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Violence in Jamaica

I

Thomas Thistlewood (1721–1786) became very aware of the extreme violence that was employed by Whites against Blacks immediately on arrival in Westmoreland Parish in April 1750. He saw enslaved men being whipped, with up to 350 lashes; the body of a dead runaway, having its head cut off and put on a pole; and on 1 October he "Saw a Negroe fellow named English [. . .] Tried [in] Court and hang'd upon ye 1st tree immediately (drawing his knife upon a White Man) his hand cutt off." Thistlewood thought these punishments were deserved because the enslaved people he was learning to manage were a "Nest of Thieves and Villains." He was informed by his employer, a wealthy sugar planter, William Dorrill, that violence was expected, and welcomed, even among whites: "In this Country, it is highly necessary for a Man to fight once or twice, to keep Cowards from putting upon him." Jamaica was a society always likely to explode into conflict, both with neighbouring French or Spanish colonies and even more worryingly with their internal enemies, the 130,000 Blacks who greatly outnumbered 10,000 Whites. Dorrill made this clear in panicking in July 1751 when he became highly agitated because he "greatly feared it was an insurrection of the Negroes, they being ripe for it most all over the island." It was "nought but a Silly Mistake" but the rumour could have become reality, in a colony notorious not just for violence but for enslaved rebellion.[1]

Thistlewood's initial experiences made him aware of the unlimited power that Whites exercised over the Blacks. He would have appreciated what Charles Leslie wrote in a hastily composed study of Jamaica, published in 1739: "No Country excels them in a barbarous Treatment of Slaves or in the cruel Methods they put them to Death."[2] White authority was supported by laws, of which there was a plenitude detailing what Blacks could not do and the harsh punishment they would get if they violated such laws.[3] White authority was upheld by draconian laws mandating extreme

1 Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 3, 6, 21.

2 Charles Leslie, *A New and Exact Account of Jamaica* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming, 1739): 41–42.

3 Edward B. Rugemer, "The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean," *William and Mary Quarterly* 70 (2013): 429–58; Vincent Brown, "Spiritual Terror and Sacred Authority: Supernatural Power in Jamaican Slave Society," *Slavery & Abolition* 24 (2003): 24–53.

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punishments for the enslaved if they demonstrated any sign of rebelliousness. White Jamaicans' ability to treat enslaved people as they pleased was so untrammelled that planters elsewhere in the Caribbean hankered after the absolute power and tyrant's charter that they believed was afforded to Jamaican slaveowners.[4]

As Vincent Brown notes, "exemplary violence was not limited to sudden events like uprisings; it was woven into the every-day experience of slave society."[5] "Migrants to the island," like Thistlewood, Brown argues, "who wished to work in the sugar industry quickly learned to be pitiless soldiers in a war against the dignity of the enslaved." Henry Coor, a neighbour of Thistlewood in Westmoreland between 1759 and 1774, explained that

> at my first coming to the island a common flogging of a Negro would have put me in a tremble, and disordered me so, that I did not feel right again generally the remaining part of the day. But by degrees and customs it became so habituall that I thought no more of seeing a Black man's head cut off than I should now think of a butcher cutting off the head of a calf.

Violence was not just something one saw; it was also part of the aural landscape of the island. A visitor to Jamaica in 1728 vividly described how the barbarity daily exercised on the Bodies of the miserable Negroes was manifest in "the piercing Cryes and dutifull Lamentations that every Day enters one's Ears both in Town and Country, being enough to terrify a meek natur'd Person just landed in those parts of the World."[6]

II

In this paper, I address the question of the extent to which violence, especially violence against the enslaved, was the defining characteristic of slavery in Jamaica and how enacting and controlling violence against the enslaved changed over time. I do so in response to some of the key assumptions of the BCDSS and how it seeks to overturn some traditional themes in the history of slavery, such as abandoning the usual European "binary opposition of 'slavery versus freedom,'" replacing it with the concept of asymmetrical dependence which encompasses all forms of human bondage and coercion over time as such dependency is found in 'strong' institutions that are an important example of 'human experience,' as explained by Joseph C. Miller.[7]

4 Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016): 17.

5 Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020): 57.

6 Cited in Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*: 57. For Coor, see Trevor Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020): 75.

7 Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012): 2.

There is no doubt that the asymmetrical dependency in Jamaica was extreme, fitting the terms of the adjective 'strong' in the first basic hypothesis of the BCDSS. Asymmetrical dependency can be defined as being "based on the ability of one actor to control the actions and the access to the resources of another."[8] That summarises White power over the enslaved in Jamaica. But it is less clear that White actors in plantation settings in the second quarter of the eighteenth century in Jamaica conformed to the second basic assumption of BCDSS, which is that asymmetrical dependency is usually supported by an institutional background so that a dependent actor normally cannot change their situation by either going away (exit) or by articulating protest (voice).[9]

As I will argue, the theoretical power exercised by Whites over Blacks in a society with a majority population of the enslaved was extreme. Yet that theoretical absolutism was not accompanied, until the aftermath of the great slave rebellion of 1760, by practical institutional help to allow slaveholders to keep the enslaved under control and themselves safe. The result, as will be shown in a micro-history of Thomas Thistlewood's slave management practices in the 1750s and the 1760s, was that the managers of enslaved Africans on Jamaican slave plantations were left defenceless against what they saw as the depredations, ill-discipline and defiance of rebellious enslaved people except through the application of extreme violence intended to keep the enslaved cowed and "in awe" of White power.[10] As Daniel Defoe argued in his novel *Captain Jack* (1722), about an Englishman transported to the plantations who became a slave overseer and who found that when governing Africans being gentle did not work but that using the rod to inflict punishment worked well, the key to dealing with Africans was to make sure that they were "ruled with a Rod of iron, beaten with *Scorpions*, as the Scripture calls it." Africans "must be used as they do use them, or they would rise and murder their Masters which their Numbers consider'd, would not be hard for them to do, if they had Arms and Ammunition sustainable to the Rage and Cruelty of their Nature."[11]

Using violence to control enslaved people was second nature to the many overseers (but not Thistlewood) who had learned their vicious slave management techniques from being soldiers and sailors in Britain's highly regimented and harshly disciplined armies and navies of the early eighteenth century embarked upon European and Caribbean wars. This group of slave managers set the tone for seeing Africans as enemies who needed to be terrorised into subjection. They were the first slave manag-

8 James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

9 Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

10 Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica by James Knight* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2021): 482–83.

11 Daniel Defoe, *Colonel Jack*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1722]): 128.

ers to control enslaved people within the context of Jamaica adopting the model of the large integrated plantation, with plantations having hundreds of brutally treated African slaves managed by a tiny group of White overseers aided by a cadre of Black "privileged" slaves.[12] Thus, this essay is in part a study of the role of institutions and especially under-institutionalisation in a society of extreme asymmetrical dependence. In short, moving beyond institutions matters, but it is also important to know how and when institutions themselves matter.[13]

The essay is also a response to the BCDSS's call for comparative studies in slavery and asks how we do comparative case studies given that one of the principal theoretical frameworks for studying slavery – Moses Finley's distinction between "slave societies" and "societies with slavery" is no longer fit for purpose.[14] Finley proposed that only a few societies – two in the ancient word (Greece and Rome) and three in the Atlantic world (US South, the Caribbean and Brazil) – qualified under his definitions of scale and scope as genuine slave societies. By implication, these were the only societies worth studying if you were interested in slavery as a topic.

