THE MEASURE OF EMPIRE:
CRISIS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN POSTEMANCIPATION JAMAICA

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Abstract

This dissertation examines a range of local and imperial administrative responses to a series of crises in Jamaica after emancipation, from roughly 1840 to 1910. It demonstrates how British authorities adopted an initial default posture of nonintervention at the outset of local crises, viewing these events as colonial problems that should largely be resolved by Jamaican authorities and charities. Any deviations from this policy were strategic calculations designed either to minimize potential embarrassment to Britain or alleviate heightened political tensions between London and Kingston. On one level, the project illuminates a range of administrative practices and moral postures that those involved in running Jamaica employed during moments of crisis and catastrophe. But on another level, the insights gleaned from these case studies explain why the post-emancipation Caribbean remains a crucial site of historical inquiry for scholars of the British Empire.

Once the wealthiest colony in the British Empire, Jamaica’s economic value declined dramatically in the nineteenth century, as the emancipation of enslaved Afro-Jamaicans—and their subsequent large-scale abandonment of their former plantations—relegated the island to minor colony status. But empires gain their force from the breadth of their presence, not simply from their possession of a few key holdings. For those living in minor colonies, the fact that some other place was the most central arena of imperial activity mattered little. What was more important was that their local and imperial government respond adequately to their needs. For this reason, the demands that Jamaican subjects felt entitled to make on the Colonial Office and even Parliament in the wake of these crises provide one measure of how minor colonies continued to exist within imperial systems. As a whole, the project illuminates mechanisms of imperial administration and the interplay between those on the ground—colonial officials, local authorities, ordinary subjects—and the metropolitan government.
# Table of Contents

Abstract iii  
Table of Contents iv  
Acknowledgments v  
List of Illustrations vi  
Introduction 1  
Chapter One  
The Moral Politics of Cholera in Postemancipation Jamaica 30  
Chapter Two  
A Question of Standards: Violence in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum 73  
Chapter Three  
A City in Flames: Fire and Constitutional Politics in 1880s Jamaica 148  
Chapter Four  
Lessons in how to be a “responsible British official”: The End of Alexander Swettenham’s Career 196  
Conclusion 237  
Bibliography 240
Acknowledgments

This whole graduate school thing started with a college trip to Britain in 2003. Convincing my father to let me go wasn’t easy, but that trip has led to this moment. My father would rather I be in business, but he has nonetheless supported my historical ambitions. He has also, at times over the last six years, provided a much-needed roof over my head and countless delicious meals.

I must thank the members of my committee—Linda Colley, Dan Rodgers, Jeremy Adelman, and Vincent Brown—for their astute guidance and their careful readings of early, faltering drafts of this dissertation. At early stages, Catherine Hall, Trevor Burnard, Verene Shepherd, James Robertson, Diana Paton, and Christopher Hamlin provided expert advice about my project. I have presented portions of this work at the Yale-Princeton British Studies workshop in 2007; the Archaeological Society of Jamaica Symposium in 2008; the North American Conference on British Studies annual meeting in 2009; the Duke African and African American Studies Working Group in 2010; the Sixth Latin American and Caribbean Graduate Student Workshop at Duke University in 2011; and the Colonialism and Imperialism Workshop at Princeton University in 2011. I am grateful for these opportunities to present my work and for the thoughtful feedback and engagement of the commentators. This dissertation and my graduate study have been funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton’s Center for African American Studies, and the Princeton history department. Susan Pedersen ran the exceptional Mellon Graduate Seminar in Modern British History in the summer of 2010, an opportunity for advanced graduate students to spend seven weeks thinking deeply about our field and critiquing each other’s work. It was the most intellectually thrilling experience I’ve had. My thanks to her and also to the other members of the seminar: Amanda Behm, Jill Bender, Megan Doherty, Aimee Genell, David Getman, Toby Harper, Andrew Keating, Ryan Linkof, Chas Reed, Scott Spencer, and Tal Zalmanovich. Dean Karen Jackson-Weaver has been a magnificent champion of Princeton’s minority graduate students. Her help and advice during my toughest moments here was invaluable. Attempting to quantify the value of Dr. David Campbell’s help is impossible. Suffice it to say I wouldn’t be finishing were it not for his encouragement.

The best decision of my academic career I made in the fall of my junior year at Duke when I decided to take courses with Cynthia Herrup and Jolie Olcott. These two women have modeled what it means to be a scholar, a teacher, and a mentor and they have done so with humor and generosity. Without them, I could not have made it into and out of graduate school. Jolie singlehandedly saved my graduate career when she arranged for me to spend my final year of writing as a visiting graduate fellow at Duke, a year that was immensely productive. It is also because of her that I’m now spending this year teaching at my alma mater, a true honor and privilege. I spoke to Cynthia after class one day in fall 2003, asking her about masters’ programs in the UK. That didn’t pan out, but she’s been a constant source of advice and encouragement ever since. My goal, when I grow up, is to be like her.

There came a moment in the last two years when it looked as though I would not finish this dissertation. That I survived this period at all, and that I finished this project, is due in no small part to the support of my closest friends and my loudest cheerleaders. Eldor Mehilli is simply one of the smartest and funniest people I know. He made grad school bearable and at times utterly hysterical, and he inspires me to be a better scholar. Anthony Petro and I bonded
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Not everyone can say that some of their closest friends are the ones they met in middle school or high school, but I have been extraordinarily lucky to have grown up with such amazing people. I have known Martha Adams probably before we could talk. She has always been there, in times of trouble and in times of joy. Jonathan Langman is the closest thing I have to a brother, and I owe him a debt I can never repay. Therese, his wife, has become a great friend over these past six years, and their family, including their two young boys, Jaxon and Brady, has welcomed me into their home for countless vacations from the dissertation. I call Micheline Anderson my soul sister because she understands me more than anybody else I know. Why she’s planning to get a PhD is beyond me, but I’m cheering her on all the way.

My mother was born in a tin shack in a tiny village in Jamaica’s Blue Mountains. Hers was a difficult life from the outset, and its difficulties overwhelmed her. But there was one thing that she loved unabashedly, and that was England. She loved everything about England: London, the countryside, Braintree in Essex, butter on sandwiches, tea. She and I had always planned to go to England together, but her gradual physical breakdown from untreated breast cancer and her slow and staggeringly painful death ten years ago not only prevented that trip from happening but cast a bitter pall over my undergraduate and graduate careers.

My mother’s journey from Jamaica to England in 1956 has been the biggest influence on my work. It was because of her story that I have always believed Jamaica and the United Kingdom cannot be understood separately and that the Caribbean is an integral part of British history, even when historiographical conventions have said otherwise. And it has been my desire to constantly learn more about perhaps the one place my mother was ever happy that has sustained me even when graduate school itself was too painful an ordeal. She was a notorious perfectionist, so I can’t say that she would be pleased with this dissertation, but she has inspired every page of it.
Illustrations

Image 1: Burnt district in Kingston, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #291, fol. 219r. Burnt districts in red.


Image 4: “The Scene is Changed,” Jamaica Times, 29 June 1907, 1.
For GHVF
1943-2001
“Those island societies would not exist as they do today were it not for Britain, and Britain would certainly not exist as it is today were it not for those islands.”

~Andrea Levy\(^1\)

Jamaica, one of the world’s most popular tourist destinations, is a nation of paradoxes. An island of staggering beauty, its social landscape has been marred by rampant poverty and brutal violence. In recent years, Jamaica has had one of the world’s highest murder rates, at times higher than every country except South Africa and Colombia.¹ Its society continues to be linked with Britain. This independent nation’s official head of state is not its prime minister Bruce Golding, but Queen Elizabeth II. And despite the United States’s current status as the most influential superpower in Jamaican economic and political affairs, it is Britain whose subcultures have most absorbed aspects of Jamaican culture, food, and music, and whose history is most intertwined with that of the Caribbean island.

These are the threads that journalist Ian Thomson has tried to untangle in his appraisal of modern Jamaica and its history, The Dead Yard. Reviewers have rightly criticized Thomson for painting too bleak a portrait of Jamaican life, one that does not acknowledge sufficiently the vibrancy of the island’s culture.² Thomson is also too grudging in his appreciation of the island’s gorgeous vistas. It is only until he drives through the Blue Mountains—presumably a few weeks into his trip—that he admits, “For the first time Jamaica struck me as beautiful.”³ But as anyone who has traveled to Jamaica knows, for all its problems, Jamaica’s beauty shines through from

the moment their plane lands in Kingston or Montego Bay. Despite Thomson’s overwhelming negativity, he presents at least one insight that deserves further consideration. He argues that by the 1840s, when, from the planters’ perspective, the abolition of slavery transformed the once-lucrative colony into an economic wasteland, British colonial authorities turned their attention away from Jamaica. As he writes, “The end of the slave trade…brought economic decline: Jamaica, a waning asset even under Queen Victoria, was demoted to the imperial category of ‘minor colonies.’” Later, as he discusses a prominent plantation’s post-emancipation decline, Thomson claims that “Jamaica, no longer vital to the British economy, became one of the Empire’s many dark slums.”

The idea that Jamaica—and by extension, the British Caribbean region—faded into imperial obscurity in the last half of the nineteenth century is now an unquestioned assumption in British imperial historiography, and to some degree, historians have followed the lead of British imperialists and have ignored developments in post-emancipation Jamaica, especially after 1865. Jamaica’s lack of economic or political importance after 1850—and indeed the British Caribbean more broadly—has become a justification for leaving the region to its specialists, even though British imperial rule continued in the Anglophone Caribbean until the 1960s. This dissertation takes the opposite tack and challenges the implication that there is little to be learned by studying the Caribbean colonies in the years after the region slid toward the bottom of British imperial priorities.

Jamaica had been the single most wealthy British colony in the mid-to-late eighteenth-century Americas, thanks to the lucrative sugar plantations, the immense value of property in towns like Kingston and Spanish Town, merchants’ trading stocks, the valuable trade—much of it illegal—with Spanish America, not to mention the monetary value of the enslaved peoples of

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African descent who were the vast majority of the Jamaican population. But, as John Darwin insists in *The Empire Project*, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a few decades after emancipation, “the West Indian colonies...seemed to most British observers a troublesome burden, tainted by slavery, ill-governed and impoverished.” Jamaica’s new position as a “minor colony” is not a justification to ignore it, but an opportunity to explore what that demotion might have meant for those living on the island. In part, my argument for the importance of the “minor colonies” is in part a recognition that the British Empire was the sum of its parts. The nineteenth-century British Empire was not comprised solely of the most prominent colonies—British India, the white settler colonies, and the new acquisitions in Africa. Instead, the empire was, at the very least, the constellation of red dots on the world map. Britain gained global force not as the holder of a few significant colonies here and there but as a presence in every corner of the globe. As John Darwin reminds us, the empire was made up not only of colonies of rule and white settlement but also “protectorates, condominiums (like the Sudan), mandates (after 1920), naval and military fortresses (like Gibraltar and Malta), ‘occupations’ (like Egypt and Cyprus), treaty-ports and ‘concessions’ (Shanghai was the most famous), ‘informal’ colonies of commercial pre-eminence (like Argentina), ‘spheres of interference’...like Iran, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf, and (not least) a rebellious province at home.” Within this broader understanding of the British Empire—or as Darwin calls it, the “British world-system”—

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5 Trevor Burnard notes that this wealth was not just in the aggregate. The average white man living in Jamaica was 36.6 times more wealthy than his counterpart in the mainland American colonies and 52.5 times more wealthy than his English or Welsh counterpart. Burnard, “‘Prodigious Riches’: The Wealth of Jamaica before the American Revolution,” *Economic History Review* New Series 54, no. 3 (Aug. 2001): 506-524, figures on 520.


Jamaica had a small role. Yet for people living in these so-called minor colonies, the fact that some other place was the most central arena of imperial politics or a more important strategic location mattered little. What was most important was that their government, both local and imperial, respond to their needs and not simply to those of the more prominent colonies. For this reason, the demands that subjects felt entitled to make on the metropolitan government provide one measure of how minor colonies continued to exist within the imperial system, regardless of the meager attention given them by the British public or modern historians.

But this argument is about more than addition. The value of studying minor colonies is not merely about adding bricks in the wall of knowledge. There are specific reasons why the relative absence of scholarship on the late-nineteenth-century Caribbean impoverishes British imperial historiography. There is a tendency to analyze certain themes within nineteenth-century imperial history—most relevant to this dissertation is the theme of colonial medicine—from the vantage point of India. But if we do not keep the Caribbean in the picture, practices and phenomena in nineteenth-century India stand in for the entire empire, despite the varied configurations of power, race, and class and the different timelines of European encounter that defined each holding with the empire. Moreover, the Caribbean remains a crucial region of study in the late-nineteenth-century for geopolitical reasons. These were British islands located in an increasingly significant geographic area: off the coast of the United States. At the turn of the twentieth century, their location would be crucial as the United States began to flex its imperial muscles in Cuba and Puerto Rico and further extended its influence in Latin America,

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8 The same argument applies for the settler colonies, which John Darwin argues have been overlooked. However, much recent scholarship has begun to correct this oversight.
in effect beginning the process by which the newer country superseded its former colonial master in the region, and indeed the world.

This dissertation is a study of four crises that primarily affected Kingston, Jamaica between 1840 and 1910 and analyzes how British and Jamaican authorities responded to them. This project has two main goals. First, it illuminates a range of administrative practices and moral postures that those involved in the running of Jamaica employed in moments of crisis and catastrophe, and in doing so, examines the governing structures of the Colonial Office and the local government under pressure. Second, it uses the insights gleaned from these case studies to explain why the post-emancipation Caribbean remains a crucial site of historical inquiry for scholars interested in the Victorian empire. The rest of this introduction lays the groundwork for this latter set of arguments. First, it provides an overview of Jamaica during this period, including how the transition from slavery to freedom impacted local and imperial administration of the colony and the various segments of the island population. It then examines some of the recent trends in Caribbean historiography and explains how these trends, despite the valuable insights they have provided, have also marginalized the political history of the postemancipation period.

I.

Jamaica’s governing structures

This dissertation is firmly rooted in the post-emancipation period in Jamaican history. In 1833, Parliament passed the Act of Abolition, ending slavery in the British Caribbean—as well as the Cape Colony and Mauritius—and replaced it with apprenticeship, a transitional labor system designed to train former slaves in the art of working for wages and teach planters how to be
employers rather than masters. Under the terms of apprenticeship, apprentices “would work part
time with neither the threat of the planter’s whip nor the promise of monetary reward, and
would, in the rest of their time, engage in contractual wage labor, thus ‘practicing’ for freedom.”
Apprenticeship also stripped owners of the power to punish and placed that power in the hands
of the state, namely the stipendiary magistrates, the new group of men tasked with visiting large
estates, hearing the grievances of apprentices, and doling out punishments to apprentices. After
news reached abolitionists of rampant state-sanctioned floggings, especially of female
apprentices, antislavery activists in Britain launched a campaign to end the system two years
early. On August 1, 1838, former slaves were fully free.9

At emancipation, Jamaica’s governing structure had several divisions. At the top was the
governor, the monarch’s representative and the head of the executive. He was the official in
most contact with the Colonial Office. But the governor had to contend with the island’s planter
faction, who ran the 45-member House of Assembly. The assemblymen were elected from the
island’s parishes, each of which had two representatives. Kingston had three. Most
representatives were associated with the plantation economy as either attorneys, overseers, or
planters. Jamaica’s electorate at the time was small, although reforms in 1832 allowed the free
coloreds to vote along with the Jewish population. As Philip Curtin notes, however, the
electorate was not especially small when compared to the British electorate before the reform act
of 1832. But representation was not evenly distributed. Kingston may have had more

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9 Diana Paton, No Bond But the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaica State Formation, 1780-1870 (Durham:
Duke University Press, 2004), 53-9; quotation found on p. 57. In using the terms “fully free” and “full freedom,” I
am referring to the legal abolition of slavery and emancipation of enslaved peoples, and I remain mindful of the
considerable economic, sociocultural, and political constraints placed on black Jamaicans by planters, British
officials, missionaries, elite people of color, and other white Jamaican elites.
representatives numerically, but each assemblyman represented about 150 voters. The representatives of rural districts answered to far fewer people, in extreme cases to few as ten.\(^{10}\)

The Assembly managed to garner virtually all the power to initiate legislation from its sister body, the appointed Legislative Council. The Assembly also established a series of boards—which oversaw public works and accounts, among other things—on which the assemblymen themselves sat. By being in charge of both legislation that determined how money could be spent and the actual spending itself, the Assembly amassed significant power and, at times, made the governor redundant. Nevertheless, the governor had the power to veto measures. He could do so himself, or he could rely on the Legislative Council, whose members he appointed. Furthermore, the Colonial Office could veto measures approved by both governor and legislature. For this reason, the Assembly’s chief power lay in blocking British initiatives.\(^{11}\)

Jamaica’s judicial system was similar to that in England. At the top was a Supreme Court of three members: the Chief Justice, an Crown-appointed position, and two justices. There were assize courts for each of the island’s three counties. The justices who served in the assizes were also appointed by the governor. Justices of the Peace were residents in the parishes in which they served; they were most often planters.\(^{12}\) At the local level was the parish vestry. Each vestry had a head magistrate, known as the custos rotulorum, the justices of the peace, an Anglican Rector, plus ten elected vestrymen and two churchwardens. The vestry set and collected taxes, maintained local infrastructure, ran local schools and medical institutions, and dealt with the

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\(^{11}\) Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 72-3.

\(^{12}\) Curtin, *Two Jamaicas*, 74-5.
poor. The property qualification was less steep for vestrymen than it was for assemblymen, and after emancipation, Afro-Jamaicans were increasingly visible in local government.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{After emancipation}

The three decades after full freedom in 1838 were marked by economic decline and political tension. Planters largely failed in their quest to keep their former slaves working on their plantations. Freedpeople largely refused to pay the exorbitant rents that planters demanded to remain in their homes and keep their provision grounds. The island had vast mountainous and rural regions with plenty of unused land, and newly freed people fled plantations in droves in the early 1840s and set up free villages, often with the help of British missionaries. Many women and children also moved away from plantation labor. The resulting loss of labor concerned planters and metropolitan officials, who worried about the continued economic viability of the plantation system. Furthermore, the 1846 Sugar Duties Act removed protection for British West Indian sugar, placing it on equal footing with slave-produced Cuban and Brazilian sugar, a cheaper product than the Jamaican sugar produced in a theoretically free economy. Of the Caribbean colonies, Jamaica suffered the most from the new level playing field.\textsuperscript{14} In an attempt to preserve


\textsuperscript{14} Gad Heuman, “The British West Indies,” in Andrew Porter, ed., \textit{The Oxford History of the British Empire Vol. III: The Nineteenth Century}, 480-2; Catherine Hall, \textit{Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 120-2. Contrary to earlier arguments, the scholarship on this period is largely agreed that the “flight from the estates” was not an immediate response to living in the same place where one had been a slave, but rather a reaction against the conditions planters were imposing on those who tried to stay on their estates. See Gad Heuman, “The British West Indies,” in Andrew Porter, ed., \textit{The Oxford History of the British Empire Vol. III: The Nineteenth Century}, 481; Hall, \textit{Civilising Subjects}, 120-2; Thomas Holt, \textit{The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938}, 134, 136, 140. Holt argues that this conflict between planters and freedpeople was unique to Jamaica and that these conflicts in the late 1830s and early 1840s did more economic damage than the 1846 Sugar Duties Act. See Holt, \textit{Problem of Freedom}, 120-121. For Caribbean scholar Douglas Hall's reevaluation of his previous arguments about the causes of the “flight from the estates,” see his “The Flight from the Estates Reconsidered: The British West Indies 1838-42,” \textit{Journal of Caribbean History}, no. 10/11.
the sugar economy, planters and colonial officials across the British Caribbean pursued various immigration schemes, all in the hopes of keeping plantations running. The most successful of these schemes involved Indian indentured servants, who went in large numbers to British Guiana and Trinidad. Significantly fewer went to Jamaica, where the program was largely unsuccessful.15

Another consequence of emancipation was that Jamaicans of African descent had increasing access to political power, thus challenging two centuries of white planters’ political hegemony.16 This was especially true for the portion of the population that during slavery had been called the free people of color, or the colored population. The mixed-race (or brown) children of planters and slave women were born as slaves—the status of slavery traveled through the mother—but were more likely to receive better treatment from their masters and were more likely to be freed by them. Once freed by their masters, these free coloreds—and their descendants—comprised the vast majority of the freed Jamaicans of African descent. Inspired by the rights that St. Domingue’s gens de couleur had managed to secure during the French Revolution, free coloreds campaigned for their civil liberties, which the Jamaica Assembly finally granted in 1830. From this point forward, free people of color had the same rights as whites.

Within one year, two brown politicians were elected to the House of Assembly, and by 1837, ten

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more had been elected. Taking into account attritions, after the 1837 general election, there were eight brown assemblymen, who formed a voting bloc against the white planter faction. This trend continued into the 1840s and 1850s; at their peak in the early 1850s, there were 20 assemblymen of African descent.\(^\text{17}\)

Thirty years of tension between planters, Afro-Jamaicans, and British colonial officials exploded in 1865, when hundreds of black Jamaicans attacked a police station in Morant Bay, the main city of Jamaica’s eastern parish, St. Thomas in the East. Eighteen people died in the riot, and over the next several days, black Jamaicans attacked planters and their plantations. Governor Edward Eyre responded swiftly. Fearing that the upheaval could spread throughout the island, he declared martial law and sent army troops along with the Maroons to rein in the rioting crowds. Hundreds of blacks died, hundreds were flogged, and one thousand homes burned. Eyre falsely accused a prominent Afro-Jamaican politician—George William Gordon, a man born a slave to a planter father—of organizing and inciting the rebellion. Gordon was found guilty in a sham trial and was hanged.\(^\text{18}\) The Morant Bay Rebellion had serious consequences for colonial rule in the Caribbean. The events in Jamaica signaled to British and white elites that the West Indian colonies were unsuitable for responsible government. Moreover, the Jamaican House of Assembly, a representative elected body, no longer believed it could control the black population and dissolved itself in favor of direct British rule via Crown Colony government.\(^\text{19}\) These three decades—and the dramatic political and economic events of

\(^{17}\) Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White*, 4-5, 131. On the free coloreds’ campaign for civil rights, see part 1; on blacks and colored in the House of Assembly, see chapter 5.


this period—provide the crucial backdrop for the first half of the dissertation. They are also the thirty years of post-emancipation Jamaican history with which British historians have engaged.

The post-1865 problem in Caribbean historiography

For the last several decades, British imperial historians have relied upon the work of area studies specialists, and this project is no different. Area studies scholars have used their abilities in local languages and increased access to local archives to do the kind of exhaustive political and social history that imperial generalists often cannot. Moreover, the agenda of area studies scholars’ to remove European imperialism as the central historical experience of a given region serves as a powerful corrective against the Eurocentrism sometimes inherent to studying European empires. The historiography of the Anglophone Caribbean, although unique among area studies scholarship in the fact that these scholars are equally dependent upon the same government documents as British historians, is no exception. Caribbeanists have written the vast majority of the sociopolitical monographs that have provided detailed analyses of plantation life, demographic patterns, the resistance of enslaved peoples, the political rise of free people of color, and post-emancipation politics and labor.

Ian Thomson claims that slavery was the defining feature of Caribbean history, and given how slavery has dominated the historiography, it seems that historians agree. Not only

20 For more on how “the sheer abundance, the relative accessibility, as well as the intrinsic value, of all this governmental documentation have ensured the dominance of the official archive as the base for much of the post-slavery history,” see Bridget Brereton, “Recent Developments in the Historiography of the Post-Emancipation Anglophone Caribbean,” in Beyond Fragmentation: Perspectives on Caribbean History (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), 194.
21 Thomson, The Dead Yard, 51-61, 284, 348.
has slavery dominated Caribbean historiography, its centrality to the history of the Americas—and indeed the region’s importance to early modern European expansion—has created fertile ground where several historiographies overlap. Early American historians now claim the Caribbean as one of their regions of interest, as do seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British imperial scholars and historians of the Atlantic World. As a result, pre-emancipation analyses of the Caribbean abound. But after the abolition of slavery in 1834, interest from these scholars drops off dramatically. Early American historiography gives way to United States history after the American Revolution. The British colonies in the Caribbean that remained loyal to Britain are therefore of little relevance to the US national literature, although this is changing. Similarly, Atlantic World historians generally look to 1800 as the point where an Atlantic perspective loses its salience. This body of scholarship as a whole has chosen a pre-emancipation cutoff point. Most relevant to this project, historians of the British Empire have themselves followed this trend, though not to the same degree as Americanists or Atlanticists.


In Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal, Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan explain why Atlantic historians have tended to view 1800 as a rough cutoff point. As they write, “Most practitioners seem content to limit the subject matter of Atlantic history to the long period between the European Atlantic discoveries of the fifteenth century and the beginnings of decolonization in the Americas between 1774 and 1825. They see it as essentially ending with the creation of anew independent nation-states in the Americas following the American Revolution and the Hispanic American wars for independence, the creation of more powerful centralized national states in Europe during and in the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, and the powerful turn of European imperialism toward the east during the nineteenth century. The presumption seems to be that the expansion of European imperialism and the spread of commerce after 1800 make a global framework of more utility than an Atlantic one for those who are not content to continue to operate within traditional national and imperial frameworks.” Greene and Morgan note some of the ways that an Atlantic framework remains relevant to the nineteenth and twentieth century, but in truth few have taken up the challenge to see what an Atlantic perspective might bring to the later period. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21. For one challenge, see Douglas R. Egerton, “Rethinking Atlantic Historiography in a Postcolonial Era: The Civil War in a Global Perspective,” The Journal of the Civil War Era 1, no. 1 (March 2011): 79-95.
But what does this mean for the state of post-emancipation Caribbean historiography? In the wake of so many scholars abandoning the Caribbean around 1800, only a handful of British historians have joined the Caribbeanists in creating an increasingly rich post-emancipation historiography. This literature has primarily focused on how these islands transitioned from slave societies to colonies inhabited by newly-freed Afro-Caribbeans, their white former owners, and the class of black and mixed-race citizens who had been free prior to emancipation. Scholars of the period between full freedom and Morant Bay have focused overwhelmingly on issues of labor, economics, and immigration, with some of the more recent scholarship analyzing the religious and moral civilizing missions that went hand-in-hand with the European desire to maintain pre-emancipation levels of plantation output.²⁵ For many scholars, especially those studying the Caribbean through a British imperial lens, these questions lose their salience towards the end when the European dream of a post-emancipation society where religious and moral Afro-Caribbeans worked happily for wages on their old plantations died for good. As a result, most British historians who write about the Caribbean have concluded their

analyses around 1865. Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects*, perhaps the most important work in the past decade on British imperialism and its connections with Jamaica, ends in 1867.

Rather than view Morant Bay as a natural beginning or end, I instead look for patterns in crisis management across a seventy-year period (1840-1910). In so doing, I treat the years between 1865 and World War I as equally important to those before Morant Bay. I uncover the heretofore overlooked connection between one of the crises and the 1880s agitation over constitutional change. And perhaps most important to the wider British imperial narrative, I situate Jamaica within the context of American expansion in the Western Hemisphere. Scholars of the twentieth-century Caribbean are doing the latter, but they are generally doing so by working backward from decolonization, whereas this project moves forward from emancipation.  

My approach also demands a broad definition of the post-emancipation period. Here, I agree with Brereton, who suggests that most scholars view the end of apprenticeship in 1838 as the true beginning of emancipation, rather than slavery’s abolition in 1834. She also offers several ways to think about when the post-emancipation period ends: 1865, which she deems the standard ending; 1900; World War I; or the 1930s, a decade that provides the perfect symmetry of a century-long phenomenon but is also a watershed in its own right—the decade in which labor protests in the region provide a good starting point for analyses of decolonization.  

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the adjective “post” is key. There will never be a time in which the Caribbean—indeed the entire Western Hemisphere—is not post (or past) emancipation. This is not just a semantic point. It is a recognition of the persistent and pernicious legacies of slavery and the constraints placed upon freedpeople once slavery had been abolished. Nevertheless, periodization is a tool of the historian’s craft, and if there must be an arbitrary endpoint to the post-emancipation period, then there is no better one than the 1930s, which marks the beginning of yet another struggle for freedom, this time national rather than individual.

II.

Urban disasters

The arguments that I have made about the reasons post-emancipation Jamaica has not received the attention it deserves within British historiography are the critical backdrop to the rest of the dissertation. What follows is a series of case studies, each of which argues, in different ways, for the relevance of the Jamaican experience as a minor colony to the wider literature on the British Empire. Each chapter is a thorough reconstruction of a crisis that impacted Kingston—for the first disaster, Jamaica as a whole—and the social and political context in which each event was situated. Each chapter also focuses on a different problem: the purported failure of emancipation, the exposure of crimes against vulnerable populations that shattered the veneer of benevolent rule, the problem of financial relief, wayward governors, and the rise of the United States as a world power. These sketches are admittedly highly detailed, and, to some degree, each could stand on its own. The level of detail is required, I believe, to convey a more nuanced and complete sense of the negotiations among colonial subjects, colonial intermediaries, and imperial administrators in London. If, as I argue, studying the forms imperial rule took in Jamaica yields
rich insights even after the colony faded in relative importance, then many of those insights can only be found by probing what might seem mundane or unimportant.  

This dissertation draws upon and contributes to two additional bodies of scholarship. First, the project focuses on a crucial Caribbean urban center: the city of Kingston on Jamaica’s southern coast. Built on the Liguanea Plain after a devastating earthquake in 1692 destroyed Port Royal, Kingston has been the major center of commerce and trade in Jamaica ever since. Though not the capital until 1872—that instead was inland Spanish Town—Kingston was vital to the island’s economic wellbeing as the colony’s largest port, and its commercial significance led to its frequent appearances in the reports of governor and colonial administrators. The city also featured prominently in travel literature since it was usually the first place people visiting Jamaica landed. As such, foreigners got their first impressions of the island from their first days in Kingston. And despite its development as a planned town featuring a geometric grid of streets, for much of the nineteenth century, those impressions were not favorable.

“Were it arranged by Fate that my future residence should be in Jamaica,” Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope opined, “I should certainly prefer the life of a country mouse. The town mice, in my mind, have but a bad time of it. Of all the towns that I ever saw, Kingston is perhaps…the least alluring, and is the most absolutely without any point of attraction for the stranger than any other.” In terms similar to Trollope, British and American travelers routinely described Kingston as a decaying and declining city. Dusty and dilapidated, the city lacked basic amenities, they reported. Slow to recover from recurrent fires—the subject of chapter three—

28 It is also important to consider how we measure importance. What might be unimportant to observers in Britain and the Colonial Office could be a crucial issue to those living and working in Jamaica.
29 Clarke, Kingston, 5, 8.
and struggling commercially, Kingston seemed to these men—whose impressions of the town were informed by British and American notions of urban order—represented Kingston as a city in a state of devastating structural, commercial, and moral ruin.31

Yet despite these negative images common to descriptions of Kingston in the mid-nineteenth century, historians have not focused extensively on Kingston, or other urban spaces in Jamaica.32 Few books deal specifically with nineteenth-century Kingston, despite the city’s importance.33 This dissertation’s focus on crises and disasters in Kingston makes it a work of urban history, a methodology that Caribbean historians have been slow to adopt, in part because the rural sector—read, the plantation—dominates the geography and history of these societies. Yet there are a handful of important models for this type of analysis. For example, Juanita De Barros analyzes cultural battles over public space in Georgetown, British Guiana between 1889 and 1924 in her 2003 monograph Order and Place in a Colonial City, while James Robertson’s 2005 Gone is the Ancient Glory provides an exhaustive overview of the history of Spanish Town from the sixteenth century to the end of the twentieth.34

Between 1830 and 1921, Kingston experienced a number of demographic, economic, and spatial changes. Its population nearly doubled. The population growth from 35,000 to 63,000 happened despite a decline of 8,000 between 1830 and 1860, the product of no natural


32 James Robertson’s monograph on Spanish Town does touch briefly on aspects of Kingston’s history. Colin Clarke has also written a seminal overview of the city’s political and demographic history. See James Robertson, Gone is the Ancient Glory: Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1534-2000 (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005); and Colin Clarke, Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).


34 Juanita De Barros, Order and Place in a Colonial City: Patterns of Struggle and Resistance in Georgetown, British Guiana, 1889-1924 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003; and Robertson, Gone is the Ancient Glory.
increase between 1830 and 1840, depopulation from cholera in the 1850s, the wave of male workers who moved to Panama, and the development of a rural peasantry after emancipation that prevented the large-scale migration of former slaves to the town. For most of the period this dissertation covers, women outnumbered men in Kingston. Jamaicans of African descent—a term I use to encompass both black and brown Jamaicans—made up the vast majority majority of the town’s population: in 1881, over 86%. That same year, 13% of the population was white, and the remaining fraction of Kingston residents were Indian or Chinese.

Economically, the city struggled throughout most of the nineteenth century, hit hard by the decline of both the sugar economy and trade with Latin America. The late-nineteenth century, however, saw the rise of manufacturing: factories produced furniture, foodstuffs, tobacco, and cigars, among other things. During this same period, Kingston expanded, mainly due to the establishment of suburban settlements. Furthermore as agriculture on the Liguanea Plain disappeared, Kingston elites began to build new homes on this land. While East Kingston became the wealthy part of town, home to schools, hotels, public institutions, and religious buildings, West Kingston was left to the poor.35

The second body of scholarship upon which this study relies is the disaster studies literature. Studying disaster has become a recent historiographical trend, one that has gathered steam in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Drawing on the insights of environmental history, disaster studies challenges a conception of disasters as natural events separate from human action. Instead, these scholars see disasters and their aftermath as the product of human interaction with the non-human world. Ted Steinberg’s work provides one particularly forceful articulation of these ideas. In Acts of God, he argues that disasters are caused as much by human

35 Clarke, Kingston, 29, 30, 34-5, 36-7, 38-9, 41, 141.
actions and culture as they are by natural forces. “Natural calamities frequently do not just happen,” he writes. “[T]hey are produced through a chain of human choices and natural occurrences.” But, he asserts, the idea that disasters do just happen, that they are indeed “acts of God,” developed as powerful men needed ways to absolve themselves from all responsibility.

