could be considered 'proto-peasants.'[72] The institution of the provision ground has been central to this debate. Jamaica is mountainous and relatively large, compared with Britain's other sugar islands (although not in comparison with Cuba or Hispaniola). From early in the colony's history, enslaved people were assigned plots of land in areas unsuitable for sugar cultivation in which to grow provisions to feed themselves, supplemented by rations of salt-fish and other foodstuffs. Over time, provision grounds came to feed not only enslaved people, but also white overseers and planters, as well as people living in the larger towns, particularly Kingston. Provision grounds were also a feature of plantation management in the newer, less-cultivated colonies ceded to Britain during the wars of the age of revolution, like British Guiana and Trinidad. Even heavily-cultivated colonies like Barbados relied to a certain extent on crops grown by enslaved people and sold in public markets by market-women.[73] Antigua, as Natasha Lightfoot shows, chose immediate emancipation over apprenticeship in part because planters there were confident that land

[71] William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London: Hatchard, 1823), 26.
[72] Mintz, "The Jamaican Internal Marketing Pattern"; Mintz and Hall, *The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System*; Craton, "Proto-Peasant Revolts?"
[73] Hilary Beckles, "An Economic Life of Their Own: Slaves as Commodity Producers and Distributors in Barbados," in *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 31–47.

scarcity would immediately push emancipation toward wage labour on sugar estates.[74] Historians and anthropologists interested in provision grounds have argued that they introduced an element of smallholding and independent marketing to the lives of at least some enslaved people, laying the groundwork for the emergence of a genuinely free peasantry, existing on the margins of plantation agriculture which the geographer Tony Weis identifies as "the foundations of most Caribbean societies" until the arrival of neoliberal structural adjustment policies.[75]

However, slave-owners also used the provision ground as evidence that enslaved people were already the contented peasantry that abolitionists wanted them to become. Provision grounds are difficult to find in the archives; they were essential to the operation of plantations, but were generally outside the remit of plantation overseers. As one plantation manager told a parliamentary inquiry when asked about what he knew about provision grounds: "It is difficult to have a minute knowledge of what they do."[76] The Jamaica Assembly occasionally passed laws demanding that enslaved people devote more of their grounds to 'ground provisions' – low-lying plants that were more resistant to hurricanes and gales than fruit trees or tall plantain or banana plants. The mysteries of the provision grounds allowed planters to fantasise about their spectacular fertility and productivity. Bryan Edwards insisted, "The most industrious of the Negroes do not, I believe, employ more than sixteen hours in a month in the cultivation of their own provision-gardens (leaving all further care of them to the beneficence of nature)."[77] This statistic, which is either an invention or hearsay, became a commonplace for both slave-owners and abolitionists. Early in his career as a

[74] Natasha Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).
[75] Tony Weis, "The Rise, Fall and Future of the Jamaican Peasantry," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 61.
[76] Testimony of William Taylor, 6 June 1832, *1831-32 (721) Report from Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery throughout the British Dominions: With the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, Reports of Committees (London: Great Britain, House of Commons, 1831), 8.
[77] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, 1806, 2:162.

writer and statesman, Henry Brougham offered an extended commentary on the colonial policies of France and Spain, prompted by France's loss of Saint-Domingue to the Haitian Revolution and by Britain's acquisition of Trinidad. Brougham concluded that although it pained him, slavery seemed to be necessary for the colonisation of any new tropical colonies. Brougham cited Edwards (while shaving an hour off of Edwards' account of labour on provision grounds), writing that "Out of the six days per month … which are allowed them in Jamaica … the more industrious [enslaved people] do not allot above fifteen hours to this employment."[78] The statistic whispered down the alley, and 'hours per week' changed into 'days per year.' After emancipation, a jurist appointed to manage the relationship between former slaves and former slave-owners commented, that "It is well known that a negro in 16 days will plant as much provisions as will do for himself and family for a year."[79] The alleged bounty of provision grounds allowed both slave-owners and abolitionists to make at least two conclusions about the future of black labour in Britain's sugar colonies. First, provision grounds seemed to prove that black labourers – enslaved or free – needed to be compelled to work, since the soil provided too much food with too little work to make the threat of starvation a motivating force. Second, provision grounds seemed to prove that black workers ought to be available for work on sugar plantations in slavery or freedom, since their own farms required virtually no cultivation.