The explosion of work into global slavery has demonstrated that, first, slave societies were more numerous than Finley thought. They existed in nineteenth-century Africa, such as in Dahomey and the Soko Caliphate; in early modern Korea; in Anglo-Saxon England; in the Pacific North-west; in Eastern Arabia; and Oman and the Persian Gulf.[15] Jamaica may have had a historically high proportion of its population before 1838 as being enslaved and that population may have been especially poor compared to the dominant minority slaveholding population.[16] But it was not as historically distinctive as previously thought. Second, scholars today are disinclined to accept that enslaved people living in places where slavery was relatively economically marginal were not especially affected by enslavement. By concentrating on lived experience, we can appreciate that enslavement was as real for individuals in places like Massachusetts or Paris as in Barbados or Jamaica.

Thus, if we are to study Jamaica in a comparative focus and move away from the restrictions of Finley's binary divide and also from the slavery to freedom binary that incompletely describes most places where the enslaved were held in bondage, then we might want to think of other ways in which Jamaica was a distinctive place where

12 Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650–1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015): chapter 2.

13 Christian G. De Vito, Juliane Schiel and Matthias van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness? New Perspectives on Labor and Social History," *Journal of Social History* 54 (2020): 644–62; Christian G. De Vito, "History Without Scale: The Micro-Spatial Perspective," *Past & Present* 242 (2019): 348–72.

14 Dale Tomich and Michael Zeuske, "The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy and Comparative Microhistories," *Review – Fernand Braudel Center* 31 (2008): 91–100.

15 Noel Lemski and Catherine M. Cameron, *What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

16 Trevor Burnard, Laura Panza and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Living Costs, Real Incomes and Inequality in Colonial Jamaica," *Explorations in Economic History* 71 (2019): 55–71.

slavery was important. It was distinctive in several ways – in regard to its dire demography; its heavy concentration on the uniquely destructive crop of sugar; and to its heavily African, indeed Gold Coast, character. But where it stands out most is in the pervasiveness of violence underpinning every part of the enslaved-slaveholder relationship. It was a violence, moreover, marked by sadism. That violence needs to be explained if we are to place Jamaica on what the BCDSS terms a "continuum of dependency" where agency and dependency varied according to circumstance.[17] Jamaica's violent slave culture and its immiseration of its enslaved population through its harsh working conditions and excessive punishments put Jamaica at the extreme end of a continuum of dependency and makes it worth studying through the lens of asymmetrical dependency. Thistlewood himself is a prime example of an extremely violent slaveowner prone not just to whip frequently and brutally but to invent sadistic punishments such as the excrementally based "Derby's Dose" for enslaved people caught eating sugar cane.[18]

Orlando Patterson joins me in emphasizing just how violent Jamaican society was in the understudied years of the first sixty years of the eighteenth century. His summary of my work on Thomas Thistlewood is that I showed Jamaica to be a Hobbesian "state of savage exploitation and, with the possible exception of the enslaved in the Laurion silver mines of ancient Attica, the most brutal in all history." It was an especially misogynistic and female-unfriendly regime, both in regard to the harsh work expected of enslaved women and the constant threat of sexual exploitation, revealed in unsparing ways in Thistlewood's sexually explicit diaries. Orlando Patterson is morally outraged about what he calls "the misogynistic nightmare of Jamaican slave society." He argues that "slavery was drenched in violence, rape an integral part, and tragically, the violence of the enslaver against the enslaved seeped down like a viper's poison through the veins of the entire system." He suggests that "the peculiar savagery" of eighteenth-century slavery which led to disastrous mortality statistics was a form of genocide, with, he calculates, 5,741,473 Jamaican lives lost through "deliberate curtailment" of demographic opportunity. "For 183 years," he concludes, "Jamaicans had their ancestral memories, and traditional cultures, destroyed, their actual lives ravaged, ruthlessly exploited and severally shortened, their familial bonds shattered, their bodies casually raped with immunity and infected with life-shortening diseases, their reproductive rights denied."[19]

17 David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, "Dependence, Servility and Coerced Labor in Time and Space," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery: AD 1420–1804*, ed. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 3.

18 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire*: 104, 149–50, 260–61.

19 Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery: Black Society in Jamaica, 1655–1838*, 2nd ed. (London: Polity, 2022): xvii, xix, lx.

III

Why was Jamaican slavery during the period of the African slave trade so violent? Contemporary observers who praised Jamaica's wealth, hospitality and the good humour and fine qualities of its White inhabitants were aware of the dreadful reputation White Jamaicans had in Britain for cruelty and violence. Edward Long, for example, flatly denied the change in his important *History of Jamaica*. He asserted that masters were humane and even indulgent and that whatever brutalities occurred were the responsibility of a few bad eggs or overseers from shabby backgrounds, "barbarians" who were imported from "among the liberty-loving inhabitants of Britain and Ireland.[20] He argued that it was in the self-interest of the planter to treat enslaved people well so that "he might profit by their labours". If the planter mistreated them, Long asserted, the planter would "be deprived of the benefit of their labour, which alone [. . .] is the foundation for their riches."[21]

James Knight was more willing than Long in his unpublished manuscript composed between 1737 and the mid-1740s, to acknowledge that there were examples of "the Inhumanity and Cruelty of the Planters to Their Negroes." But charges of bad behaviour were "very much aggravated and very few [planters] are so Barbarous as They are Represented to be." If they were vicious to their enslaved property, however, they had a good excuse, or so Knight thought. Just like Defoe had done, but with actual experience of running a plantation, Knight argued that the only way to treat enslaved people was with a firmness that in England might be misinterpreted as cruelty. "Whoever considers the Negroes' Superiority in Numbers, the sullen, deceitfull, Refractory Temper of Most of Them, that some are Careless, others Treacherous or Idle, and apt to Run away," he argued, and, because "Their Masters' Interest depends on the Care, and diligence of his Slaves," slave owners had "an Absolute Necessity of keeping a Vigilant Eye, and strict hand over Them." That vigilance resulted in "severe whipping on the bare back," though that was less harsh, he argued, than what White soldiers faced in Europe. Like Long, Knight argued that punishments were relatively light because "the death or disability of a Negro is a Certain loss and Their Plantations depend on keeping up the Number." Moreover, "Free Negroes and Mulattos, even those who have been Slaves Themselves, are the most Rigid and Severe Masters." In short, enslaved people were used to punishment and cruelty was the only way of keeping them in check. In addition, enslaved people should be thankful for having got away from "the Arbitrary Will and Pleasure of Their Kings and Chief men" as in Africa, the enslaved people who came to Jamaica had lived under masters who "had an Absolute

20 Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, vol. 2 (London: T. Lowndes, 1774): 269.

21 Long, *History of Jamaica 2*: 269.

power of Life and Death," unlike more moderate and legally constrained masters in America.[22]

Other contemporary commentators did not concur with Knight that Jamaica was an "Industrious, usefull and beneficial society to the Nation."[23] They instead concentrated on Jamaican deficiencies, and how those deficiencies, drawn from White West Indians' humble social origins that made commentators deride West Indians as the refuse of British society, meant that they were naturally vicious in ways that were uncommon in Britain.[24] One of these deficiencies was that through the absolutism of slavery, which enabled even the most humble migrant to become a "cowskin hero," as he punished enslaved men with impunity and abused enslaved women without consequence, Whites had an excessive pride that they acquired soon after arrival, or, in the case of Creoles, was bred into them from birth.[25] White Jamaicans were cruel to their enslaved charges because the nature of Jamaican society and Whites' tyrannical charter over Blacks gave them "something of a Haughty Disposition" which "required Submission" from others. Like Thistlewood, whose "seasoning" to Jamaica included moving from shock at examples of cruelty to becoming a predator himself, routinely giving enslaved people 70 to 100 lashes at a time, often for minor offences against his perceived sense of order, migrants soon became accustomed to "Barbarous Treatments" and developed an "unmerciful Temper."[26]