Disasters, and their catastrophic consequences for those living in vulnerable areas, were the fault of nature, not the choices of governments and businessmen.\textsuperscript{36} For one scholar, the trend that Steinberg’s arguments represent has gone too far. Jonathan Bergman argues that the force of natural elements cannot be so easily downplayed, and he suggests instead that we view disasters “as triggering mechanisms revealing flaws in environmental and social systems.”\textsuperscript{37} Bergman is right to insist that we keep the awesome force of nature in the picture. Nevertheless, this dissertation follows Steinberg in focusing on the choices and responses made by governments and authorities, an emphasis made more strongly by my decision to substitute another word for “disaster.”

Despite this project fitting loosely within the disaster studies literature, I have chosen to use primarily the word “crisis” rather than “disaster,” when discussing these emergencies as a whole. First, the word “crisis” implies a problem for which administrative or governmental solutions are required and thus lends itself well to this dissertation’s focus on the responses of the state. Second, “disaster” calls to mind “natural disaster” and therefore limits the kinds of problems appropriate to this study. Using “crisis” as my analytical category rather than “disaster” allows me to include problems and emergencies beyond the realm of natural disaster.


But why crisis at all? What do crises uncover that calmer periods leave uncovered? For one, Kingston tends to show up more in Colonial Office documents in moments of crisis. With so much of Jamaica’s fortunes resting on the rural sector—both before and after the emancipation of slaves—official commentators worried more about the status of the countryside than the cities, an imbalance which appears in the British documents. For this reason too, Jamaican historiography has focused on questions of rural life or on Jamaica at large almost to the exclusion of urban centers. But crisis provides one window into the island’s cities, with fires and earthquakes disproportionately affecting Kingston.

In a similar way, the voices of Afro-Jamaicans often come through more clearly in the government sources during moments of crisis. Afro-Jamaicans were inevitably the ones who suffered most when disaster struck. Not only were they the vast majority of the island’s population, they also were on the whole its poorest. As such, they were more likely to live in areas where disease was rampant; they were more likely to be left vulnerable in incarcerating institutions; and their houses were less likely to be able to withstand fire and earthquake damage. (Businessmen and merchants also experienced tremendous loss of property and livelihood as a result of fires and earthquakes, but they were less likely to sink into permanent destitution.) With the state forced to address the plight of black subjects in times of crisis, the testimony and stories of these Jamaicans shine through especially clearly in documents relating to these emergencies.

Finally, crisis provides a way to analyze the state under pressure. Within the context of a British colony, the state includes the colonial administration on the ground—Robinson and Gallagher’s “official mind,” as it were—local government structures, and the Colonial Office. Throughout the dissertation, the British government is most frequently represented by the
Colonial Office, the government department theoretically in charge of the administration of the empire, with the exception of India, which had its own department, the India Office. For much of the nineteenth century, prime ministers exhibited only intermittent interest in colonial affairs. To a large degree, the Colonial Office was the bureaucratic ghetto to which these issues were relegated. Accordingly, the office and those who staffed it had a low profile in Parliament. But what the office lacked in parliamentary business, it made up in administrative overload. The office’s main work was reading and responding to the dispatches that colonial governors had to send to London, and the workload multiplied rapidly—but without a proportional increase in manpower—over the nineteenth century.

At the head of the Colonial Office was the secretary of state for the colonies, the position described by one historian as “an unattractive office, full of labour and difficulty and unrewarded by parliamentary triumphs.” This position was a political appointment and, as such, men moved in and out of this position as governments changed. Although the Colonial Office dealt with an enormous amount of correspondence from all the colonies (again, except India), the system of sifting through this material still meant that the secretary of state read almost everything that came in and approved everything that went out. In 1880, the secretary of state dealt with 75% of all correspondence. Secretaries of state did not have the required wealth of knowledge about the various colonies, so they depended on the Colonial Office’s permanent staff—civil servants with long-term appointments. The head of this stable cadre was the

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permanent undersecretary, who had a vital role in policy making and in running the Colonial Office itself. He also dealt with the majority of the material that arrived at the Colonial Office, and all response drafts went through him. Below the undersecretaries were a group of senior officials that included an assistant undersecretary, a précis writer, and the senior clerks who headed geographical divisions. The number and names of divisions changed over time, with the exception of the West Indian department, the division of most relevance to this project. Junior clerks and service staff rounded out the office.

Much of this dissertation is based on the documents these men produced that are now archived in the Colonial Office files in the British National Archives in Kew: the dispatches, telegraphs, Blue Books, and annual reports that all governors were required to send, along with the locally-produced reports, correspondence, and copies of legislation and assembly proceedings that accompanied many of these dispatches; the vital internal memoranda between the senior clerk, undersecretaries, and secretary of state; and the draft responses that were then sent to the governors. This material yields rich insights when thoroughly mined. These documents can even sometimes produce a surprisingly clear picture of colonial contexts and local squabbles, as the second and fourth chapters of this dissertation will show. Like all sources, however, these documents do have their limits. The vast majority of the exchanges between

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41 According to Pugh, who drew this information from the memoir of a senior clerk’s wife, the West Indian division was “much favoured as a training-ground for juniors owing to the variety of its work.” See Pugh, “The Colonial Office,” 742; and Sydney Haldane Olivier, *Letters and Selected Writings* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 227.


43 Beginning in 1872, copyists no longer transcribed official copies of outgoing correspondence. From that year on, only the drafts of outgoing messages were included in the Colonial Office files. For more on this subject, see R. B. Pugh, “The Colonial Office, 1801-1925,” in E.A. Benians et al., *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Vol. 3, 1870-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 720-1, 742.
colony and metropole that fill these volumes were initiated by the governor of a colony; these documents therefore only provide details for the events that he believed were important to report. The specific provenance of these documents is significant for many reasons. First, an event reported by a governor may have been brewing well before he sent his dispatch. Similarly, the ramifications of a given crisis for non-elite Jamaicans frequently continued to manifest long after it disappeared from imperial view. Moreover, these correspondence volumes are not exhaustive accounts of colonial affairs, nor do they reliably provide access to non-British actors. And then there is the issue of distance. Although the telegraph had become a crucial method for sending messages between Britain and its colonies by the twentieth century, the handwritten dispatch delivered by ship remained the primary means of communication between governor and Colonial Office during the decades covered by this dissertation. London was always responding to colonial events at least three weeks after the fact. Moreover, this time lag meant that by the time the secretary of state’s instructions arrived, crises might have advanced significantly or died down completely. As a result, these documents often speak past each other, and the telegraph only increased the din. Terse telegrams were good for conveying brief announcements but not for conducting any significant business. Furthermore, these messages did not always come in clearly. As such, telegrams were always supplemented by the more formal, mailed dispatch.44 For these reasons, I read these colonial texts alongside local municipal records and colonial newspapers in order to gain a fuller understanding of the ways imperial bureaucracies, colonial administrations (governors and their subordinates), and local authorities (legislatures, relief committees, religious leaders, and the like) interacted with each other.

Zoe Laidlaw has pointed out that studies of the mechanisms of colonial governance have languished, despite the wave of historians heeding the call to examine home and empire in concert. This omission is unfortunate, she argues, because “an understanding of colonial governance, considered in its broader imperial context, can provide a framework for studies of both particular colonial societies and cultures of imperial rule.”\(^{45}\) That imperial bureaucracy has gone out of fashion is made all the more clear by the dearth of recent studies on the Colonial Office. With the exception of Laidlaw’s *Colonial Connections*, the most valuable books on the subject, like John Cell’s classic *British Colonial Administration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, all come from the 1970s or earlier.\(^{46}\) Similarly, the multi-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire (OHBE)* has spotty coverage of the topic. The few essays that mention the subject are often short on the nuts-and-bolts details of Colonial Office operations and the challenges and limitations the office faced.\(^{47}\) Indeed, the real irony is that the most detailed account that tracks the Colonial Office’s various permutations over the entire nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth comes from the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, the outdated compendium the *OHBE* was designed to replace.\(^{48}\)

This project is not a history of the Colonial Office, and as such it does not fill one of the voids I perceive in the field: that is, a new account of how the empire was run that draws upon


\(^{47}\) Peter Burroughs, “Imperial Institutions and the Government of Empire,” *OHBE Vol. III*, 170-197; John Cell, “Colonial Rule,” *OHBE Vol. IV*, 232-254. Ronald Hyam’s “Bureaucracy and ‘Trusteeship’ in the Colonial Empire,” *OHBE Vol. IV*, 255-279 is the exception, but he’s focusing on a later time period than this dissertation covers. Note that volume 5 of the *OHBE*, the historiography volume, does not have a single essay on bureaucracy or administration.

the recent and sophisticated literature on imperial culture and power and that eschews the
triumphalism and boosterism that mar some of the older offerings. But the questions that drive
this dissertation, questions about administrative responses to crisis, demand close attention to
the mechanisms of administration and the interplay between those on the ground (colonial
officials, local dignitaries, ordinary Jamaicans) and those on Downing Street.

For any given crisis, these three levels of government faced different challenges. Jamaica’s colonial government—the governor and his subordinates—were caught between the
commands of the far-off Colonial Office and the more insistent—and more pressing by virtue
of proximity—demands of the legislature, Jamaican elites, and Afro-Jamaicans. The governor in
particular had to struggle to prove his legitimacy to both his superiors and his subjects. During
crises, he had to chart his own course between what the Colonial Office wanted and what his
subjects needed. Jamaica’s local governing structures—the island’s legislature and especially
municipal bodies—were at the frontline of relief efforts. The relief organizations formed by local
dignitaries not only handed out food, money and clothes, however; they also petitioned the
Colonial Office and even Parliament asking for significant outlays of relief grants and loans to
alleviate the distress caused by Kingston’s many destructions. Finally, the Colonial Office was
always under pressure, buried under a workload that only increased as the nineteenth century
wore on. The overwhelming amount of paper shifted forces us to change our focus: given how
much these men had to do, what stands out are the debates officials in London had amongst
each other over how to approach a problem in Jamaica. What stands out are the moments in
which the Colonial Office deviated from its more neutral and financially stringent stance. And
what also stands out are the times when the Colonial Office had to respond to Jamaican
demands for metropolitan attention to their plight. The outcome of these pleas can be more
revealing about the nature of the relationship between Britain and Jamaica in the mid-to-late Victorian period than the more typical but more mundane required communications between governors and overworked clerks.

_The measure of empire_

“The Measure of Empire” begins in 1850 with a cholera epidemic that killed nearly a tenth of the Jamaican population. Chapter 1 tracks the development of a specific moral rhetoric that linked the problems in sanitation and lifestyle that the epidemic purportedly uncovered to the ways the British had handled the transition of Afro-Jamaicans from slavery to freedom. Through an analysis of the writings of Scottish physician Gavin Milroy, who conducted a comprehensive investigation throughout Jamaica in the months after the first outbreak, this chapter focuses most explicitly on two threads, to which subsequent chapters will allude. First, Milroy and others used the opportunity provided by the disease to determine whether Afro-Jamaicans had made sufficient moral progress in the thirteen years after full freedom. Of the four crises, these debates were most acute in the aftermath of cholera, a product of the epidemic’s relative proximity in time to emancipation. But in all four cases, in the wake of upheaval or crisis, white elite commentators found reasons to pass judgment on the behavior of black Jamaicans. Second, the first chapter deals obliquely with the question of how involved British authorities would get in Jamaican problems. The response to the cholera epidemic sets something of a default position of non-intervention, from which the Colonial Office would deviate in the three remaining chapters.

Starting with the second chapter, the dissertation moves more firmly into the subject of urban crisis. In 1858, a Jamaican-born white physician began to denounce the revolting physical
conditions and rampant neglect in Kingston’s public hospital and lunatic asylum. Chapter 2 follows this scandal as it grew from one man’s pet project into a local controversy among Jamaica’s professional elites and the governor into a full-blown indictment of British imperial governance. I examine the reasons the Colonial Office moved from a position of neutral observation to hands-on intervention, and in the process I foreground the written testimony of a mulatto woman whose tales of her time in the asylum proved critical to the resolution of the case. Through her story, this chapter directly addresses the issue of gender, a subject which occasionally surfaces in the other chapters.

While questions about public health and colonial medicine form the core of the first two chapters, the final two are organized around a different set of questions: the physical health of the city. More specifically, they deal with the destruction of Kingston as the result of fire and earthquake. Unlike the cholera epidemic and the scandal over brutal asylum practices, fires in Kingston started suddenly and destroyed quickly, thereby demanding immediate responses from both the Jamaican governor and local administration as well as British authorities. However, the Colonial Office staff still had choices about the nature of these responses, especially on the question of whether the British state would financially support rebuilding efforts. Chapter 3 focuses on an 1882 fire that destroyed Kingston and the attempts of local dignitaries backed by the governor to obtain a relief loan from the British government. I link these petitions, and the Colonial Office’s response to them, to a political battle over constitutional change that was ongoing at the time of the fire. Although the fire was not related to the political situation—the origin story blamed a disgruntled former employee of a local merchant—the Colonial Office’s deviation from their standard position of non-interference was tied to it.
The 1907 earthquake that leveled Kingston, the subject of Chapter 4, is the most cataclysmic of the crises in this dissertation. Here, the British government was significantly involved from the outset as the scale of the problem demanded significant military and financial aid. Moreover, almost immediately after news of the earthquake reached London, the Colonial Office had to respond to a minor diplomatic crisis created by Jamaica’s governor, Sir James Alexander Swettenham, who rejected the help of American marines who had landed in Kingston Harbor and had taken up policing duties around the city. The chapter examines why Swettenham turned the Americans away, why this was a diplomatic mistake, and why his decision resulted in his forced resignation. But it also explains Swettenham’s logic, and presents several post facto reevaluations of Swettenham’s actions that Jamaicans made several decades later.

In sum, this dissertation works on three levels. It presents a series of rarely-mentioned historical narratives, and it challenges the longstanding historiographical assumption that nothing important or interesting happened in Jamaica from 1865 to 1920. But at its core, this is a story about people: the men in the Colonial Office who processed the information coming out of Jamaica and told the governors, often in vain, how to react; the interested British elite observers, some of whom Jamaicans contacted in their quest to be heard by their government; the colonial governors stuck in a thankless colonial post that few of them liked and where even fewer were welcomed; the local political and professional elites in Kingston who most strenuously challenged these governors, and who sometimes were the only advocates for Afro-Jamaicans; and most important, though hardest to reach in the sources, the Afro-Jamaicans who did not often have much contact with these white elites, but whose lives were impacted in countless but important ways by the political games and maneuvers of the white elite. This is a continuation of
the story, well told by historians of the slavery and early post-emancipation periods, of the encounter between British imperialism and Jamaican life.
Chapter One

The Moral Politics of Cholera in Postemancipation Jamaica

In October 1850, cholera claimed its first Jamaican victims. The Western Hemisphere’s first brush with the disease had been in the early 1830s, but of the islands in the Caribbean, only Cuba had been affected by this first pandemic. Less than two decades later, neither Jamaica nor the rest of the Caribbean was spared in the Americas’ second battle with the disease.¹ The disease initially appeared in Port Royal, the small town situated on the narrow peninsula across the harbor from Kingston. There, washerwoman Nanny Johnson became the first victim, when she died on October 7.² “[A] most filthy and ill-regulated place,” according to the governor, Sir Charles Edward Grey (1785-1865), the town of a thousand was hit hard. Two weeks into the epidemic, almost twenty percent of Port Royal’s residents had died. Kingston’s proximity to Port Royal made the island’s central port the first place to which the disease spread. Home to 40,000, reports of infections here appeared by mid-October. Within two weeks, 150 residents had died. By late October, cholera reached the island’s inland capital, Spanish Town, where as many as 15,000 people lived. Over the course of another week, fifty people died in and around the capital.³

Just one month after the first fatality, at least 2,000 people had died from cholera, including 250 in Port Royal and more than 500 in Spanish Town. In Kingston, cholera had not yet abated. “There is no decrease of mortality,” the governor wrote, noting that “[m]ore than

³ Governor Charles Edward Grey dispatch #86 to Earl Grey, 26 October 1850, British National Archives, Colonial Office (CO) 137/307, fol. 310-312.
100 buried corpses had accumulated on Saturday, the 9th [of November].” By the end of November, Grey reported signs that the disease was waning in the three-town cluster of Port Royal, Kingston, and Spanish Town at the same time that it was spreading rapidly to other parishes. “[I]t is almost certain the mischief will spread throughout the island,” he predicted, “which, perhaps, may scarcely ever again be wholly free from this hitherto unknown affliction.”

The first three months of the epidemic—October to December 1850—were the most lethal. During this time, as many as 13,000 people succumbed. Hardest hit proportionately was the Afro-Jamaican population. Higher proportional rates of death among Afro-Caribbeans was a common feature of cholera epidemics in the region: blacks were more likely to contract the disease, and once infected, were more likely to die from disease than whites. Kenneth Kiple, who marshals studies from the 1960s and 1970s, combats the opinion prominent in the mid-nineteenth century that blacks were more susceptible because of their race. Instead he argues that because most Afro-Caribbeans in these societies were poor, they were more likely to live in areas where cholera thrived. Moreover, they were more likely to be under-nourished, and thus more likely to develop more fatal cases of the disease.

Initially, it was Jamaica’s coastal towns that bore the brunt of the disease’s onslaught. However, interior black settlements were not spared for long. By March 1851, Governor Grey

4 Governor Grey dispatch #87 to Earl Grey, 11 November 1850; and Governor Grey dispatch #91 to Earl Grey, 28 November 1850; both found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.4, 7-8, CO 137/308, fols. 324v, 326.

5 In a dispatch to the Colonial Office, Grey reported that “the white or European people have not suffered at all in proportion to their numbers, and that the greatest proportionate mortality has decidedly been amongst those of unmixed African descent.” He did not provide numbers beyond the 13,000 total deaths. See ibid., Governor Grey despatch #5 to Earl Grey, 11 January 1851, fols. 332v-333r. Higgins and Kiple note the lack of numerical data to corroborate Grey’s conclusions, but they argue that his accounts line up with current knowledge about cholera. See Higgins and Kiple, “Cholera,” 44.

reported “that in many rather remote and out of the way places from which no report whatever was made the people died in great numbers without medical aid and almost without notice in the time of general distress.” Cholera continued to ravage Jamaica’s rural parishes through 1851, with occasional flareups in urban areas. Final death tolls, published in early 1852, listed 30,590 deaths—out of a total population of 400,000—in the span of fifteen months. In Kingston, 3,675 people reported died, while in St. Andrew, the parish directly north of Kingston, over 2,000 perished.

Grey’s dry and sober communiqués cannot convey the chaos that took over Jamaican society during the epidemic, chaos largely stemming from the fear fostered by an incomplete understanding of the disease. Prominent physician Lewis Bowerbank (1814-1880) described some of the confusion and mayhem fifteen years later. According to him, the fear “that the dead body was more contagious than the living one” determined how the living buried their dead. In one instance, a husband stayed with his wife until he realized she was nearing death, at which point he prepared her grave and tied a rope around her neck. He could then drag her corpse into the grave, eliminating any need to touch her dead and presumed contagious body. Bowerbank relayed even more harrowing stories. After the owner of a livestock pen told his workers to whitewash the walls of their modest homes, a measure endorsed by British public

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7 Governor Grey dispatch #26 to Earl Grey, 15 March 1851, CO 137/309, fol. 98v.
8 Ibid., fol. 96; “A summary of deaths from Cholera in the several parishes of this Island in 1850 and 1851,” enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #5 to Earl Grey, 28 January 1852, CO 137/313, fol. 13r. One such flareup happened after unusually rainy weather in March 1851; among other deaths, two people died in Kingston. Grey’s final official death tolls are broken down by parish; they do not provide a demographic breakdown. For a rough estimate of the Jamaican population, see Grey’s January 1851 dispatch in which he reported a population of 400,000: 300,000 black, 75,000 colored, and 25,000 white. He further commented that Indian indentured servants had barely been affected by the disease. Yet in his population breakdown, he did not account for the “East Indian coolies.” Governor Grey dispatch #5 to Earl Grey, 11 January 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.20-1, CO 137/308, fols. 332v-333r.
9 Bowerbank plays a central role in the following chapter.
health officials, he discovered the more gruesome use that the son of a cholera victim had found for the chemicals. When the proprietor asked the young man why he had not used the lime to whitewash the walls, “[the son] remarked, —Oh, yes, he had washed [the father] well, and so saying pointed out the poor patient lying on the floor thickly smeared over with lime.”\(^{10}\)

The idea that dead bodies were powerful vectors of cholera not only led to dehumanizing burial methods, it also caused premature and avoidable deaths. Bowerbank insisted that “during cholera many people were buried alive.” He described medical workers at a Spanish Town hospital who, “to save themselves the trouble of carrying the dead down the steps”—and undoubtedly motivated by concerns about their own health—“[laid] a plank along the steps, on which they placed the body, allowing it to glide to the bottom.” Once, as Bowerbank walked up the steps, an old man was pushed down the rough-hewn slide. As his body passed, the physician noticed signs of life in his eyes and examined him. The man was indeed alive, but died shortly thereafter, possibly from a concussion. Some of these stories ended well for the hastily pronounced dead. As Bowerbank described:

> In another case a man was placed in a badly-made coffin (luckily for him), and had been taken to the burial ground; while there, waiting to be buried, the sexton, a very heavy man, sat down upon the coffin to eat his lunch; the yielding of the top of the coffin pressed upon its contents, and the man groaned aloud, much to the surprise and horror of the sexton.

Other stories were deeply tragic, such as one woman shut in a coffin while she was still alive:

> “[T]he person in charge, in nailing it up, awkwardly drove a nail into her hip, after which the coffin was…taken to the burial-ground. Here she was found to be alive, and for some years after

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appeared as a crippled beggar in the streets of Kingston.” Bowerbank detailed his efforts to eliminate many of these unfortunate incidents, but terror overrode meticulous examination.

The panic that Bowerbank described no doubt skewed the death toll figures reported in official documents. For this reason, these numbers are best viewed as minimums. As Grey himself noted, there was no way to know how many people had died in remote parts of the country, or, in his words, in “the Negro hamlets which are not comprize [sic] within the boundaries of any cultivated estate.” In an overview of cholera in the Caribbean, Kiple claims that underestimating death tolls was a feature common to government tallies during this period. Stories like Bowerbank’s, whom Kiple cites along with two additional Jamaican observers, suggest that accurate counting of the bodies piled onto funeral pyres or thrown into burial pits was not a priority. Indeed, he points out that there are fewer mortality figures for Jamaica than for earlier outbreaks in Cuba, despite the existence of death registration laws in the British colony. Nevertheless, he cautions against straying too far away from stated figures. In the same way that chaos and fear prevented the counting of those cholera victims whose bodies were too hastily discarded, the mayhem also meant that those who died of causes unrelated to the epidemic were nonetheless folded into the higher counts. As a result, Kiple suggests, a more accurate death toll is more likely found in the average between low and high estimates.

This brief biography of cholera’s life in Jamaica demonstrates the severe devastation wrought by the disease in the course of eighteen months: nearly a tenth of the population died.

12 See Governor Grey dispatch #79 to Earl Grey, 29 August 1851, CO 137/310, fol. 343v.
making Jamaica perhaps the worst-hit location in the world in the early 1850s. At this point in the nineteenth century, cholera was a worldwide problem, making the events in Jamaica both particular to the island and symptomatic of a larger global conundrum. As Charles Rosenberg explains in the opening to his seminal study *The Cholera Years*: “Cholera was the classic epidemic disease of the nineteenth century, as plague had been of the fourteenth.” A terrifying disease, cholera kills quickly, and, for the dying, those final hours are grim. The disease spreads through food and water that are contaminated with human excrement. Cholera vibrios—the bacteria that carry the disease—settle in the small intestine, causing vomiting and stool the consistency of rice water. Those infected lose an immense amount of fluids, and they suffer “a terrible dehydration that produces, in progressive fashion: powerful muscular cramps and ruptured capillaries that turn the skin black and blue; lethargy; stupor; shock and finally death.” Moreover, the disease was especially frightening in nineteenth-century societies, where cholera made public the bodily functions that notions of bourgeois propriety decreed hidden. Thus, Richard Evans speculates, “the thought that one might oneself suddenly be seized with an uncontrollable, massive attack of diarrhoea in a tram, in a restaurant, or on the street, in the presence of scores or hundreds of respectable people, must have been almost as terrifying as the thought of death itself.”

Because of the disease’s centrality to the nineteenth century, a rich historiography has developed that probes the societal impact of the disease. Indeed, it was social historians, not

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historians of medicine, who led the surge of scholarship into cholera that began in the 1960s. For these scholars, cholera “provided ‘a unique opportunity to penetrate class structure, social attitudes, and the living conditions of a broad segment of the population.’” The disease’s three major appearances in the nineteenth century, moreover, gave these scholars the perfect means by which to examine change over time.\textsuperscript{18} But much of this literature focuses more on Europe and the United States than on cholera’s impact on European imperial possessions. Studying how cholera spread through colonies and how local and imperial authorities responded to these epidemics demonstrates how European understandings of disease and the suggestions made based upon those understandings were adapted to specific colonial contexts.

This chapter documents the myriad British responses to Jamaican cholera, focusing especially on the ways that colonial and metropolitan commentators approached the question of disease prevention. I then situate these discussions within the context of Jamaica’s transition from slavery to freedom which began in the 1830s. Jamaica was not the only place where commentators linked disease to the dismantling of slavery. In Brazil, for example, a yellow fever epidemic in 1850—and fears that African slaves had brought the disease to Brazilian shores—led authorities to consider banning the slave trade after years of flouting British and American dictates. The appearance of cholera five years later only solidified this view, as planters and businessmen feared importing Africans who were presumed more susceptible to the disease.\textsuperscript{19}


But Jamaica is a particularly interesting place to study the impact of cholera for two connected reasons. First, unlike Brazil or Cuba, Jamaica was no longer a slave society. The second, related point is that Jamaica was the British colony most economically affected by the emancipation of slaves and the turn to free trade in the 1840s. When Governor Henry Barkly (1815-1898) toured Jamaica in the 1850s, he reported the widespread abandonment of plantation estates and the drastic decrease in sugar production from the few operating estates that remained. Between 1834 and 1848, sugar production had dropped by half.\textsuperscript{20} These numbers represented a calamity for planters and politicians alike, and the economic crisis imbued with more urgency the questions of labor that arose when tens of thousands of Afro-Jamaicans died of cholera. For these reasons, then, this chapter also tracks how commentators adapted a rhetoric common to analyses of cholera—a discourse that combined sanitary prescriptions with moral sermonizing—to address Jamaica’s post-emancipation economic woes.

\section{I.

An ounce of prevention

Jamaica may not have experienced cholera until halfway through the nineteenth century, but Europeans had been battling the disease on home soil since the 1830s, while British physicians in India had been dealing with the disease since 1817, the beginning of the first pandemic. But despite the head start, the mid-nineteenth-century European medical community had no better understanding of the disease than anyone in Jamaica. Doctors had not yet discovered a cure—the treatments they advocated often did more harm than good by further depleting fluids rather

than replenishing them—nor did they understand how victims contracted the disease. All they had was a correlation: the poor who lived in the filthiest environments were the hardest hit when cholera swept through an area. The most prominent British medical authorities subscribed to anticontagionist theories—drawn from early experiences in India—which posited that people caught cholera from the foul atmosphere of their surroundings. For example, Britain’s General Board of Health, established in the late 1840s and headed by sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890), published texts that addressed issues of treatment and prevention, all underpinned by the belief that cholera was not contagious: “There is no danger from infected persons; the true danger is continuing to live in infected districts, in close, damp, and filthy dwellings.” In naming the houses of the poor and working classes the presumed locus of infection, observers often slipped into a moralizing register that blamed the “moral failings or psychological disturbance” of these residents. It was not until 1849 that John Snow first published his assertions that cholera spread through contaminated water, but his findings were quickly dismissed. Therefore, in the absence of a cure, responses to the epidemic focused largely on preventing future recurrences.

22 “Precautions against the Cholera.—Extracted from the Notifications of the General Board of Health in England,” enclosed in Earl Grey’s second circular dispatch to West Indian governors, 1 January 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104). XXXVI.49, CO 137/308, fol. 347r.
The Colonial Office dealt with the epidemic from afar mainly by flooding Governor Grey with the latest medical knowledge from British physicians and health authorities, although both Jamaican and British authorities provided some measure of financial relief. From the outset, the Jamaican government allocated £15,000 in relief money that parochial boards would distribute to victims and their families. In Britain, Henry George Grey (1802-1894), 3rd Earl Grey and the secretary of state for the colonies, announced a £3,000 advance to support the “many families, who have lost from this fearful disease those by whose industry they are maintained.” The money came with a warning. “I need scarcely point out,” he wrote, “the necessity of observing the strictest caution, and a rigid economy, since you are well aware how great a tendency there is in all countries to abuse, when grants for charitable purposes are made from the public purse.” According to Grey, this advance was all the British government could offer. As he explained, “I have only to express the sincere regret of Her Majesty’s Government that, deeply as they deplore the heavy calamity with which it has been the will of Providence to afflict Jamaica, they do not possess the means of doing more for the relief of its inhabitants.”

Despite a widespread unease with financial aid, the governor distributed over £5,600 by October 1852, a sum augmented by charitable subscriptions collected in Barbados and England. But the

26 In terms of money actually spent, local authorities distributed over £4500 of the initial provision of £5000 by November 21, 1850, and the Commissioners in charge of the funds reported that they had been forced to reject some requests in order to spread the funds across as many districts as possible. Kingston received the largest share of this money, a total of £1200, paid in three installments. The idea that charitable contributions during times of crisis had the potential to corrupt was shared by one Scottish commentator. Writing about the epidemic a few years later, this physician stated, “The very fact of relief having been afforded from the public money during the cholera, will be regarded by an ignorant and selfish people as a precedent for like assistance being granted in future, and will thus serve to confirm them in their reckless apathy, and in their repugnance to bear their share in the general burdens of civilised life.” See Governor Grey dispatch #86 to Earl Grey, 26 October 1850, CO 137/307, fol. 313r. See also Governor Grey dispatch #90 to Earl Grey, 27 November 1850; “An Act to provide additional Funds for the assistance of Parishes in this Island, in which Cholera has appeared or may appear, and for other Purposes.”; “Extract from the Journals of the Council,” 21 November 1850, enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #93 to Earl Grey, 13 December 1850; Earl Grey dispatch #393 to Governor Grey, 1 January 1851, all found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to
monetary outlays only dealt with the disease once it was too late to save people; medical
knowledge had the potential to prevent the disease altogether.

In a series of Colonial Office dispatches sent to the governors of the West Indian
colonies, Earl Grey warned of the likelihood that “the British West Indies generally may be
visited by the disease.” He therefore urged the governors to task local authorities with the duty
of determining how best to prevent or soften such a catastrophe. Most importantly, he insisted
that quarantines must not be imposed. Quarantines failed to check the spread of disease, and
instead, “by checking trade and industry, [they] created poverty and distress, and thus aggravated
some of the most powerful predisposing causes of the disease.” A more effective approach
would be to “promote cleanliness and ventilation” throughout the colonies.27 But the
transmission of medical expertise happened through more than prescriptive texts. On the
recommendation of the General Board of Health, three physicians sailed to the British
Caribbean to assist local authorities. Of the three doctors, only Scottish physician Gavin Milroy
(1805-1886) went directly to Jamaica. A longtime critic of quarantine, Milroy had argued in his
1846 pamphlet Quarantine and the Plague that “the Plague has never, in one authenticated instance,
been introduced by merchandize coming from infected countries,” thus rendering quarantine
unnecessary for diseases like cholera and yellow fever.28

meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.5, 9, 23-24, 51, fols. 325r, 327, 334, 348.
“Report on the Cholera in Jamaica, &c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica) Copy
of the report made by Dr. Milroy to the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and
correspondence with the Governor of Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.97; Governor Grey dispatch
#89 to Pakington, 14 October 1852, CO 137/314, fols. 237-245.

27 “Circular Despatch to the Governors of the West India Islands,” 9 December 1850, found on Cholera
(Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island
of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to
meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.48, CO 137/308, fol. 346r. Grey also
referred to a previous missive to the governors in which he had enclosed a report from the General Board of
Health. “[I]t is most important,” he argued, “that the results of so much experience and scientific inquiry…should
be carefully considered, and that the colonies should not fall into the errors into which this and other countries were
betrayed at a former period, when less knowledge of the disease had been acquired.”

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These doctors were not sent to the Caribbean to treat cholera patients. That was a pursuit the General Board of Health deemed worthless, since the disease killed too quickly for such help to be of any value. Instead, the job of Milroy and the other two men was to show local authorities the methods that British doctors had used to encourage their patients to take appropriate precautions. Furthermore, they were instructed to “call the earnest attention of the local authorities to the fact, that the epidemic in those islands, as in Europe, will probably follow the track of preceding [sic] epidemics, in respect to the localities and the classes of persons who will be attacked.” They would also show local bodies how to run house visitation campaigns, the only way physicians could catch the earliest symptoms of cholera that could potentially be treated, and teach local authorities how to “[remove] the localizing conditions which predispose to an outbreak of the pestilence.” In other words, these men were to teach local authorities how to eliminate the potential causes of the disease and how to prevent the spread of the disease with the knowledge gained from Britain’s previous experience with cholera.