Edwards also praised provision grounds as providing "a happy coalition of interests between the master and the slave. The negro who has acquired by his own labour a property in his master's land, has much to lose … He earns a little money, by which he is enabled to indulge himself in fine clothes on holydays, and gratify his palate with salted meats and other

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[78] Henry Brougham, *An Inquiry Into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers: In Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1803), 414.

[79] Report from Retreat Estate, Henry Blake, Special Magistrate, 17 March 1835, *1835 (278-II) Papers Presented to Parliament, by His Majesty's Command, in Explanation of the Measures Adopted by His Majesty's Government, for Giving Effect to the Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies. Part II.*, Accounts and Papers (London: Great Britain, House of Commons, 1835), 31.

provisions that otherwise he could not obtain … it saves the proprietor the cost of feeding him."[80] The slave-owner William Beckford used grounds to 'season' enslaved people – to prepare new arrivals on his plantation for the routines and rigours of sugar planting. "The two methods generally adopted for the seasoning of negroes," he wrote, are "either to quarter them upon old ones, under whom they are to learn to make a ground; or to have one ready planted, full of provisions, and apportioned to them upon their arrival."[81] According to Bryan Edwards, fully one-third of all the land in Jamaica was devoted to pasture and provision grounds.[82] For slave-owners, provision grounds were both a necessary feature of plantation economics and a kind of Eden. Matthew Gregory Lewis remarked that the days allotted to work the grounds, every second Saturday, were more than enough. On his plantation, he allowed enslaved people every Saturday, which **"**almost converts it into an amusement; and the frequent visiting their grounds makes them grow habitually as much attached to them as they are to their houses and gardens."[83] The provision-ground, which in theory represented the quasi-independence of enslaved people from plantation society, was taken up by slave-owners as evidence that plantation slavery was organic and harmonious.

Brougham, drawing on a century of Enlightenment reflection on the nexus of labour, climate and political economy, remarked that people from the tropics have fewer wants, and without compulsion, "the powers of his mind become languid and feeble; his corporeal strength decays; and he regards as the greatest of all evils any occupation that calls for mental exertion."[84] At the same time, he was convinced that "There can be no doubt that the climate of the West Indies renders the labour of negroes essential to the cultivation of the soil … They excel all the other races of mankind in hardiness, agility, and strength of limbs; in the

[80] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, 1806, 2:347.Edwards 2:347
[81] Beckford, *Remarks Upon the Situation of Negroes in Jamaica*, 27.
[82] Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 4th edition, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1806), 66.
[83] Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 83.
[84] Brougham, *An Inquiry Into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers*, 2:409.

capacity of sustaining the most galling fatigue and pain."[85] However, Brougham was also impressed with the state of enslaved people in colonies belonging to Spain, who seemed to live in conditions similar to European peasants living under feudalism in late-antique and medieval Europe. "In many parts," he wrote, "the negroes are precisely in the situation of the *coloni partiarii*, or *metayers*, of the feudal times … all the overplus of his industry belongs to himself."[86] This model, of slavery palliated by good treatment, the limited ownership over small areas of land, and the accumulation of money and other goods by enslaved people was influential. Edward Long, jealous of the Cuban sugar industry, complained about the Spanish policy of converting enslaved people to Catholicism, and about the general principle of permitting self-purchase of freedom at prices determined by the government, rather than by the market. Long imagined louche Catholic slaves shirking work "until the confederate gang of Negroes there can make up a purse for him." After manumission, Long imagined that Cubans refused to work the land, and made a living "by cultivating tobacco, breeding poultry and hogs, making chip-hats, segars, and other trifling articles… It is only astonishing," he concluded, "the defection is not greater."[87] The idea that enslaved people would not work without compulsion troubled even Britons sympathetic to antislavery. As James Ramsay wrote, "In a free country, a peasant in general executes twice the work of a slave in the sugar colonies." Peasants, he argued, received better food and clothing than enslaved labourers, but "not in proportion to the difference in value of their labour, perhaps not exceeding greatly the insurance, and other incidental charges of slavery."[88]

By the late 1820s, the idea of slaves as peasants was flourishing among slave-owners and their defenders. An official in Saint Kitts even proposed to replace the terminology of

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[85] Brougham, 2:449.
[86] Brougham, 2:515.
[87] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island, With Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, vol. 2 (London, 1774), 86.
[88] Ramsay, *Essay*, 123.