That process of desensitization was even more apparent among Creoles, "brought up among a perpetual Scourging" of slaves so that they became accustomed to seeing "Bodies cover'd with Blood and the Flesh thereof perfectly dissected after Correction." Creoles came to enjoy the spectacle of violence that accompanied their lives: "They are pleas'd in the West Indies with Scourging, and the first Play-Thing put into their hands is commonly a Whip with which they exercise themselves upon a Post, in Imitation of what they daily see perform'd on the naked Bodies of those miserable Creatures, till they are come to an age that will allow them Strength to do it themselves."[27] This pleasure in inflicting violence was not confined to men; White women were involved in disciplining enslaved people and by some accounts proved, like the free people of colour denigrated by James Knight as especially vicious, to be especially pleased

22 Greene, *Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica by James Knight*: 493–95.

23 Greene, *Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica by James Knight*: 473.

24 For the longstanding way in which commentators debased the character of English and British migrants to the islands in order to show that these people were alien creatures who could be conceptualized as being not British due to their origins and cruel behaviour, see Carla Gardina Pestana, "Distance and Blame: The Rise of the English Planter Class," *Early American Studies* 20 (2022): 557–75.

25 Trevor Burnard, *From 'Little Better than Slaves' to 'Cowskin Heroes': Poor White People in Jamaica, 1655–1782* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2021).

26 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*.

27 Cited in Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*: 58.

to inflict violence on Black bodies.[28] That enjoying violence was bred into White West Indians was a prominent theme in later abolitionist discourse, perhaps best summarised in the famous academy painting of enslaved men being whipped while a white woman and her child watched on by Marcel Antoine Verdier, *Châtiment des quatres piquets dans les colonies* (1843–49). Contemporaries speculated that the hot climate altered the very personality of the White Jamaican. They used humoral understandings of medicine to develop a climate theory in which, inter alia, the heat of the sun encouraged both excess and languor and turned the phlegmatic Englishman into a hot-tempered tyrant.[29] Heat led to disease; disease led to death; and awareness of the likelihood of imminent death led to a callous indifference for the lives of others in a society addicted to the short-term, paying little attention to the consequences of a relentless push to enrich oneself. In a place where Whites were indifferent to death and dying, because they saw death all around them as a regular occurrence, concern over violence may have felt like an unnecessary emotion. Nevertheless, it is hard to accept that Jamaicans had an innate tendency towards violence as part of their character and training given that we no longer hold with humoral understandings of medicine.[30]

Modern interpretations of why White Jamaicans resorted so easily to violence revolve around explanations based not on culture or on climate but on the emotional consequences of living in a highly stressful environment. The current popular explanations for excessive violence by planters and overseers towards Black people revolve around assumptions that these were especially fearful people living in a martial environment in which being fearful was an obvious and rational response. In short, White Jamaicans believed in force because they were wary of a hostile enslaved population who had shown numerous times that they were willing and able to use violence against their oppressors whom they envisioned as enemies. Bryan Edwards summed up the role that fear played in Jamaica with considerable sophistication, in an argument that owed much to Hobbes and even more to Machiavelli. His essential point was that the master's need for self-protection justified any sort of behaviour, no matter how outrageous or objectionable. Even more than this, White freedom was predicated on the oppression of Blacks: "so long, therefore, as freedom shall be enjoyed exclusively by one race of people, and slavery be the condition of another, contempt and degradation will attach to the colour by which that condition is generally recognised, and follow it in some degree, through its varieties and affinities." White author-

28 Trevor Burnard and Deirdre Coleman, "The Savage Slave Mistress: Punishing Women in the British Caribbean, 1750–1834," *Atlantic Studies* 19 (2022): 34–59.

29 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41 (1984): 213–40; Emily Senior, *The Caribbean and the Medical Imagination, 1764–1834: Slavery, Disease and Colonial Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

30 Suman Seth, *Difference and Disease: Medicine, Race and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

ity was based ultimately upon fear, and Edwards declared, in an especially famous phrase, that "in all countries in which slavery is established the leading principle on which government is supported is *fear*, or a sense of that coercive necessity, which leaving no choice of action, supersedes all sense of *right*." The implications of this political philosophy, in which white unity was predicated upon fear of the vengeance that badly treated enslaved people might use against whites if they got their chance, was spelt out in nearby 1771 in Saint Domingue where the French Crown argued in court that "it is only by leaving to the masters a power that is nearly absolute, that it will be possible to keep so large a number of men in that state of submission which is made necessary by their numerical superiority over the whites. If some masters abuse their power, they must be reproved in secret, so that the slaves may always be kept in the belief that the master can do no wrong in his dealings with them."[31]

Practical considerations contributed to the feeling of fear that often-permeated White Jamaicans' consciousness. Blacks were not defenceless. Indeed, they had access to weapons as part of their job. Machetes were used to cut sugar cane and could and were deployed to attack Whites. Many enslaved people had more serious weapons, such as guns and even without guns, they could employ, as was done to devastating effect in several slave rebellions, notably in 1833, fire to burn down plantations.[32] Nevertheless, we should not assume from the importance of fear as an emotion in Jamaican society, that whites were paralysed by fear or anxiety. Bravery was a key value for male colonial planters and cowardice strongly denigrated. Whites were wary of Blacks and prone to panic in slave rebellions and to overact through massive explosions of violence. But their fearfulness and wariness of Blacks did not mean that they were scared of their opponents. One factor behind the cruelty that was endemic in White Jamaicans' dealings with the enslaved was that they were convinced that one way of maintaining their own safety was in making sure that it was the enslaved, not themselves, who were most scared of living and dying in Jamaica. Even if, as Jason Sharples contends, "enslavers had less confidence in their 'mastery' than they claimed [. . .] a person with some awareness of others' fear could use it to exercise power to attempt to oppress them, to subvert them, or to survive."[33] In short, White Jamaicans, like the landed gentry and aristocrats in Britain whom they emulated, used the weapons of fear and exercised the power of *Leviathan* against the poor and the oppressed with remarkable success, keeping their rule relatively safe for nearly 200 years.[34]

31 Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*: 32–33.

32 Jason T. Sharples, *The World That Fear Made: Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020): 9; Tom Zoellner, *Island on Fire: The Revolt that Ended Slavery in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

33 Sharples, *World That Fear Made*: 19.

34 For the resilience and determination of Britain's elite, see Vic Gatrell, *Conspiracy on Cato Street: A Tale of Liberty and Revolution in Regency London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Iron-

Because White Jamaicans considered themselves at war, they convinced themselves that the normal rules of behaviour did not apply to how they interacted with enslaved people. It was a conviction reinforced by their belief that Africans were, as Edward Long insisted, savages towards whom European standards of behaviour need not apply. Africans, he argues were "men of so savage a disposition, as that they scarcely differ from the wild beasts of the wood in the ferocity of their manners," so that planters had to think that enslaved people should "be managed at first as if they were beasts; they must be tamed, before they can be treated like men."[35] Long's highly racist comments not only show an alarming equation of Africans with beasts but also demonstrate a belief that when dealing with Africans, just as with wild animals, one could assume that one was living in a state of war.