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28 Gavin Milroy, *Quarantine and the plague: being a summary of the report on these subjects recently addressed to the Royal Academy of Medicine in France: with introductory observations, extracts from Parliamentary correspondence, and notes* (London, 1846), The Making of the Modern World. Gale 2011. Gale, Cengage Learning. Princeton University Library. 15 March 2011. Milroy trained at Edinburgh. During the 1849 cholera epidemic in Britain, Milroy had been a medical inspector for the General Board of Health. Milroy was interested in foreign travel and he spent much of his career traveling to the West Indies and the Mediterranean. When the General Board of Health recommended him for this position, they claimed that he had “acted with the greatest zeal and efficiency during the prevalence of cholera in the Metropolis in 1848-49, as one of the medical superintending inspectors of the Board.” C. Macaulay, Assistant Secretary General Board of Health, letter to B. Hawes, Colonial Office, 1 January 1851, enclosed in Earl Grey dispatch #393 to Governor Grey, 1 January 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.23, CO 137/308, fol. 335r. See also Mark Harrison, ‘Milroy, Gavin (1805–1886),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18797, accessed 26 March 2011].

29 “Minute of the General Board of Health, 31 December 1850,” enclosed in Earl Grey dispatch #393 to Governor Grey, 1 January 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.25, CO 137/308, fol. 335r.

30 “Instructions to Medical Officers proceeding to the West Indies,” found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and
II.

*Milroy inspects the island*

Milroy arrived in Kingston in mid-February 1851 before spending nearly two months traveling around the island. 31 From this research, he produced two reports, one submitted to the Jamaican House of Assembly in April 1851 and a second, much longer report written in London, which he sent to the Colonial Office in July 1852. 32 These are among the most detailed analyses produced about Jamaica’s 1850s brush with cholera; his is certainly the most extensively researched and articulate examination produced outside the colony. Milroy was truly the expert. No other British official had so thoroughly researched cholera’s path through the island. Milroy’s reports included detailed sketches of weather conditions in each parish. He named many of the victims, especially those who died first as the disease appeared in new areas. He interviewed countless doctors, planters, and other prominent elites. No one in Britain, and few people in Jamaica, gathered as much information. Furthermore, Milroy’s reports went to Parliament, both bound together in an 1854 House of Commons parliamentary paper. It was through him that the most detailed information about the epidemic reached Whitehall. As such,
Milroy was the most prominent writer to express a set of widely held sentiments that linked cholera to emancipation.

Milroy’s interpretation of the correlation between filth and poverty on the one hand and high rates of cholera on the other framed his first report. As he explained, “whenever the Choleriac poison is abroad in the atmosphere of a district, there are certain local causes or conditions which will inevitably favour its development.” These precipitating conditions needed to be corrected or eliminated, he argued, if the spread of cholera was to be checked.\footnote{Milroy report on cholera to Governor Grey, 31 March 1851, enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #30 to Earl Grey, 26 April 1851, CO 137/309, fols. 123-124r.} In Jamaica, Milroy located two major problems. The first was the poor sanitation and living conditions endemic to much of the island, the result of years of neglect by parish officials. He argued that the failure of local boards of health to maintain clean towns and villages was due to negligence rather than ignorance. After all, “the very first act which the Local Board of Health in each parish set about doing, on the apprehended approach of the cholera, was to order an immediate cleansing of streets & dwellings.” That this was their first action suggested to Milroy that they knew all along the woeful state of these areas.\footnote{Ibid., fol. 127r.}

But although he criticized local government, Milroy also blamed Afro-Jamaicans, and especially their homes. He declared:

Now nowhere are the Evils of this state of things carried to a greater extent than in the Dwellings of the Negroes; their whole condition is usually wretched in the extreme. Generally situated in the very worst localities, squatted down upon the bare earth, without in most instances even a few boards for a flooring, choked with rank vegetation close up to the very door, and almost always surrounded with filth & refuse, little is the wonder that the pestilence committed such devastation among the occupants.\footnote{Ibid., fol. 133r, his emphasis.}
The homes’ interiors held more horrors. Overcrowding and poor ventilation were key features of these buildings, and the people who lived in these structures did not do enough, in Milroy’s estimation, to promote purifying airflow. He complained: “The negroes, it is well known, have a great dislike of cool air, and they therefore most diligently exclude its introduction by shutting both the windows and doors of their sleeping places.” In this formulation, Milroy ignored the host of reasons black Jamaicans may have had to keep their windows and doors closed at night: mosquitoes, wild animals and birds, human intruders, not to mention local superstitions and folklore. Instead, he chalked up the closed windows to the moral failure represented by a “dislike of cool air.”

Milroy’s inability to understand why black Jamaicans were not throwing their windows open was not unique. Florence Nightingale also exhibited this blind spot during arguments with Viceroy John Lawrence in which she insisted that army barracks in India had to have windows and not just doors that, when closed, blocked vital airflow. In *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey poked fun at her ignorant determination:

> The authorities, who knew what an open window in the hot weather meant, protested, but in vain; Miss Nightingale was incredulous. She knew nothing of the hot weather, but she did know the value of fresh air - from personal experience; the authorities were talking nonsense; and the windows must be kept open all the year round.

But at least she had never traveled to India; whatever discomfort Milroy experienced from the island’s heat, humidity, and mosquitoes was no match for his medical convictions.

> Throughout the report, Milroy conflated racial and class markers. His comments were broadly about the living conditions of the poor, but within these observations, he singled out

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36 Ibid., fol. 134r.
black Jamaicans. It was “the negroes,” not simply the poor, who did not understand the importance of ventilation. It was “the Dwellings of the Negroes” that were so revolting, not just the residences of those living in poverty. This conflation of race and class was not unique to Jamaica. Greg Grandin shows how, when cholera visited Guatemala in 1837, non-indigenous Guatemalans, known as ladinos, asserted their identity by associating the Indian poor with cholera. As he writes, “Casting Indians as impoverished victims and attributing the spread of cholera to their behavior gave Ladinos the opportunity to project their identity and values as universal and to promote assimilation as the cure.” He then describes “[t]he obsession of Guatemalan Ladino reformers with equating squalor and pestilence with indigenous culture.”

Milroy, then, was part of a long line of elite observers who folded race and ethnicity into their opinions about the correlation between poverty and infection.

Milroy’s second major concern was that most Jamaicans living in rural parishes were out of reach of medical care because the island had too few physicians and medical staff, a product of emancipation. During slavery, planters had contracted physicians each year to oversee the medical care of their slaves. After emancipation, doctors lost work en masse as planters refused to provide free medical care to their workers. Many freedpeople moved into the mountainous interior of Jamaica, out of reach of doctors, who did not join them in these rural hinterlands but instead moved to towns. There were not enough whites in the island’s towns to match the supply of unemployed doctors, and many physicians either left Jamaica or turned to other work. Although cholera killed quickly, Milroy believed that there were enough early warning
signs for doctors to spot, if only there were enough of them throughout the colony. He called for a system where medical treatment could be given at the earliest possible moment, rather than the current unfortunate conditions whereby “[t]housands upon thousands have died unseen & unprescribed for by any medical man.”

Milroy’s solutions tackled both problems. He recommended that each parish have a medical officer appointed by the Governor along with a cadre of assistants, preferably recently trained physicians who would form a new group of medical experts on the island. The medical officer would also act as a sanitation inspector. As Quarantine and the Plague had indicated, Milroy argued that quarantine was never the solution, an opinion he bolstered by invoking an unattributed quotation: “‘Sanitary measures, not Sanitary cordons or quarantines, constitute the safety of a people.’” A more appropriate step would be a program of island-wide vaccinations; as Milroy noted, smallpox remained a worry, and he warned that “a heavy responsibility will rest upon the authorities of the island if so serious a risk shall be allowed to continue.”

Milroy’s advice fused scientific theory with moral teaching, a combination common to Victorian public health commentary. Doctors taught the poor how to live, and they had the power to unite the communities that they served. “No set of men,” he wrote, “have a greater, or probably so great an influence on the habits of the poor as medical men,” and because of their unique ability to influence the poor, doctors were “the most useful pioneers in the great work of

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40 Milroy report on cholera, CO 137/309, fols. 139-141r.

41 I have not been able to identify the original author of this statement.

42 Milroy report on cholera, CO 137/309, fols. 147-151r.

social improvement.” He continued: “Medical men form the best link between the higher & the lower classes and especially in a country like this where there is a difference of race as well as of condition.” Sanitation had to be addressed on the medical level, but it also had wider implications. Milroy linked the perceived slowness of black Jamaicans’ intellectual improvement to their poor standards of living. He argued “that the results of Educational Efforts [were] intimately connected with, and indeed dependent upon, the amelioration of the physical condition of the working classes; and probably the want of success which ha[d] hitherto attended the labours of the missionary & teacher…[was] not a little owing to the condition of the homes of the people.” These were themes he would develop further in his second report.

These recommendations required money, and Milroy’s suggestions about how to fund his proposals further amplified the moral and civilizing mission inherent in his critique. If the laboring poor would benefit the most from an improved medical and public health system, a point he assumed outright, then these men and women should contribute to the creation of such a system through a direct tax. Milroy did not provide detailed financial suggestions for how his taxation scheme might work, but he was clear on two points. First, any “assessment” should “reach, as far as possible, every class and grade in the Community from the highest to the lowest.” But more importantly, because “[t]he habitual exercise of such a feeling will…not be without some effect in gradually accustoming the mind of the negro to take juster views of the reciprocal obligations and privileges of civilised life,” he argued that a direct tax was “very preferable” to an indirect levy. Milroy was even more certain of a direct taxation solution two

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44 Milroy report on cholera, CO 137/309, fols. 153-154r.
45 Ibid., fols. 154-155r, his emphasis.
46 “If it be desirable that the labouring people should feel that they have a claim to medical relief for themselves & families in time of sickness, that it is not a boon of charity dole out to them but a right to which they are entitled, then the course appears to me to be clear; the right which is claimed implies the performance of a duty that has been discharged.” Ibid., fol. 158r, his emphasis.

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years later. Even if indirect taxes could raise the required sums, Milroy argued, a direct tax offered a more important benefit than collecting money. It made sure that “the people [knew] for what they are called upon to pay, and thus be made to appreciate the benefits which they are to receive in exchange.”\textsuperscript{48} By this logic, not only would the existence of an effective medical system improve the physical health and well-being of black Jamaicans, paying for it directly—and, by extension, working enough to afford paying for it—would also improve their moral health.

Milroy’s presentation of medical knowledge combined with confident sermonizing was certainly not unique to Jamaica. As Christopher Hamlin notes in his recent biography of the disease, cholera commentary and prevention treatises in Europe were frequently suffused with moral prescription. “Filth talk,” he writes, “represented the poor not simply as suffering from cholera but as responsible for it.”\textsuperscript{49} Milroy’s first report did exactly that.\textsuperscript{50} His final sentence demonstrates how entangled medicine and morality were in his thought: he wished that the cholera epidemic “be made the occasion of lasting benefit to [Jamaica’s] best interests, in the amelioration of the physical & moral condition of the people, and in their laying the only sure foundation for their progressive welfare & prosperity.”\textsuperscript{51} But what distinguished Jamaica’s experience with cholera from that of Europe was that the epidemic came at a moment when, in

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., fol. 158r.
\textsuperscript{48} “Report on the Cholera in Jamaica, &c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica) Copy of the report made by Dr. Milroy to the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and correspondence with the Governor of Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.95.
\textsuperscript{49} Christopher Hamlin, Cholera, 52, 54, 56-7, 70, 78-81; quotation from 79. For similar statements in an American context, see the classic Charles E. Rosenberg, The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), especially chapters 2-3.
\textsuperscript{50} As Jonathan Dalby notes, “There was a distinct and characteristic tendency on the part of Milroy and other observers to blame the poor for their poverty, and by implication, many cholera victims for their fate.” See Jonathan Dalby, “Luxurious Resting Places for the Idle and Vicious? The Rise and Fall of Penal Reform in Jamaica in the 1840s,” Small Axe 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 159.
\textsuperscript{51} Milroy report on cholera, CO 137/309, fol. 160r.
the wake of Jamaica’s economy worsening after Britain removed protective tariffs on foreign sugar, commentators were beginning to label emancipation a failure. Milroy had expressed significant concern about the moral and economic condition of black Jamaicans. Although he had used the bulk of the treatise to lay out the various ways the people of Jamaica were ill-served by the inefficient and sparse medical service and the negligence of local authorities, even those sections were shot through with scathing appraisals of black Jamaicans and their living conditions. Moreover, when Milroy made his strongest concluding statements, he did not reiterate his frustration with the negligence of parish authorities. Rather, he devoted the final pages to a critique of the insufficient social elevation of poor blacks. He asked whether the substandard living environments of much of the laboring class had stunted their intellectual development, and he further suggested that a direct tax on the poor to fund an improved medical system would have a civilizing effect. But these concerns were more than the standard blaming of the poor. They were rooted in a widely shared dismay about the status of post-emancipation Jamaica.

*Milroy on emancipation*

Milroy’s second report, which he sent directly to the Colonial Office, articulated in much further detail the moralist rhetoric and racial prejudices against black Jamaicans that underpinned his recommendations. In the year and a half after his travels to Jamaica and his first report, Milroy’s convictions about the moral components of his plan had grown stronger. In this second report, the physician more extensively linked the public health problems which cholera had revealed to a failed transition to freedom.
Throughout his detailed descriptions of how cholera spread through each Jamaican parish, Milroy turned the foibles of individual Afro-Jamaicans into social ills that afflicted the entire race. As he described the painful death of one of the first victims of cholera, a black married woman Mrs. Wilson, he noted this about her living environment: “The hut was, as usual with negro dwellings, small and filthy.” Milroy used this same formulation when he discussed the spread of the disease to the villages that surrounded Kingston. “[T]here, as in negro villages everywhere,” he declared, “the same local causes of unwholesomeness were invariably present; the fresh air excluded, while within and around were impurity and decay.” By contrast, fewer people in the “better conditioned classes” contracted the disease. That people—presumably servants—died on the property behind some of these homes only further proved Milroy’s thesis, for in these backyards, he explained, “the same noxious influences were at work as in the dwellings of the rural population.”

Laziness was another trope Milroy often deployed. In itself, this was not remarkable; accusing blacks of rampant idleness was a common feature of British discourse, exemplified most clearly in Thomas Carlyle’s 1853 “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question,” a reprinted version of his earlier, more mildly titled “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question.” The Scottish writer argued that emancipation had created a class of black people who refused to work for anything other than the pumpkins on which they gorged, and he called for a return to the hierarchies that slavery had produced: blacks working the land and producing an array of crops for their white masters. If returning to this natural order required the whip, so be

52 “Report on the Cholera in Jamaica, &c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica) Copy of the report made by Dr. Milroy to the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and correspondence with the Governor of Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.12, my emphasis.
53 Ibid., 15, my emphasis.
it. Carlyle’s opinions were full of contradictions: here was a writer deciding that the manual labor required for subsistence did not qualify as real work. Catherine Hall has noted that Carlyle had spent much of the 1840s making “the man of letters a figure of respect” and masculinity.

“Preoccupied with proving that writing was work of the highest order,” she writes, “producing food within a peasant economy did not count for him as work.” But if Carlyle’s language was extreme, causing many of his intellectual peers to distance themselves publicly from his essay, the underlying assessment—that blacks would not volunteer to work on plantations—was nevertheless widely shared. During the 1840s, Thomas Holt points out, the planters’ image of blacks—one determined by their economic needs—became the dominant conception in Britain. Holt writes,

> By mid-century, the logic ran as follows: Blacks refuse to work on the sugar estates as needed and at the wages the planters feel they can afford to pay. Ergo, blacks will not work on the sugar estates. Ergo, blacks will not work. By this logical legerdemain, what freed people valued as the attainment of some measure of autonomy—that is, market gardening—came to be labeled simply “laziness.” Working when, where, and as they chose became “They will not work.” The defect was racial.

It was this stereotype of blacks that Carlyle so savagely depicted, and even his critics did not question the substance of his analysis. Everyone who had championed the abolition of slavery, including missionaries and abolitionists, had supported an emancipation in which black people remained on plantations and worked for wages. No one supported a post-emancipation economy based upon subsistence agriculture. The Colonial Office also shared this distaste for peasant proprietorship, especially senior clerk Henry Taylor, a friend of Carlyle who also “saw wage labor as a source not so much of profit as of social discipline.”

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55 Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, 278-285; block quotation on 280; quotation about Henry Taylor on 285. See also
Milroy tapped into this prevalent stereotype about the work ethic of Afro-Jamaicans, but his use of these ideas—whether he realized it or not—was different. Carlyle based his argument upon caricatures of lazy black men: “Sitting yonder with their beautiful muzzles up to the ears in pumpkins, imbibing sweet pulps and juices; the grinder and incisor teeth ready for ever new work…while the sugar-crops rot round them uncut.” These pumpkins, Carlyle further claimed, demanded only thirty minutes of work a day.\(^5^6\) By contrast, Milroy’s accusations of laziness relied upon his peculiar reading of the considerable amounts of work that he described Afro-Jamaicans doing.

As Milroy contended in his first report, the money his schemes required provided the perfect opportunity to right some of the wrongs emancipation had ushered in. Freedpeople “had been accustomed during slavery to have the doctor found...at [their] master’s expense,” he asserted, and this precedent contributed to their subsequent unwillingness to pay for medical services. But Milroy insisted that their refusal to pay was a matter of personal choice: “they are quite able to pay for it, if they choose to work.” Plantation workers could earn up to two shillings a day. That they usually only earned half as much was “their own fault,” he wrote, before launching into an extended sketch that depicted supposed idleness.

They will seldom work above five or six hours in the course of the day, and very rarely upon Fridays or Saturdays at all. These days they generally spend upon their plantation grounds, which they either rent or may have bought for a trifle; and where, with very little labour, they raise yams, and other vegetables and fruits for an adjoining market. The profit upon these provisions is large, and thus enables them to be more or less independent of working upon the estates. Saturday, being market day, the women flock in troops to the towns to sell their produce; often walking 8, 10, or 12 miles to market, and thence back at night, although they could dispose of it as advantageously within a mile of their huts. But they like the holiday-sort of excitement of meeting together, chattering,

and bargain-making; and moreover, they have to buy their salt fish and fineries in the town. Unfortunately, there is of necessity a prodigious waste of time and labour which might be more profitably expended, and which is sorely needed for the sugar estates all round.  

Although Milroy’s argument was similar in spirit to that of Carlyle, his selection of anecdote was crucially different. Rather than the half-hour’s work that Carlyle reported, Milroy complained that these men and women did not work longer than six hours. And although he tried to disparage the time spent on provision grounds, his point was undercut by the revelation that women walked up to twelve miles each way to sell their goods. True, Milroy insisted that they wasted this time solely for their own enjoyment, but here too, the information he provided states the contrary: these women also bought salt fish, a dietary staple. But despite the fact that his evidence did not prove his point, the Scottish doctor came to the same conclusions as his countryman Carlyle: “[t]he very facility of subsistence in Jamaica is at the root of much of the indolence and wasteful habits of the people.” Idleness functioned as a catch-all description in Milroy’s text that encompassed wasted effort and social enjoyment, along with the more easily recognizable laziness of black men. For all the ways that Milroy impugned the serious work of black women, he at least acknowledged their activity, wasted though it was. He was more severe with the men: “While the women and children are thus employed with much superfluous toil at market, the men are usually lounging about the hut the greater part of the day, and then ride about afterward upon their ponies.” Deploying the “laziness” trope also allowed him to

57 “Report on the Cholera in Jamaica, &c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica) Copy of the report made by Dr. Milroy to the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and correspondence with the Governor of Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.94, my emphasis.
58 Ibid., 95.
59 Ibid., 94.
chastise Jamaicans for refusing to work on the plantations. Here too, Milroy’s ideas aligned with
Carlyle’s: black peoples’ labor was only legitimate when put to use on plantations.

Fundamentally, Milroy, like Carlyle, believed that the transition from slavery to freedom
had failed. “It is indeed deeply to be regretted,” he declared, “that when the Act of
Emancipation took place, by which a semi-barbarous people were hastily released from the care
and protection as well as from the oppression and ignominy of servitude, measures were not
devised or precautions taken to provide for the changes which would inevitably ensue in the
condition of the people.”

Though written in more temperate language than Carlyle’s
inflammatory manifesto, this argument nonetheless required that the horrors of slavery be
downplayed. It was not enough for the abolition of slavery to be a humanitarian good;
emancipation was only a success if Afro-Jamaicans worked for wages on their old estates and
kept sugar exports at the same level they had been during slavery.

The crux of Milroy’s argument, as elaborated most explicitly in his second pamphlet, was
that both Jamaica’s economic setbacks and the continued threat of cholera had the same
solution: the moral uplift of blacks. Throughout the report, he decried practices and customs
that failed to meet his own expectations of what a moral life entailed. In noting the failure of
Jamaica’s population to increase naturally, he isolated concubinage, which, he declared, “has
unhappily of late years universally prevailed among the negroes, to the general neglect and
abandonment of marriage.”

Polemics against concubinage would continue in Jamaica and the
wider Caribbean throughout the rest of the century, despite the practice’s prominence in all

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60 Ibid., 93.
61 Though “always unfavourable to the increase of the species,” Milroy had to acknowledge that in Jamaica the
problem seemed to be a high rate of infant mortality. “[M]any of the women are anything but unprolific.” See ibid.,
89.
levels of society. He noted spiritually bereft burial practices, such as “the numerous interments which are everywhere occurring among the negro population in the grounds immediately around their huts, and without the celebration of any religious rite whatever. This degrading practice appears indeed to be the rule in many districts.” Most crucially, however, Milroy believed that this moral uplift could only happen through sanitary measures. The religious instruction provided by missionaries had proved inadequate, despite what he believed was a favorable ratio of ministers to island residents (200 pastors to 300,000-400,000 residents). That “the bulk of the people are retrogradings, both in morals and in enlightenment” could only be explained by “the existing wretched state of their buildings.” He continued,

Physical debasement and pollution are invariably associated with distempers alike of mind and body; and as long as the evil operation continues, these distempers will be found to be but little amenable to treatment. We must begin by withdrawing the patient from the atmosphere of corruption around him; he must be brought into a purer medium.

For Milroy, the mismanaged transition to a free society had failed to teach blacks how to live a virtuous life, and emancipation’s failures had led to the devastating cholera epidemic. But more importantly, these failures could only be addressed through the promotion of a sanitary lifestyle.

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63 “Report on the Cholera in Jamaica, &c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica) Copy of the report made by Dr. Milroy to the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and correspondence with the Governor of Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.90.
64 Ibid., 101.
Health officials and physicians in Jamaica had come to similar conclusions as well. In particular, local observers identified among Jamaica’s poorest inhabitants rampant levels of moral and material filth that they believed to be the root cause of the epidemic. These writers did highlight administrative shortcomings, but they did so without establishing a causal link between municipal neglect and the squalid conditions. In other words, local authorities may not have noticed the conditions in which so many townspeople lived, but culpability nonetheless lay with the poor.

Two months after the disease first arrived in Jamaica, the Kingston Board of Health presented a petition to Jamaica’s House of Assembly, in which the petitioners criticized “the low social and material condition of the greater portion of the poorer inhabitants, whose sordid, unwholesome, and vicious habits, if not in some degree caused by, are certainly fostered and perpetuated by the character of the hovels in which they dwell.” The cholera epidemic, they argued, brought these conditions to the attention of the local Board of Health. The houses in which Kingston’s poor lived were “for the most part, from their situation, construction, materials, and condition, unfit for human habitation, and totally incompatible with habits of decency, cleanliness, morality, or self-respect.” To support these claims, the petitioners noted that areas “where ordinary cleanliness, ventilation and decent habits were observed” had remained relatively unscathed by the disease. If not purged of filth, the areas of town in such wretched condition would pose a future threat to the safety of the city. “[I]f not prevented,” they
contended, “the seeds [of cholera] may be long preserved, ready to burst forth again at any time
with renewed virulence.”

The petitioners put forth a simple solution: “[I]t would be highly advantageous to public
health, to morality, and to the value of property generally, if the whole class of hovels referred to
were by some strong and sweeping measure destroyed, and the sites thereof cleared and
purified.” Their plan also involved constructing buildings on the same sites. In addition, they
suggested mandatory “domiciliary visitations” once the neighborhoods were rebuilt, a tactic
often used in Victorian Britain. They called for “a comprehensive and scientific system of
sewerage,” and they wanted to ban slaughter-houses and burial grounds that were too close to
residential areas. Even the practice of “feeding of hogs,” a common custom in European cities
as well as Kingston, came under scrutiny: “the rearing and keeping of such animals is properly
the occupation of a rural peasantry, rather than of city paupers, with whom it is at best a sordid
and idle occupation, while the food produced cannot be wholesome, and the nuisances created
are great and offensive.” In conclusion, these men insisted that these measures would comprise

a great step…taken towards the social improvement of the most degraded portion of the
people, the recurrence of pestilence may, under Divine Providence, be averted or greatly
mitigated; and, under God’s blessing, this heavy visitation of his justice be converted into
a manifestation of his goodness.

This petition highlighted the terms in which matters of disease prevention were discussed in
Jamaica. The correlation between unsanitary living conditions and a higher prevalence of cholera

65 Milroy echoed parts of this argument in his 1852 report, noting that “No one…had till then had any idea of
the squalid wretchedness in which the mass of the people were living.” See “Report on the Cholera in Jamaica,
&c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica) Copy of the report made by Dr. Milroy to
the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and correspondence with the Governor of
Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.25. Kingston Board of Health petition, found on Cholera
(Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island
of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty's government for the adoption of measures to
meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.18, CO 137/308, fol. 331v.
became the tool to condemn the working poor: Kingston’s Board of Health abdicated any responsibility for the state of these residences when they claimed that the cholera epidemic had “brought to the knowledge, and forced upon the observation of the petitioners, and of the better class of the community generally,” the appalling conditions in which poor blacks lived.\textsuperscript{66}

The relationship between filth and disease also provided an opportunity for reformers to push a platform of sanitary and moral improvement. As such, this combination of ideas was not isolated to any one governmental body. Port Royal-based naval surgeon James Watson articulated a similar opinion in his February 1851 report to S. J. Dallas, custos (or chief parish magistrate) of Port Royal.\textsuperscript{67} Watson also sent a copy of this report to Governor Grey, and in his cover letter, he remarked that “[cholera], and indeed all other Epidemic diseases are inseparably dependent for their full, and most malignant developement [sic], on the presence of filth in its numerous forms.”\textsuperscript{68} Although the surgeon suggested that Port Royal’s notoriety as a haven for disease and death was unwarranted, he could not ignore the “miserable community of about 1000 souls (That was the supposed Number before Cholera) mostly black or brown.” This community lived in squalor, he argued. The area was vastly overcrowded, while pigs, dogs, and children roamed around, and refuse and garbage were not cleaned properly. “[E]very breath of air which passed over this heap of filth comes over the Town impregnated with the seeds of disease,” he declared. The situation contravened “the natural laws by which human communities

\textsuperscript{66} Kingston Board of Health petition, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.18-19, CO 137/308, fols. 331v-332r. On house visitations, see Wohl, \textit{Endangered Lives}, 68-9. On pigs, see Evans, \textit{Death in Hamburg}, 112-14; and Wohl, \textit{Endangered Lives}, 82-3.

\textsuperscript{67} The \textit{Dictionary of Jamaican English} defines “custos” as “the principal magistrate of a parish; he is also the Governor’s adviser on matters of his parish.” See F.G. Cassidy and R.B. Le Page, eds., \textit{Dictionary of Jamaican English, Second Edition} (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 137.

\textsuperscript{68} Watson letter to Governor Grey, 24 February 1851, enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #23 to Earl Grey, 15 March 1851, CO 137/309, fol. 74r.
can exist in a state of health,” which explained why twenty-five percent of Port Royal’s population died during the recent battle with cholera. All who died were “Natives” and only “the Gentlemen connected with the public services and the Clergy” were spared. They survived “no doubt because they were placed in circumstances generally favorable to Health.”

Based on Britain’s previous experiences with cholera in 1832 and 1848, Watson believed cholera would return to Port Royal, probably to the same places it had been the first time around. It was the job of local authorities, therefore, to “[deprive cholera] of its malignancy.” To this end, he laid out several recommendations. He too endorsed the idea of home visits, and he shared an enthusiasm for the prohibition of pig rearing. He believed that one person, who would report to a central Board of Health, should supervise every aspect of sanitary reform. Watson wanted “the Government…[to] insure an abundant supply to the Town of the very excellent water from Rock Fort which the Towns people now receive indirectly and sparingly.” Watson also suggested that potholes be filled in to avoid the smells emanating from large pools of standing water. And, in addition to home visits, Watson recommended the inspection of all rental properties to stop the practice of renting out unfit accommodation to poor Jamaicans. He also suggested that a medical officer be appointed to work especially with the poor.

The rhetoric that linked poor sanitation to moral corruption and, by extension, posited that sanitation was the only hope of fixing Jamaica’s economic woes became so prominent that it dominated the introduction to the Jamaican Central Board of Health’s 1853 report on cholera. This board was a body created at the behest of Milroy, the only significant measure passed by

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69 Watson letter to S. J. Dallas, 22 February 1851, enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #23 to Earl Grey, 15 March 1851, CO 137/309, fols. 76-82r.

70 Ibid., fols. 82v-86.

71 When introducing the document to the Colonial Office, Governor Grey explained that “[t]he first thirty four pages of the manuscript are filled by an animated but eccentric effusion which is more religious and political than medical.” Governor Grey dispatch #95 to the Duke of Newcastle, 23 September 1853, CO 137/318, fol. 125v.
the Jamaican legislature in response to his 1851 report. The board’s 1853 treatise was their second exhaustive report on the subject, and they delved into the “close and intimate connexion and dependency between physical and moral purity” that was the key to their reform platform.

“Every moment,” they proclaimed, “we hear of the apathy, of the ingratitude or the recklessness of the lower classes, neglectful of themselves and indifferent as to the fate of their kindred and their fellow men. These displays of evil passions and hardened hearts have surprized and disgusted many.” The only cure, “the only way to…cure such a fatal moral disease is to ameliorate the physical and social condition of the poor,” they suggested. Only then could any serious attempts be made to raise the moral and religious character of the lower classes.

IV.

Quarantine

The rhetoric that this chapter has thus far tracked resonated beyond the realm of sanitation and moral uplift. Jamaica’s economic woes intruded into cholera crisis management in at least two other arenas. First, Jamaica’s increasingly desperate economic situation informed discussions about quarantine, discussions that were part of a global debate on the measure. Quarantine had

72 Even still, the Central Board of Health created by this legislation did not meet the criteria that Milroy had laid out. In particular, Milroy had wanted the Board to be comprised of paid physicians, whose work on the board was full-time. Instead, the members of the board were not paid, making it a part-time position. C.H. Senior, “Asiatic Cholera in Jamaica (1850-1855),” Jamaica Journal 26, no. 2 (December 1997), 36-7. See also “An Act to establish for a limited period a Central Board of Health and for other purposes,” CO 139/87, fols. 566-569.

73 This particular document “gave rise to some angry feeling, and the House of Assembly refused to print it.” Governor Grey dispatch #45 to the Duke of Newcastle, 11 May 1853, CO 137/316, fol. 304r. For the quotation, see “Duplicate of the Report of the Central Board of Health for His Excellency the Governor Presented to the Legislature under the provisions of the 15th Victoria Chapter 36.,” enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #95 to the Duke of Newcastle, 23 September 1853, CO 137/318, fol. 140.

74 “Duplicate of the Report of the Central Board of Health for His Excellency the Governor Presented to the Legislature under the provisions of the 15th Victoria Chapter 36.,” enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #95 to the Duke of Newcastle, 23 September 1853, CO 137/318, fols. 133v-134r. In a further elaboration of this point, they wrote: “let us take the necessary steps to reform those we have here, improve their physical condition, and in so doing we shall alleviate their moral disease.” See fol. 144v.
been the standard European response to the threat of ships ferrying diseases from port to port. During the early years of the nineteenth century, British quarantine laws required ships with passengers infected with plague or yellow fever, as well as ships traveling from ports where these two diseases were present, to be isolated at sea. All passengers, healthy and sick, were confined to the ship for the duration of the quarantine period, which in Britain was up to 60 days. But although these measures were common throughout Europe, disgruntlement with the policy grew steadily in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century. Restraining and isolating ships and their crew had always posed a problem for maritime commerce, and early complaints about quarantine focused on how much the practice cost merchants and the British state. As Krista Maglen notes, “Quarantine was a problematic factor within British maritime trade, potentially adding, by the turn of the nineteenth century, over 30 days to the duration of a journey. During this month of detention another trip might have been completed, perishable goods may have decayed, if not been destroyed, and a hefty quarantine duty had to be paid.”

The practice remained largely unchallenged as long as medical science vouched for its effectiveness. Quarantine’s economic costs could not be justified, however, if it did not prevent the spread of epidemic disease. At the beginning of the century, contagion theories that claimed people passed a certain category of diseases—contagious diseases—to each other held sway. When contagion was the medical consensus, quarantine made sense: the only way to stop the

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75 According to Mark Harrison, “Critics of quarantine estimated that its annual cost to Britain amounted to between two and three million pounds, with similar losses incurred by merchants in the Mediterranean.” See Mark Harrison, “Disease, diplomacy and international commerce: the origins of international sanitary regulation in the nineteenth century,” *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 2 (July 2006): 213.