'slave' and 'slavery' with 'vassal' and 'vassalage' in colonial law and policy.[89] Among the leaders of parliamentary and public antislavery, gradual emancipation was fully entrenched as a consensus position. Frederick Bayley, who supported antislavery, wrote in his memoirs of the West Indies of creole enslaved people living in contentment, with generations "protected by the same master and nurtured on the same estate" and cottage, garden and "little stock of domestic animals" all held securely, while religion and education gradually and incrementally lay the groundwork for freedom.[90] Gradualism would both promote civilisation and preserve the sugar industry. "If, by some hasty and inconsiderate measure, the slaves in our colonies receive their emancipation suddenly," Bayley wrote, "they will proceed in their ignorance to commit the same follies as their brethren in St. Domingo."[91]

Arthur Young's account of the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland, and of the brutality of landlords, resurfaced in one of the most popular pro-slavery works on the West Indies. Bryan Edwards boasted that slave-owners would never think of interfering with "their *peculium* thus acquired. They are permitted also to dispose at their deaths of what little property they possess; and even to bequeath their grounds or gardens to such of their fellow-slaves as they think proper." Edwards' use of *peculium* was a flourish of his understanding of the law in ancient Rome that permitted slaves to hold land, but he was more explicitly comparing the cottages and grounds of enslaved people to the homes and possessions of the impoverished rural Irish.[92] In Parliament, Francis Burdett lamented, "The comfort and happiness of the English people, their old love of independence, their unexampled industry, their patience under sufferings, their great care and foresight, all could not save them from

[89] Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, *The Slave Colonies of Great Britain; or A Picture of Negro Slavery Drawn by the Colonists Themselves; Being an Abstract of the Various Papers Recently Laid before Parliament on That Subject* (London, 1826), 71.
[90] Frederic William Naylor Bayley, *Four Years' Residence in the West Indies.* (London: William Kidd, 1830), 378.
[91] Bayley, 399.
[92] Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial*, 1806, 2:163.

the competition of the Irish peasantry, who were fast degrading the English peasantry."[93] Just as the fecundity of the soil in the West Indies structured the way that enslaved people – and apprentices – were given access to land, the impressive yields of the potato crops in Ireland seemed to be a cause of Irish poverty and overpopulation. "The other necessaries of life, such as clothing and habitation, do not keep pace with the abundance of the subsistence," wrote Gilbert Blane, the Scots physician and reformer of the Royal Navy's medical service, "neither have the peasantry the means of giving their children that share of education which is necessary to *civilize* them."[94] William Cobbett spat, "'A *potatoe-ground*' was allotted to the '*peasant*' in a country of '*roast-beef*,' where the rascally root of slavery had, in this way, never been known before, and where, until now, nobody had ever had the insolence to use the word '*peasantry'* … this word meaning, not merely, '*country-people*,' but a *distinct cast*, hereditarily of character inferior to the owners of the soil."[95]

A parliamentary committee hastily established in 1831 to consider emancipation asked a group of planters, missionaries and merchants about the capacity to work, religious education and economic predilections of enslaved people in the Caribbean colonies. Measuring amelioration and comparing British 'peasants' and enslaved workers were prominent themes in the committee's cross-examinations. One witness, the plantation attorney William Taylor, was pressed to compare the Scots, Irish and English 'peasantries' to enslaved people. Taylor was confident that "the negroes are like the peasantry of England, Ireland and Scotland" in their overall capacity to work, although he admitted that "the Scottish peasantry are more addicted to drinking than the negroes are generally speaking."[96]

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[93] HC Deb 11 May 1824 vol. 11 cc. 710-711

[94] Sir Gilbert Blane, *Inquiry Into the Causes and Remedies of the Late and Present Scarcity and High Price of Provisions: In a Letter to the Right Hon. Earl Spencer, ... , Dated 8th November, 1800, with Observations on the Distresses of Agriculture and Commerce Which Have Prevailed for the Last Three Years*, 2nd ed. (London, 1817), 292.