IV

Lots of evidence existed to support the notion that Jamaica was a place that was especially touched by warfare. It had been founded by the English from conquest in 1655. In the first quarter century of English rule, soldiers were replaced by pirates who made marauding runs upon the Spanish main.[36] The move to a plantation system from the 1690s did not mean a move to peace. The war against pirates might have been won around that time but other wars, notably the long international wars between France and Britain between 1690 and 1714, kept Jamaica in a state of insecurity. Jamaica delighted in its martial character. Nearly all leading politicians and planters were designated by the military titles that they had as officers in the militia, with people commonly described as 'Colonel' or 'Major.' White Jamaicans, also, were required to be part of local militias and their musters and marching were central events in White Jamaican lives. Governors with proper military experience might have been dismissive of what was termed Jamaica's 'indifferent Militia' composed of white servants "of whom much the greater part is not to be trusted with arms."[37] But White Jamaicans were dedicated to their militias; they marched and mustered regularly; and made out in many of their actions and words, especially their constant concern about 'internecine' enemies, that they considered themselves always to be on a war footing. Their military activities may not have impressed senior British officers but commentators thought that their presence terrified Africans.

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ically, the leader of the Cato St conspiracy and one of the last men to be executed with the punishment of a traitor was Thistlewood's radical nephew, Arthur Thistlewood (1774–1820).

35 Long, *History of Jamaica 2*: 401.

36 Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570–1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

37 Cited in Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire*: 144.

Vincent Brown has made the most comprehensive argument in favour of Jamaica being a society at war building on my own work from 2004 onwards.[38] He notes that from the mid-seventeenth century, Jamaica was a garrison government, run by military veterans focused on order and security. That set of military assumptions, Brown argues, continued into the eighteenth century with the military ethos being a central doctrine of white supremacy in the island.[39] In the eighteenth century, Jamaica was involved in many of the myriad wars that Britain engaged in against France in a more direct way than elsewhere in the Caribbean, being, for example, the place for which large expeditionary forces left to attack Cartagena, unsuccessfully, in 1741 and Havana, successfully, in 1762.[40] It was often subject to martial law, when governors felt the island under external or internal threat. From the 1720s onwards, Jamaica faced an unrelenting series of enslaved rebellions, culminating in a decade or more long war with the Maroons.[41]

The Maroons were fearsome warriors, living in a society defined by martial masculinity and committed to constant warfare. In this way, they resembled many enslaved Africans who came from places marked by wars and conquest and who saw themselves as warriors. That certainly was the case for Wager, previously called Apongo, the real leader of Tacky's Revolt, whom Thistlewood thought had been a prince in Guinea, specifically Dahomey, and prolific slave trader. Whether this assumption was true or not – Brown thinks it more likely that Wager was an Akan-speaker[42] – it is clear that his experience in the Caribbean as an enslaved driver on the estate of a Royal Naval officer involved much military service. He worked on his master's naval frigate, was involved in battles at sea in 1747 and seems to have been part of the British invasion of Guadeloupe in the Seven Years' War.[43]

Thus, it is not surprising that Wager would have seen himself as a warrior forced to live in a society whose rule he wanted to overthrow through force. What little we know of him suggests that he had the motivation, the skills and the courage to attempt such an audacious task. Focusing on Wager highlights the importance of war in enslaved peoples' backgrounds and their continuation of African military practices in

38 Brown, *Tacky's War*; Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*: 137–74.

39 Brown, *Tacky's War*: 45.

40 Elena Schneider, *The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Richard Harding, *Amphibious Warfare in the Eighteenth Century: The British Expedition to the West Indies, 1740–1742* (London: Boydell Press 1991).

41 Brown, *Tacky's War*: 110–18; Orlando Patterson, "Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Sociohistorical Analysis of the First Maroon War, 1665–1740," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979): 246–97; Philip Wright, "War and Peace with the Maroons, 1730–1739," *Caribbean Quarterly* 16 (1970): 5–27.

42 Brown, *Tacky's War*: 37.

43 Brown, *Tacky's War*: 70–72, 82–83.

the New World.[44] No-one on Thistlewood's Egypt estate probably matched Wager as a military leader but many of the enslaved people there, Thistlewood speculated after Tacky's revolt had been put down, were prepared to confront white rule through force. Wager, while being executed by being gibbeted alive, told Thistlewood that he knew Lewie from his estate. Several of Thistlewood's enslaved men seem to have known in advance of the 1760 rebellion, shaving their heads as a sign of support. One man had a brother on Masemure who was killed in battle and three men called Quacoo, Abraham and Achilles from Egypt participated in the rebellion.[45]

Being physically attacked by enslaved men was nothing new for Thistlewood. Thistlewood was physically confronted in the early 1750s by Black Men willing to risk severe punishment by attacking their master. On 4 December 1752, Thistlewood whipped Tony for "neglect." Tony tried to drown himself in the morass and, when Thistlewood stripped and dragged him out of the water, threatened him with a stick, being subdued "with much ado" and marched back to the estate with his hands tied behind him. In late December 1752, Thistlewood was attacked by a runaway, Congo Sam, whom he only just managed to subdue while his enslaved men stood by watching with one witness, London, refusing to go with him to support Thistlewood at Sam's trial. To Thistlewood's disgust, Westmoreland magistrates did not punish Sam, not doing so in order to appease Sam's wealthy owner who did not want his valuable property physically disfigured. On 8 April 1754 an enslaved man belonging to George Goodin, a wealthy planter, "came at me with an Open Knife" and Thistlewood, accompanied by Cuffee, who was fishing, first "offer'd to defend myself with a harpoon" but finding Goodin's enslaved man not relenting was forced to get Cuffee to get his gun, after which the confrontation ended. Thistlewood noted how lucky he was to escape: "tho' God knows I had no one Nigh me, but it frighted him. So yt he run away."

Fear of slave insurrection certainly nagged at the White Jamaican psyche. Violence against the enslaved, often randomly and very often brutally employed, was one way of coping with living fearfully in a state of war. Nicolas Lejeune, a Saint Domingue planter and such a psychopath in his torturing of enslaved women because he feared they were poisoning him that he was the very rare planter prosecuted for violating the Code Noir, declared on his acquittal from charges he was clearly guilty of, that each slave hated his master and "it was only force and violence that restrains him; he is bound to harbour an implacable hatred in his heart, and if he does not visit upon us all the hurt of which he is capable it is only because his readiness to do so is chained down by terror." Lejeune argued that "it is not the fear and equity of the law

44 For Africans and military orientations, see, inter alia, John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa* (London: UCL Press, 1999); Manuel Barcia, *West African Warfare in Bahia and Cuba: Soldier Slaves in the Atlantic World, 1807–1834* (London: UCL Press, 2014).

45 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*: 172.

that forbids the slave from stabbing his master, it is the consciousness of absolute power that he has over his person. Remove this bit, he will dare everything."[46]

V

What is noticeable about the punishment regime of Jamaica in the first half of the eighteenth century was how personal it was. Wealthy planters may have subcontracted the actual inflicting of pain through whipping to Black drivers and other privileged enslaved men but they were the people ordering punishments and supervising how Black people were to be disciplined. Diana Paton notes that the fierce laws mandating punishment for enslaved people for any act of violence against a White person were based upon the assumption that such an act was an act of rebellion, amounting to treason. The legal system, in her view, "valorized the slaveholder's penal power," and implicitly transferred the authority vested in the state to punish to the individual slave owner.[47] This does not mean that individuals were not supported by a legal system designed to increase their authority. From the late seventeenth century, the colonial assembly sought to construct laws that prevented rebellion and which gave the slave manager power to institute brutal acts of retribution. These were laws designed to terrify the enslaved. They provided brutal physical punishment as a matter of course – whipping, bodily mutilations, gruesome forms of execution – that were much fiercer for enslaved culprits than for servants who committed crimes. Whites were able to use as much force as they wanted against the enslaved as the presumption was that otherwise the enslaved would turn to rebellion. The only exception was for murder when that murder was done out of "wilfulness, wantonness, or bloody mindedness." But even then the penalty, if convicted (which was seldom),[48] was light – three months imprisonment and a fine of £50 compensation to the owner of the dead slave. If, however, a white servant was murdered, that was a felony, punishable by death. Free White people, moreover, could always get away with murder entirely if they explained the death as someone stealing, running away or refusing to submit "to their authority."