76 Krista Maglen, “‘The First Line of Defence’: British Quarantine and the Port Sanitary Authorities in the Nineteenth Century,” *Social History of Medicine* 15, no. 3: 413-6; quotation from 416. For another approach to quarantine and sanitary reform, see Mark Harrison’s 2006 article. He makes similar points to Maglen about Britain’s gradual move away from quarantine, but he does so by approaching the material through the lens of diplomacy. Mark Harrison, “Disease,” 197-217.
spread of a contagious disease was to keep those sick with the disease physically separate from
the healthy population. But an opposing hypothesis, developed out of British experience in the
colonies and common among Royal Navy physicians, increasingly came to the fore over the first
half of the century. Adherents to the anticontagionism thesis believed that disease spread not
through interpersonal contact but through foul, sickly air—hence Milroy’s obsession with proper
ventilation. 77 Once enough medical experts subscribed to anticontagionism, the theory
“significantly threaten[ed] the conceptual basis upon which quarantine had been built.”
Moreover, Britain’s first brush with cholera in the early 1830s left over 30,000 people dead,
which seemed to prove that the quarantine measures put in place were ineffective. Combined
with the widespread belief in the primacy of free trade—a belief Frank Trentmann suggests
became something like “a national ideology” for the British—the ineffectiveness of such a
disruptive measure forced British politicians, physicians, and public health officials to devise
another prevention system based around sanitation. “Britain…continued to develop an
approach to cholera prevention which was more compatible with the doctrine of free trade,” in
contrast to its European neighbors which continued to use quarantines. This turn to sanitary
measures resulted in the adoption in 1872 of the Port Sanitary Authorities. Under this system,
also known as “the English system,” infected or potentially infected passengers were sent to
isolation hospitals, while healthy passengers could go about their business, although they were
observed while in the country. This system maintained the physical separation of the healthy and

77 Mark Harrison notes that “the seemingly distinctive disease environments of Asia, Africa, and the Americas
made a profound impression upon medical practitioners.” He also argues that “the revolutionary and Napoleonic
wars tilted the balance of medical opinion towards those who sought to abolish or…to reform quarantine.” The
overseas experience that doctors had during these wars led them to “[place] more emphasis on the climatic and
sanitary conditions necessary to produce the diseases in epidemic form.” See Mark Harrison, “Disease,” 203-5. On
the Royal Navy, scurvy, and ventilation, see Arnold Zuckerman, “Scurvy and the Ventilation of Ships in the Royal
sick, but only incarcerated the sick, rather than entire ships. Although many scholars have seen the development of the port sanitation system as a sign of quarantine’s final collapse, Maglen insists that the port sanitation system worked hand in hand with quarantine until the latter’s abolition in 1896. Potential cases of plague and yellow fever might still incur quarantine.  

Although quarantine was much maligned by 1850, it nevertheless remained the only national policy designed to prevent the importation of communicable diseases via trade and shipping, and in the absence of another solution, cholera was too terrifying a prospect to leave unchecked. The first impulse of Governor Grey and the Jamaican legislature was to impose quarantine on both international and intracolony shipping, despite the stern warning from London not to choke trade and industry for a measure not proven to work. In Milroy’s second report, the Scottish doctor criticized this move: “That the Executive should have thought of imposing quarantine upon arrivals from Kingston at the outports, when the inland

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78 Krista Maglen, “First Line of Defence,” 416-9; Frank Trentmann, Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2. As Maglen describes: “Ships which arrived into a port continued to be boarded first by an officer of the Customs Service who inquired into the health of those on board. If plague or yellow fever was found or suspected, the case remained with the Customs Service. If any other infectious disease was present, the Customs Officer then summoned the Port Medical Officer of Health to the vessel to take over the case. Except in crisis periods, such as during the cholera threat of 1892, the Port Medical Officer of Health did not inspect any vessel unless the Customs Service discovered a case of non-quarantineable infection.” Maglen goes on to discuss an 1889 incident in which a ship from Brazil came into Southampton with the dead body of a yellow fever victim and another person with a serious case of the disease. The Customs Office sent the ship back to sea, while healthy passengers, crew members, and the sick man were confined to two additional ship. Maglen admits this is only one case—although she does not specify whether this is the only case she could find or the only case she is mentioning here—but she nevertheless asserts that this isolated case proves that quarantine still remained an option as late as 1889, and that had there been more instances of yellow fever, quarantine would have been applied in all of them. The strength of this claim is somewhat dubious, but Maglen’s findings do indicate that, legally, quarantine remained a possibility, in contrast to the arguments of other scholars. See Maglen, “First Line of Defence,” 423-4, 426-8 and Anne Hardy, “Cholera, quarantine and the English preventive system, 1850-1895,” Medical History 37, no. 3 (July 1993): 250-69.

79 Mark Harrison notes that outbreaks of disease in other parts of the world led to a “sense of vulnerability [that] meant that most nations…were reluctant to abandon quarantine, their traditional defence against epidemic disease.” Mark Harrison, “Disease,” 205-6.

80 Earl Grey, “Circular Despatch to the Governors of the West India Islands,” 9 December 1850, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.47, CO 137/308, fol. 346.
intercommunication was uninterrupted, and after the disease had already manifested itself into
different parts of the island, can only be accounted for by the bewilderment of the moment.”
Moreover, Grey’s imposition of quarantine was a vote of confidence in the measure, and Milroy
worried that “it gave authority to the very erroneous views” about how cholera was transmitted,
“while it served to divert the attention of the community from the only trustworthy means of
protection.”81 But despite the fact that free trade ideology had gained enormous purchase in the
1840s, the dictates of free trade had already burned Jamaica in the form of the 1846 Sugar
Duties Act. When cholera arrived, many Jamaicans were less convinced of the virtues of free
trade and still viewed quarantine as a vital tool against the deadly disease.

As a result, Governor Grey and the Legislative Council hesitated to give up their
quarantine power. A longtime civil servant, Grey’s tenure as governor of Jamaica was his final
appointment. Trained at Oxford and Lincoln’s Inn, Grey became a puisne judge in Madras in
1821, and by 1825, he was named chief justice of Calcutta. After short stints in Canada and
Barbados, Grey became the Jamaican governor in 1846. Grey’s wife Elizabeth died in London
on November 15, 1850, while cholera ravaged the colony, although there is no mention of her
death in the Colonial Office correspondence files.82 Grey had quarantined all ships arriving from
Port Royal, despite the Colonial Office’s condemnation of the measure.83 Two years later, the

81 “Report on the Cholera in Jamaica, &c.,” enclosed in Milroy letter to Pakington, July 1852, Cholera (Jamaica)
Copy of the report made by Dr. Milroy to the Colonial Office, on the cholera epidemic in Jamaica, 1850-51; and
correspondence with the Governor of Jamaica in relation thereto; PP 1854 (235) XLIII.84.
2011]. Katherine Prior claims that during this time, Grey was “critical of the home government’s apparent desire to
wash its hands of the social and economic problems of its Caribbean colonies.” Grey’s time in Jamaica was marked
by his struggles with the planter faction. Grey died in June 1865. Among other things, he left a Jamaican estate in
the Blue Mountains to his oldest son. Katherine Prior, ‘Grey, Sir Charles Edward (1785–1865)’, Oxford Dictionary of
11528, accessed 19 Feb 2011].
83 CO 137/307: Governor Grey dispatch #86 to Earl Grey, 26 October 1850, fols. 310-311, 313; Grey draft
dispatch #385 to Governor Grey, 27 November 1850, 316-317.
issue had not yet been put to rest. In September 1852, the new secretary of state John Pakington (1799-1880) sent Governor Grey a statement from Milroy denouncing the practice. In response, the governor reported the legislature’s increasing willingness to limit the island’s reliance on quarantine, but he and the legislature refused to ban its use altogether. Their reluctance made sense, especially in light of the staggering loss of black lives—and a staggering loss of labor. Quarantine promised a potential opportunity to stop cholera from killing even more laborers. But blocking commerce had its own severe economic costs that could exacerbate the problem of the declining sugar exports. In the end, the latter concern won out, bolstered by proclamations from the Jamaican Central Board of Health that quarantine did not work. The Governor and Council chose not to establish quarantine during a subsequent smallpox outbreak, an additional sign of a more cautious approach to this controversial measure.

Labor

A second application of this rhetoric can be found in indentured immigration debates. The deaths of so many black Jamaicans aggravated the issue most pressing to white planters and

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84 Grey had placed Milroy’s letter before the Legislative Council, the body that had the authority to impose quarantines on ships, along with the governor himself. “There is not any unanimous agreement amongst the Members of the Council which would justify me in saying that Quarantine will never again be imposed even by the present members: and it is of course impossible to answer for what may be done by a Council comprising new Members,” Grey reported. Nevertheless, despite his inability to declare quarantine formally struck from the law, Grey described changing opinion among members of the legislature: “The visitations of pestilence…within the last two years, Dr Milroy’s residence and exertions within the island and the spread of the doctrine as to Quarantine now so generally entertained in England have produced a considerable change of opinion here..and I do not think it likely that any inconvenient interruption of commerce is likely to recur from Quarantine regulations.” Grey dispatch #87 to Pakington, 29 September 1852, CO 137/314, fols. 212-213.

85 As the board members wrote in their second report, “The idea that malignant cholera is per se contagious or that its spread is amenable to Quarantine restrictions is now fast passing away. It is an Idea which has been repudiated by the ministers connected with the Colonial office and who have taken opportunities of expressing their surprize at Quarantine restrictions being imposed.” See “Duplicate of the Report of the Central Board of Health for His Excellency the Governor Presented to the Legislature under the provisions of the 15th Victoria Chapter 36.,” enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #95 to the Duke of Newcastle, 23 September 1853, CO 137/318, fol. 161r. For the entire section on quarantine, see fols. 150-163.

86 Grey dispatch #87 to Pakington, 29 September 1852, CO 137/314, fols. 312-313.
colonial officials, the problem of a labor shortage.\textsuperscript{87} In his official reports, Governor Grey described the tens of thousands of dead Afro-Jamaicans in terms of the lost labor they represented. In one annual report, he noted that the disease had “not only killed thousands of labourers, but ha[d] unsettled and otherwise injuriously affected the habits and dispositions of the rest.” He concluded this paragraph with a similar sentiment: “I see no reason to doubt that on the whole ten thousand able-bodied labourers, male and female, or an equivalent amount of labour, has been lost to the colony.” Here again, the lives of black Jamaicans were intimately bound with the work they could no longer complete.\textsuperscript{88} Seen in this light, the deaths of Afro-Jamaicans only made worse the problem on which Jamaican politicians and British merchants had been fixating.

Two months after the first outbreak of the disease, Governor Grey presented a petition from Jamaica’s House of Assembly to the Colonial Office:

I…lay before your Lordship a Memorial addressed to Her Majesty by the House of Assembly of Jamaica, representing the new and very serious difficulties with which the planters in this colony will have to contend, a consequence of the sad mortality amongst the labourers, which has been occasioned by the cholera, and praying for some extra supply of immigrant labourers.

\textsuperscript{87} Madhavi Kale has strenuously challenged historians’ general acceptance that there was a labor shortage. She insists that there was less consensus among economic commentators on the existence of a labor shortage than scholars have acknowledged. Furthermore, she argues that “[l]abor shortage was the idiom in which some British Caribbean sugar planters, metropolitan creditors and entrepreneurs with investments throughout the British Empire both represented their unhappiness with conditions under which they produced and sold sugar, and negotiated more favorable ones.” In other words, “labor shortage,” in Kale’s reading, was little more than a rhetorical tool planters and other investors used to force the British government to move laborers from India to the British Caribbean. As she writes, “colonial planters and metropolitan capitalists….focused on persuading administrators and legislators in Britain that the sugar colonies were suffering from acute labor shortage, and that the consequences of imperial neglect and parsimony would be dire for imperial as well as colonial prosperity and civilization.” Although I won’t go as far as Kale does, her arguments are nonetheless valuable in reminding us that we should understand the concept of labor shortage in terms of perception rather than objective fact. Members of the newly-forming black Jamaican peasantry likely would not have shared this particular concern. See Madhavi Kale, \textit{Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 6-8, 56-65. Quotations are on 59 and 6, respectively.

\textsuperscript{88} Grey’s 1850 Blue Book report, Governor Grey dispatch #115 to Earl Grey, 31 December 1851, CO 137/311, fols. 318-321.
He continued: “The effect in impeding the cultivation and manufacture of sugar, and coffee, and rum must necessarily be very great, and is much to be deplored, coming as it does upon the heels of so many other discouraging circumstances which the Jamaica planter has had to encounter.”

The Assembly petition bemoaned the possibility of losing nearly ten percent of the population, “these principally among the labouring classes.” But although Grey’s accompanying dispatch had made only a general reference to immigrant labor, this memorial, along with a similar document drawn up by the Legislative Council, was much more specific. Both houses of the Jamaican legislature asked that, in light of the severe losses of labor, Jamaica receive more immigrant laborers, in particular the “captured Africans” that the Royal Navy had freed from slave ships headed to other parts of the Americas. That forcing these men and women, once bound for enslavement in other countries, to work on Jamaican plantations was tantamount to slavery was a cruel irony these earnest petitioners failed to notice.

Earl Grey’s response validated the legislature’s preoccupation with labor. Son of the second Earl Grey who had been prime minister in the early 1830s, Grey supported free-trade ideology. Beginning with his stint as a Colonial Office undersecretary in 1830, Grey held numerous positions throughout the government. He became colonial secretary in 1846, where

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89 Governor Grey dispatch #94 to Earl Grey, 13 December 1850, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.14, CO 137/308, fol. 329v. The Legislative Council sent a similar petition as well.

90 Assembly petition, 12 December 1850, enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #94 to Earl Grey, 13 December 1850; Legislative Council petition, 13 December 1850, enclosed in Governor Grey dispatch #96 to Earl Grey, 16 December 1850; both found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.14-16, CO 137/308, fol. 329v-330v. British merchants also sent several similar petitions to the Colonial Office. See CO 137/308, fols. 340-344.
he oversaw vigorous debates over the removal of government protection on sugar from the Caribbean colonies as well as the push towards self-government in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.\textsuperscript{91} He agreed that one of the most worrisome results of the epidemic was the way that it exacerbated the existing labor shortage. Production and exports had to be kept up, and Grey argued that all Jamaicans, peasants and planters alike, were invested in the island’s economic success. If Jamaica’s economy continued to slide, “the most civilized of the inhabitants of the island would have no inducement to reside in it, while their departure could not fail greatly to retard, if not to arrest the progress of improvement in that part of the population which has so recently emerged from slavery and barbarism.”\textsuperscript{92}

What the petitioners and Governor Grey had failed to mention, however, was that Jamaica was already receiving a portion of the African men and women “rescued” from slave ships. So too were the rest of the West Indian colonies, all at the expense of the home government. For Jamaica to receive all these men and women would rob the other colonies, which also had their own struggles with labor. Earl Grey recommended another idea: recruitment efforts to target free blacks from the United States and Canada. This plan would work, he argued, for several reasons: free blacks were familiar with the kind of work they would do in Jamaica, they spoke English, their fare to Jamaica would be cheap, and they would be eager to leave the racist societies where “their presence in the actual state of society is a source of discomfort both to themselves and to others.” But even then, he remained skeptical that


\textsuperscript{92} Earl Grey dispatch #398 to Governor Grey, 15 February 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.26-7, CO 137/308, fols. 335v-336.
immigration schemes were the best solution to the labor supply problems.93 The secretary of state’s proposals were not new. In the 1840s, Peel’s administration proposed an emigration agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom, one that would recruit free black Americans to work in British colonies on a one-year contract. These proposals went nowhere; if anything, they only proved to American officials that Britain’s “great experiment” was failing.94

In Grey’s mind, Jamaica’s real problem was the mismanaged transition from slavery to freedom, the same root cause identified by Milroy. He wrote, “[I]t was a great and unfortunate error when slavery was abolished, not to place the emancipated population under regulations calculated to impose upon them the necessity of greater exertion.” Grey understood the reasons black peasants chose not to work on the plantations to the degree planters wanted. Their provision grounds, a holdover from slavery, provided them with enough food to eat and sell. They had no need to work on plantations full time. Yet emancipation was supposed to have taught black peasants to want more for themselves than mere subsistence; he too read as idleness their failure to aspire to the level of livelihood he deemed appropriate. As he explained, “Though their mere animal instincts led them to work sufficiently to obtain the means of gratifying their rude desires, and for the supply of their immediate physical wants, there are other wants of human nature no less real, which they were incapable of understanding, and for which therefore they made no provision.” These tendencies could be reversed, he argued, if the Jamaican government established a system akin to Milroy’s proposal, where workers made a

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93 Earl Grey dispatch #398 to Governor Grey, 15 February 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.27-8, CO 137/308, fol. 336.

weekly payment for local services, particularly medical help in the form of hospitals and dispensaries. But in the end, only the legislature had the power to make these changes, for it was “the Legislature to which the destinies of Jamaica are mainly entrusted.” These statements, written before Milroy’s first report, nonetheless echo the physician’s conclusions and suggest the degree to which all those who commented on cholera viewed the disease—and the rampant, execrable living conditions it had revealed—as a referendum on emancipation.95

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how medical professionals and colonial administrators thought about the medical problems cholera posed in Jamaica. Questions about health, sanitation, prevention, and the possibility of a recurrence were viewed by these commentators not merely as issues in themselves but as symptoms of a larger problem: what appeared to them to be the ill-thought-out and ruinous transition of emancipation.96 In this sense, cholera provided another forum to lament Jamaica’s woes. The specific issues that observers linked to the epidemic also

95 Earl Grey dispatch #398 to Governor Grey, 15 February 1851, found on Cholera (Jamaica). Copies or extracts of despatches and other documents relating to the outbreak of the cholera in the island of Jamaica, and respecting any applications made to Her Majesty’s government for the adoption of measures to meet the difficulties thus brought upon the colony; PP 1851 (104) XXXVI.30-5, CO 137/308, fols. 337v-340r.

96 One measure of this assertion that the damage done by cholera took a back seat in colonial priorities is the amount of time Governor Grey spent dissecting the aftermath of cholera in his annual reports. In his 1851 report that accompanied the 1850 blue book, he did not mention cholera until the tenth section of his report and then he only devoted one paragraph to it before moving onto a discussion of black laborers and rioting. See Grey’s 1850 Blue Book report, Governor Grey dispatch #115 to Earl Grey, 31 December 1851, CO 137/311, fols. 318-321. A similar skimming over cholera happened in Grey’s 1852 report for the 1851 blue book. Once again, only one paragraph was spent on cholera and even in that paragraph, cholera shared space with smallpox, which was spreading in the northern part of the island. Again, Grey said nothing about sanitation or medicine, treatment, or prevention. He did, however, comment on how the outbreak of smallpox “greatly augmented the difficulties of the planters there arising from the want of steady and efficient labor.” See Governor Grey dispatch #73 to Pakington, 23 August 1852, CO 137/314, fol. 106. More important than whether or not Grey devoted enough paper to discussing cholera is the fact that, as of yet, I have found no evidence of any significant movement on any of the prevention measures suggested by Milroy or others. In fact, there is evidence of political stonewalling on the issue. As mentioned earlier, the Jamaican House of Assembly, angered by the contents of the Central Board of Health’s 1853 report, “refused to print it.” Governor Grey dispatch #45 to the Duke of Newcastle, 11 May 1853, CO 137/316, fol. 304r.
lined up with the prevailing concerns of the period. Discussions of preventive measures were bound up with sermons on morality and civilization, right at the time of increasing disappointment that black peasants had not remained dutiful plantation workers and general agreement that the missionary endeavor had failed to instruct black peasants in the proper forms of daily life, family structure, religious affiliation, and work habits. Furthermore, cholera had exacerbated the economic problems that had preoccupied Jamaican elites and British officials for over a decade. The deaths of so many black Jamaicans provided yet another reason to consider wide-ranging immigration schemes and gave white elites another chance to blame the country’s economic woes on black peasants’ desire for a life on their own terms.

It makes sense, then, that the solutions put forth were designed to solve what these elites deemed the larger issue: the island’s economic troubles brought on by blacks’ widespread refusal to work on plantations. In particular, commentators, both British and Jamaican, settled on sanitation as the panacea for both the medical and economic problems. The newest medical theories advocated sanitary reform over quarantine measures. Clean living environments would eliminate opportunities for pestilence to fester and poison the air, thereby limiting cholera’s spread. But, more importantly to these medical and moral crusaders, a sanitation program promised moral progress as well as material uplift. For them, the failures of emancipation had left Jamaica vulnerable to cholera, and only by addressing what had supposedly gone wrong—the moral decay and rampant idleness not yet corrected—could there be any chance of preventing future recurrences. What would keep cholera at bay was the same thing that would

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97 Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* explores these themes in full, as does Michele Johnson and Brian Moore’s *Neither Led nor Driven*. See Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), especially the introduction; chapter four “Sex, Marriage, and the Family;” chapter five “Manners Maketh (Wo)Man;” and chapter six “Christianizing Jamaica.”
cure Jamaica’s economic woes: the creation of a class of docile, hard-working, married, healthy, clean, and otherwise morally upstanding plantation laborers.
“The next morning,” a former patient in Kingston’s lunatic asylum wrote, “Louise Cochran was again ‘tanked.’” She continued:

Horrified and frightened at the terrible repetition of the scenes of yesterday, I rushed from the yard of the Lunatic Asylum into the yard of the Public Hospital….I ran up the stairs that lead to the Fever Wards, and grasped the railings, when I was seized by Antoinette, Julian, and a male labourer….Dr. Keech ordered them to take me back to the Asylum….Immediately, on returning, I was confronted with Mrs. Ryan, who, with great indignation, ordered me to be ‘tanked.’…I was stripped; my arms held behind me; my legs extended and forcibly separated from each other; I was plunged into the tank, and kept under the water till all resistance, on my part, ceased; their grasp was then relaxed; I rose to the surface and breathed as if it were my last. Scarcely, however, had I drawn my breath when I was again subjected to the same horrible treatment, with the addition of having my head hurt against the sides of the tank, and my poor body beaten and contused with blows, till the fear of murder prompted them to desist.¹

Such violent and harrowing scenes were typical in Kingston’s asylum in the late 1850s.

Kingston’s lunatic asylum and adjoining public hospital were the major institutions of their kind on the island of Jamaica. As such, the conditions within them were of critical importance to the island as a whole. Over the course of 1857-1858, the beginning of the period in question, almost 1800 people were treated in one or the other institution.²

¹ Ann Pratt, Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I Saw There (Kingston: George Henderson, Savage, & Co.), enclosed in dispatch #118, 21 August 1860, British National Archives, Colonial Office (CO) 137/350, fol. 434.
² 1500 were admitted (meaning that roughly 300 people were in the hospital and asylum in October 1857, when the year began), and 1275 were discharged. In September 1858, 284 people remained. The bulk of these patients came from Jamaica, just short of 1200. Just over 100 patients were English (in addition, 55 were of Scottish origin), and approximately 90 were born in Africa. In terms of occupation, nearly 500 were servants, a similar number were laborers. Around 250 were seamen, and about 150 were unemployed. But all trades were represented among the patients, including one solicitor, one schoolmaster, one surveyor, three printers, the same number of policemen, ten clerks, one engineer, and thirty planters. See CO 137/344, Darling dispatch #40 to Bulwer-Lytton, 3 March 1859, fols. 2-39 for this report and demographic information. The report does not specify which people of which profession were in the hospital or the asylum.
This chapter reconstructs the intense controversy that began in 1858, when Jamaican physician Lewis Bowerbank exposed endemic violence, abuse and neglect in the asylum and the hospital. The scandalous nature of these revelations created a rift in Kingston’s elite between those who supported Bowerbank and those who backed the head physician of the asylum and hospital, James Scott. The latter group included several prominent politicians as well as the governor, Sir Charles Darling. At first, Bowerbank’s detractors successfully painted him as a jealous fraud, thereby prompting those who read his claims to question whether the problems he mentioned even existed. But by the early 1860s, asylum staff were dismissed and tried, a Kingston-based commission conducted an exhaustive examination of both institutions, and the Colonial Office sent questionnaires to the governors of over thirty colonies, asking about abuse in public asylums. This chapter analyzes the circumstances that convinced British officials to take Bowerbank’s claims seriously and to assume a leading role in investigating the extent of the abuse in the asylum. In the process, it focuses on a number of themes: the debate over the proper standards by which to measure colonial institutions; the role of personality politics in imperial and colonial administration; and the role of one woman in almost singlehandedly persuading the men in the Colonial Office of the validity of Bowerbank’s allegations.³

³ A note on terms is required with regard to the term “lunatic” and the related word “insane.” The actors discussed in this chapter referred to the patients in Kingston’s asylum as lunatics and described their mental condition as insane. However, I have chosen not to apply these same terms myself to the people held in this institution. The asylum and the hospital often functioned as dumping grounds for the poor, the blind, the disabled, and the aged. Moreover, it is futile to attempt to diagnose the mental state of those deemed “insane” from the records that we have, especially given the racist ideologies that cut through these documents. Even at the time, the mental condition of these patients was constantly in question. We see this tension most clearly as former patients testified about their treatment in the asylum. Various parties tried to discredit such testimony on the grounds that it came from people who had been legally classified as “insane” and therefore could not provide clear and accurate statements. Nevertheless, some people took seriously the descriptions these women and men gave, which suggests that they put aside any concerns about the lucidity of these witnesses. For these reasons, I use the terms “lunatic” and “insane” only where they appear in the sources. For my own purposes, I will refer to the people in the asylum as “patients”, “inmates” (a term found in the records), and “residents.”
This chapter inserts Jamaica, previously ignored, into debates about British colonial asylums. Scholarship on colonial psychiatry has been growing over the past several decades. But despite the existence of studies on asylums in India and British colonies in Africa, similar work for the British Caribbean has seldom been done. As Juanita de Barros, Steven Palmer and David Wright note in the introduction to their edited collection *Health and Medicine in the circum-Caribbean, 1800-1968*, the oversight of the Caribbean is a feature of the broader historiography on colonial medicine. Richard Keller’s 2001 review essay, “Madness and Colonization: Psychiatry in the British and French Empires, 1800-1962,” further illustrates this point. Keller defines colonial psychiatry as “the establishment, administration, and practice of mental health care for both European and indigenous populations in Asian and African possessions from the early nineteenth century to decolonization.” This formulation explicitly leaves the Caribbean out of the picture; indeed, it is possible to read Keller’s otherwise insightful piece and come away convinced he does not consider the Caribbean and Australasia to be part of the British Empire. This omission is a problem for two reasons. First, Keller’s definition hones in on the question of “indigenous populations,” a question of some importance for him since he criticizes other

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4 This chapter also challenges scholars who locate the beginning of Britain’s concern for public health in the Caribbean in the 1930s, an argument that focuses on the Moyne Commission’s conclusion that disease was rampant in Jamaica. This chapter pushes the timeline back to the 1850s and argues that this scandal prompted British officials in London to care a great deal about the health and treatment of Jamaicans. Margaret Jones pointed to the 1930s as the critical juncture in a personal conversation, April 2009. For other iterations of this argument, see Jason Parker, *Brother’s Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23, 26. See also James C. Riley, *Poverty and Life Expectancy: The Jamaica Paradox* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Riley focuses on the rise of life expectancy in Jamaica starting in the 1920s. Such an idea might be fine in the main in terms of the degree, the level of publicity, and the organization of these efforts but this chapter suggests that this thesis needs some tweaking. The 1930s and 1940s were not the first time that reports of deplorable conditions in Jamaica shocked the British government into action on the public health front. Darcy Hughes Heuring suggested this book in a personal conversation, November 2009.


scholars for failing to pay sufficient attention to the indigenous insane. The Caribbean complicates this question, since it is a region populated virtually exclusively by immigrants, both forced and voluntary; there were no “indigenous” insane as such. Nevertheless, white Creole elites still created stark divisions between themselves and Afro-Caribbeans. Moreover, as De Barros, Palmer, and Wright note, the story of Caribbean medicine is not the story of Western medicine attempting to supplant preexisting traditional forms. Instead, they argue, “in the Americas more widely, ‘Western medicine,’ having arrived with the conquest and taken strong root at many levels of society, could not so easily be considered an alien, colonizing imposition in the nineteenth century in the way it was in many Asian and African colonial contexts.”

The second problem with excluding the Caribbean is a chronological one. As Keller himself asserts, “Across the [African] continent…the establishment of psychiatric institutions followed colonization by a long interval.” Thus, he writes, “A European psychiatric presence was therefore largely absent in most of Africa during the nineteenth century.” Given this context, it is not surprising that all of the books that Keller reviews on psychiatry in African colonial spaces reference twentieth-century developments. But if the historiography of British colonial psychiatry only encompasses India and Africa, and if colonial psychiatry in Africa is mainly a twentieth-century phenomenon, then we are left with a woefully incomplete picture of nineteenth-century colonial psychiatry and asylum practices in which the Indian versions stand in for the rest of the empire. Focusing on asylums in the Caribbean becomes ever more important for comprehending the wide range of Victorian imperial contexts in which psychiatric practices existed.

7 De Barros, Palmer, and Wright, eds., Health and Medicine, 5-6.  
8 Keller, “Madness and Colonization,” 304-305.  
9 De Barros, Palmer, and Wright, eds., Health and Medicine, 11-12. This chapter is not a history of psychiatry, or
Until recently, scholarly analyses of the scandal over abuse in these two institutions were hard to find. But two recent *Journal of Caribbean History* articles have made a strong case for the importance of the scandal and its resolution. Margaret Jones’s 2008 article, “The Most Cruel and Revolting Crimes,” provides a useful summary of the case. She argues that the violence and neglect were the result of diminished health services and a decreasing number of physicians in the wake of emancipation, as well as administrative problems within the asylum. She also blames Governor Darling for neglecting the hospital and asylum, and she claims that Darling had never visited these institutions nor was he particularly interested in them.  

Leonard Smith takes a broader approach in his 2010 “Caribbean Bedlam,” which charts the construction of asylums, the development of treatment regimens, and the frequent discoveries of appalling conditions throughout all the British islands. In so doing, he weaves the Kingston abuse case—a moment he calls a “defining event in the historical development of lunatic asylums in the British Caribbean”—throughout his argument, doling out pieces of the story as they reflect the broader trends of his analysis. Smith’s interest lies in the gap between the standard of care in Britain and that in the Caribbean. He argues that “the essence of asylum practice in the West Indies” was to follow the model provided by British institutions, a standard upon which all medical
practitioners agreed. Caribbean institutions failed to meet this standard. The required resources were scarce but more importantly, these institutions were based in societies struggling with the aftermath of emancipation.  

Both articles provide vital context and information, but ultimately they both have shortcomings. Jones begins her narrative in 1861, thereby overlooking the first three years of the controversy. As such, she misses the interplay between doctors, the governor, the Colonial Office, clergymen, British medical authorities, and patients in these institutions, the very material that this chapter analyzes. Smith’s analysis of how Caribbean institutions applied and adapted British models of mental health treatment, however, is a more significant issue, one that is at the heart of this chapter. He argues that physicians all agreed with and attempted to carry out treatment plans based upon British ideas. Failure to meet these goals was a failure in execution, not a disagreement with the fundamental principle. But my research does not bear out this claim. In fact, questions about the appropriateness of the British asylum as a model for Jamaican institutions were at the heart of the controversy. The intense debate between Bowerbank and his foes was not a disagreement over how well or not well the Kingston Lunatic Asylum had followed the English blueprint. It was a more fundamental dispute: should the asylum try to adhere to this standard at all?

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I.
The initial complaint

In spring 1858, Jamaican-born physician Lewis Quier Bowerbank published a letter to the Commissioners of the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum of Kingston, a seven-member body that oversaw both institutions. Born in 1814, Bowerbank was the son of St. Catherine’s parish rector. He studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, where he received an M.D. in 1836 and did some additional training in London. Bowerbank returned to Jamaica in 1836 to practice medicine, both as Deputy Physician General of Hospital under Militia and as part of a practice in Spanish Town, St. Catherine, then the capital of Jamaica. In 1853, Bowerbank moved to Kingston, where he started a practice with his brother-in-law, Dr. Charles Campbell.13

In Bowerbank’s sprawling treatise, he condemned virtually every aspect of the hospital and asylum.14 He began with problems of governance, flagging first the hospital’s chronic intake problems, issues that led to overcrowding. He also criticized the managing Board of Commissioners, the panel that ostensibly oversaw the hospital and asylum and the panel to whom he was writing. The board consisted of seven members of Jamaica’s legislature, including three members who were on the governor’s Executive Committee, a body drawn from the two houses of the legislature that ran the government. Bowerbank saw this overlap as a clear conflict

13 Biographical sketch drawn from his obituary, “Death of the Honble. Dr. Bowerbank,” Daily Gleaner, 11 October 1880, 2; and from “History of Medicine in Jamaica,” Medical Association of Jamaica Supplement to the Daily Gleaner, 13 June 1991, 3. At the end of his life, he was described as “a man of quick, impulsive temper, great independence and resolution, and of unchecked frankness in the expression of his thoughts.” The writer of his obituary continued, “[H]e was regarded by all with esteem, and his popularity was considerably enhanced by his genial, hearty manner and his lavish, courtly hospitality.”

14 Lewis Quier Bowerbank, A Letter to the Commissioners of the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum of Kingston, Jamaica relative to the present State and Management of these Institutions by Lewis Quier Bowerbank, M.D. (Kingston: Ford & Gall), enclosed in CO 137/342, J.W. Perry letter to CO, 24 June 1858, fols. 433r, 434-495r. See also CO 137/338, Darling dispatch #108 to Bulwer-Lytton, 9 August 1858, fols. 202, 204r-205v. Bowerbank was a member of Jamaica’s Central Board of Health, a body formed in the aftermath of the 1850-51 cholera epidemic, the subject of chapter 1 of this dissertation.
of interest. The physical layout of both institutions, situated on the same plot of land, came in for significant scrutiny. The fact that the institutions were adjoining was a problem for the physician because the “noise of the inmates” in the asylums “must be very distressing and depressing to the sick.” Their shared location itself was “situated in the most unhealthy portion of the town,” Bowerbank noted. Moreover, the structures themselves were not sound and the physician rattled off a long list of structural defects. The older buildings of the hospital had poor ventilation and lighting, rotting wood beams, and small, cramped wards; the newer ones delivered little better. Severe drainage and sewerage deficiencies created revolting cesspools and allowed streams of effluvia to run into the streets of the surrounding neighborhoods. Conditions in the asylum were just as bad, and the poor sanitary condition had led to the deaths of 82 patients during the 1850 cholera epidemic, a high percentage of the 128 people who had caught the disease. The wards of the asylum were also small and crowded, but here the cramped quarters led to violence: “In each [cell], three, four, or even fourteen lunatics are locked up at night, to fight and murder each other; for there is no one to keep the peace; no one to tell of the awful tragedy till morning, when the cells are opened, and the lifeless corpse proclaims the truth in all its terrors.” Even worse, in his eyes, “among the males crowded into these cells, there is reason to apprehend that sodomy has been committed!!”