[95] "To Sir Francis Burdett, Bart., On the Injustice, on the part of Landlords, in holding Tenants to their Leases under the present circumstances," *Cobbett's Political Register*, vol. 42, no. 8 [25 May 1823], 451

[96] Examination of William Taylor, 6 June 1832, *Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery*, 10.

The Committee was intrigued, and pressed Taylor to judge whether slaves or peasants worked harder. He replied, "if the question is with respect to the quantum of work, the Scottish peasant does more," although he admitted that the rigours of 'crop time' on sugar plantations meant that enslaved workers probably worked more on average.[97] Wiltshire Stanton Austin, the son of a slave-owner who had been born in Barbados and had worked for his father in Suriname and Demerara was asked about what would happen if his father's estates were foreclosed upon by the family's creditors. "My father," he replied, "would remove immediately with his 200 slaves, whom he has attached by kind treatment, and they would be his peasantry," leaving the mortgagees of the estate without a labour force.[98] Meanwhile, colonial newspapers in Jamaica inveighed against the antislavery movement for "thrusting into carnage and destruction the peaceable and hitherto contented peasantry of our once happy island."[99] Planters doubled down on their appeals to the pastoral fantasy of slavery. As a pro-slavery speaker told an audience in London, enslaved people did not need to fear "the Militia ballot, the tax-gatherer, the heartless bailiff, and the brutal press-gang" or seeing "aged parents dragging out a miserable existence in the parish poor-house… There is not a peasant in the world that walks abroad with a more contented countenance."[100]

From 1834 to 1838, British officials struggled to manage the transition from slavery to 'apprenticeship.' Because the period of apprenticeship was so star-crossed, and collapsed definitively in 1838, historians have tended to look past it to the post-1838 period, and particularly to the era of free trade in sugar, ushered in by the 1846 Sugar Duties Act.[101]

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[97] Examination of William Taylor, 6 June 1832, *Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery*, 13.
[98] Examination of Wiltshire Stanton Austin, 2 July 1832, *Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery*, 182.
[99] Quoted in 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 ...*, 3rd edition (London: W. Nichols, 1868), 135.
[100] *The Speeches of Mr. Barrett and Mr. Burge at a General Meeting of Planters, Merchants, and Others, Interested in the West-India Colonies, Assembled at the Thatched-House Tavern on the 18th of May, 1833*, 33. For another contemporary example, see *The Voice of the West Indies, and the Cry of England; Or, Compensation Or Separation Considered* (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1832).
[101] On the failures of apprenticeship, see, *passim*: William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865*, 1st paperback edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Diana

However, the enormous and underexplored archives of apprenticeship show the workings of British antislavery in clear detail. The provisions of Emancipation Act, moreover, show the consequences of the idea of enslaved people as peasants that had passed back and forth between slave-owners and abolitionists in the forty years before 1833. Special magistrates were particularly charged with inspecting the provision grounds – the places, virtually secret to planters in the era of slavery, where apprentices could grow enough food to subsist while continuing to work on sugar plantations. One special magistrates complained apprentices didn't bother taking wages because of "the vicinity to their houses and productiveness of their provision grounds."[102] Another magistrate complained that no apprentices would work for hire on the 'great gang' of a sugar plantation, weeding and trimming cane in the growing season and cutting and hauling it during 'crop' since they seemed to be able to earn six times as much by growing produce for the market.[103] The slave-as-peasant was supposed to be open to improvement and amelioration and just self-sufficient enough to begin the path to full autonomy. However, actual apprentices proved more stubborn than antislavery fantasies allowed.

Edward Baynes, one of the special magistrates, was sceptical of the equivalence between apprentices and European peasants real or imagined. "There are doubtlessly among them individuals not inferior for intelligence and acquirement to the European peasant," he wrote, "but the proportion is by no means large … At home, in the negro villages, he is as licentious and unrestrained as ever."[104] In another message, Baynes admitted that "it would

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Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Holt, *Problem of Freedom*; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[102] Report from J. Kennet Dawson, Manchioneal, St. Thomas-in-the-East, 17 March 1835, *1835 (278-II) Abolition of Slavery, Papers in Explanation, Part I*, 30.

[103] Report from Henry Blake, Retreat Estate, 17 March 1835, *1835 (278-II) Abolition of Slavery, Papers in Explanation, Part I*, 31.