46 Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*: 137; Burnard and Garrigus, *Plantation Machine*: 257–60.

47 Diana Paton, "Punishment, Crime and the Bodies of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 923, 927, 931.

48 Thistlewood discovered the biases of the racially-based justice system when a free person of colour shot one of Egpyt's slaves during an argument over fish. Thistlewood argued that Humphrey – "a stout hopefull young Fellow" – was shot "Wilfully and purposely (out of Mere Wantonness) without giving them any Manner of Provocation." A White man swore in favour of the quadroon killer and the killer was acquitted, on account of this strong White testimony. Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire*: 167.

The law and customs thus gave enormous support for Whites in whatever they did with their enslaved charges. There was a catch, however. The colonial state expected masters and mistresses, rather than itself, to provide for the policing of enslaved people. Whites in charge of the enslaved were expected to personally control, coerce, compel and punish enslaved people, searching their huts for any weapons and responsible themselves for uncovering plots. The slave codes, in short, personalised slavery. They invested nearly unlimited power in White people to act as they pleased towards enslaved people, power that in Britain was confined to the crown, church, and court. In Britain, *Leviathan* was the state; in Jamaica *Leviathan* was the individual White person. Jamaica had a strong state, devoted to ensuring White people's security and in passing acts to enhance White prosperity.[49] Yet the state delegated most of the things of which *Leviathan* was meant to be in charge to individuals. As Christine Walker, acutely comments: "the colonial transference of command from the institution to the individual marked one of the most significant departures from European legal tradition. In passing these acts, local lawmakers placed tremendous authority and responsibility in the hands of a wide range of ordinary colonists. Frequent outbreaks of violence justified slaveholder suspicions, making merciless retribution seem all the more necessary, especially in sparsely settled frontier regions."[50] But was this awesome authority accompanied by the state resources which gave force to this authority? My argument is that authority was not matched by resources to make such authority until the 1760s and the crisis for White society of Tacky's Revolt.[51]

In making this argument, I follow the intriguing argument made by Orlando Patterson, who uses historical precedents from the eighteenth-century to comment on the often lawless nature of modern day Jamaica, that a distinctive feature of Jamaica, even when compared with other Caribbean societies such as Antigua and Barbados, was that Jamaica was a Hobbesian society, with enslaved people subject to the savagery of living in a state of nature without protection of law but with one crucial aspect of Hobbes' understanding of *Leviathan* missing. That missing aspect was consent – Whites acted to Blacks without Blacks agreeing to accept White authority. Hobbes insisted that raw power was not enough to sustain *Leviathan*; members of a community needed to agree that in order to have peace and order people formed a covenant with each other to obey a common authority, or what he called "sovereignty

49 Trevor Burnard and Aaron Graham, "Security, Taxation and the State in Jamaica 1721–1782," *Early American Studies* 18 (2020): 461–89.

50 Christine Walker, *Jamaican Ladies: Female Slaveholders and the Creation of Britain's Atlantic Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020): 63.

51 Orlando Patterson, *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

by institutions."[52] In Hobbes' formulation, slave owners' pretensions to power were illegitimate because the enslaved had not entered a covenant to submit to rule by sovereign institutions. The enslaved thus "have no obligation at all" to obey rulers to whose rule they did not consent. In short, places like Jamaica were in the war zones that Hobbes conceived of as being states of nature in which social norms did not apply.

Masters, in this Hobbesian scenario, had no obligation to obey laws of natural justice and could punish and kill the enslaved as they wished. Conversely, the enslaved had no obligation to obey what masters demanded. They always had the right of resistance, including the ability to kill their owners or managers. As Mary Nyquist argues, the implication of living in this kind of Hobbesian place was that masters' "despotical dominion" originating in living in a place of continual warfare "legitimates the extralegal power held by the slave master at the same time that it contributes ideologically to the militarization and bureaucratization of sovereignty claimed by the state."[53] Patterson's gloss on Hobbes is that "Jamaican slave society, while it used the monopoly of might to ensure its genocidal and exploitative rule and prevent successful revolt, never solidified its rule through 'sovereignty by institutions' and hence never won the obligation to obey from the enslaved population." Patterson distinguishes Jamaica from other Caribbean societies, such as Barbados, where he argues that effective institutions were created that controlled both Black and White people, and which have been maintained into the present, whereas in Jamaica institutions existed and worked well in some respects but did not work in the crucial area of master-slave relations as so much personal autonomy was given to masters to act as if they were at war and where the enslaved responded to their owners' depredations by acting themselves according to the rules of war, employing consistent resistance to what was considered an illegitimate authority.[54]

VI

The diaries of Thomas Thistlewood provide a compelling case study of how the state's response to Tacky's Revolt in 1760 transformed the ways in which managers of slaves were able to deal with the challenges posed to them by restive and rebellious en-

52 Note [GB]: The phrase in Hobbes is "sovereignty by institution" (i.e. singular – an act of institution), but Trevor Burnard has it in the plural and seems, as the discussion continues, to take the phrase in directions not envisaged by Hobbes. But the plural version seems to come from Orlando Patterson, who is quoted later on. I have left it unchanged, even though the quote is wrong if it is meant to come from Hobbes himself. Patterson's error seems a fruitful one.

53 Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule; Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 325; Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*: 28–30.

54 Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*: xli; Patterson, *Confounding Island*: chapter 1.

slaved people. It shows that in the 1750s the unregulated plantation system, in which managers of the enslaved had absolute powers, and exercised them frequently and with extreme brutality, but where they were largely unsupported by local authority and by the colonial state in how they managed their troublesome enslaved labour force, was under severe stress. Thistlewood was a highly competent if excessively hard-hearted slave manager, as can be seen in how he was virtually able to demand his own price as salary for being an overseer.[55] But his job was very difficult. James Knight noted that

> the Life of a Planter, is attended with great Anxiety, Care and trouble for he is Obliged not only to be up Early and ride about his Plantation [a] great part of the day, in the Scorching heat of the Sun; but to have a Constant Eye over his Servants and Negroes. And it requires great Thought, Temper, and Discretion to order and manage them, their dispositions being as different as their Several Countries, or Nations; and many Quarrels, and Controversies, often arise amongst them, which are heard and determined in Every Plantation, by the Master or Owner, and in his absence the Overseer, who has an Absolute Authority over them, Life and Limb excepted.[56]

It is notable that, while Knight suggests the power of the overseer is close to absolute, he gives no impression that the planter can expect any help from outsiders – the plantation is an enclosed world.

Thistlewood's job was made harder by hostility to him from wealthy Whites who objected to what they considered Thistlewood's presumption in regard to their enslaved property. Thistlewood retails in his diaries for the early 1750s – years when he was very much a newcomer to southwestern Jamaica – numerous occasions when he was lambasted and threatened by prominent White Jamaicans for what they considered was his impudence in whipping their slaves when these enslaved people intruded upon the plantation he supervised. On 17 December 1751, for example, Thistlewood recorded that the wealthy planter Jacob Ricketts visited him and "told me he would prosecute me for whipping his Negroes last Friday as far as the law will allow." On 11 July 1752, he noted that he "was certainly informed of Mr Thomas Dorrill's dislike to me, Since I whipped his Negroes." Thistlewood tried to mend fences by visiting Dorrill two weeks later seeking reconciliation and Dorrill told him "he'd think upon it." On 14 April 1753 he noted that "Mr [William] Barclay had 'promised to fine me severely if I ever missed Exercise at Savanna la Mar for Whipping his Negroes'." Sure enough, on 2 May he missed exercise and was threatened with a fine. It did not stop him: on 11 May 1753 he caught Colonel Barclay's slaves fishing on his estate and "brought them home and whipped them." He related how "Colonel Barclay threatened me as he went home that he would whip me when he let off me in the Kings Road."