Bowerbank insisted that both the medical community and the Jamaican government had known about these institutions for years. He referenced annual reports from hospital doctors as well as a letter written by a former head physician, Dr. Edward Bancroft eighteen years earlier, in

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16 Bowerbank, *A Letter to the Commissioners*, enclosed in CO 137/342, fols. 452-453v. The two exclamation points are his. See chapter 1 of this dissertation for more on the 1850 cholera epidemic.
which the older man documented much the same grievances as Bowerbank. In response to Bancroft’s criticisms, the legislature passed an act to build a new asylum in 1843. “Years back then,” Bowerbank explained to his readers, “the Legislature…acknowledged the existence of the evil, and the necessity for providing a remedy. They accordingly granted £20,000 for the erection of a new Lunatic Asylum.” Fifteen years later, the structure remained unfinished, although the completed portions had provided “temporary refuge” during cholera epidemics.\footnote{Ibid., fols. 454-457r. On the 1843 act to which Bowerbank was referring, see CO 139/81, “An Act to make provision for the Erection of a Lunatic Asylum,” fols. 51-55v.}

Bowerbank situated his argument within a longer history of criticism from respected medical authorities. He reprinted long sections of letters and reports from prominent Jamaican and British medical experts, all of whom took issue with the state of affairs in the asylum.\footnote{This includes Gavin Milroy, the Scottish doctor who had traveled to and around Jamaica in 1851, writing about cholera’s spread through the island. See chapter 1.} Among these critiques was a memorandum from Jamaica’s Central Board of Health produced earlier in the decade, in which the board described the threat of both institutions becoming “the birth-place and cradle of pestilence and death.” Through the 1850s, various commentators and government bodies deplored the conditions, and Bowerbank reproduced these complaints in his text.\footnote{Bowerbank, A Letter to the Commissioners, enclosed in CO 137/342, fols. 454-462v.} For him, the volume of past complaints proved his point, especially since his exposé of current conditions echoed those previous criticisms. He railed against woeful mortality figures, arguing that poor sanitation and the resulting diseases caused the high rate of death. The pervasiveness of disease was a critical problem, one that carried potential repercussions for the island at large. “Who shall relate,” he wondered, “the sufferings thus entailed by preventable disease upon those who were discharged? Who shall say how many of them are now suffering in silent woe, in their obscure hovels, from the effects of chronic dysentery and diarrhœa, caught
within the precincts of this Pandora’s box?” His reference to Greek mythology was significant. When Pandora opened the box in defiance of the gods’ strict warning, she unleashed “plagues innumerable, sorrow and mischief for mankind. In terror [she] clapped the lid down, but too late.”20 For Bowerbank, the problems of these institutions could not be confined within them; as his reference to effluvia running down the city streets highlighted, these institutions posed a threat to Kingston and even to the entire island.21

For Bowerbank, fixing these institutions was paramount. It would be better to shut the institutions down than to keep them open in their present state, he argued. Moreover, the government had a responsibility to the asylum patients: “the paternal care of the government, which, as it permits [the insane] to be deprived of their liberty, is bound to afford them protection, and to assure them the best means of restoration to health.” In Bowerbank’s mind, governmental paternalism worked as a contract: the right to commit people in the asylum came with the obligation to protect and cure them.22

This was Bowerbank’s opening salvo. Although he wrote and published a second letter to the Commissioners, his first has the bulk of his criticisms.23 These institutions failed on all accounts: poor location, abysmal construction, failed mission. Rather than save lives and cure

21 Bowerbank, *A Letter to the Commissioners*, enclosed in CO 137/342, fols. 464v-465r.
22 Ibid., fols. 465v-466r, 469r. As we will see shortly, Bowerbank got this idea from someone else, even though he did not attribute the quotation.
23 In the second letter, Bowerbank criticized the two doctors of the institutions (Dr. James Scott and Dr. Keech) who expressed offense in the *Morning Journal* and who tried to impugn Bowerbank’s credentials and character. Bowerbank stood firm: “[A]s to those who would accuse me, I defy them to prove one single mean, dishonest, or ungentlemanly act, either in my private or professional life.” Bowerbank had even harsher words for the Commissioners, who had failed to act on any of Bowerbank’s findings in the month since publication. Bowerbank accused them of “supineness,” and he suggested that the inordinate amount of time they had let elapse only provided an opportunity “to correct the abuses complained of, to gloss over or conceal the defects pointed out, and to prepare everything and every place, for a formal visit and inspection by your own Board.” For Bowerbank’s second letter, see Lewis Quier Bowerbank, *A Second Letter to the Commissioners of the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum* (Kingston: Ford & Gall, Printers), enclosed in CO 137/342, J.W. Perry letter to CO, 24 June 1858, fols. 499r-505v.
mental illness, they inflicted new diseases upon helpless patients and potentially threatened the health of the island as a whole. There was one glaring omission in this pamphlet, however. Although questions of staff abuse would become important as the scandal unfolded, Bowerbank said nothing about staff violence in these first pamphlets. The only violence he mentioned was among asylum patients locked in small cells overnight, and though he believed these incidents were serious, he attributed them not to the misdeeds of asylum employees but to the poor construction of the buildings.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{The model British institution}

At the core of Bowerbank’s criticisms, and at the heart of the local debate that would develop, was the question of the appropriate standard by which to measure Jamaican facilities. For Bowerbank, the only appropriate standards for the Jamaican hospital and asylum were their British counterparts. The model for him was the ideal British institution, a standard to which, crucially, most British institutions could not measure up either. What the ideal asylum looked like was a question that had preoccupied British reformers for the first half of the nineteenth century, a process sociologist Andrew Scull documents in \textit{The Most Solitary of Afflictions}. Scull tracks two related phenomena: the process by which insanity became “defined as an illness,” as opposed to one of many forms of deviance—George III’s well-known mental ailments aided this transformation, since the king’s popularity kept discussions of his disease out of the realm of “moral condemnation”—and the process by which the asylum became the sole medical solution to a newly medicalized madness.\textsuperscript{25} According to Scull, new ideas about treating the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Bowerbank, \textit{A Letter to the Commissioners}, enclosed in \textit{CO 137/342}, fols. 467r-468v.
\item Andrew T. Scull, \textit{The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 8-9, 185. For more on George III and how his illness bolstered his popularity, see chapter.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
insane sparked the nineteenth-century reform movement. Eighteenth-century understandings of insanity treatment focused on controlling and dominating the insane, “of the breaking of the will by means of external discipline and constraint.” Such domination could happen through brutal corporal punishments or through various forms of restraints. Although there had been calls against the use of whippings and beatings in madhouses—the private, usually small, institutions that housed a minority of the insane during the eighteenth century—Scull argues that those who tried to abandon the whip did so because they believed it was not the best way to restrain and control patients. The reform movement, however, involved a more significant rethinking of treatment for the insane, one that shifted away from any form of domination, restraint, or control. The lunacy reform movement idolized the York Retreat, a Quaker institution built in 1792 that advocated “moral treatment”, a system that attempted to view patients as rational people who could recover. As Scull writes, “moral treatment actively sought to transform the lunatic, to remodel him into something approximating the bourgeois ideal of the rational individual.” Physical brutality could not transform one’s moral character and therefore, it had no place in this new curative practice. “[T]he very attempt to tame madness was increasingly seen as seriously misguided,” Scull concludes.

The reform platform had two key components: first, reformers advocated a state system of public asylums; second, this system would be maintained by a thorough independent inspection system. These two principles, first articulated in an 1815-16 parliamentary committee report, comprised the reformers’ platform until they finally succeeded thirty years later in 1845.28

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27 Scull, The Most Solitary of Afflictions, 87-88, 96-100.
28 Ibid., 121-2.
The eventual success of this agenda required an elaboration of the benefits of the asylum. As Scull puts it, “families who could exercise some choice in the matter had somehow to be convinced that the institution [asylum] should be the place of first rather than last resort.” The picture of ideal asylums that these men created—and that Bowerbank and others in Jamaica drew upon for their critique—was indebted to the model of the York Retreat. State asylums would offer flexible, individualized care practiced kind and patient staff who possessed “upright moral character.” Superintendents of these facilities would be a visible presence, visiting patients daily at the least, and would exemplify the “high standard for subordinates to emulate in their dealings with the inmates.” These institutions would be small, as would the individual wards, and patients would be classified by the seriousness of their ailments. “Even the architecture and the physical setting of the asylum” was a crucial part of treatment. “A modern curative establishment should be sited where the patients could enjoy the benefits of fresh, bracing country air, and where there was an extensive and pleasing view of the surrounding countryside to divert the mind from its morbid fantasies,” Scull writes. Similarly, each asylum should have ample grounds space on which patients could take up various games, recreation, and physical labor. Crucially, these asylums would “eliminate the horrors of the old madhouse regime” by banishing restraints. It was this image of asylums that finally got lunacy reform passed in Parliament in 1845, producing two bills that established a national Lunacy Commission and required counties and boroughs to build pauper lunatic asylums. And it was this model that Bowerbank knew intimately and on which he based his critique of Kingston’s facilities.

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29 Ibid., 135, 146-150, 156.
30 Ibid., 164-165.
Bowerbank elaborated his position in the first pamphlet when he praised British hospitals: “In the Mother Country are numerous Hospitals; many of them in extent and grandeur of buildings, vying with palaces.” In his opinion, no doubt based upon his British medical education, a well-run hospital was a boon to its community. “By keeping its engagements,” he wrote, “it prevents pauperism and wretchedness, and lessens vice and crime; thus no less benefiting the higher than the lower ranks of society.” Indeed, the real duty of a hospital was to “dispense love and charity” to “every sufferer of every disease.”

Bowerbank applied a similar standard to Jamaica’s asylum. He quoted extensively from British experts who had written about improvements in asylum policy. Bowerbank first referenced the work of William Farr (1807-1883), a prominent English statistician and expert on epidemiology. Born in 1807 to a Shropshire working class family, Farr entered the medical profession by way of the elderly bachelor, John Pryce, with whom his parents had left him to do an apprenticeship. Pryce supported Farr’s basic education as well as some basic medical training and, when he died, the older man left Farr £500 to finish his education. Farr became a licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries in 1832. After joining the General Register Office in 1837, Farr spent the rest of his career working on statistical analyses of birth, death, and marriage data. Through this position, he became an expert on statistics and epidemiology, and he worked extensively on issues like the spread of disease, public health, and sanitation. Bowerbank had evidently studied Farr’s 1841 article “Report Upon the Mortality of Lunatics” carefully. His comments about the paternal responsibility the government had towards the insane were an unattributed quotation from Farr’s article. In this essay, published in the *Journal of Statistical Society*

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32 Bowerbank wrote about both the hospital and asylum, but the problems in the asylum seem to have been his main concern and were also of the more serious nature. Later investigations bore out this conclusion.
of London, Farr praised the non-restraint system that had flourished at Hanwell asylum. In response to Farr’s comment that the best British asylums no longer used restraints, Bowerbank wrote that an asylum “intended to be conducted on the modern, or so-called non-restraint system” required special attention to construction and division of space. “A full and complete classification” of patients replaced restraints.33

“Modern” asylums took special care to ease conditions for their patients, Bowerbank argued, and they even went as far as providing a better food regimen than patients in other institutions would receive. Here again, the physician turned to another British expert, this time John Conolly (1794-1866), a leading authority on treating mental illness and asylum practice, who wrote, “All habitual physical discomfort is opposed to mental recovery; and a scanty ill-cooked, unwholesome diet, creates a chronic uneasiness and dissatisfaction, impairs the health, and increases the mortality of an asylum.”34 Conolly had overseen the complete transition in Hanwell County Asylum from a system based on physically restraining asylum patients to the non-restraint system.35 Hanwell was the first large asylum to introduce a non-restraint system, though not the first—the honor went to Robert Hill, whose small Lincolnshire asylum Conolly


35 Born in Lincolnshire in 1794 to an Anglo-Irish father and a mother who was a distant relative of Tennyson, Conolly received his medical training in both Glasgow and Edinburgh. He received his MD in 1821, after writing a thesis on mental illness. The first eighteen years of his medical career were unremarkable as he bounced from position to position, barely earning enough money to feed his family. During those years, he had very little lasting success as either a practicing physician or a professor. But in 1839, Conolly’s fortunes changed. The previous year he had applied to be Hanwell County Asylum’s superintendent but had been rejected in favor of J. G. Millingen. When Millingen was forced to resign the following year, Conolly replaced him. In his new position as Hanwell superintendent, Conolly finally achieved some measure of fame as he announced the banishment of all forms of physical restraint.
had visited before moving to Hanwell. As a result of this accomplishment, Conolly quickly became one of the leading experts on mental illness and was twice the president of the Association of Medical Officers and Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane.\textsuperscript{36}

Even after Conolly resigned from Hanwell in 1844, he remained a passionate advocate for the non-restraint system. In 1856, he published a lengthy tract that championed this system, \textit{Treatment of the Insane Without Medical Restraints}. For Conolly, the non-restraint system was about more than just removing all forms of bondage from these facilities. It was a new, holistic approach to caring for the insane. The emphasis here was on creating the most calming situation possible for those of troubled mind. His ideal institution—and presumably Bowerbank’s—featured competent, well-presented attendants; cheerful and clean surroundings; fresh clothes; ample diet; and plentiful opportunities for games, entertainment, work, leisure, and exercise. Conolly’s chief motto was this: “whatever the state and circumstances of a newly admitted patient may be...he comes to the asylum to be cured, or, if incurable, to be protected and taken care of.”\textsuperscript{37}

By 1856, most asylums had switched over to the non-restraint system. However, reading Conolly’s passionate defense of the system suggests that the physician was not so confident that this new practice would last past the deaths and retirements of its chief advocates. Indeed, he


\textsuperscript{37} John Conolly, \textit{The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraints}, eds. Hunter and MacAlpine (1856; rpt. ed., London: Dawsons, 1973), 5, 13, 53-54, 35-36, 81, 38. Andrew Scull has noted that Conolly’s thinking on asylums changed three times during the course of his career. His earliest position lambasted the reformers’ agenda of creating a state-run asylum system; he advocated care in individual homes. By the time he was the superintendent of Hanwell, he joined the reformers and called for a public asylum system. Later in his career, as he himself switched to private practice, he championed private asylums. See Andrew Scull, “A Brilliant Career? John Conolly and Victorian Psychiatry,” \textit{Victorian Studies} 27, no 2 (Winter 1984): 203-235 but especially 234-235.
opened the book by explaining that he wanted “to contribute to [the system’s] preservation and further improvement, and perhaps to its wider adoption.” Most importantly, however, he wanted “to prevent its being abandoned…when those by whom it has been steadily maintained…can no longer describe or defend it.” Throughout the first section that reiterated previous woeful conditions, Conolly took pains to emphasize the remarkable persistence of the old asylum methods. A 1774 Act that promised to regulate these institutions “was extremely inefficient,” he maintained. Thirty years later, similar stories surfaced. And even when progress towards a more humane approach was made, such progress was halting and generally confined to certain institutions or regions.38 Treatment, then, was a defensive document, written by someone who viewed the transition to the holistic non-restraint approach as incomplete and constantly under threat, even as late as 1856.

In comparison to these British hospitals and asylums—or at least the ideas behind them—Bowerbank found Kingston’s counterparts lacking.39 It was this question of standards that the head physician of both institutions, Dr. James Scott, took up when he published a lengthy riposte in the form of a letter to Bowerbank. Scott had no quarrel with Bowerbank’s praise of British hospitals but, unlike Bowerbank, the head surgeon did not view these metropolitan institutions as realistic models for Jamaican facilities. “It would be well if the Hospital in Jamaica, as well as other Institutions in the island, could be assimilated more and more to a European standard,” he wrote, “but, however fervent your aspirations may be on this point, I very much fear that the prospect of their realization is rather remote.” Indeed, he went

38 Conolly, Treatment, 2, 11-12, 19.
39 Bancroft also compared these institutions to those in England, Bowerbank reported: “If we now consider the excellent examples that are afforded by Lunatic Institutions in England, and contrast them with the several serious and incurable defects in our own prison-like Asylum, it will surely be apparent that the latter is most unfit for its present purposes.” Bowerbank, A Letter to the Commissioners, enclosed in CO 137/342, fol. 456r.
further and asked, “Is there a single institution in this country, that will bear favorable
comparison with analogous establishments in Great Britain?” The disagreement between the
two men was one of ambition.40

Scott put forth another rubric, one that lowered the aspirations for what colonial
medicine could accomplish. Rather than comparisons to British or European hospitals, a
standard his institutions would struggle to meet, he insisted that the more appropriate reference
was the previous condition of both facilities, particularly in the early 1840s. Judged by this
measure, the hospital and asylum looked much better, allowing him to offer a narrative of
progress that contradicted Bowerbank’s tale of failure, in which the asylum and hospital moved
out of their previous squalor under his aegis.41 His first reference point was the scene he
witnessed in 1839, the first time he visited the asylum: “A more ill regulated place I never
entered; all was confusion, disorder, filth, and coercion.” Little had changed by the time Scott
became head surgeon in 1844, and he recounted the heinous state of the institutions in terms
that sounded not too dissimilar from Bowerbank’s complaints in the late 1850s.42

The brunt of Scott’s rebuttal rested upon casting himself as the savior of these
institutions, but he nevertheless spent time discrediting Bowerbank and countering his
opponent’s descriptions. Bowerbank’s writing was spoiled by the “unmistakeable malus animus
[that] pervade[d] the whole of [his] voluminous pamphlet.” In Scott’s opinion, Bowerbank had
only one goal: “to make out a case against the Hospital and Asylum” in whatever way he could.43

40 James Scott, A Reply to a Letter By Lewis Quier Bowerbank, M. D. Edinburgh, To the Commissioners of the Public
Hospital and Lunatic Asylum of Kingston, Jamaica, Relative to the Present State and Management of these Institutions. By James
Scott, M.R.C.S.E. (Kingston and Spanish Town: Jordon & Osborn, Printers, 1858), enclosed in CO 137/338,
dispatch #108, 9 August 1858, fol. 225r.
41 Ibid., fol. 225r.
42 Ibid., fols. 225v-226v, 230r.
43 Ibid., fols. 222r, 224. Scott also blamed Bowerbank for forcing him to inflect an unwieldy pamphlet on the
public, going as far as to blame the erratic structure of his own counter-argument on his foe. Scott also questioned
Scott presented Bowerbank as a man who, spurned in his quest to gain a position in the hospital, sought revenge against that institution with an argument that seemed strong but was in fact poorly argued with faulty evidence and unreliable sources. Moreover, he maintained that Bowerbank had ignored all the signs of progress: “Is there not evidence of something like progress in our public Institutions…? But, if great improvements have taken place in the Asylum, from the year 1843 to 1854, why should a corresponding advancement not have been observed between the latter year and 1858?” Furthermore, Scott downplayed the severity of some of Bowerbank’s findings. He tossed aside reports of murder, saying that no deaths had happened under his watch. Even if they had, however, such acts were “committed in the best regulated Asylums in England and America,” he wrote, in effect turning Bowerbank’s own standards against him. He also rejected Bowerbank’s suggestions that the cramped cells for men prompted sodomy, arguing that his opponent’s information was dated.

In sum, Scott’s response revealed both his antagonism towards Bowerbank and his satisfaction with the status quo. He admitted that neither the hospital nor the asylum lived up to the standards set by British institutions. In his mind, however, those institutions were not the appropriate yardsticks with which to assess their colonial counterparts. He instead preferred to look to the past, and he placed considerably more emphasis on how the institutions had improved under his watch. By listing the improvements he had made and attacking Bowerbank’s credentials, suggesting that he was “no authority on the management of” asylums. Here, he pointed to Bowerbank’s reliance upon the work of John Conolly. See CO 137/338, fol. 230r. Scott, *A Reply*, enclosed in CO 137/338, fols. 234r-235v, 240r. Further attacks on Bowerbank can be found on fols. 252v-253r.

Without the testimony of a direct witness, neither Scott nor Bowerbank could have known whether or not homosexual acts were occurring in the asylum. After all, neither man was in these crowded cells at night. Scott’s conviction that these acts were not taking place in the asylum may have come more from his own moral revulsion at the idea than from any definitive evidence. Likewise, Bowerbank’s conviction that such acts were not taking place may have come from a similar source as he might have used this particular accusation to draw the moral revulsion of his readers that he hoped would spark immediate action. Scott, *A Reply*, enclosed in CO 137/338, fol. 233r.
fitness as a commentator, Scott deflected attention away from potential deficiencies in the present.

The middle man

The public debate between Scott and Bowerbank expanded into a local controversy as personal disagreements and egos determined the positions people took. Scott was remarkably confident for someone accused of such dangerous neglect, but his self-assurance made sense. He had the preponderance of local authorities vocally on his side. The printers of his pamphlet, Edward Jordon and Robert Osborn, were prominent members of the burgeoning colored political elite. Jordon was born in 1800, in all likelihood the son of a free black woman and a free colored man. He was heavily involved in the free coloreds’ 1820 campaign for civil rights and, as a result of his political activities, he lost his job as a merchant clerk in Kingston. Jordon and Osborn—the son of a Scottish planter who was also born in 1800 and who was a trained printer—joined forces and opened up a bookshop. The proceeds allowed them to publish the Watchman, a newspaper that supported free people of color’s fight for political rights. Together they edited the publication as well as the newspaper that succeeded it, the Morning Journal. Jordon was a member of the board of commissioners as well as a member of the Executive Committee.46

But best of all, Jamaica’s governor, Sir Charles Henry Darling (1809-1870), was firmly in Scott’s camp. Darling had spent more time than most governors in Jamaica and was intimately familiar with the island’s political life. He had spent part of his military service in Jamaica in the 1830s. After retiring from the army in 1841, Darling moved back to Jamaica. During the next six

years, he held several government positions and served on the legislative council, the only Jamaican governor to have been a member of the island’s legislature.\footnote{Sketch drawn from H. M. Chichester, ‘Darling, Sir Charles Henry (1809–1870)’, rev. Brian H. Fletcher, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}, Oxford University Press, 2004; online cdn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7153, accessed 9 Oct 2010]; Holt, \textit{Problem of Freedom}, 254.} Darling had also been a member of the board that oversaw the initial stages of the new asylum building project. Darling’s role as a commissioners involved, among other things, committee work in which the Governor at the time, James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin, Darling, and two other men examined asylum plans. The committee singled out two designs: the first, a submission from James Harris, the architect who designed Hanwell, and the second, a design created by Dr. Luther Bell, the physician in charge of Boston’s McLean Asylum. Although Bell’s scheme came with a detailed treatise on treating the mentally ill, Darling and his colleagues selected the plans of the Englishman. Harris’s design was selected because it was cheaper and more suited to the tropical climate than that of Dr. Bell. It took up less space, required a smaller staff, and would have sufficient ventilation without resorting to the expensive setup Bell had proposed. Darling was on this committee from 1844 until 1847, when he became the lieutenant-governor of the Cape Colony.\footnote{Minutes from 12 February 1845 meeting of Asylum Commissioners and a committee report on site and design, both found in Jamaica Archives (JA) 1B/5/17/1, Minute Book of the Honourable Commissioners for building a Lunatic Asylum, frontispiece, 5, 9-11.}

Darling took a quick dislike to Bowerbank, and the resulting stalemate between the two men had significant repercussions for the trajectory of the scandal. The governor was suspicious of Bowerbank’s motives and believed that his campaign was merely a bitter response to the rejection of his application for an asylum vacancy.\footnote{CO 137/338, Darling dispatch #108 to Bulwer-Lytton, 9 August 1858, fols. 202r-203r, 204r-205v.} The physician’s behavior after his pamphlet was published further cemented Darling’s negative impressions. From their first meeting, Bowerbank refused to provide specific examples to support the various accusations he made in
his letter and demanded instead that the governor form an investigating committee. Darling’s response was that he could not take that step without “statements sufficiently explicit and well authenticated.” This circular pattern, in which Bowerbank refused to provide the information Darling needed to start the formal inquiry that the physician had demanded, repeated itself innumerable times. Darling found the physician’s evasiveness counterproductive, and Bowerbank’s refusal to speak more concretely only played into Darling’s preconceived ideas about him. Indeed, Darling’s descriptions of Bowerbank in his official dispatches to London grew increasingly hostile.

Darling’s suspicions of Bowerbank and his previous involvement in the asylum’s administration no doubt influenced his critique of the doctor’s accusations. At first, the governor dismissed Bowerbank’s claims because of what he had witnessed during his last visit to the asylum. With the exception of a few buildings and wards, he was “highly pleased with the clean and comfortable aspect of the place,” especially since no patients were forcibly restrained. Although the governor accepted Bowerbank’s contention that the asylum staff spruced up the facility before his visit, he insisted that he had not received any complaints other than Bowerbank’s.

Given Darling’s strong personal dislike of Bowerbank, it is not surprising that the governor championed the physician’s main foe, Dr. James Scott. Darling largely adhered to the latter’s view of both institutions as places that did not match European models but that were
better than anything else Jamaica had to offer. When it came to sewers and drains, the governor noted, “the City of Kingston itself is without a system of Drainage and Sewerage and the nuisance of Cess-Pools is one to which the best Residents in it are exposed.” That may well have been—visitors to Kingston during this period frequently remarked how filthy the city was—but Darling had no response to the physician’s point that perhaps curative facilities should aim for a higher standard of cleanliness, if only for the sake of the patients. The governor explicitly rejected the higher benchmark:

There is no doubt that some of the Buildings on the Old Hospital Premises must be utterly condemned, when compared with the Modern Hospitals of Europe and America and even of some young and flourishing Colonies, but bad as they may be, they are nevertheless Abodes very superior to the wretched Hovels to which some of the Patients admitted into the Hospital have been accustomed.

Here, Darling set an even lower bar for the hospital and asylum than did Scott. Even the idea of matching practices in other colonies, a standard he clearly intimated would have been lower than those in Britain, was inappropriate. In fairness, his argument was not entirely cold-hearted. It was rooted in a firm belief that it was better to accept the suffering and sick into hospitals, no matter how poorly outfitted, than to turn them away. But the governor would not accept Bowerbank’s higher aspirations. In his mind, conditions at the hospital and asylum only had to be better than the “wretched Hovels,” which, if one agreed with Darling’s damning opinion of local homes, was a very low bar indeed.  

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55 CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #17 to Bulwer-Lytton, 26 January 1859, fols. 129r-131r.
Darling’s adherence to such a low standard seems to account for his repeated insistence that Bowerbank’s allegations were ludicrous. As he saw it, the hospital and asylum met the only two necessary standards: they were open, and they were better than the homes of many ordinary Jamaicans. But despite his antipathy towards Bowerbank, Darling did concede the poor quality of the asylum buildings. (No doubt the fact that a new asylum was being built allowed him to minimize the seriousness of this problem.) However, the governor’s power to address these issues was limited by financial constraints; no money could be spent on sanitation or asylum completion unless the legislature approved it.56

Nevertheless, by early 1859, Darling started doing more than just complain about Bowerbank. He signed into law a bill that disbanded the board of commissioners that oversaw the hospital and asylum and placed the two institutions under the supervision of the “Executive Government.” This law, passed by the Jamaican legislature in January 1859, amended previous legislation, and it eliminated the conflicts of interest inherent in the oversight of these institutions. This bill replaced the board of commissioners with an inspector and director, a man who could not be a member of either branch of the legislature.57 The inspector and director—who would have no involvement in the medical side of operations—reported directly to the governor, who now had the power to appoint and fire medical staff and to make or amend various rules and regulations. In effect, this act placed the hospital and asylum more clearly under the governor’s authority. All of the responsibilities of the board of commissioners were transferred to the governor, or to the inspector, who reported directly to the governor.58 Darling

56 CO 137/340, Darling confidential to Bulwer-Lytton, 11 December 1858, fols. 213v-214r. See Holt, Problem of Freedom, 181 on the matter of the Assembly’s control over money.
57 An additional stipulation prevented any member of the legislature from being the director of the institutions until at least six months after their resignation.
58 CO 139/93, “An Act to amend the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum Act 1855” (Nineteenth Victoria Chapter four), fols. 252-254.
designated Daniel Trench, an audit commissioner, to fill the newly created position of inspector.\textsuperscript{59}

Most importantly, Darling conducted a cursory investigation of his own, albeit through the work of others. Trench reported the conditions of the institutions at the outset of his tenure as inspector. The governor also received a report from a civil engineer that confirmed the existence of significant drainage and ventilation problems that plagued most, but not all, the hospital and asylum facilities.\textsuperscript{60} Darling took an additional step: he canvassed Kingston’s ministers, from all denominations, and asked whether they had witnessed or heard of anything untoward about the institutions. The ministers who responded largely fell into two camps. The first group, eleven ministers in all, had nothing to report.\textsuperscript{61} An additional few ministers claimed never to have heard of any problems, but their answers suggested otherwise. Vicar Apostolic Dupeyron wrote, “considering the course which the question at issue has taken, it would be both unwise and invidious on my part, to mix myself up in that question.” The vicar was especially concerned that the controversy could turn into a legal battle. Nevertheless, he claimed he would have spoken up if he had seen anything, a statement he no doubt felt obligated to make but that his previous statement belied.\textsuperscript{62} In the second camp were those who freely relayed stories of

\textsuperscript{59} The commissioners viewed their dismissal as an unceremonious and offensive dumping. The governor declared no such disparaging intent and insisted that the commission had fulfilled its duties “with creditable zeal.” CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #5 to Bulwer-Lytton, 10 January 1859, fols. 16, 19v-21v, 34r-35v. For mention of the act, see CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #36 to Bulwer-Lytton, 26 February 1859, fols. 616v-617r.

\textsuperscript{60} CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #17 to Bulwer-Lytton, 26 January 1859, fols. 123r-127r, 156r-160r; Dawson, civil engineer’s report on drainage and ventilation, found in appendix to the 1858 Annual Report of the Medical Officers of the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum, enclosed in CO 137/344, Darling dispatch #40 to Bulwer-Lytton, 3 March 1859, fols. 12-13. Trench’s report focused mainly on accounting practices.

\textsuperscript{61} This included Wesleyan ministers Jonathan Edmondson and his colleagues; Thomas Stewart; Charles Street (who had at times filled in for the chaplain of the institution); and Church of Scotland clergyman Radcliffe who raved about the cleanliness of the hospital.

\textsuperscript{62} Another minister said he had nothing to report but then launched into a story about a parishioner who refused to stay in the hospital. A third clergyman recused himself from giving testimony because of “the unfortunate aspect which the Hospital controversy has assumed.” Vicar Apostolic Dupeyron letter, which includes excerpts from Rev. Dupont, Rev. Palmer letter plus additional correspondence, Abraham Hyams letter, all enclosed
woe. For example, James Watson mentioned that a white servant, Mrs. Bramhold, had seen a patient attacked by ants in the hospital. The nurse on duty “refused to assist giving as her excuse that she was not employed to pick ants.” A subset within this second group, including mulatto preacher Reverend George Trueman, claimed to have detailed knowledge of incriminating events, but they, like Bowerbank, refused to elaborate except before an impartial commission.

Darling’s interpretation of the ministers’ responses demonstrates that, despite what seemed to be a flurry of productive activity at the start of 1859, the governor’s opinions were still clouded by his bias against Bowerbank and his faith in Scott’s assessments. When confronted with stacks of letters from the city’s men of the cloth, he sided with those who reported nothing out of the ordinary and mustered an impressive amount of evidence to discredit those who claimed to have evidence of significant misdeeds. Reverend Watson’s parishioner, Mrs. Bramhold, had refused to speak to the Commissioners, and, Darling announced, “it is clear that she acted under the dictation of others” affiliated with Bowerbank. Bramhold was a servant for Mr. Gall, one of the partners of the printing house that had published Bowerbank’s pamphlet, Ford & Gall. For Darling, this was a clear conflict of interest.

63 In CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 249r-251r, 268r-271r, 284. James Watson letter, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 254r-255r. In the volume, the quote is underlined. Another reverend, who had visited the hospital frequently between 1853 and 1855 (but never the asylum), witnessed neglect, although he refrained from naming any offenders. He spoke of yellow fever patients who were left in rooms where the sun beat down on them. His suggestion to cover the sunlight with blinds was rejected; the blinds would block ventilation, a prime concern for health officials and an issue that came up incessantly during the cholera epidemic. But even this clergyman, who claimed the public hospital was “wretchedly mismanaged,” did not have a bad word to say about Scott and instead praised his vigilance and care of patients. F. H. Almon letter, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 277-283.

64 William James Gardiner letter to Lewis Bowerbank, George Trueman letter to Hugh Austin, Duncan Campbell letter to Hugh Austin, all enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 264-265v, 297, 298r-299v.

65 Of course, a similar conflict of interest could be found in Scott’s rebuttals, which were published by a member of the Executive Committee and a commissioner, but Darling ignored this problem. CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #17 to Bulwer-Lytton, 26 January 1859, fols. 136-137v. As for Bramhold’s refusal to testify before the
preacher gave Darling plenty of ammunition. “Mr Trueman,” he pronounced, “belong[ed] to no recognized Denomination or Sect.” So suspicious of (and perhaps threatened by) Trueman (and the sway he possibly had over black Jamaicans) was Darling that he asked Kingston’s police inspector about him. The police report revealed that Trueman was illiterate and an associate of Richard Rouse, a black former warden at the asylum who the commissioners believed was Bowerbank’s source. Furthermore, the police inspector wrote: “George Trueman is a Mulatto Man, a native of Kingston, above forty years of age, he…has never been regularly ordained, but is one of those self constituted preachers of which there is such a number in this Country….he sometimes goes into the country and preaches for whatever he can get, he calls himself a ‘Native Baptist Preacher.’”