[104] *1835 (278-II) Abolition of Slavery, Papers in Explanation, Part I*, 247. The magistrate Edward Davis Baynes seems to have been a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars who retired in 1821 from the Royal Artillery, a relatively typical background for the special magistracy. See *A List of the Officers of the Army and of the Corps of Royal Marines* (London: War Office, 1821), 322.

be equally difficult, in a country of such unbounded fertility, to persuade even the German or British peasant that his interests would lead him to give that time and exertion to a master" in a place with as much uncultivated land as Jamaica. He worried that the lives of former slaves were too comfortable, that their lives were "vastly superior to that of the peasantry in the most favoured part of Great Britain. Some have large sums of money hoarded; many possess several horses, and not a few indulge in wine, and other expensive articles imported from Europe."[105] The police officers assigned to the various magisterial districts in Jamaica also routinely referred to former slaves as 'peasants': "no agitation among the peasantry at present…the peasantry have assumed their work, and all is quiet …the peasantry, generally speaking, are attentive to their employment, but prefer employing their leisure time in cultivating provisions for themselves."[106] And yet, the apprentices were not 'peasants' in the sense that political economists meant it – rather than independence, continued subservience and labour in the sugar industry was a condition of their freedom.

One of the principal punishments available to special magistrates was to award more unpaid labour from apprentices to masters (and, conversely, to remove access to free labour from masters, although as Diana Paton shows, most special magistrates sided with planters as a matter of course).[107] This punishment measured in hours was time that could be spent earning wages, or working on provision grounds. By 1836, the Colonial Secretary Lord Glenelg was satisfied that apprenticeship would not ruin the sugar industry. But he worried about freedom. "During Slavery," he wrote in a circular dispatch, "labour could be compelled to go wherever it promised most profit to the employer. Under the new system it will find its way wherever it promises most profit to the labourer." Glenelg worried that this tendency

[105] Enclosures No. 189: Edward Dacrest Baynes to Sligo, Aylmers, St John's, 30 December 1835
[106] A Report from the Inspector General of Police up to the 31st December 1835, containing Extracts from the County Inspectors' and Sub-Inspectors' Reports
[107] Paton, *No Bond but the Law*; Diana Paton, "Punishment, Crime, and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (June 1, 2001): 923–54.

could threaten the staple crops of the Caribbean colonies if land were too cheap. He urged colonial governors to set the base price of Crown land as high as possible, to concentrate the population, and make them "more open to civilizing influences, more directly under the control of Government, more full of the activity which is inspired by common wants, and the strength which is derived from the division of labour."[108]

In Barbados, the antislavery leaders Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey were pleased to hear planters report that the costs of production of sugar had dropped, as much as one-fifth. They took rising prices of lands and of houses as evidence of progress, and happily reported that "estates which were over populated have largely benefited by the dismission [sic] of their superfluous numbers." People who had been enslaved had, at the very least, had a place to live – but the shock of freedom allowed planters who had owned few slaves to profit "by availing themselves of the labour thus thrown into the market." They continued, "A purchasing as well as consuming population has been formed."[109] And yet, Sturge and Harvey did not expect freedpeople to move very much in search of higher wages: "Their strong attachment to the place of their birth, to their houses, gardens, to the graves of their parents and kindred, exceeding what has been recorded of any other people" would keep freedpeople tied to both their own land and the land where they worked for sugar planters.[110] The idea that enslaved people had had some element of peasantry about them, some organic and near-mystical connection to the soil carried over into the post-emancipation era.

Sturge and Harvey were forthright: "The island can never realise the full benefits of the new system, till there *are* such [independent] villages, which would be to the planters as

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[108] Lord Glenelg to Colonial Governors, Circular Despatch P, 30 January 1836,Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *1836 (166-I) Papers Presented to Parliament, by His Majesty's Command, in Explanation of the Measures Adopted by His Majesty's Government, for Giving Effect to the Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies. Part III.*, Accounts and Papers (London: Great Britain, House of Commons, 1836), 10–11. 10-11

[109] Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837*, 71.

[110] Sturge and Harvey, 377.