I have made a close examination of Thistlewood's relations with his enslaved charges for several years, the earliest and most notable being 1756. This year's diary –

55 Burnard, Mastery, *Tyranny and Desire*: ch. 2.

56 Greene, *Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica by James Knight*: 474.

the one introducing Derby's Dose – reveal a man and system under considerable strain. His slaves were starved, overworked, excessively punished and desperately unhappy. One sign of their unhappiness, what I focus on here, was running away, or *petit marronage*. Enslaved people supervised by Thistlewood ran away in such numbers that the productivity of the estate was greatly compromised. Thistlewood lost 665 days' work from 28 runaways, four of whom were multiple repeat offenders. The amount of time lost from *petit marronage* can be measured in financial terms – 665 days lost based on an enslaved person producing £16 wealth per annum equalled 1.82 year's income, or £29.15. That sum was equivalent to what a starting bookkeeper earned per annum.

Thistlewood had to do the retrieving of such runaways by himself. Only once did he mention that a fellow overseer sent an escaped slave back to him. In all other cases, Thistlewood used trusted privileged enslaved men to hunt for runaways. These hunters took their time doing so, often taking several days to find a runaway. If you add the time that was spent searching for runaways in 1756 to days lost from *petit marronage*, the total days lost expands by 95 days to 760 days or 2.08 years' income, amounting to £33.32. That sum showed that Thistlewood's very personal pursuit of runaways, done by himself and his enslaved men without any White involvement or any help from the state, was not noticeably successful. Runaways stayed away from working in the field for days on end. They suffered, however, when they were returned to the plantation. Punishments in 1756 were especially horrific. They involved such sadistic touches as 'pickling' whipped slaves with stinging lime juice rubbed into wounds and placing 'cart chains' and 'pot hooks' around necks and shackles around ankles. It meant that Thistlewood would often have one or more enslaved men working in chains. Almost all runaways were men, accounting for 643 days absence (96.5 percent) and 738 days of runaways and time spent hunting them (97.1 percent). It accentuates how different life was for men and women on plantations. So many men absent for so long increased female workloads in the fields. And while enslaved men were viciously punished, they were seldom raped, something which happened to all but the oldest and youngest of the women controlled by Thistlewood.[57]

As Orlando Patterson insists, this *petit marronage* must be placed within a context of *grand marronage* or rebellion. Thistlewood's enslaved men had an example of successful slave rebellion in front of them, the Maroons of the central-western interior who had fought the British in a series of wars in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries, lasting until 1739 when the British and the Maroons agreed to a peace that was to prove beneficial to both sides.[58] The Maroon threat was an intense

57 Heather V. Vermeulen, "Thomas Thistlewood's Libidinal Linnaean Project: Slavery, Ecology, and Knowledge Production," *Small Axe* 22 (2018): 18–38.

58 Barbara Kopytoff, "Colonial Treaty as Sacred Charter of the Jamaica Maroons," *Ethnohistory* 26 (1979): 45–64; Helen McKee, "From Violence to Alliance: Maroons and White Settlers in Jamaica, 1739–1795," *Slavery & Abolition* 39 (2018): 27–52.

one. They forced White Jamaicans to settle outside places that were perfect for plantation agriculture, hampering settlement and economic productivity considerably. They harried the settlements Whites did make and forced the Jamaican state, at great cost, to fight costly wars to try unsuccessfully to subdue them. Most importantly, they provided an example to enslaved people of what was possible outside slavery. The Maroon communities before 1739 were constantly reinforced by runaways from plantations and served as an example of what Kathleen Wilson has called "a double-edged performance of freedom."[59] That inclusion of runaways into Maroon communities ceased after 1739 when the Maroons became a singular case of a state inside a state, with full sovereignty. What the Maroons had is what the rebels of 1760 (and subsequent rebels in 1765) wanted. Thistlewood's diary entry on 1 August 1760 made this clear, just after the great slave revolt had been quashed. Thistlewood reported a statement from another White man that the aim of Wager and his co-rebels was to "fire all the plantations they can, till they force the whites to give them free like Cudjoe's Negroes."[60] They were to be badly let down as the Maroons were instrumental in helping White authority put down the revolt, to the extent of killing the putative leader, Tacky, of the St. Mary uprising.[61]

Recent work has focused on the African antecedents of this massive slave rebellion, noting in particular how members of the Akan speaking nation in present day Ghana, commonly denoted as Coromantee by Jamaican planters, fashioned a revolt out of their African experiences as part of highly militarised societies.[62] Such a view would not have been opposed by Jamaican commentators who regularly demonised Akan peoples as hard working but inherently rebellious. Edward Long, for example, explained the great slave rebellion of 1760 entirely within the terms of a Coromantee led revolt (that is true for Tacky, who was Akan, but not for the main leader, Wager, who was a military leader and slave trader from Dahomey), allowing him to indulge in one of his principal conceits, which was that Creole slaves were docile and that any slave rebellion could be explained as an inevitable outcome of importing unassimilated Africans with inherently violent natures rather than as a consequence of how badly enslaved people were treated.[63] James Knight, writing thirty years earlier, was convinced of the bad character and rebellious nature of Akan warriors who were enslaved, declaring that while the Coromantee were 'ingenious' and expert in science

59 Kathleen Wilson, "The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (2009): 55.

60 Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750–86* (London: Macmillan, 1989): 110.

61 Long, *History of Jamaica 2*: 457.

62 Brown, *Tacky's Revolt*; Edward B. Rugemer, *Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Walter C. Rucker, *Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture and Power* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

63 Long, *History of Jamaica 2*: 447–64.

and mathematics, they were "Fractious, and in Their Nature Deceitfull, Revengefull, and blood thirsty, and require a Stricter hand being kept over Them than those of any other Country." He believed that "there was never as I have heard of it in this and any other Colony, any Plot or Conspiracy, but they were at the bottom of it."[64]

Yet if we read Thistlewood's account of Wager's revolt in Westmoreland, noting that his is the only extensive first-hand account, we get a different picture than the Coromantee-inspired event promulgated by Long and promoted by modern scholarship. Thistlewood concentrates on how the rebels came from particular estates, most notably the Masemure estate owned by the absentee naval officer, Commodore Arthur Forrest. Thistlewood's concentration on plantations as the source of discontent makes sense given his experiences as an overseer on a sugar estate, ominously named Egypt, thus confirming its Biblical-inspired status as a place of bondage for an oppressed people. His analysis was shaped by what he had experienced in the 1750s when he was only barely able to keep control of an embittered and riotous enslaved population through extreme violence and through the calculated use of sexual violence as a weapon of control. Thistlewood's diary supports an alternative explanation for the great slave rebellion of 1760, which is that conditions on plantations for enslaved people in "the starkest and most exploitative slave system in British America"[65] at what I consider to be the nadir of the enslaved experience in both Jamaica and British America were so bad as to create an explosive, combustive experience explicable by reference to problems in slave management and enslaved peoples' distaste for the extreme violence employed against them. We don't need to move to African antecedents; what was happening in Jamaica was sufficient to explain how a ruthless system when enslaved peoples' lives were especially miserable and stunted came under attack.[66]

Jamaican authorities after 1760 moved rapidly away from the system where every person was master of his own plantation but not assisted in that mastery by community or state support. The results were immediate. The transformations in defence and in securing Jamaica from attack by their "internal enemies" that marked the reaction to Tacky's revolt, which I have retailed elsewhere, had significant effects at both the community and the individual level. Just as the state took it upon itself to punish rebels, it also started to take responsibility for dealing with runaways by organising White patrols searching for missing enslaved men. The legislature ordered the militia to patrol the countryside during Christmas, a time when fears of rebellion were heightened. When Thistlewood sought to capture runaways, he was aided by the local community; when runaways arrived at his estate called Breadnut Island, he returned them to the overseer in charge and made sure they were sent to gaol. Disciplining enslaved people was increasingly a collective enterprise involving the

64 Greene, *Natural, Moral, and Political History of Jamaica*: 484.

65 Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972): 120.