Native Baptism developed in Jamaica in the 1790s after black loyalist preacher George Liele set up his own chapel in Kingston, the first Baptist church in Jamaica. Liele and his followers preceded white Baptist missionaries by two decades. Some strands of Native Baptism adopted a more syncretic approach to Christianity, emphasizing the spiritual realm and merging that aspect with remnants of African religious practice. Throughout the nineteenth century, British Baptists increasingly tried to establish themselves as the true and orthodox version of Baptist faith in opposition to Native Baptism. By the late 1850s and early 1860s, as British missionaries and their faiths had increasingly less purchase among black commissioners, her employer spoke for her: “Mrs. Bramhold respectfully submits that there must surely be some mistake in inviting and expecting her to give evidence…before the very parties themselves who are implicated in such abuses. Mrs. Bramhold has not much knowledge of British Law, but she has such exalted views of British fair play as to consider such an invitation a mockery.” Whether this invocation of “British fair play” was Bramhold’s formulation or her employer’s, its use is critical both as an appeal to an abstract notion of British fairness and a rhetorical tool to explain away an unwillingness to cooperate with the governor’s investigation. James Watson letter, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 260v-261r.

See also CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #26 to Bulwer-Lytton, 4 February 1859, fols. 415r-417v, in which Darling takes another opportunity to eliminate Trueman as a credible witness.
Jamaicans, Native Baptism surged, providing new community and political spaces for freedpeople. The emphasis on Trueman’s status as a “Native Baptist” was intended to delegitimize his claim as a minister, which would in turn discredit any evidence he claimed to have.

For Darling, all of this information proved the dubious nature of Bowerbank’s claims. He wondered whether these supposed friends of Bowerbank could really have pure motivations. He certainly thought not since they had “allied themselves with Dr. Bowerbank in Proceedings which…are virulently directed against the Professional and Personal Reputation for Humanity of Dr. Scott.” Darling’s casting aside of stories that did not fit within his own narrative was part of the impasse between the two men that reached new levels of rancor. Darling’s failure to look beyond his faith in Scott struck Bowerbank as an unacceptable problem that only prolonged various abuses, “the existence of which renders the Lunatic Asylum of Kingston a disgrace to a Colony under British Government and a scandal to humanity.” Fundamentally, Bowerbank no longer had faith in Darling’s ability to fulfill his role as an impartial mediator, a line of questioning that offended Darling. The governor immediately ended communications with Bowerbank.

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CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #17 to Bulwer-Lytton, 26 January 1859, fol. 141v-142v.

Ibid., fols. 145r-146v, for Darling on Bowerbank’s continued silence.

Bowerbank letter to Hugh Austin, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 220v-221r. Bowerbank continued on from this quotation: “If Sir His Excellency is content to rest upon the evidence of such a statement as that enclosed to me in your despatch I can only say that I shall take care that Her Majestys [sic] Government and the British Public are furnished with indisputable proof of what I have stated.”

Bowerbank letter to Hugh Austin, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fols. 363v-364v. Austin letter to Bowerbank, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #17, 26 January 1859, fol. 367r. Darling told Bowerbank he would forward letters to London as was his duty as governor.
Trying to assess which man was most correct is a futile exercise. Bowerbank’s indignation at the treatment of patients in the ramshackle institutions was well-founded, but that fact does not preclude the possibility, as voiced by Darling, that he may have had self-serving motives. More revealing are the exchanges between the two men and the freeness with which each man criticized each other in letters both knew would be read by the Colonial Office. Most concerning, however, is how the impasse between the two men impeded reform and cost lives. Convinced that Bowerbank’s claims had little merit, Darling believed anything Dr. Scott told him. He also dismissed offhand virtually all testimony from people even slightly within the physician’s orbit. Darling’s blind spots seem to have prolonged things as he played into the hands of the people who had the most to lose. But Bowerbank too slowed down investigations with his continued refusals to produce the evidence he claimed to have. The battle lines forming among Jamaica’s professional and political elite were clear: Bowerbank seemingly stood alone against Scott, political players like Jordon and Osborn, and the governor. With the exception of a few clergymen, some of whom had either a familial or professional connection to the physician, Bowerbank was the main voice of reform in 1858 and early 1859.

II.

*Dr. Bowerbank goes to London*

As the scandal over Bowerbank’s claims expanded locally, the Colonial Office adopted a position similar to the observational and advisory role the department had played during the cholera epidemic as described in Chapter 1. The men who worked in the West Indies division had relatively little to say at the beginning about the onslaught of dispatches they had been
receiving from Darling since August 1858. Their official responses repeatedly called for Darling to investigate the situation himself, a move that attempted to confine the scandal to the island of Jamaica. Internal memoranda, however, reveal some interest in the hostile exchanges between the two men: signs, most frequently in penciled comments in the margins, that perhaps Darling should not have been so confident in his opinions. In one letter to Bowerbank, the governor’s secretary, Hugh Austin, claimed that the Secretary of State’s instructions to the governor told him to see whether any abuses existed in either institution, not to assess whether Bowerbank’s accusations had any validity. In the margins of the Colonial Office copy of this document, someone remarked, “Distinction with little difference.” In a late 1858 dispatch, the governor claimed he did not “possess any power or control over the Commissioners, except the power to dismiss those of the Commissions who are not of the Executive committee.” Once again, this distinction rang false. Not only did someone pencil in “What further power can he want?”, they also noted that the Executive Committee, over which Darling claimed to have no control, “consist[ed] of his own officers & is bound to assist him according to his own views.” Of course, these comments were merely faint, marginal scribblings, not official proclamations. Nevertheless, they tell us something important: despite the Colonial Office’s official neutral position, the men reading the correspondence noted the rancorous tenor of the controversy and were unimpressed by the rhetorical tricks Darling employed against Bowerbank.

72 CO 137/338, Darling dispatch #108 to Bulwer-Lytton, 9 August 1858, fol. 202r.
74 Hugh Austin to Bowerbank, CO 137/340, dispatch #146, 11 and 13 November 1858, fols. 105, 111-112r. Pencil notations in the margins of CO 137/340, Darling dispatch #159 to Bulwer-Lytton, 24 December 1858, fols. 267v-268r. Henry Taylor noted how the animosity between Bowerbank and Darling was getting in the way of potentially important questions. He wrote, “as the correspondence already before us shows it will be very easy…to lose all the facts of public importance in a labyrinth of personal controversy.” See also Taylor minute, CO 137/340,
Although Darling had ended his communications with Bowerbank, his position as governor demanded that he forward the physician’s letters to London. Thus, Bowerbank began to use Darling solely as a conduit to the Colonial Office. In January 1859, the doctor directly addressed the Secretary of State for the Colonies, at the time Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), the novelist who made famous the phrase, “It was a dark and stormy night.” Historians have appraised negatively Bulwer-Lytton’s time as secretary of state, with one noting that although he was “industrious,” he was also “inexact and unmethodical, and a crisis agitated him.” John Cell calls Bulwer-Lytton the one incompetent secretary of state in the mid-nineteenth century. Bowerbank declared his intentions to prove the existence of abuses in both institutions, the asylum in particular. His earnest attempts had been thwarted, he claimed, by a series of obstacles placed in his way by the Jamaican government. These included Darling’s replacing the board of commissioners with Inspector Trench, a move Bowerbank read as a ‘complete acknowledgment of the truth of the charges of mismanagement preferred against the Commissioners.” Convinced that no “justice” could be found in Jamaica, Bowerbank instead sailed to London in February 1859 with the evidence to prove his claims.

Bowerbank arrived in London sometime in early March 1859. He announced his presence to Bulwer-Lytton on the 17th and requested an audience with the Secretary of state to prove that the Jamaican government had ignored him. The Colonial Office denied his appeal.

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76 Bowerbank letter to Bulwer-Lytton, 10 January 1859, enclosed in CO 137/343, dispatch #18, fols. 357-359r. On Bowerbank’s trip, see also CO 137/343, Darling dispatch #30 to Bulwer-Lytton, 9 February 1859, fols. 456v-457r.

77 Bowerbank letter to Bulwer-Lytton, CO 137/347, 17 March 1859, fols. 351-352r. See also Bowerbank letter
on the grounds that any investigation had to happen “in Jamaica & not in England.”

It took a month for the parliamentary undersecretary to send this formal rejection. Bowerbank tired of waiting and sent another letter in the interim. In this longer letter, Bowerbank explained that the sole purpose of his trip was to meet Bulwer-Lytton but in the meantime he had spoken to permanent undersecretary Herman Merivale (1806-1874). Merivale was a former barrister and Oxford professor who secured his position in the Colonial Office on the back of a popular lecture series turned successful pamphlet (*Lectures on Colonization and the Colonies*) on emigration to the colonies. He had had no previous experience in the civil service. He held the position of assistant undersecretary in 1846 until he was promoted a year later to permanent undersecretary, a position at which he apparently excelled and held until 1860, when he left to take the same position in the India Office.

Merivale repeated the official position to Bowerbank: the Colonial Office was abstaining from any direct involvement. In response, Bowerbank fell back on his old refrain: Darling was so “mixed…up with the subject, that he [was] now deeply implicated in the existing abuses.” Any local investigation was doomed, he argued, since potentially relevant witnesses were reluctant to testify because they believed Darling was biased in favor of the authorities at the two institutions.

Once Bowerbank received the official reply, he sent another response that repeated his arguments against the colonial administration in Jamaica. But, by this point, the physician recognized the limits of what he himself could accomplish. All he could do was “[draw] the

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80 Bowerbank letter to Bulwer-Lytton, CO 137/347, 13 April 1859, fol. 355r.
attention of the Home Government to the fact that these institutions are shamefully mishandled, and are a disgrace to civilization and a scandal to Humanity.” Bowerbank may have run up against an imperial bureaucracy that, for the time being, backed their man on the ground, but he remained determined. He tapped into another British resource, one that had considerably more clout than an unknown Jamaican physician.

In mid-May 1859, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885), chair of the Lunacy Commission, began to advocate on Bowerbank’s behalf. Speaking for his entire commission, Shaftesbury argued that the British government—specifically the Colonial Office and not Governor Darling—was duty bound to lead an investigation into Bowerbank’s charges, which the Jamaican doctor had brought to the organization’s attention. Shaftesbury, an evangelical politician and philanthropist who had been a leading figure in the lunacy reform movement, made clear that some representative of the Colonial Office had to conduct this enquiry to protect those resident in these institutions, while at the same time ensuring that those accused received a fair hearing. The earl acknowledged that Darling had disbanded the commissioners, but he remained unconvinced that this one action symbolized more significant change in the management of the asylum and its patients. The physician’s serious charges still needed a full review, Shaftesbury contended, even if the problematic administration was no longer in place.

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81 Bowerbank letter to Carnarvon, CO 137/347, 14 April 1859, fols. 361-362r.
83 Shaftesbury letter to Bulwer-Lytton, CO 137/347, 14 May 1859, fols. 265-266. Shaftesbury had a handle on all of Bowerbank’s major points, including the death of one patient at the hand of another, sewage and drainage problems, and the ever-present threat of sodomy. See Shaftesbury letter to Bulwer-Lytton, CO 137/347, 14 May 1859, fols. 266v-274r.
Bulwer-Lytton’s response to Shaftesbury echoed Darling’s complaints as the secretary of state questioned his track record in Jamaica. Bowerbank’s refusal to back up his contentions with evidence frustrated Bulwer-Lytton, who asserted that he had been interested in the doctor’s point of view, even if he did not see the physician as “an impartial witness.” That Shaftesbury thought Darling was the wrong man for the job told the secretary of state that the Commissioners in Lunacy had taken Bowerbank’s opinion as fact. The secretary of state also reminded Shaftesbury of the limits to what he and the British government could dictate to Jamaica’s assembly. Instructions about “construction & dimensions” would be difficult to mandate because “Jamaica is a Colony engaging the forms of responsible Govt.” As such, the Lunatic Asylum and Public Hospital came under the direct authority of the Jamaican legislature, a body characterized by the Colonial Office as “jealous of its authority” and likely to “refuse anything which might be demanded of it in a spirit of dictation & reproach.”

The Commissioners remained undeterred. They insisted again, this time to Henry Pelham-Clinton (1811-1864), 5th Duke of Newcastle, who had just replaced Bulwer-Lytton as secretary of state for the colonies, that “the unfortunate personal jealousies and misunderstanding prevailing in the Island” demanded that any investigation not be run by a local body. The only person suitable to wade into this affair was someone “specially appointed…by the Home Authorities” who was “neither…resident in, nor in any way connected with the Colony.” But here again, the men in the Colonial Office, whose experience with Bowerbank

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84 Carnarvon letter to Shaftesbury, CO 137/347, 30 May 1859, fols. 286-291.
85 Carnarvon letter to Shaftesbury, CO 137/347, 30 May 1859, fols. 293-294. Thomas Holt confirms this, noting that, while the Colonial Office and governor had veto power, “this proved a blunt tool.” The metropolitan government had few means to demand that specific legislation be passed. See Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, 181. For some of the legislative proceedings that get to this point, see JA 1B/5/5/6, the Legislative Council Journals for 1859-1860.
was limited to their reading of his acrimonious correspondence with Darling, were too suspicious of the doctor to give much weight to Shaftesbury’s recommendations. Nor were they particularly impressed that Bowerbank had turned to the commissioners. Henry Taylor, the longtime senior clerk in the West Indian department of the Colonial Office, reported Bowerbank had already appealed to a member of Parliament who refused to intervene, at which point the doctor went to Shaftesbury. 

Similarly, Taylor was unimpressed with Shaftesbury and the commission for adopting Bowerbank’s position without questioning his evidence. The earl’s recommendations struck Taylor as “inexpedient, if not impracticable.” Parliament was unlikely to approve the money required to send over investigators and, even if that did happen, it would offend “the Legislature & the local Authorities in Jamaica.”

88 “[I]f the Legislature, offended at the interference of the Home Authorities…resolve to withdraw the grants altogether,” Taylor warned, “& leave it, as it is left in this Country, to private charity to provide for such objects, the Home authorities wd. have no power to prevent it.” Commissioners sent by the British government would also have no power to call witnesses; their only recourse would be through the Jamaican government itself. If the local government was not made leading partner in this investigation, Taylor explained, the “interests of humanity which ought to be the object of the enquiry…will not be promoted.”


88 This position is somewhat in contradiction with the government’s actions during the cholera epidemic, where the home government sent Milroy and two other doctors to the Caribbean colonies to help the local authorities. Perhaps the crucial distinction is the posture that was taken. During the cholera epidemic, Milroy’s presence in Jamaica was couched in terms of aid and support whereas a similar maneuver in this case might have been seen as blaming the colonial government and overstepping the bounds of responsible government.

89 Taylor minute in response to Shaftesbury letter to Newcastle, CO 137/347, 1 July 1859, fols. 301v-304r. Of course Taylor did not speak for everyone in the office. One clerk reminded those reading these internal missives that Bowerbank’s charges, if true, were serious. Despite the carelessness of Shaftesbury’s presentation and the
Shaftesbury’s insertion of his commission in the battle between Bowerbank and Darling was not met particularly well by the Colonial Office. Nevertheless, from this point forward, the office sent most of the dispatches from Jamaica on the subject of the asylum to the Commissioners, frequently with questions about various aspects of asylum practice.

The local scandal grows

While Bowerbank rallied support around his cause in England, back in Jamaica, outrage was steadily building towards Darling. In midsummer 1859, five doctors petitioned the governor, accusing him of appointing an unqualified obstetrician as consulting surgeon to the hospital solely because he was the son of Robert Osborn, the prominent local politician “of African Extraction.” These physicians complained that the junior Robert Osborn was too young for the position and that other more senior physicians in the community had been overlooked in the name of nepotism. Dr. Alexander Fiddes, a Scottish-born physician who began working in Jamaica in 1841, became their spokesman and published a scathing critique of Darling in a local

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90 Darling himself was also dismayed by some of Shaftesbury’s interventions. In particular, he was appalled at a letter Shaftesbury had written to Bowerbank, which was reprinted in the Times. Shaftesbury had asked the secretary of state if he could send Bowerbank the copies of the letters his commission had sent to the Colonial Office. The reprinted letter was Shaftesbury’s telling Bowerbank that his request had been denied, on the grounds that “such communication would be inexpedient for the public interest.” Darling believed that Shaftesbury had misrepresented Herman Merivale’s reasoning. As the governor understood it, the secretary’s reluctance was because he believed these letters were “calculated to produce upon persons unacquainted with the controversy which has taken place respecting the state’ of those Institutions ‘impressions of a most fallacious and injurious character.’” CO 137/346, Darling dispatch #126 to the Duke of Newcastle, 21 October 1859, fols. 324-325r. The article in question: “Jamaica Lunatic Asylum. To the Editor of the Times,” Times, 8 September 1859, p. 10. For the exchange between the Commissioners in Lunacy and the Colonial Office to which both Shaftesbury and Darling referred, see CO 137/347, John Forster letter to Herman Merivale, 12 August 1859; Colonial Office minutes, 14, 16, and 17 August 1859; Merivale letter to Forster, 24 August 1859, fols. 308-312.

91 CO 137/347, John Forster letter to Herman Merivale, 2 August 1859, fol. 306.

92 The signing doctors were Andrew Dunn, Charles Campbell (Bowerbank’s brother-in-law), Alexander Fiddes, Edward Robinson, and Charles Lake. CO 137/345, Darling dispatch #94 to Bulwer-Lytton, 22 July 1859, fols. 322-349r; memorial itself on 348-349r. For Osborn’s credentials, see his course of study enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/345, fols. 374-392r.
newspaper. Fiddes linked Osborn’s appointment to Darling’s continuing dispute with Bowerbank and argued that both were signs of dereliction of duty. “[Darling’s] conduct cannot possibly stand the test of public scrutiny,” the doctor wrote, continuing: “the inherent love of honesty and fair-play which pervades the British people, will condemn his course of procedure as soon as it is fully and fairly brought under the notice of the Imperial Parliament.” Darling’s actions were motivated by “his malevolence against Dr. Bowerbank.” Moreover, Darling’s choice was merely an attempt to curry favor with Osborn’s father, “who is supposed to be essential to the maintenance of his government,” Fiddes claimed. The governor’s decision was “the most ungallant, undignified and abject, to which a British Colonial Governor has ever descended.”

Osborn’s appointment may have prompted Fiddes’s editorial, but the Scottish physician used the opportunity as a pretext to express his opinion on the long-brewing disputes over the hospital and asylum. Here his opinions were equally firm: because of the revelations of “the late jobbery at the King’s House,” all the reports and dispatches Darling sent to London “must cease to have any weight whatever.” Furthermore, under Darling’s rule, Fiddes argued, “the Royal ensign is being sullied to a considerable degree by…the Queen’s representative.” Fiddes’s statements are important because they, along with the petition, are the first significant signs of an active public debate in Jamaica about the hospital and asylum in the colonial archive. At the

93 “Bust of Dr. Fiddes at The Institute of Jamaica,” Daily Gleaner, 21 January 1932, 7.
94 Alex Fiddes, “Governor Darling and the Public Hospital of Jamaica. To the Editor of the Jamaica Tribune and Daily Advertiser,” Jamaica Tribune and Daily Advertiser, [no page number or publication date; Fiddes wrote the letter on 30 June 1859] enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/345, fol. 412r.
95 Ibid., fols. 412-413r.
96 Earlier hints of this public conversation can be found in CO 137/338, Darling dispatch #108 to Bulwer-Lytton, 9 August 1858, fols. 206v-207r and CO 137/340, Darling dispatch #146 to Bulwer-Lytton, 24 November 1858, fol. 58v. By “colonial archive,” I mean the files of the Colonial Office, as held in the National Archives. There is another side to this story than what we get from this specific genre of sources, but I believe the petition and Fiddes’s article (again, all sent to London by Darling) represent a significant moment in the information flow.
very least, these two documents signaled where a larger medical community in Kingston stood: against Darling and in support of Bowerbank.\footnote{97} This the men of the Colonial Office knew, even as they backed Darling on this issue and promised not to interfere. As Taylor remarked, “The truth is that so many of the medical men in Jamaica have got themselves involved in the controversy about the management of the Hospital & Lunatic Asylum that the Gov. might well find some difficulty in appg. any one to cooperate with Dr. Scott who was not at variance with him.”\footnote{98}

Back in London, Bowerbank had done all he could do. He never met either Secretary of State, Bulwer-Lytton or Newcastle. Recognizing this, he left Britain in early September and headed back to Jamaica. If he was demoralized, his final letter to the Duke of Newcastle revealed no such discouragement. But he could not have known, despite what must have seemed a failed trip—he continued to maintain that his only goal was to prove his claims to the secretary of state—that the Colonial Office would soon take a more active role and insist that the practice and conditions condemned for two years be investigated.\footnote{99}

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\footnote{97} There would of course have been physicians who did not side with Bowerbank. The alliance between Fiddes and Bowerbank did not last long, particularly as Bowerbank gained considerable power under the Eyre administration (whose arrival in Jamaica at the tail end of this controversy will be mentioned briefly in a later section of the chapter). In 1865, Fiddes and Bowerbank got into a public battle similar to that between Bowerbank and Scott. See National Library of Jamaica (NLJ) 362 Ja Bowerbank: The Letters of Mr. Alexander Fiddes, F.R.C.S., EDIN. Considered and refuted, his misrepresentations exposed, his calumnies and innuendoes set in the light of truth—his various Statements in the Press and otherwise weighed in the balance and found wanting, by Lewis Quier Bowerbank, L.C.R.S., EDIN., M.D.—F.R.C.P., EDIN. together with DOCUMENTARY LETTERS AND PAPERS, Tending to expose a Professional Conspiracy, and to afford the Public in the Colonies, and in Great Britain, correct judgment as to the Controversy now existing on Hospital matters (Kingston: George Henderson, Printer and Publisher, Kingston and Spanish Town, 1865).
\footnote{98} CO 137/345, office minutes, including Taylor minute, 26 August 1859, fols. 343v-344r. Darling himself speculated as to why the physicians were so angry of his appointment. He wrote: “one motive of the Complaint on the part of the Gentlemen of longest standing amongst the Medical Remonstrants (the Juniors in this case merely echoing their Patrons) is, that they looked upon the office of Consulting Surgeon, as an agreeable Sinecure for a Kingston Practitioner, to which Two hundred a Year is attached, and which one of them, or perhaps each in succession, might obtain and hold, in conjunction, with his private practice, and that their hopes were destroyed, by the arrangement made with Dr Osborne, and my explanations respecting it, too surely foreshadowing as they did, my intention if possible to have the office abolished, and another of a more effective character substituted for it.” See CO 137/345, Darling dispatch #100 to Duke of Newcastle, 6 August 1859, fols. 517v-518r.
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III.

_The death trap_

If Bowerbank’s trip to London could not draw the Colonial Office into the fray and if his cultivation of a powerful ally like Shaftesbury did not either, then what would? The central problem for the Colonial Office seems to have been the lack of evidence supporting Bowerbank’s allegations. His presence in London alone could not serve as proof. What was required, then, was incontrovertible evidence of the kinds of problems Bowerbank had reported: actions that went against the ideas the Colonial Office had for good governance; treatment regimens that went against contemporary standards of restorative practice. Moreover, reports of these kinds of problems were most valuable if they came from people _other_ than Bowerbank, even if the physician had a hand in producing these testimonies. In 1860, two such revelations came to light, and together they convinced the Colonial Office to intervene in the stalemate between Bowerbank and Scott.

The first trigger was the revelation that mortality rates in the asylum were high, information that came from testimony presented to the Jamaican assembly. In the dispatch that accompanied copies of this testimony,^100^ Darling attacked Bowerbank for accusing Scott of inappropriately seducing a patient of his—though not one admitted to the hospital. In the Colonial Office, Henry Taylor also found Bowerbank’s testimony problematic.^101^ But Taylor found more troubling news in the same dispatch: the investigation had turned up evidence of a 27% mortality rate over the course of a year. Such a high number could not go unquestioned.

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^99^ CO 137/347, Bowerbank letter to Duke of Newcastle, 15 August 1859; and Duke of Newcastle letter to Darling, 23 August 1859, fols. 370-371r.

^100^ The copies of this testimony did not make it into the National Archives files.

^101^ He wondered why the physician had been allowed to make statements based on hearsay. CO 137/348, Darling dispatch #16 to Newcastle, 26 January 1860; and Taylor minute, 3 March 1860, fols. 182-184r.
Even accounting for asylum patients who might have been old, impoverished, or suffering from other ailments, such a high death rate worried Taylor, and he called for an investigation into these findings.\(^{102}\)

In response, Darling transmitted a report in which Scott claimed that it was the poor conditions in which many patients entered the asylum that accounted for the high mortality rate. And although no epidemic had hit the institution, Scott claimed that many of the patients had caught a virulent form of diarrhea that “approached somewhat the character of an Epidemic.” The death statistics bore out Scott’s claims, with twelve patients dying from diarrhea, followed by eight who died of “emaciation, general debility and exhaustion” and six from forms of tuberculosis and other lung problems. Scott’s explanations, however, still did not satisfy Taylor, who complained, “On the whole I cannot think that the mortality is sufficiently accounted for.”

Keen to get a better context from which to judge these figures, the Colonial Office asked the Commissioners in Lunacy about average mortality rates in the best British asylums.\(^{103}\) Even the Colonial Office, who had supported Darling for so long, believed in Bowerbank’s means of assessment: the British institution as the guide for appropriate practices, conditions, and death rates.

The Commissioners’ response seconded Taylor’s conviction that something was amiss. They reported that “a well conducted County Asylum in England” usually had mortality rates between 11 and 12 percent, making Kingston’s numbers abnormally high. Moreover, English patients frequently entered asylums in similar condition to those in Jamaica, even if the vast

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\(^{102}\) CO 137/348, Taylor minute, 3 March 1860, fol. 184v.

\(^{103}\) CO 137/349, Taylor minute, 3 July 1860, fol. 407r; James Scott letter to Henry Hutchings, Acting Inspector and Director of the Hospital and Asylum, 15 May 1860, enclosed in dispatch #79, fol. 413; “Analytical Synopsis of deaths occurring in the Lunatic Asylum of Kingston between the 12th January and 8th December 1859,” enclosed in dispatch #79, fol. 427r; draft of Chichester Fortescue letter to Commissioners in Lunacy, 28 July 1860, 428-430r.
majority of patients in Jamaica were black. No matter what reason Scott gave, the Commissioners were convinced that “a strict enquiry into the management of the Lunatic Asylum...ought to be instituted.” The revelation of a shockingly high rate of death during the previous year transformed the Colonial Office’s approach to this case. No longer did these men accept Darling or Scott’s justifications without first sending them to the Commissioners in Lunacy for scrutiny, and no longer was this a problem best handled locally. But it was the second event, the publication of a sensational pamphlet, that truly galvanized significant metropolitan action. The mortality figures may have sparked the interest of men like Taylor, but only after a former patient spoke of the incredible violence visited upon her and others in the asylum did the Colonial Office truly understand the severity of the problem and the urgency that was required.

The smoking gun

In July 1860, Ann Pratt, a mixed-race Jamaican-born woman who lived in the northwest town of Lucea, sent copies of her pamphlet, Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I saw There, to Darling, along with a request that he send a copy to the “Colonial Minister.” Pratt devoted most of her pamphlet to charting the countless horrors she either experienced or witnessed during her seven-month stay at the asylum. The most central of her revelations was the practice of tanking, where asylum staff dunked patients in the bathing tanks, sometimes once, sometimes multiple times, and sometimes held under. A mulatto woman, Louise Cochran, was “dragged naked through the yard, and then forcibly carried to the tank, where she was held down in the tank...”

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104 CO 137/352, John Forster letter to CO, 20 August 1860, fols. 182r-183v. Leonard Smith notes that most of the patients in Caribbean asylums were part of the lower classes. See Leonard Smith, “Caribbean Bedlam,” 17-19.
under the water by Antoinette and Julian, assisted by some of the most powerful of the lunatic patients.\footnote{Ann Pratt, \emph{Seven Months in the Kingston Lunatic Asylum, and What I Saw There} (Kingston: George Henderson, Savage, & Co., 1860), enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fol. 434r, her emphasis.} Tankings frequently functioned as punishment. The quotation that started this chapter was just one of Pratt’s vivid examples of this abuse. When Pratt ran into the hospital yard to alert one of the doctors that Louise Cochran was being tanked again, nurses dragged her back into the asylum and plunged her into the tank repeatedly, all the while beating her. Pregnant women were not immune to this rough treatment, nor were the sick or the elderly. Moreover, Pratt implied, tanking was lethal. One old woman, Margaret Reed, died days after a tanking. Louise Cochran also died, just a few days after her mother had discharged her. Pratt attributed her death to the abuse she had suffered.\footnote{Ibid., fols. 433r, 434, 436v-437v.}

The person who oversaw all of this abuse was Matron Judith Ryan. Pratt portrayed her as a woman who lied about patients, who ordered tankings almost as a matter of course, and who reacted viciously any time her position seemed vulnerable. Ryan and her staff would beat patients with all manner of implements: umbrellas, ropes, broomsticks, sticks, pins, whatever was in reach. Anyone unwilling to join in the cruelty was summarily dismissed. She abused her position, viewing the patients as a pool of laborers for various household chores. She also routinely stole foodstuffs from the patient diet, a crime which asylum expert John Conolly would have deemed a severe offense, given his arguments for a more robust diet for the insane. Pratt wrote: “In the evening…we got rice water, insipid stuff, the thick part was retained, and was carried into Mrs. Ryan’s house, from whence it was taken to her pen to feed pigs, at least, such was the general impression throughout the Asylum.”\footnote{Ibid., fols. 438-439. Quotation is from CO 137/350, fol. 439v. Pratt also mentioned a Mrs. Branigan who received special treatment because she was the sister of Mary Seacole, the Jamaican nurse who had treated the wounded of the Crimean War. Seacole did have a sister but I have not been able to find her married name.} What comes through most in
Pratt’s writing is that the asylum was, at best, a place of incarceration rather than care; at worst, being housed there brought a patient more torment and, in some cases, brought them closer to death.\textsuperscript{108}

Pratt’s pamphlet is one of only a few narratives of Afro-Jamaicans from this period and, as such, the document is invaluable. Its value as a text, however, is tempered somewhat by the challenges its provenance presents to historians. Pratt’s wealth of knowledge sprung from her own incarceration in the facility, and this fact put the veracity of her claims in question from the start. Could a woman whom a justice of the peace had deemed insane be a trusted witness eight months later? Ann Pratt and her publishers had anticipated the ways her character would be questioned, and her narrative therefore began with a vigorous defense of her credibility. She established herself as a Christian woman whose only “resource” during her time of abandonment was God’s “help and blessing.” In addition, she listed several gentlemen who had heard her story and would vouch for her credibility, a list that included Bowerbank.\textsuperscript{109}

In the weeks after her pamphlet was published, there were several men in Jamaica who tried to invalidate her testimony. Governor Darling sent a copy of her pamphlet to the acting attorney general, Edward Kemble, and asked whether there were any libelous charges within the document.\textsuperscript{110} Asylum director Trench also viewed the tract with considerable skepticism, even though recent investigations he had conducted into similar claims had turned up credible evidence of abusive practices.\textsuperscript{111} To him, “the entire pamphlet now under consideration (of

\textsuperscript{108} Pratt left the asylum in July 1860 and her pamphlet ends with her leaving the asylum and trying to return home. The copy of the pamphlet on CO 137/350, fol. 441v is torn so there is an incomplete conclusion.

\textsuperscript{109} Pratt, \textit{Seven Months}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fols. 429v, 431. Pratt also dedicated her pamphlet to Bowerbank: “Permit me…to dedicate to you this narrative, as one that has proved yourself the unflinching friend of the unfortunate, and the truthful expositor of the fearful management, and foul atrocities [sic] carried on within the walls of the Kingston Asylum.”

\textsuperscript{110} CO 137/350, Austin letter to Kemble, 26 July 1860, enclosed in dispatch #118, fol. 405.

\textsuperscript{111} Trench letter to Austin, 8 August 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents on the Case of Ann Pratt, The Reputed...}}
which this poor ignorant woman is made to assume the authorship), is...a disingenuous contrivance to convey to the public mind, a *prima facie* [sic] corroboration of the numerous random charges which have been published from time to time by Dr. Bowerbank against the Officers and Nurses of the Asylum.” His concerns were so strong that he interrogated several of the people Pratt named in her document.112 Once Trench’s investigation was complete, the governor’s secretary, Hugh Austin, instructed him to collate all the evidence he had gathered—interviews, correspondence with Scott, and letters from Hanover authorities who had interacted with Pratt—and publish his own pamphlet. Austin also told Trench to circulate the pamphlet widely to various members of Jamaica’s professional and political elite, the West India Committee, former residents of Jamaica now in England, and the editors of the major newspapers and medical journals in Great Britain. Darling sent a copy of Trench’s tract to the Colonial Office in the same dispatch with Ann Pratt’s pamphlet. Thus, the two documents would have been read in London side by side.113

Most of the attempts to discredit Pratt’s statements, however, focused on her mental state and her character. William Browne, the justice of the peace who had committed her to the asylum, felt obligated to respond to her pamphlet.114 In his opinion, which he claimed was “also the opinion of every intelligent person in this town,” Ann Pratt could not produce such a text in either written or oral form. Whoever helped her, “the ‘kind friend’” she had mentioned, Browne

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112 Trench letter to Austin, 8 August 1850, printed in *Official Documents*, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 452a.
113 CO 137/350, Darling dispatch #118 to Newcastle, 21 August 1860, fols. 390r-393v; Austin letter to Trench, 11 August 1860, enclosed in dispatch #118, 403-404r.
114 That Browne, based in northwest Jamaica, had received and read a copy of *Seven Months* by July 30, one week after Pratt sent copies to the Governor, speaks to the rapid island-wide circulation of the pamphlet. However, people like Browne who had been involved in sending Pratt to Kingston in the first place might have been sent copies directly so the range of the pamphlet cannot yet be established.
argued, “has, for some sinister purpose of his own, exaggerated the complaints she has been induced to make.” Various Lucea authorities agreed with Browne, he reported, and insisted that “Ann Pratt was mad, and dangerously mad too, while in the Female Prison at Lucea, and for two days before she was committed there; and a Lady, who was one of her fellow-passengers on board the Marie Louise, declared that, on two occasions, she was seized with fits of madness.”