'reservoirs of surplus labor,' enabling them to employ many or few hands, according to their actual wants."[111] After 1838, however, many planters refused to sell land to freedpeople, and some antislavery activists, and particularly members of the very active Baptist Missionary Society, advocated for the founding of 'free villages' independent of the plantations, established for freedpeople on land purchased, often secretly, from planters. As Catherine Hall has shown, these villages became the incubators of a British missionary project of remaking black Jamaican society in the image of bourgeois Britain.[112] The slave-as-peasant seemed to have come of age. James Phillippo, a leading Baptist missionary in Jamaica, was quick to praise the people he called a "newly emancipated peasantry" on 1 August 1838, the day when apprenticeship came to an early end. "There was no crowding, no vulgar familiarity… no dancing, no noisy mirth, no carousing, no gambling, or any of the rude pastimes and sports which often disgrace seasons of public rejoicing in England."[113] Emancipated people, in Phillippo's view, had the virtues and none of the vices of the lost British 'peasantry.'

The collapse of apprenticeship and the massive importation of indentured Asian labour to the West Indies, particularly to Trinidad and Guiana, as well as to the Indian Ocean sugar island of Mauritius, swung the attention of Britons away from the question of free black labour.[114] However, in the forty years before emancipation, slave-owners and antislavery activists, writers and legislators had staked claims to the idea of enslaved people and emancipated

[111] Sturge and Harvey, 51.
[112] Catherine Hall, "White Visions, Black Lives: The Free Villages of Jamaica," *History Workshop*, no. 36 (1993): 110; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.
[113] James Mursell Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (London: John Snow, 1843), 184.
[114] On the era of indentured labour, see Kay Saunders, *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Christopher Bischof, "Chinese Labourers, Free Blacks, and Social Engineering in the Post-Emancipation British West Indies," *Past & Present* 231, no. 1 (May 1, 2016): 129–68, https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtw015.

people as a peasantry, as either enslaved people living in comfort or as freedpeople on the first step of the long road to civilisation. Neither model of 'peasantry' had much to do with the material reality of rural agricultural labour in Britain or in Britain's Caribbean colonies. Instead, the concept reflected a emergent social imaginary, one that was ultimately shared by slave-owners and many abolitionists – and particularly by the well-to-do elite leaders of British antislavery – that there were parts of the world where black labour belonged, and certain kinds of industries that were the destiny of what W.E.B. Du Bois called "that dark and vast sea of human labor…spawning the world's raw material and luxury – cotton, wool, coffee, tea, cocoa, palm oil …transformed and transported at fabulous gain."[115]

Finally, it didn't take long for recrudescent racism to rewrite the history of emancipation for early Victorian Britons. In the 1840s, Thomas Carlyle cast Ireland and Jamaica as twin symbols of the apocalypse of industrialisation. "Between our Black West Indies and our White Ireland," he wrote, "between these two extremes of lazy refusal to work, and of famishing inability to find any work, what a world have we made of it." Carlyle's racism is grotesque and belletrist, but his essays and their histrionic rhetoric nonetheless capture a feature of the history of slavery in the British empire that it would take historians another hundred years to grasp. Emancipation and industrialisation *were* connected to one another; the fires in Kent and Saint James Parish burned the same fuel. "Supply-and-demand, Leave-it-alone, Voluntary Principle, Time will mend it," Carlyle wrote, "till British industrial existence seems fast becoming one huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence physical and moral."[116] In the 1850s, the American political economist and fervent, eccentric

[115] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 15–16. See also recent work on the proliferation of the 'plantation' after the end of slavery: Kris Manjapra, "Plantation Dispossessions: The Global Travel of Agricultural Racial Capitalism," in *American Capitalism: New Histories*, ed. Sven Beckert and Christine Desan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 361–87.

[116] Thomas Carlyle, "The Present Time," in *Latter-Day Pamphlets [1850]*, Thomas Carlyle's Collected Works (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870), 33.

defender of slavery George Fitzhugh quoted swathes of Carlyle in his book *Cannibals All* and explicitly tied a defence of slavery and a critique of industrial capitalism back to the putatively comfortable material circumstances of enslaved people. "The negro slaves of the South," Fitzhugh wrote, "are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world."[117] After all, they were 'peasants.'

[117] George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves without Masters* (Richmond, VA: Adolphus Morris, 1857), 29.