66 Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*: 14.

White population as a whole in monitoring, capturing and punishing enslaved people deemed to have committed offenses. Planters were able to counter enslaved opposition by using the disciplinary mechanisms of a more interventionist colonial state, as well as being more rigorous about militia service and by paying for regiments of British soldiers and for Maroons to help them keep order. It led to stability, which is explained by Kamau as occurring "because the unprivileged and the underprivileged within it conformed to the system, its divisions and restrictions."[67] That stability came at great cost, as the tendrils of the fiscal-military state became more all-encompassing and more expensive from the 1770s onward.[68] But it worked.

We can see how much better prepared Jamaica was to deal with enslaved challenges to White rule in the small-scale rebellion of 1765 at Whitehall in St. Mary's Parish. It was small-scale because planter intelligence was greatly enhanced from 1760 and because attempts at organising rebellion by enslaved people on the estates like Masemure that had risen in 1760 to devastating effect were foiled by Whites getting knowledge of the plot, using enslaved informers and employing more quickly and effectively than before a better-led White militia to frighten potential rebels into not rising up against Whites. A few Blacks did so at Whitehall but they were quickly overcome by a more prepared state response led by the rich merchant-planter, Zachary Bayly. In Westmoreland, there was no uprising. Local leaders "used every precaution necessary to strike Terrour into the minds of Slaves with the Militia marching with their Drums beating through every part of Westmoreland."[69] Better preparation by Whites meant that the possibility of a major slave rebellion disappeared.

VII

Tacky's War provided important lessons to White Jamaicans about how to keep themselves safe.[70] A new modus vivendi was established in which the previous emphasis on individual power and control on plantations was replaced by a greater collective desire to support Whites when they were in trouble controlling enslaved people. As

67 Edward Braithwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971): 193.

68 Aaron Graham, *Tropical Leviathan: Slavery, Society, and Security in Jamaica, 1770–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

69 William Lewis to William Lyttleton, 5 December 1765, Lyttleton Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan; Devin Leigh and Clifton E. Sorrell III, "How to Control the History of a Slave Rebellion: A Case Study from the Sources of Blackwell's Revolt in St. Mary's Parish, Jamaica, 1765," *Journal of Caribbean History* 55 (2021): 19–56.

70 Trevor Burnard, "Slavery and the Enlightenment in Jamaica, 1760–1772: The Afterlife of Tackey's Rebellion," in *Enlightened Colonialism: Imperial Agents, Narratives of Progress and Civilizing Policies in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Damien Tricoire (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 227–46.

David Geggus argues for the 1790s, the solidarity of the White minority and its determination to impose its will on slaves was crucial in shaping slave willingness to risk rebellion.[71] Few Blacks were willing to confront this organised authority, knowing how likely it was that their rebellion would be crushed and they personally would be executed in gruesome manner. As I have written elsewhere, "White Jamaicans survived because they mastered the real and symbolic instruments of violence. And power in the Caribbean is closely connected with trauma."[72] That trauma was overwhelmingly that of Black people, which we would do well to recognise.

What difference did this new collective approach to ensuring White safety make to Thistlewood's slave management practices? The changes occurred abruptly, from about mid-1760, when rebels were still being hunted down. They made Thistlewood's life much easier. On 30 July 1760, Thistlewood noted that "several runaways and Addison's Cuffee belonging to Colin Campbell were flogg'd and mark'd at Savanna-la-Mar." The state was taking responsibility for punishments which it had previously delegated to individual slave managers. When Thistlewood sought to find runaways, he was able to enlist, unlike in the 1750s, teams of White people to assist him and his enslaved male helpers. Informal arrangements quickly become solidified into something more permanent. He wrote of how his "Black Partie" was sent out regularly to capture runaways as on 4 September 1760, "3 Negro men" who had pretended they were lost fishermen. By Christmas the Westmoreland vestry was authorising a slave patrol to circulate around plantations during Christmas, a period when slave rebellion was especially likely.

Running away of course, continued and was a problem for the state.[73] But the state, at a local and island level were much more supported by the state in practical ways than they had been before Tacky. The legislature authorised parish vestries to organise patrols of paid White overseers to search for runaways when the numbers of runaways had become sufficiently large. Thistlewood found that fewer enslaved people ran away over time, although we have to keep in mind that he became more experienced over time and, more importantly, moved from the horrors of a sugar plantation to the calmer environment of a livestock and garden produce pen. In 1771, only three enslaved people – all female – absconded. He was assisted in getting these women returned by assistance from other White overseers who paid attention to slaves from other plantations being at their own places. Thistlewood was active himself when he encountered runaways, as on 28 January 1771 when he returned a run-

71 David Geggus, "The Enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on the Causes of Slave Rebellion," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 274–99.

72 Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*: 19.

73 Simon P. Newman, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Escaped Slaves in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Jamaica," WMQ, OI Reader App, 2018, https://oireader.wm.edu/open_wmq/hidden-in-plain-sight/hidden-in-plain-sight-escaped-slaves-in-late-eighteenth-and-early-nineteenth-century-jamaica/ [accessed 29.10.2024].

away man found on his property to his owner. Dealing with runaways had become a much more collective enterprise by the 1770s and the frequent confrontations that occurred in the 1750s between Thistlewood and enslaved people from other plantations that resulted in angry White elite men threatening Thistlewood for punishing their enslaved people ceased in frequency. In the later period, the White community as a whole took responsibility for monitoring the enslaved population.

The years following Tacky's Revolt until the start of the American Revolution were boom times for White Jamaicans and terrible times for enslaved Jamaicans and the thousands of Africans who became enslaved in the island every year. Tacky's Revolt caused a great deal of damage to Jamaican infrastructure and frightened Jamaicans half to death, encouraging many people to leave the island, at least according to Westmoreland gossip which Thistlewood retailed in his diary. But the plantation machine ground on. 1760 saw the largest sugar crop yet harvested in the island.[74] Jamaican productivity boomed further in the 1760s and 1770s, meaning that by 1774 White Jamaicans were the wealthiest people in the British Empire. Thistlewood can be included in that number, dying in 1786 with 600 acres and a personal estate worth nearly £3,500 having arrived in the island aged 29 and virtually penniless in 1750.[75]

Thistlewood was also a much happier and content man in his last twenty-five years. He stopped the most sadistic of his punishments after 1760, such as Derby's Dose, and while still a very violent man, frequently whipping enslaved men and raping enslaved women, the tone in his diaries is appreciably different from that previously exhibited. In the 1750s, Thistlewood was largely alone and the White leaders of his local area tended to be antagonistic to him rather than supportive; by the late 1760s he was increasingly integrated in a White society that saw itself as mutually involved in disciplining enslaved people and in supporting other Whites in managing enslaved people and in returning to their owners and managers enslaved people who had run away. The trauma of Tacky's revolt had solidified the community of White Jamaicans around an explicitly White supremacist political philosophy and mode of action. That creation of racially-inspired community was not an accidental creation. It was deliberately fostered by Whites after the shock of 1760 as a means of ensuring White solidarity. Much more than before 1760, whiteness was the justification for inclusion in the political community and government and individual actions all combined to create a *herrenvolk* democracy, in which White behaviour was tolerated, even valorised, with the explicit aim of keeping Whites united around the idea that if all Whites stuck together, then all Blacks could be kept cowed and under control.[76]

74 Rugemer, *Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance*.

75 Trevor Burnard, "'A Prodigious Mine': The Wealth of Jamaica Before the American Revolution Once Again," *Economic History Review* 54 (2001): 505–23.