The medical attendant at Hanover jail, William Brebner, classified her problems as “‘mania,’ alternating with ‘melancholia;’ during the paroxysm of the former, she would utter the most indecent language, strip herself naked—eat her own excrement, and rub her body over with her ‘fœces.’” During these times, Brebner reported, a straitjacket was necessary. The conviction of Browne and others that Pratt had been insane left some to wonder how she could have produced the pamphlet. J.S. Trench, clerk of Hanover’s Peace Office, wondered: “If the Lunatic did, indeed, as it is pretended…keep in her memory dates, events, persons, names, particulars, and treatment, it is to be deplored, that for the purposes of ‘revenge,’ and to gratify ‘a wounded spirit,’ they should have ‘lately washed over’ with pen and ink by her ‘kind friend,’ so that there cannot be ‘found underneath the wash’ anything but gross exaggerations and untruths.”

For Browne and others who knew Pratt in Hanover, it was not just her mental state that was in question, it was her moral character as well. Browne reported: “Ann Pratt is the mother of two children for a man named Levi, who was living with, or married to another woman.”

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115 Pratt’s own mother had apparently confirmed her daughter’s continued struggles with mental stability: Brown reported that “The mother of Ann Pratt informed me that she was made some years since, and I believe she has been rather eccentric since that time.” Extract of William Browne letter, 30 July 1860, printed in Official Documents, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 463v.


117 J.S. Trench letter to Daniel Trench, 6 August 1860, printed in Official Documents, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 467r.

118 Extract of William Browne letter, 30 July 1860, printed in Official Documents, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 464r.
J.S. Trench raised similar stories as he poked holes in her biography. Pratt had started her pamphlet by describing her childhood in patchy detail. Born in 1830 on a Hanover estate, Pratt did not specify whether she was born a slave, saying only that her father, John Pratt, was a storekeeper in Hanover’s major town, Lucea. At age six, she went to live with a Hanover magistrate for at least ten years, during which she went to school. At some point before 1859, she lived with her mother until she moved to Barbary Hill in 1859, at the age of 28 or 29.\textsuperscript{119} She did not mention any children in this initial biographical sketch, although she mentioned them later in the text. Similarly, there was only a fleeting and indirect reference later in the text to the fact that she may have been married.\textsuperscript{120} For J.S. Trench, Pratt’s evasiveness was purposeful, an attempt to paper over her moral failings. What little information she had provided about her life had largely been unnecessary detail about her birth and early childhood, while the more relevant period, the intervening twenty years, were ignored entirely. Glossing over the past two decades of her life, according to the clerk, was an attempt to skip over her more unsavory affiliations.

“‘Miss Pratt’ has, for years past,” he wrote, “born the character of a prostitute, has had connection with black men, and had children, the result of promiscuous intercourse, two of whom are now alive.” Furthermore, although she said she had attended James Watson’s church regularly before he left Lucea in 1850, her relatives claimed otherwise; they declared that she had never attended church of any kind.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} Pratt, \textit{Seven Months}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 432r. Pratt did not seem to know her birthday. All she wrote was her birth year, 1830, but she later referred to herself as leaving school at “14 or 15,” suggesting a lack of knowledge about when precisely she was born.

\textsuperscript{120} On the children, see ibid., fols. 432v, 441r. On a possible husband, see fol. 435v. The matron of the asylum called her “a damned negro man’s wife.”

\textsuperscript{121} J.S. Trench letter to Daniel Trench, 6 August 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 465r.
The Hanover authorities also challenged Pratt’s version of the events that led to her admission into the asylum. According to her pamphlet, Pratt’s ordeal had begun when three men broke into her home in late 1859, and one “assaulted [her] personally.” When legal proceedings against these men instead turned against her, she was fined £1. That night, she experienced convulsing fits and was briefly “deprived of [her] sense,” at which point the police took her to Hanover’s Female Prison, where she stayed until a local doctor admitted her to Kingston’s asylum. But although the recollections of the Hanover officials varied little from Pratt’s story in terms of the bare outlines of the case, the accounts these men told supplied details that only furthered the questions about her character. Not only had Pratt borne Levi’s children, William Browne insisted, she had been living with one of the men she had accused, a man named McKenzie, who himself was with another woman. Her charges were the result of a lover’s quarrel between her and McKenzie. J. S. Trench told a similar story, but about a different man. From what he had heard, “a familiarity” had developed between Pratt and “a libertine, named John Davis, [who] came as a bookkeeper to the Kew estate.” In this retelling, it was Davis, with the assistance of two other men, including McKenzie, who beat and raped her. Trench also claimed that Pratt’s charges were motivated by jealousy; in this case, jealousy when Davis started living with another woman. But despite these extensive attempts to invalidate

122 Catharine Coleborne’s article suggests that police involvement in restraining and committing the insane was perhaps a common feature through the empire. Catharine Coleborne, “Passage to the asylum: the role of the police in committals of the insane in Victoria, Australia, 1848-1900,” in Roy Porter and David Wright, eds., The Confinement of the Insane: International Perspectives, 1800-1965 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 129-148.
123 Extract of William Browne letter, 30 July 1860, printed in Official Documents, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 464r.
124 J.S. Trench letter to Daniel Trench, 6 August 1860, printed in Official Documents, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 465r.
125 J.S. Trench letter to Daniel Trench, 6 August 1860, printed in Official Documents, enclosed in CO 137/350, fols. 465v-466r. Trench was particularly interested in the fact that Pratt had waited a few weeks before reporting her rape; his suspicions were also raised by the fact that no one within the vicinity of her home had heard any screams or other noise on the night in question.
Pratt’s testimony, Pratt’s pamphlet seems to have had the desired effect. Although Newcastle did not have much of a response to this particular dispatch—the letter to Darling said only that Newcastle was waiting for the legal proceedings to conclude—he also did not join in the attacks on Pratt. As we will see, the question of tanking was foremost in his mind after her pamphlet had reached London.

Despite the problems with Pratt’s text, her testimony ultimately had weight because it fit in with similar stories that were starting to emerge. Corroborating evidence had been mounting during the months before and after the publication of Pratt’s pamphlet. Just a few weeks prior to its publication, an asylum official told Trench about a violent incident he had witnessed. Caleb Hall was the purveyor of the Public Hospital and Asylum, a position in which he visited the wards of both institutions frequently. During one of these inspections in late June 1860, Hall witnessed Nancy Lloyd, one of the asylum’s nurses, “dragging a Lunatic Patient along towards the Bath in a most unceremonious manner.” Lloyd then shoved the patient, Deborah Lloyd, down on the ground and punched her twice. The matron told a different story. Nancy Lloyd had not been abusing Deborah Lloyd, argued Ryan; instead the female patient had run away from the bathing station naked, and the nurse chased after her so that Hall and the two men who were with him could not see her nude. It was during this chase that the patient fell down. Moreover, Ryan vouched for Nancy Lloyd’s character and approach

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126 CO 137/350, draft Chichester Fortescue letter to Darling, 19 October 1860, fols. 469-470r.
127 Margaret Jones comes to this same conclusion, but I spell it out further by incorporating sources not found in the British National Archives. See Jones, “Most Cruel and Revolting Crimes,” 299.
128 CO 137/350, Caleb Hall letter to Trench, 26 June 1860, enclosed in dispatch #118, fols. 412-413r.
129 Trench letter to Austin, 29 June 1860, ibid., fols. 410-411.
130 Hall never named Deborah Lloyd; her name comes from the recollections of Judith Ryan, Antoinette Burrie, and Nancy Lloyd. Interrogations of Judith Ryan, Antoinette Burrie, and Nancy Lloyd, ibid., fols. 417v, 419-420v.
131 Two letters from Caleb Hall to Trench, both 26 June 1860, ibid., fols. 412-414. Ann Pratt recounted this scene in her pamphlet, only she said the patient was Emma Steele, not Deborah Lloyd. Other than that, her story matched Hall’s. See Pratt, Seven Months, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 437r.
to her job. The nurse had been at the asylum for four months, and Ryan claimed to have “found her very obedient and attentive to her work.” Neither Lloyd nor any of the other nurses had ever mistreated any of the women in the asylum, Ryan reported.\footnote{Judith Ryan letter to Trench, 26 June 1850; and Interrogation of Ryan, both enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fols. 415, 416v–417r. Ryan told the same version of events twice, once in a letter to Trench and then in an oral statement Trench took two days later.}

Trench also interviewed Nancy Lloyd and another nurse who had been nearby, Antoinette Burrie. Burrie said that, at the crucial moment, she had turned away from the tank while she was cutting the patients’ hair. She heard Deborah Lloyd crying but paid no attention. As she explained, “I heard her crying as if she was being beaten, but that is the way she always cries.”\footnote{Interrogation of Antoinette Burrie, ibid., fol. 419.} Nancy Lloyd’s story matched with Ryan’s: “I saw Mr. Hall and 2 other Gentlemen at the top of the Piazza up at the end of the building, I was afraid they might see the Patient naked, and I got hold of her hand, to take her back to the Bath, and she pulled against me and fell down.”\footnote{Interrogation of Nancy Lloyd, ibid., fol. 420.} Hall vigorously rebutted the statements of Nancy Lloyd and Judith Ryan.\footnote{He had no quarrels with Antoinette Burrie’s statement.} He claimed that Deborah Lloyd had not been naked and that, rather than Deborah falling accidentally, the nurse had “placed her hands upon the back of the Lunatic and pushed her with such force as to throw her heavily on the terrace.”\footnote{Hall letter to Trench, 29 June 1860, enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fol. 425.}

Trench reported Hall’s accusations to the governor’s secretary, along with the statements of Ryan and the two nurses. Trench expressed his suspicion of Ryan in his accompanying letter: “Mrs. Ryan has on her own admission […] displayed so much want of proper surveillance and so much neglect in the performance of her duties that I feel bound to submit the whole matter and particularly her neglect, for His Excellency’s consideration and judgment thereon.”\footnote{In }

\footnote{132 Judith Ryan letter to Trench, 26 June 1850; and Interrogation of Ryan, both enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fols. 415, 416v–417r. Ryan told the same version of events twice, once in a letter to Trench and then in an oral statement Trench took two days later.  
133 Interrogation of Ryan, ibid., fol. 418.  
134 Interrogation of Antoinette Burrie, ibid., fol. 419.  
135 Interrogation of Nancy Lloyd, ibid., fol. 420.  
136 He had no quarrels with Antoinette Burrie’s statement.  
137 Hall letter to Trench, 29 June 1860, enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fol. 425.}
early July, the Governor decided, in response to Trench’s concerns, that Ryan “[was] not sufficiently active and attentive to her duties” nor could “her veracity...be relied upon,” and he ordered that a replacement for her be found. Similarly, he ordered the dismissal of Nancy Lloyd.\textsuperscript{139}

This was the context within which Ann Pratt’s pamphlet was read: just weeks prior to her pamphlet’s publication, Darling, Trench, Scott and Austin were investigating another report of patient abuse from a source they trusted more. Certainly Trench’s response to Hall’s accusations bore none of the hostility he mustered against Pratt. Her story piled onto an increasing heap of evidence against the asylum staff. Indeed, the very production of the pamphlet, and the immediate response from Darling and Trench, speak to how this particular moment, June and July 1860, marked a tipping point, after which the Colonial Office and Darling could no longer act as though Bowerbank’s accusations were malicious flights of fancy.

Ann Pratt was released from the asylum the same day that Judith Ryan was dismissed, July 4, 1860, and at some point during the next ten days, she came into contact with Bowerbank, who presumably bankrolled her publication. (The fact that he had two of his own pamphlets published suggests that he likely had the means to support hers.) Ten days after her release, Bowerbank wrote to King’s House, the official residence of the governor.\textsuperscript{140} Bowerbank announced that “a most extraordinary and frightful case of abuse” had just occurred in Kingston’s asylum, and the victim of this abuse, “[a] poor female” who he doubted had ever been insane, was willing to testify—in either oral or written form—to the horrors of the asylum.

\textsuperscript{138} Trench letter to Austin, 29 June 1860, ibid., fols. 410-11.
\textsuperscript{139} Austin letter to Trench, 4 July 1860, enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fols. 427-428r.
\textsuperscript{140} He reminded the governor of his longstanding accusations against Mrs. Ryan “for her ill usage, and especially for the cruel and murderous system of ‘tanking’ the unfortunate patients under her charge.”
The physician himself would verify her claims. Crucially, Bowerbank asserted that Pratt’s discharge had been the direct result of Ryan’s firing from the asylum.\footnote{For whole paragraph, see Bowerbank letter to Austin, 14 July 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 444r. Scott rejected Bowerbank’s claim for the reasons for Pratt’s discharge. “I am at a loss to conceive on what ground Doctor Bowerbank could have arrived at the conclusion that Ann Pratt had been discharged in consequence of the removal from office of the late Matron, for neither had she, nor is the present Matron likely to have the slightest power of detaining or discharging, at will, any inmate of the Lunatic Asylum. The Medical Men alone are the Officers required, under the law, to determine when a Lunatic may be discharged; and, under the circumstances, which I have deemed it necessary to detail, it will be apparent to his Excellency that Ann Pratt was properly discharged from the Asylum, and that she was not released therefrom for the reasons assigned by Dr. Bowerbank.” See Scott letter to Trench, 4 August 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 450r.}

Bowerbank never mentioned Ann Pratt by name and instead only referred to her as a female victim. Darling instructed Trench to use the admission and discharge dates Bowerbank had used in reference to his nameless female victim to figure out the patient to which the physician had referred.\footnote{Bowerbank letter to Austin, 14 July 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 444r.} Using the asylum’s register, Trench named Pratt as Bowerbank’s witness and requested that she meet with him. Pratt was staying at Bowerbank’s house at the time.\footnote{Edward Cephas, the hospital’s messenger, gave Trench’s letter to Pratt at Bowerbank’s home. See Trench notice to Pratt, 25 July 1860; and Cephas comment, both printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 445r. I am presuming that she never left Kingston and never returned to Lucea, despite how her pamphlet ends.} She responded the following day and agreed to meet with Trench, albeit on a different day than he had suggested. Since her charges were “of a public nature,” however, that prevented her from meeting with him alone; instead, she brought along Bowerbank, Rev. James Watson (Mrs. Bramhold’s preacher), and her solicitor, John Macpherson Macneil.\footnote{Pratt letter to Trench, 25 July 1860; and Macneil, Watson, and Bowerbank witness statement, 30 July 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fols. 445, 448v.} Ann Pratt’s statement to Trench focused almost exclusively on the violent treatment she herself had received, in contrast to her published pamphlet that had taken a broader view of the subject and had reported the abuse of her fellow patients as well. Nevertheless, her story was largely the
same: over the course of her stay, she had been subjected to repeated abuse at the hands of various nurses, whose actions Matron Ryan sanctioned. Medical staff ignored her appeals.\footnote{Pratt statements, 27 and 30 July 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fols. 445v-448v.}

In addition to meeting Pratt herself, Trench’s investigation of Bowerbank’s claims led him to ask the head surgeon of the two institutions, Dr. James Scott, why she had been admitted and for any other information about her that the physician had noted on his occasional visits to the facility.\footnote{Trench letter to Scott, 25 July 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 448v.} In Scott’s opinion, Pratt entered the asylum suffering from “mental derangement” that occasionally turned violent and required restraint. Both Dr. Keech and Matron Ryan had reported similar behavior to him. However, Scott had seen evidence that a nurse had punched Pratt in the face. Initially the head surgeon tried to suspend the nurse but “withdrew the order” out of deference to institution policies and the position of the inspector. When it came to any complaints from Ann Pratt about Judith Ryan, Scott pleaded ignorance.\footnote{Scott letter to Trench, 26 July 1860, printed in \textit{Official Documents}, enclosed in CO 137/350, fol. 449.} At every turn, Trench and Scott did their utmost to invalidate Pratt’s testimony, even though Trench had found significant evidence of wrongdoings in another case just weeks before Pratt’s pamphlet was published. This alone suggests a mountain of evidence that could not be ignored, but there is one additional source worth looking at closely.

In 1860, another pamphlet was published, this one a reprinting of Richard Rouse’s journals under the title \textit{New Lights on Dark Deeds}. Rouse, a black asylum warden, was the man Darling had previously labeled an associate of Rev. George Trueman. \textit{New Lights on Dark Deeds} had been edited by Rouse’s son, who published his father’s writing as a response to the critics who were trying to discredit Ann Pratt. To combat those who “[had] declared the narrative to be the illusions of a maniac,” Rouse’s son felt compelled “in duty to the memory of [his] father, and
Rouse had started working in the asylum in April 1854 and remained in that position until his firing in 1858. According to his son, his “delicate constitution” could not withstand his distressing dismissal, and he died a month and a half later. But during his four years there, he noted rampant abuse. He recorded a general atmosphere of careless treatment of patients, insubordination among lower-level staff, and vulgar speech. His description of Judith Ryan echoed Pratt’s: “She, together with the nurses and servants, treated the lunatics often with harshness and cruelty.” Not only were nurses, servants, and the matron unconcerned with the welfare of patients, Dr. Scott was as well. Over the years, Scott continually ignored Rouse’s reports of violent incidents and warned him not to meddle.

Rouse described several ways in which the asylum failed to be a curative space. Cells were frequently overcrowded; this worried Rouse, who, like Bowerbank, was certain that such close proximity in the men’s quarters inevitably led to unseemly consorting. He had similar concerns about the two men who were night nurses and watchmen and who both had nighttime access to rooms in the female ward. Rouse’s journals also echoed Pratt’s description of patients who were put in charge of their fellow inmates. Nicholas Steele, a man prone to “severe

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149 Ibid., 5. Rouse got in trouble when he eagerly praised the appearance of Bowerbank’s first pamphlet in spring 1858. Soon after, he realized he was “a suspected person,” accused of being Bowerbank’s inside man. But he claimed he did not meet Bowerbank until a few months after the document was published. Rouse may not have been Bowerbank’s initial informant but once the warden saw the physician as someone who would be sympathetic to the information he had, he met with Bowerbank in June 1858 and also sent him written testimony. See 11, 13.
150 Ibid., 9-11. On subordination, see also page 18.
151 Ibid., 13-14, 17.
fits,” whipped and beat patients, at times with a cat-o-nine tails. The warden also claimed to have witnessed Steele pulling women violently out of the privy.\textsuperscript{152}

While Rouse had admitted before his death that Bowerbank’s investigation had sparked some improvements in the asylum, his son remained skeptical. He wondered how far-reaching could the improvements be. Like Bowerbank and Shaftesbury, Rouse’s son believed such wretched institutions had no place in the British Empire. His final statement was the most damning. “How long,” he asked, “shall such a state of things be allowed to continue with impunity, nay, be fostered and encouraged by the ruling authorities of a Colony under the British Flag?”\textsuperscript{153}

Rouse’s pamphlet never arrived in London, even though Darling had mentioned him as an associate of Rev. George Trueman the year before. Nevertheless, Rouse’s testimony seems to have had an impact in Jamaica. Rouse and Bowerbank had met, and the warden’s statements had influenced the physician. For our purposes, Rouse’s journals provided yet another elaboration of the problems within the asylum and lends even more credence to Pratt’s story. Taken together, the two pamphlets, both written by Jamaican-born people of color, provide a compelling description of the violence within the asylum’s walls and the Nurse Ratched-like matron who presided over much of it.\textsuperscript{154} The importance of the collective effect of the numerous testimonies that emerged in the summer of 1860 cannot be underestimated. Individually, the testimony of any of the nonwhite and poor men and women who testified—nurses, former patients, asylum

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 20, 25, 27. Rouse accused Steele of breaking the ribs of another patient in front of Dr. Scott, who was unperturbed by the incident.

\textsuperscript{153} Rouse claimed to have left out quite a bit; whether he left out large sections of his father’s writings or just his own recollections is unclear, just as it is unclear why he believed his account would remain credible after he admitted his omissions. Nevertheless, he was satisfied: “More, much more, might be stated; but I shall rest content with what my father wrote as to the Lunatic Asylums above.” Ibid., 36-7.

\textsuperscript{154} Ryan Linkof first pointed this out to me.
staff, preachers, and servants—could easily be dismissed. Those in power found countless reasons to argue that any one piece of evidence should be thrown out. The evisceration of Pratt’s character was the most extensive of these attempts, but Rouse too had struggled to be heard before his death. But collectively, these statements were less easily dismissed once they had formed a critical mass. Pratt’s pamphlet marks a crucial turning point: once colonial officials in London had read it and the various documents produced in Jamaica discussing it, they stopped supporting Darling tacitly and began to ask serious questions about asylum practices. In particular, tanking troubled these men, and from this point forward, no amount of excuses, explanations, or evasions coming out of Jamaica shifted their focus away from learning more about this practice.

In labeling Pratt’s pamphlet the spark that drove the Colonial Office into action, however, one caveat is in order. In 1859, the Duke of Newcastle replaced Bulwer-Lytton as Secretary of State for the Colonies. It is probably not a coincidence that the Colonial Office took a more aggressive interest in the developments in Jamaica under new leadership, although Newcastle has been described by one historian as “hesitant and dilatory.” However, assigning too much credit to the change in leadership is unwise, given the continuity in staffing. For example, Henry Taylor, whose wry marginal comments litter these volumes and whose memoranda formed the bulk of official responses, was senior clerk of this division for 47

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155 According to Rouse’s son, Trench had spread the rumor that his father had been discharged because of drunkenness, a claim Rouse the younger vigorously denied. Moreover, Rouse’s journals suggest that Scott used the knowledge he had of the warden’s domestic disputes with the mother of his 14 children against Rouse. See Rouse, *New Lights*, 7, 12-13.

Nevertheless, Pratt’s gender likely gave her narrative more heft, even though questions about her mental state threatened to undermine her claims.

Abolitionist rhetoric about flogging had frequently focused on the whipping of women. As Diana Paton writes, “When abolitionists wanted to convey a sense of slavery’s horror, they told stories about women. They emphasized the violations of women’s bodies that accompanied enslavement – the sexual brutality, the vicious flogging, the enforced nakedness.” The laws designed to modify the harshness of slavery—the 1823 Amelioration laws—had declared the flogging of women illegal. This legislation, however, did not apply to the older Caribbean colonies, and Jamaica’s Assembly did not pass similar decrees. But what made the whipping of women the most powerful emblem of the evils of slavery was not that women themselves were being subjected to this violence. Flogging a woman inevitably meant publicly exposing her body and bringing shame upon her and the men who were watching. Moreover, the act had a coarsening effect on the victim and the perpetrator; it celebrated the basest instincts in men at the same time that it forced indecency upon women. “[T]he most serious effect of flogging women,” Paton writes, “was its distortion of appropriate gender norms for men as well as women, free people as well as slaves, and whites as well as blacks.”

Pratt’s reporting functioned in this same fashion: she reported violence against women, frequently perpetuated by men, that often involved female nakedness. That the Colonial Office sprung into action after a copy of her pamphlet arrived in London can be no coincidence.

157 John Cell makes this point both about the permanent undersecretaries and some of the subordinate senior officials. See John Cell, British Colonial Administration, 7-9, 20-1.
IV.

The trial

Newcastle had refrained from making any significant pronouncements on the correspondence surrounding Ann Pratt’s pamphlet because he wanted to wait for legal proceedings against Ryan and other nurses to conclude. Edward Kemble, the acting attorney general, had reviewed the materials Darling had sent him. In response to the governor’s query about the possibility of a libel case, Kemble suggested that a libel charge was not the best way to proceed. The attorney general had another plan in mind. He had received sworn testimony from Andrew Carey, whose wife had died in the asylum. Carey’s statements were corroborated by depositions taken of Ann Pratt and others. Kemble was persuaded by these documents and started criminal proceedings against Ryan—who, by this point, was no longer working at the asylum—and the nurses. This trial, Kemble argued, would be the best opportunity to “[test] the mode in which that Institution has been conducted.”

The trial happened at the end of March 1861. Judith Ryan and a few asylum nurses were put on trial and then acquitted of Bowerbank’s charges against them. According to Attorney General Alexander Heslop, the jury took no more than five minutes to find the women innocent. The trial had consisted of lengthy testimonies from Henrietta Dawson, a previous patient in the asylum, and Ann Pratt, in which both women recounted the rough treatment of Harriet Jarrett, who had died in the asylum in either late May or early June 1860. Jarrett, who reportedly entered the asylum in relatively decent physical health, was then battered and tanked repeatedly by Ryan and the nurses. Dawson described Ryan striking Jarrett with an umbrella, her

159 Kemble letter to Austin, 8 August 1860, enclosed in CO 137/350, dispatch #118, fols. 407-409r. Kemble also made clear that he would order criminal proceedings in the case of Ann Pratt if and when he received sworn testimony taken by a Magistrate.
hands, and a stave at various points. She also testified that, during one tanking, nurses and some patients pushed Jarrett’s head underwater and held her there, one by pressing her knee in the patient’s chest. (When the inevitable question arose about her mental state, Dawson insisted she was well though not because of any treatments she received in the asylum: “I never took a dose of physic all the time I was there.”)\(^{160}\) Pratt told much the same story.\(^{161}\)

The verdict hinged on the question of Jarrett’s health prior to her arrival at the asylum. Acquaintances of Jarrett, who had known her before she went to the asylum, were questioned about her physical state before her admission. Those who testified included her former landlady Mrs. Dowie, who insisted that the woman had entered the asylum “sound in body” with no marks or bruises.\(^{162}\) Only the rector of Port Royal, Reverend J. B. Turner, told a different story. He had examined her and sent her to the asylum, and he insisted that she had had physical ailments in addition to her mental struggles. Numerous people testified that Harriet Jarrett had arrived at the asylum in reasonable condition. Whatever mental problems she may have had did not manifest themselves visibly to these witnesses. Only the Anglican minister, on whose authority Jarrett had been sent to the asylum, claimed to have seen a woman in poor health with marks and “blotches” on her torso prior to her trip to Kingston.\(^{163}\) There is no way to know Jarrett’s real condition, but Turner’s status as a trusted clergyman for the Established Church—a key affiliation because it separated him from the more meddlesome evangelical missionaries—surely trumped the testimony of a random smattering of friends and acquaintances, among whom included fellow inmates in the asylum.

\(^{160}\) Henrietta Dawson testimony, enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 277-282r, emphasis in the trial transcript.
\(^{161}\) Ann Pratt testimony, ibid., fols. 288v-289v.
\(^{162}\) Mrs Dowie testimony, ibid., fols. 290-292r, 294.
\(^{163}\) Revd. J. B. Turner testimony, ibid., fols. 292v-293r.
The defense paraded a line of nurses, washerwomen, and medical staff, including Scott, all of whom claimed that Jarrett had entered the asylum in poor physical condition. She was feeble, they said, riddled with venereal diseases—which was of course an attack on her character as well—and “deranged.” Scott, in addition, tried to discredit Dawson and Pratt, claiming that the former had “melancholia” that rendered her dumb and that the latter had been violent with “maniacal excitement.” As for the matron, Scott described Ryan as “always Kind to the people,” “attentive to her duties,” and someone who “had great moral influence over the patients.” The defense’s tactic of discrediting all who had testified on Jarrett’s behalf worked well. In Heslop’s instructions to the jury, he reminded them that the only two people who had given “direct Evidence of any assault…were inmates of the Lunatic Asylum sent there (necessarily) under Medical recommendation or certificate.” All other evidence “was purely circumstantial” and contradictory—Rev. Turner, for example, had been a witness for the prosecution. By contrast, the defense’s case seemed stronger.

Darling reported the acquittal to the Colonial Office in April 1861, but his initial dispatch was sparse and had no accompanying documents that explained the trial or the verdict. Newcastle’s response demonstrated the Colonial Office’s newly serious engagement with the problems in Jamaica. “I am not satisfied with this statement,” the response began, and the secretary of state proceeded to demand that the governor send him the judges’ notes complete with a full report. In addition to wanting a more detailed account of the proceedings, Newcastle had a specific question. “I wish you to report specially,” he ordered, “whether the practice of what is called ‘tanking’ has been resorted to in the Lunatic Asylum…for purposes of

164 Transcript of the defense witnesses’ testimony, ibid., fols. 294v-300v.
165 Alexander Heslop, Acting Chief Justice, statement to the jury, ibid., fol. 303.
166 CO 137/353, Darling dispatch #49 to Newcastle, 8 April 1861, fols. 385-386v.
punishment, discipline or intimidation.” Moreover, he wanted to know if hospital physicians had sanctioned these acts, knew about them and therefore could have prevented them.  

Newcastle was not convinced by the exoneration of Ryan and her nurses. Their acquittal, he argued, did not mean they had not behaved reprehensibly. His skepticism marked a considerable change. He and his colleagues had convinced themselves that there was significant truth to Bowerbank’s claims, no doubt a conviction based on Pratt’s pamphlet—why else would Newcastle single out “tanking”, a practice unmentioned before Pratt’s story?—and those high mortality figures. With this new conviction came a new drive to seek out the truth about the asylum, regardless of what Darling, Scott, or even trial verdicts said to the contrary.

The question of bathing

Darling’s investigation into whether tanking was a routine practice opened up a lengthy conversation about bathing practices. According to his report, none of the hospital doctors had known about or sanctioned tanking. Nevertheless, he did admit that they likely would have discovered the practice themselves, had they been more vigilant. Both Scott and Trench denied the practice of tanking but simultaneously acknowledged so-called bathing mishaps, the latter of which they readily admitted had occurred, usually the result of the female patients being too boisterous to control. Nurses walked a fine line between bathing violent patients and turning violent against them, or at least that was the argument of hospital officials. Men like Scott and Trench, and then by extension, the governor, exploited the blurriness between violent

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167 CO 137/353, Newcastle draft response to Darling, 16 May 1861, fols. 388-389.
168 Ibid.
169 CO 137/355, Darling dispatch #94 to Newcastle, fols. 216v-217r.
170 Trench letter to Austin, 3 September 1860; and Scott letter to Trench, 3 September 1860; both enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 224-225, 228-232.
punishment and curative practice to deflect attention away from the endemic brutality. Better to discuss at length the more comfortable topic of shower arrangements in the new buildings, the shared logic seemed to be, than to admit that the mechanisms of oversight had failed to protect helpless patients.

Both Trench and Scott argued that the main problem was poorly rigged shower arrangements that required nursing staff to use physical force to position patients underneath the water. Trench had spoken with a former nurse, Mrs. Mary Clarke, who demonstrated her method for bathing patients. In Trench’s words, Clarke followed this procedure:

The Patient is made to sit down in the bath, the Nurse then strides over her chest and holds the Patients head between her Knees, face downwards in the Nurses lap, under the gutter which conveys the Water into the Bath, when the Water runs direct on the base of the head: Sometimes it is difficult to keep Patients in this position they become violent and then assistance is required and employed to hold them!

Both inspector and head physician condemned Clarke’s methods while simultaneously vouching for her kindness and expertise. Trench restated his belief in Dr. Scott’s opinion that no one had died from Clarke’s methods but agreed that it would be “prudent to discontinue its application so long as the Patients remain in the present Asylum.” Two other staff doctors, Keech and Osborne, also found Clarke’s methods unacceptable.

Clarke’s methods, questionable though they were, do not seem to be the tanking to which Pratt, Bowerbank, and Newcastle referred. But asylum officials focused significant attention on the retired nurse’s practices, which were admittedly in a grey area, rather than on

171 Trench letter to Austin, 10 September 1860, enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 237v-238r.
172 Trench letter to Austin, 1 October 1860; Keech letter to Trench, 26 September 1860; Osborne letter to Trench, 1 October 1860; all enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 251v, 253, 262v. As for Clarke’s kindness and expertise, see Scott’s letter to Trench, 27 September 1860, enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, especially fols. 257v-258r.
the more dramatic acts that Trench had investigated earlier in the year. Their focus on one nurse, whose name Pratt never mentioned, served as a distraction from the main issue. Instead, these men wrote at length about two topics that were related but ultimately irrelevant to the question of staff brutality: the violence that patients visited upon nursing staff, which required more force to restrain them; and the desired plumbing arrangements for the new facility. On the first issue, Scott claimed,

> It frequently happens that Lunatics evince a repugnance, indeed a morbid dislike to Bathing, and on this account will conceal themselves to prevent their being taken to the Bath. It is no matter of surprize [sic] that when about to be bathed this portion of them should shew resistance to the attendants, be sometimes violent, and afterwards complain that they had been treated with unkindness or cruelty in the Bath.\(^{173}\)

Complaints about patients turning violent were a common defense against Bowerbank and Pratt’s accusations. After all, dealing with physical recalcitrance certainly would have been an occupational hazard.\(^{174}\) Such rough-and-tumble interactions were exacerbated, Scott argued, by the bathing set up. Water flowed from a small pipe that was so low it required patients to be placed in a reclining position rather than a sitting or standing one; placing patients in a nearly horizontal pose and holding them there involved more force.\(^{175}\) Thus, the discussion turned to

\(^{173}\) Scott letter to Trench, 7 September 1860, enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fol. 242r. See a similar statement on fol. 241.

\(^{174}\) In one letter to Trench, Scott claimed that there were serious problems with patient discipline, to the degree where staff felt under threat of being hurt. Patients also felt as though they could invoke Bowerbank’s name to block further punishment. “It is remarkable,” he complained, “that the name of Doctor Bowerbank is constantly introduced by them, especially when they are directed to do anything in the Institution...they then threaten to make complaints to that person, and express their determination to see him so soon as they leave the Asylum. I know not by what means, Doctor Bowerbank has succeeded in making his name known to the Female Lunatics, for he has not visited the Institution from the year 1854 and only few of the inmates now under treatment were examined by him before being sent there. It is however being freely used by them, seemingly with the view of intimidating the Officers and servants. [C]onsequently the discipline has been subverted, and unless speedily restored, serious casualties may occur among them.” See Scott letter to Trench, 3 September 1860, enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 228v-229v. He continued in a similar vein on fols. 230v-231r.