76 Trevor Burnard, "Tropical Hospitality, British Masculinity and Drink in Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaica," *Historical Journal* 65 (2022): 202–33.

In the 1790s, Bryan Edwards noted how well White supremacy worked in alleviating fear and creating community. He stated that in the West Indies there was "a marked and predominant character to all white residents" that revolved around "an independent spirit and a display of conscious equality throughout all ranks and conditions." All whites were equal insofar as they had "the pre-eminence and distinction which are necessarily attached even to the complexion of a white Man, in a country where the complexion, generally speaking, distinguished freedom from slavery."[77] As is so often the case with social analysis, Edwards assumed that what he observed had always existed and came out of something natural and inherent in Jamaica, the presumption that any White man (White women are ignored in his treatment of West Indian race relations) was superior to any Black man because of the biological superiorities of white skin.

White supremacy in Jamaica, however, was a created phenomenon and it was largely created out of a painful episode (for Whites) in 1760, even if the development of a society in which all White people were free and all Black people inferior had been evolving since the 1730s. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Jamaica, as a society at war, was a place with highly precarious security and with such a strong commitment to the individual autonomy of White people, especially in their rule over Black people, that the ability of Whites to manage volatile plantations was considerably compromised. By the 1750s, White Jamaicans had established a fearsomely efficient method of plantation management that resulted in large profits, making a few Jamaicans extremely rich.

But it was a system of plantation management with a fatal flaw. That flaw was how the slave work force was managed. Enslaved people were a hostile, barely controllable enemy population. One way of controlling this population was through the application of extreme violence, done personally by overseers and masters without interference by the community or state. Another option was to raise the condition of Whites so that unfree Whites as a category disappeared, with no convicts being allowed to land and the number of indentured White servants disappearing, making it clear that all Whites were free.[78] But such strategies relied far too much on individual initiative and capacity. They foundered also in the context of a society in which working conditions for the enslaved were so bad that enslaved people died in such numbers that they were always needing to be replaced by fresh imports of alienated, often militarily accomplished, slaves from West Africa.

The problem was recognised by Edward Trelawney, a particularly astute observer of Jamaican morals and Jamaica's most impressive governor in the first half of the eighteenth century. In private communications to Britain, he excoriated White Jamai-

77 Cited in Burnard, *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*: 32.

78 Trevor Burnard, "From Freedom to Race: Unfree White People in Jamaica, 1655–1784", unpublished paper for an edited collection that will no longer appear.

cans as "the worst managers of slaves under the Sun," noting "that nowhere else are slaves so completely at the mercy and caprice of their masters." In an anonymous pamphlet of 1746, he lamented White Jamaicans' short-termism, their excessive individualism, their unwillingness to cooperate with each other, and, most of all, their fixation on profits at the risk of social stability. He correctly saw Jamaica in the 1740s as a tinderbox, likely to explode at any time if current tendencies were not stopped. The principal problem was that planters did not think of the future consequences of their present-day actions, notably their compulsive reliance on the slave trade and their excessively violent slave management practices. "Planters," he lamented, "have a Rage for buying Negroes and have little Care and Conduct that is used in the Management of Them. Like children playing with Edge-Tools, which they cannot manage, Jamaica would soon be over-run and ruined by its own slaves." Such ruin would be due to planters' lack of concern over security "due to a narrow Selfishness and total Unconcern for everything that doth not regard their immediate Interest," manifested in not obeying laws designed to keep Whites safe. He quipped that it was no point "making new Laws until the old ones are obey'd" and he exploded about how planter's selfishness endangered the safety of the island in noting how a bandit band of thirteen slaves had taken advantage of slack slave management to escape until "routed" by Maroons:

> Have they not Sense to know how precarious their Condition must be, when thirteen Rogues only out of so many thousand are able to bid them Defiance, and give the such Alarms? Can they be ignorant that their whole Constitution must be quite crazy, their whole Mass of Blood vitiated, when such small Eruptions can endanger so much the whole Body, and when they break out so fast one after another [. . .] Many see the Symptom of a Country approaching its Ruin, but they fancy it may last their Time, they may sell out and get Home first, and what comes afterward they care not.[79]

Trelawney was prescient. The slave rebellion he anticipated occurred in 1760 and shaped understandings of security and potential enslaved insurrection forever afterwards.[80] Tacky's revolt marked a major step change in White Jamaican life. Henceforth White Jamaicans came to believe that their only protection against slave insurrection was to enshrine in law White supremacy and to provide many ways in which the authority of White managers of slaves was supported not just by law but also by practical assistance. The slave manager was to be a tyrant supported by the state rather than just the master of his little kingdom. Jamaica stayed a violent place but the cadence of violence was henceforth slightly different. James Knight and Edward Long thought that Jamaica could rely on the goodness of planters to preserve peace

79 Edward Trelawney, *An Essay Concerning Slavery* (London: C. Corbett, 1746). Reprinted in *Exploring the Bounds of Liberty: Political Writings of Colonial British America from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Craig Yirush (Carmel, IN: Liberty Fund, 2018): 1131–65.

80 Claudius Fergus, "'Dread of Insurrection': Abolitionism, Security, and Labor in Britain's West Indian Colonies, 1760–1823," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2009): 757–80.

without state interference. Trelawney and, later, Edwards, were more realistic about the ubiquity of violence in Jamaica. Edwards declared that the occasional planter kindness "affords but a feeble restraint against the corrupt passions and infirmities of our nature, the hardness of avarice, the pride of power, the sallies of anger, and the thirst for revenge."[81] Edwards and Trelawney had a better grip on White Jamaican character than Long or Knight, as can be seen in the horrific violence meted out to enslaved rebels in 1760 and 1761.

Revenge, of course, was not confined to Whites; Blacks yearned for revenge as well. The anarchic radical, Thomas Tryon, proposed in 1684 that understanding that the enslaved were full of "the Cup of Wrath" due to resentment about their mistreatment should encourage Whites to treat the enslaved better.[82] In general, White Jamaicans, including Thomas Thistlewood, did not heed such warnings but took the view of Defoe and Knight that kindness was wasted on Africans. That Africans needed to be treated with the rod rather than gently remained axiomatic among White Jamaicans throughout the period of slavery, though the intense cruelty exhibited in the frst half of the eighteenth century reduced over time as management techniques were refined and as planters tried to emulate the scientific approach to agriculture (including in Jamaica the management of the enslaved) that existed in Britain.[83] What changed after 1760 was an increased appreciation that maintaining White supremacy in the island and protecting the White population from the horror of slave revolt meant a communal approach to managing, controlling and punishing enslaved populations. White Jamaicans' "imagined community" required Whites to join together in the war against Blacks in collective ways that had not thought of in the more individualistic past. That was the effect of a great slave rebellion on White social and cultural patterns.

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81 Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies 2* (London: John Stockdale, 1801): 169–70.

82 Thomas Tryon, *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies* (London: Andrew Sowle, 1684): 206–08.

83 Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 132, 288.

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