\(^{175}\) See Scott letter to Trench, 27 September 1860, enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 256, 258. Scott also commented on the opportunities for abuse but noted that they were not just confined to Jamaica. “At the same time I must admit that in the use of the latter two [douche and Shower Baths] especially, as has happened in some
plans for the current asylum, and all of those who wrote about the subject advocated for shower baths with higher pipes.\textsuperscript{176}

Once again, Darling’s opinions on the subject aligned with Scott’s arguments, and the governor continued to be skeptical towards Bowerbank’s accusations. What Pratt had called “tanking,” Darling called “bathing,” and his continued tendency to minimize the abuse highlighted his disbelief. He too focused almost exclusively on the shower arrangements in the new but unfinished asylum. Darling refused to acknowledge that any improper and rough treatment of female patients, intentional or not, had occurred. Even if he had, he viewed the potential crime as overeager bathing rather than an intentional act of abuse.\textsuperscript{177} “Tanking” to him was merely overeagerness or the unavoidable result of having to place violent patients in bathtubs. This view was influenced by how he viewed blacks and, by extension, the black workers in charge of these women. He characterized his decision not to reinstate Ryan or the nurses after their acquittal as motivated by “a spirit of precaution and expediency.” He explained,

\begin{quote}
[t]here are few people for whom so much allowance should be made in respect to occasional loss of temper and exhibition of force, as those whose natural passions have not been moderated by civilizing influences, and who being themselves of what may be called an African temperament are charged as subordinate Servants with the duty of handling and restraining violent lunatics for the most part of the same excitable Race.
\end{quote}

For him, while tanking—if it had ever happened—was unfortunate, it was not a punitive practice but rather the inevitable result of uncivilized blacks restraining insane blacks.\textsuperscript{178}

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of the model asylums of England, they may be abused by attendants who lack a necessary amount of intelligence and kindness of disposition.” See fols. 259v-260v.
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\textsuperscript{176} Trench letter to Austin, 1 October 1860; Keech letter to Trench, 26 September 1860; Scott letter to Trench, 27 September 1860; all enclosed in dispatch #94, CO 137/355, fols. 252r, 253, 257.
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\textsuperscript{177} CO 137/355, Darling dispatch #94 to Newcastle, fols. 210-211r.
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No doubt swamped with colonial documents arriving in London from across the globe, Newcastle withheld judgment once he had received the trial documents. As he noted in a letter to the Commissioners in Lunacy, he was waiting for a commission in Jamaica to finish their inquiry into asylum practice. The Commission that Newcastle was referring to had been created by legislation passed by the Jamaican legislature in February 1861. This act instructed the panel to conduct “a searching enquiry” into conditions in the hospital and asylum. The bill also named the five commissioners who would comprise the panel: Alexander Fyfe, member of the legislative council, custos for Portland, and a stipendiary magistrate; Dr. Robert Hamilton, also a member of the legislative council; Alan Ker, assistant judge of the Supreme Court; Dr. Richard O’Flaherty, deputy inspector-general of army hospitals; and Dr. Charles Kinnear, O’Flaherty’s counterpart for the navy. The commission held its meetings at the Kingston courthouse as well as some sessions at the hospital and asylum, where they interviewed and examined the patients. Each commissioner was given significant power by the act: “the said commissioners shall possess and exercise all powers vested in the judges of the supreme and assize courts of this island, for the purposes of this act.” Moreover, anyone who was summoned before the panel and refused to appear ran the risk of being sent to jail where they would stay until the commission’s next meeting. After the men finished their investigation, the bill commanded that copies of their report be sent to the governor, the legislative council and house of assembly, and

179 Journals of the Legislative Council of Jamaica (November 1860-March 1861), meetings on 7 February 1861 and 21 February 1861, JA 1B/5/5/7, p. 77, 91; “An act authorizing the appointment of a commission to inquire into the condition and management of the public hospital and lunatic asylums of Kingston,” CO 139/94, fol. 164r; Blue Book for Jamaica 1858, list of Legislative Council members, CO 142/72, fol. 35r; Jones, “Most Cruel and Revolting Crimes,” 306 n.21.
180 “An act authorizing the appointment of a commission to inquire into the condition and management of the public hospital and lunatic asylums of Kingston,” CO 139/94, fol. 165r.
the chief officer of the two facilities.\textsuperscript{181} The Commission finished its investigation and submitted its report to the governor in November 1861.\textsuperscript{182} Ker, Fyfe, and Hamilton wrote the report. Their assessment of the management of both institutions was thorough and penetrating and impressed Henry Taylor, who praised their willingness to criticize the Assembly that had appointed them.\textsuperscript{183}

The commissioners were scathing in their critique. The location of the institutions was poor and prone to malarial winds; razing it, however, was probably not worth the cost since some of the buildings could still be used if new drainage systems were installed. The women’s hospital was wretched and revolting, in desperate need of new plumbing systems. Conditions were much the same in parts of the male hospital, which they noted—to return to the question of yardsticks—“judged by the European, or even an inferior, standard, the old wards of this institution will not stand criticism.” But on this issue of sewerage, the commissioners leveled their complaint at the city itself rather than the administrators of these facilities. Conditions in the hospital were “not worse than in other parts of Kingston,” they remarked, and the fault lay “with that combination of circumstances which has hitherto kept Kingston without a comprehensive system of drainage.”\textsuperscript{184}

The commissioners reserved their most savage criticisms for the asylum. The female lunatic asylum had to be abandoned immediately, they explained. The sooner the women were moved to the new site, the better.\textsuperscript{185} In 1859, Darling had remarked that the asylum was “nothing more than a place of confinement,” and the commissioners agreed. At no point during

\begin{footnotes}
\item[181] Ibid., fol. 165.
\item[182] The five volumes of evidence and testimony gathered are CO 137/359-363.
\item[183] Taylor minute, 6 March 1862, CO 137/364, fol. 233r; “Report on the Management of the Public Hospital. 20th November, 1861,” enclosed in CO 137/364, dispatch #37, fol. 246v.
\item[185] The new lunatic asylum, though still not completed, began to house the asylum’s male population in November 1860. CO 137/353, Darling dispatch #9 to Newcastle, 23 January 1861, fols. 47v-48v.
\end{footnotes}
the years their investigation covered “ha[d] anything like systematic curative treatment” been the main goal, they wrote. Instead, medical staff focused solely on curing physical ailments to the exclusion of any concern over mental condition, naturally leading to low recovery rates. The institution, they suggested, more likely worsened the condition of patients than cured them. The new asylum was much more suited to the task of curing patients. “Lunatics are to find regular and systematic employment” in the garden created at the back of the asylum. Providing opportunities for patients to work was crucial to the commissioners, who decried the cruelty of confining these men and women without giving them anything to pass the time. They then requested that other handicrafts and games be introduced to the patients. After all, “[i]n the better managed European asylums these resources are provided.”\textsuperscript{186} Their arguments recount the lunacy reformers’ attempt to depict the ideal facility.

Most troubling was the general lack of “kindness and humanity” towards patients. When patients fought, they reported, their guardians merely sat back and watched, “find[ing] a brutal pleasure in these shocking encounters.” Patients oversaw other patients. A staff member had impregnated a patient, who subsequently died along with her child. For the convenience of the “keepers,” women were forced to sit on benches in the hot sun throughout most of the day, threatened with beatings if they moved. Patients had repeatedly died under suspicious circumstances, but no coroners’ inquests had been held.\textsuperscript{187}

Amidst all that violence, tanking, which was overwhelmingly practiced on women, received “the first and most prominent place,” for it had occasionally hastened the death of women who underwent the punishment. (It was overwhelmingly practiced on women, they

\textsuperscript{186} “Report on the Management of the Public Hospital. 20th November 1861,” enclosed in CO 137/364, dispatch #37, fols. 242-243r, 245v.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., fols. 245v-246r.
Tanking “was the established punishment and means of coercion….That the dread of it might sink as deeply as possible into the insane mind, it was the frequent practice to threaten it one day, and not carry out the threat till the following.” Men were frequently brought in to drag the partially-dressed women to the tanks of unclean water and then dumped them in. The practice did not “absolutely cease till the dismissal of the matron” in summer 1860.\(^\text{188}\)

The doctors may not have known the full extent of the violence in the asylum, but “there [was] ample testimony that they had strong cause to suspect, and even positively know, that very much was amiss.” That these physicians would have turned a blind eye was “a dereliction of the gravest character,” the commissioners concluded. But their most crucial revelation was that Scott had owed money to Judith Ryan and her husband, who had previously been a superintendent of the men’s asylum until his dismissal in 1852. (Richard Rouse had noticed this problem. As he wrote in his journal, “I believe Dr. Scott owes her money. I know he did, and I believe still does.”)\(^\text{189}\) Scott “was obliged to abstain from too strictly enquiring into Mrs. Ryan’s management, and is alleged, we believe truly, to have left the control of the asylum almost entirely in her hands.” If Scott as head physician was compromised, there was nobody else paying attention to proceedings, especially since the previous commissioners had abdicated all responsibility.\(^\text{190}\)

Trench’s status as a new arrival to the asylum did not exempt him from the commission’s criticisms: they still deemed him culpable. He had become inspector in early 1859, they noted, “a year and a half before tanking ceased.”\(^\text{191}\) His job required him to become intimately

\(^{188}\) Ibid., fol. 246.  
\(^{189}\) Rouse, \textit{New Lights}, p. 20.  
\(^{190}\) “Report on the Management of the Public Hospital. 20th November 1861,” enclosed in CO 137/364, dispatch #37, fol. 246v. One former commissioner had told the panel that “he saw no reason why he should devote time and attention to the business of the institution.” Quotation also on fol. 246v.  
\(^{191}\) Ibid., fol. 246v, my emphasis.
familiar with all proceedings in both institutions, and yet he had failed to notice such stark violence. Trench’s defense—that his job did not require him to actively search for problems unless they were brought to his attention—was nothing more than an excuse. Although those committing the crimes had concealed their actions well, Trench should have worked harder, the panel contended, and he should not have so easily believed what people like Ryan told him. Nevertheless, because the asylum had benefited from his presence, the commission’s final comments about Trench were full of praise: “A more zealous, intelligent, and fearless public office is not often found at the head of any institution.” The report’s inherent contradiction between descriptions of Trench’s actions and those of his character did not escape the notice of the Colonial Office.\footnote{192}

The report also echoed the second part of the British lunacy reformers’ platform when it called for an independent inspection system. The previous system in which a commission that included part of the executive committee had overseen both institutions was unacceptable. In a comment that echoed one of Conolly’s criticisms, they insisted that such commissions were not “accordant to the European model.”\footnote{193} To solve the oversight issue, they recommended that honorary boards of visitors be formed of men who had no connection to the institutions. These men would inspect the facilities in frequent intervals and conduct any required investigations.\footnote{194}

\footnote{192} Ibid.  
\footnote{193} Conolly wrote about this issue in his 1856 \textit{Treatment of the Insane Without Medical Restraints}. In his conclusion, he turned to the question of the oversight of these institutions. He railed against the practice of oversight committees that made inexperienced laypeople superintendents of asylums rather than knowledgeable physicians. No doubt part of his disapproval of this practice lay in the fact that he had resigned from Hanwell when local authorities made a layman the superintendent of daily operations, relegating Conolly to the medical side of the asylum. But additionally, Conolly argued that this practice impaired the quality of treatment that these institutions could provide their patients. Men not expert in the medical treatment of mental illness could not anticipate the ramifications of any of their decisions, choices made largely with an eye to the budget. Conolly wrote, “Alterations which appear to them expedient, and, especially, formal arrangements copied from the usages of prisons, are often found by the physician to produce annoyance to the patients.” Conolly, \textit{Treatment}, 369-371.  
\footnote{194} Entire paragraph,”Report on the Management of the Public Hospital. 20th November 1861,” enclosed in CO 137/364, dispatch #37, fol. 243.
The commission’s findings vindicated Bowerbank completely. They found that indeed heinous acts had been repeatedly committed in the asylum and that both institutions suffered from poor construction, overcrowding, and chronic mismanagement. Even more crucially, the strength with which their findings corroborated Bowerbank’s put the governor in a bad light. Darling had backed Scott vociferously, largely on the basis of his stellar character, a claim that looked silly in the face of the physician’s financial debts to the very woman who had supervised and sanctioned the violence.

The aftermath

In the wake of this report, several of the panel’s suggestions were taken up by the Jamaican legislature and the governor. The legislature passed a law that “embrace[ed] most of the Recommendations.” Although the legislature did not approve a £16,000 grant—the amount the commission believed would improve the hospital adequately—they did pass bills for two grants of £1250 each to improve the sewers. An additional £2000 was designated for the new asylum’s completion. Darling also made Dr. Andrew Dunn temporary Consulting Surgeon, a man chosen for his seniority among Kingston physicians.

Finally, Darling had to deal with Dr. Scott, in whom he had believed for so long. Although he refused to accept all of the Commission’s conclusions, there was too much evidence against Scott. Darling charged the doctor “with culpable neglect” and, after reading Scott’s unsatisfactory response to the charge, submitted the case to Jamaica’s Privy Council. He

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195 For legislation on governance in the new asylum, see “An Act for the government of the New Lunatic Asylum,” CO 139/95, fols. 34-40r. For later legislation on governance in the public hospital, see “An Act for the Government of the Public Hospital of Kingston,” CO 139/95, fols. 236-243.

196 CO 137/364, Darling dispatch #48 to Newcastle, 28 February 1862, fols. 401v-406r. Dunn had signed the petition against Darling’s choice of Osborn’s son.
would later suspend Scott from his position, on the advice of the Privy Council, which proceeded with the charges.197 Alexander Fiddes was Darling’s choice to replace Scott. Fiddes’s brutal editorial about the governor was not mentioned.198

Darling still tried to save face, even as his actions were an admission of his errors. In particular, the governor stressed that improvements were already in progress when Bowerbank started his crusade and certainly before the Commission began its investigation. Even Judith Ryan, whose treatment of the patients Darling acknowledged was “cruel”, had been dismissed from her post before Ann Pratt’s statement was published. Similarly, Darling did not waste this opportunity to note that Bowerbank knew nothing of tanking before he spoke with Ann Pratt, a conclusion that the documents support. Darling finished this report with defiant flair. “I see no reason,” he proclaimed, “to withdraw or even modify the Opinions I have recorded, except in regard to the confidence which I have expressed in the late Board of Commissioners.”199

Henry Taylor had no tolerance for Darling’s final argument. As he noted in the margins, the most heinous of the abuses happened in 1860, well after Bowerbank published his first pamphlet. And when Darling said the only opinion he would revise was his faith in the commissioners, an incredulous Taylor wrote in the margins: “& in Dr. Scott?” It is not surprising that Darling refused to publicly reconsider his position over the previous three years;

197 For the correspondence, evidence, and proceedings related to Scott’s suspension, see CO 137/366, Eyre dispatch #17 to Newcastle, 8 May 1862, fols. 237-537.
198 CO 137/365, Darling dispatch #65 to Newcastle, 20 March 1862, fols. 165-167r; and Darling dispatch #69 to Newcastle, 24 March 1862, fols. 179-186r. Scott wrote a letter to the Secretary of State in March 1862 requesting that Newcastle review his case, arguing that he had not been able to cross-examine witnesses, rendering the Commission’s report invalid. He referenced the jury trial “where their testimony, being well sifted, was by a Jury of the Country disregarded.” See also Darling dispatch #73 to Newcastle, 24 March 1862, fols. 220v-223r. Dr. Fiddes wrote later that he “had become so disgusted at the discreditable manner in which the Hospital controversy had been conducted” that he initially refused to take the position until Bowerbank and his brother-in-law Dr. Campbell and, separately, Darling convinced him. See NLJ 362 Ja Bowerbank, The Letters of Mr. Alexander Fiddes, pp. 3-4, which is a reprinting from a 23 January 1865 letter to the editor in the Colonial Standard. Fiddes wrote this to explain why he had resigned from his position in the hospital.
199 CO 137/364, Darling dispatch #48, 28 February 1862, fols. 406-413r.
he had staked the lives of the most vulnerable residents of his territory on the trustworthiness of Scott. Not that his misjudgments mattered much in the end: Darling took a leave of absence in March 1862, which turned into a permanent relinquishing of his position. Into his place stepped Edward Eyre, who was left with the mess.

Taylor’s sarcastic marginal comments foreshadowed the Colonial Office’s lengthy response to the commission’s report and Scott’s suspension. Newcastle’s concern lay primarily in Trench’s continuing role as inspector. Although he did not insist Trench be suspended as well, he issued a stern warning to the inspector. The secretary of state picked up on the ambivalence of the panel, who criticized Trench for abdicating his responsibility all the while praising his zeal. Newcastle wondered “how it was that for a year & a half his services were utterly ineffective to detect the daily & habitual commission of the most cruel & revolting crimes.” Trench may have claimed he did not know it was his job to inspect the asylum at night, but Newcastle believed that a man with such an impressive reputation would know that only impromptu visits had any chance of revealing the truth. As he wrote, “There ought to have been no hour of the day or night nor any corner of the Hospl. or Asylum in which the Attendants cd. have assured themselves that the Inspector might not make his appearance.” If indeed he was as zealous as the commissioners suggested, then his failure to notice the violence “render[ed] him an easy dupe to the arts of concealment.”

For Newcastle, no one could claim moral victory at the conclusion of this affair. Trench may have been negligent but, in truth, he only began working at these institutions in the middle

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200 Ibid., fols. 413-414r; marginal notations on both sides of fol. 413.
201 CO 137/365, Darling dispatch #73 to Newcastle, 24 March 1862, fol. 216. In 1863, Darling took up a position in Victoria, Australia.
202 Eyre informed Trench of Newcastle’s comments in October 1862. CO 137/368, fol. 18.
203 CO 137/365, Newcastle/Taylor draft response to Eyre, 14 August 1862, fols. 247-252r.
of the controversy. Therefore, Newcastle turned to Bowerbank, whom he refused to let off the
hook. “When information was conveyed to Dr. Bowerbank,” the secretary remarked, “it was
unfortunately used by him to provoke a distrust of his motives & a disbelief of even that portion
of his charges which has been abundantly proved to be true.” Although he was loath to
downplay the significance of Bowerbank’s work, he insisted that the same resolution could have
happened “with less difficulty and delay” if Bowerbank’s approach had not alienated the very
people to whom he had appealed.204

Finally, Newcastle had some prescriptive words for Eyre. It was the governor’s duty,
Newcastle directed, to make unannounced visits to this class of institutions—hospitals, prisons,
workhouses, and the like. On such visits, he need to look through every corner of the premises,
“not merely to those portions to which the persons in charge of them may propose to conduct
him.” And more importantly, he needed to create opportunities to speak privately with the
residents in these facilities. These pronouncements had a more universal tone to them;
Newcastle was speaking to a broader audience than the governor of Jamaica. Indeed, the
revelation that such crimes had been endemic in the Jamaican asylum cast suspicions over other
similar colonial institutions, and men in the Colonial Office wondered whether Darling’s
approach was typical to colonial governors, rather than an unfortunate exception. Taylor noted
that colonial governors might have assumed that these institutions were not their responsibility,
since in England, “Hospls. are generally supported by voluntary contributions & supervised by
those who support them.” But this assumption, if it existed, was not true; overseeing these
institutions was one of the governor’s responsibilities.205

204 Ibid., fols. 254-255r.
205 CO 137/365, Newcastle/Taylor draft response to Eyre, 14 August 1862, fol. 260. CO 137/365, Taylor
minute , 26 July 1862, fol. 240. Darling’s own comments suggested he shared the outlook Taylor ascribed to
Conclusion

In the end, the standard that Bowerbank put forth won out. Colonial institutions, in theory at least, were to be judged against their metropolitan counterparts, not against each other or their past condition. These standards applied even in the very different colonial context. In the absence of the charitable organizations that oversaw incarcerating establishments in Britain, it fell to governors to oversee their management. But despite the vindication of Bowerbank and the flurry of activity in the early 1860s to amend the grievous conditions in the asylum, the changes made should not be overemphasized, a point made by Margaret Jones and Leonard Smith. The new asylum was eventually finished, and an English physician was sent out to Jamaica to oversee the asylum. However, the assembly once again refused to fund refurbishment plans appropriately, and the hospital never received its promised drainage improvements.  

There are other conclusions that can be drawn from these years as well. There were a group of men and women—Bowerbank, Scott, Fiddes, Mrs. Bramhold, Ann Pratt, Richard Rouse’s son—who all had a faith in a sense of metropolitan fairness, one that stayed strong, even after their belief in Darling disappeared, if it had ever existed at all. Their experience with a governor they loathed did not taint their view of the government and the empire he represented. To this group of Jamaicans, Darling was just one in a line of bad apples, but...
crucially they understood the breakdown in imperial administration as his failing to do his job properly, rather than as representative of an imperialism that was deaf to their needs. Despite their intimate experiences with a governor they found severely wanting, their faith in both an abstract concept of British fairness—as revealed by frequent references to the Mother Country—and in the Secretary of State and the British Parliament—as we saw with Fiddes’s editorial—never wavered. In some respects, then, they divorced the governor from the empire. He may have been the queen’s representative, but they did not view him as representative of the British Empire. What is more, there is some evidence, albeit too slight to make any broad generalizations, that this faith in fairness and justice as embodied by Britain was shared by some poorer Jamaicans, although we only hear in these pages from those who had significant contact with white men, either physicians or ministers.

As for Bowerbank, he went on to hold several important political positions. In the middle of the asylum scandal, he ran for a position in the House of Assembly, which he won. He became Kingston’s representative in 1860. Two years later, Kingston’s custos rotulorum—an official akin to mayor—died, and Darling appointed Bowerbank his replacement. Bowerbank also took a prominent role during the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion and, in the words of his obituary writer, “[h]is fitness for the post [of custos] was made evident in the prompt measures which he adopted for the safety of the city during the disturbances of 1865, and the active superintendence which he gave, although in bad health, to the carrying out of these measures.” A more recent appraisal of these “prompt measures” suggests that Bowerbank “was responsible for some of the exceptionally harsh reprisals meted out to native black Jamaicans.” The dissolution of the Jamaican legislature in the aftermath of Morant Bay meant the end of Bowerbank’s job as a legislator, but he continued as custos until 1871, when he resigned over a
conflict with the new governor, Sir John Peter Grant. In 1872, Bowerbank took on the role of whistleblower once again, this time uncovering hideous conditions in smallpox hospitals in St. Andrew, the parish of which Kingston is a part. He then left Jamaica for England, where he died in October 1880.\textsuperscript{208}

At midday December 11, 1883, Edward Foster allegedly set fire to a shed filled with shingles located on the property of his employer, Kingston merchant Alexander Feurtado. Foster, who was approximately 20 years old, had already reportedly stolen from his employer, and he had been sentenced to six months’ hard penal labor. Once he had finished his time in prison, the young man returned to Feurtado’s where he was apparently hired once again after he had apologized, strange though that seems. But by early December 1883, Foster was disgruntled yet again. A co-worker overheard him muttering that he was going to seek revenge. A week before the fire, Foster stopped working at Feurtado’s.\(^1\) Foster’s feud with his employer, and his alleged act of revenge, was the kind of news item that ordinarily would have been relegated to the *Daily Gleaner*’s “General Gleanings” section, the spot in the Kingston-based newspaper for short tidbits. At most the story might have received an extended airing in the reporting of Foster’s trial. But Foster’s decision to set fire to his employer’s property had consequences beyond what he could have predicted. The blaze quickly grew out of control, and the flames spread rapidly throughout the city. Foster’s petty grudge, it seems, turned much of Kingston—which had become Jamaica’s capital in 1872—into charred ruins.

Fire was a frequent occurrence and a constant concern in nineteenth-century Kingston. Indeed, as Bonham Richardson notes, the potential of urban fire was a shared worry throughout

the British Caribbean. Despite new legislation that stipulated that new buildings were to be built
in stone or brick, most city structures in the late 1800s were made of wood, which, in
combination with the small wooden homes of rural migrants that were cropping up throughout
the Caribbean’s cities, provided the perfect environment for fires to spread rapidly.\textsuperscript{2} Frederick
Douglass also pointed to the region’s problem with fire when he recalled in 1893 that Haiti’s
“Port au Prince...has been destroyed by fire once in each twenty-five years of its history.”\textsuperscript{3} But
fire was not just a Caribbean concern. Urban dwellers throughout the United States feared fires
that could ravage their wooden cities.\textsuperscript{4} Unlike the crisis and scandal discussed in chapters one
and two respectively, fires wreaked physical destruction. They destroyed buildings and
businesses, and they rendered families homeless. The main problem to be solved was not
costs about prevention or how to protect vulnerable populations incarcerated in public
institutions. Fire required a different set of solutions: how to restore a city physically and how to
pay for this restoration.

This chapter focuses on how Governor Anthony Musgrave, Kingston dignitaries, and
the Colonial Office dealt with the latter problem—how to raise the funds to rebuild Kingston
after 1882—by situating both the fire and responses to it within the politics of the period. The
fire came one month after the Colonial Office rammed an unpopular piece of legislation through


\textsuperscript{3} Frederick Douglass, excerpts from \textit{Lecture on Haiti, The Haitian Pavilion Dedication Ceremonies Delivered at the World’s Fair, in Jackson Park, Chicago, Jan. 2d, 1893. By the Honorable Frederick Douglass}, reprinted in Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, eds., \textit{African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents} (New York: Routledge, 2010), 205.

Jamaica’s Legislative Council, causing an uproar that fed into an existing movement that was calling for reforms to the 1866 imposition of Crown Colony government. In effect, the fire was a crisis within a crisis. As this chapter will demonstrate, this political unrest influenced discussions over financial aid from Britain as Colonial Office staff members seriously contemplated loaning money to Jamaica. Under normal circumstances, such a measure was rarely considered, as comparisons to two previous Kingston fires will show. Furthermore, by comparing the metropolitan response to these three devastating Kingston fires, all of which happened within four decades, this chapter most clearly demonstrates one of my central contentions: that Britain’s noninterventionist approach to crisis and scandal in Jamaica remained largely the same after the 1866 imposition of Crown Colony rule. What this chapter suggests is that any deviation from that approach in 1882 was not the result of new administrative policy towards Jamaica but was instead a strategic calculation made in response to a growing political crisis on the island.

I.

The fire

After the fire had destroyed the merchant’s property, the flames raced westward through a cluster of government buildings, including the Post Office, Town Hall, Treasury, and Supreme Court House. Flames leapt “from roof to roof,” helped along by the old, dry, and highly flammable shingles common to roofs in this section of the city. The sea breeze then pushed the fire to the northwest, threatening Kingston’s train station. Just before the fire reached the rail works, however, the wind changed. The nightly land breeze “unhappily set in unusually early and in great strength” and pushed the fire back in the direction from which it had come. Overnight,
the fire continued to rage along the shoreline and burned down wharves, warehouses packed
with food, supplies, export goods, and Christmas surplus, and ordnance depots. 

At least eight people died, a low number given the severity of the blaze. The devastation that the fire wrought was severe. In early January 1883, Britain’s *Manchester Guardian* claimed that the fire had rendered 7,000 people homeless, with thousands more made destitute. In terms of economic damage, the newspaper listed £3,000,000 worth of damage, only £150,000 of which was covered by insurance. Governor Musgrave likened the burnt zones to “the ruins of Pompeii; literally nothing is left but cracked and blackened walls.” The commercial district was hit hardest. Shops, offices, and warehouses were destroyed, as were over 300 homes—or 54 residential blocks. Most government buildings survived, but a government wharf, ordnance stores, telegraph office, and savings bank were destroyed as well.6

Various attempts to stop the blaze had failed. Although Musgrave’s official reports suggested that there had been a well-organized fire brigade with access to enough water,7 the *Manchester Guardian*...
Guardian and the Times of London, both of which published numerous articles about the fire in December 1882 and January 1883, told a different story. According to these British newspapers, the fire brigade had responded quickly to the fire alarms—according to the Guardian, firemen arrived fifteen minutes after the first alarm—but was overwhelmed by the size of the blaze, “the force of the sea breeze, the want of pressure in the water pipes, and their few appliances.” Outmatched and underequipped, the fire brigade could do nothing to stop the flames for hours. With the help of the British army and navy, as well as other seamen, marines, and townspeople, the firemen pulled down the houses and managed to control the fire by the next morning.\(^8\)

Jamaica’s press picked up on the discrepancies between the accounts of Musgrave and the British newspapers. “Private correspondence and newspaper reports do not speak very highly of the Fire Brigade and the Police authorities during the fire,” claimed the Daily Gleaner’s London correspondent, “and the absence of any specific reference to these two bodies in the Governor’s despatch is particularly conspicuous, and the swearing in of Special Constables by the Custos leads to the belief that the Police authorities were unable to cope with so great a disaster.”\(^9\)

Similarly, while the governor praised the conduct of Kingston residents—their “deportment,” he

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\(^{9}\) See “London Letter,” Daily Gleaner, 5 February 1883 (but letter dated 16 January 1883), 2. Complaints about the inadequacy of local fire brigades had abounded in 1843 and 1862. See “The Late Awful Visitation,” Jamaica Times, 29 August 1843 in CO 137/275, Elgin dispatch #153 to Colonial Office, fol. 20v; “Dreadful Fire & Destruction of Property,” Royal Gazette and Jamaica Standard, 29 August 1843 in CO 137/275, dispatch #153, fol. 22; Firewardens’ report, 4 September 1843, enclosed in CO 137/275, dispatch #153, fol. 25v; Elgin dispatch to Stanley, 16 March 1844, CO 137/278, fols. 313, 318v-319; “An Act to protect the City and Parish of Kingston and certain parts adjacent thereto from Fire, and to repeal certain acts relating to the said City and Parish,” 19 March 1844, CO 139/81, 452-472; Eyre dispatch #3 to Newcastle, CO 137/365, fol. 266; Fire Commissioners’ report, enclosed in Eyre dispatch #26 to Newcastle, CO 137/366, fol. 598v, 600.
declared, “was surprizingly orderly and quiet during this trying time”—other accounts reported
the “remarkable indifference” of Kingston’s black residents.\textsuperscript{10}

The fire’s disruption lasted long after the flames had died down, and countless reports
described urban mayhem. A week after the fire, a relief bulletin announced the deaths of six
children, who had eaten poisonous food that their parents had scavenged from burnt ruins.\textsuperscript{11}
Food supplies were a prime concern, especially since some shopkeepers were allegedly ratcheting
up their prices.\textsuperscript{12} Dead bodies turned up at hospitals “so charred that they were completely
unrecognisable,” while at least one patient had suffered serious burns around his eyes.\textsuperscript{13}
The list of problems continued. Over a month after the fire, pungent smells were wafting away from the
site of the fire, attracting hordes of flies. “Myriads of flies have taken possession of almost every
building in the lower part of the city,” proclaimed the \textit{Daily Gleaner}, continuing, “and so
persistent are they in their attacks on poor humanity that they have become a veritable plague.”
The flies—and the noxious fumes that had lured the insects downtown—were the result of
“decomposed matter” not yet cleared from the rubble. That the flies were an extreme annoyance
to inhabitants was a point driven home by the \textit{Gleaner’s} witty and sarcastic commentary: “No
place seems free from their unwelcome presence, and for a bald-headed man to sit quietly for

\textsuperscript{10} CO 137/507, Musgrave dispatch #391 to Kimberley, fols. 214v-215; “The Conflagration at Kingston. Details
by Eye-witnesses,” \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 5 January 1883, 6. Musgrave was so impressed that he had the acting
colonial secretary create a government notice that expressed his sympathy with the plight of Kingston residents, “as
well as his high appreciation and admiration of the good order which has been up to this time maintained by all
classes of the population, and the courage with which this calamity has been met.” See CO 137/507, Jamaica
Gazette Extraordinary, 12 December 1882, enclosed in dispatch #391, fol. 218r. Historical geographer Bonham
Richardson writes that reports of the good behavior and helpfulness of townspeople during fire were exceedingly
common in the British Caribbean during this period. See Bonham Richardson, \textit{Igniting the Caribbean’s Past: Fire in
British West Indian History} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 59.

\textsuperscript{11} “Children Poisoned,” \textit{The Relief Bulletin}, 19 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol.
269r.

\textsuperscript{12} “Food Supplies,” \textit{The Relief Bulletin}, 16 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 271r.

\textsuperscript{13} “Sufferers from the Fire in the Hospital,” \textit{Colonial Standard and Jamaica Despatch}, 19 December 1882, enclosed
in CO 137/508, dispatch #61, fol. 256v.
fifteen minutes and at the same time lay any claim to being a consistent Christian is beyond the range of possibility.”

The criminal questions surrounding the fire’s origin were answered quickly, as Edward Foster was tried in Kingston Circuit Court in mid-February 1883. The presiding Judge was Alan Ker, a key member of the commission that had investigated alleged abuses and other malpractice in the city’s Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum. Facing a seven-man jury, the defendant pled not guilty. Several people associated in some way with Feurtado or his business testified against Foster. Jacob Tulloch, a coach boy, was about to run an errand for Feurtado’s daughter Matilda when he saw smoke billowing out from “the shingles under the galvanized roof.” He sounded an alarm, but the fire grew out of control too quickly. The next morning, Tulloch spoke with the defendant: “he said what a great damage has been done; I told him, ‘yes, but you never came to give assistance;’ he said he was too busy to give any assistance.” Feurtado’s son, Alfred Alexander Feurtado, was next to testify. He had been down at a wharf when he heard the alarm. By the time he ran back to the lumber yard, he saw the flames billowing out from the shingles. Carpenter Daniel Robert McPherson had seen Foster loitering on the property around this time as well. He described the defendant “standing on the pile of lumber saying: ‘look at that old b——; he sent me to prison, but I will have my revenge.’”

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14 “Flies!”, *Daily Gleaner*, 26 January 1883, 2. A short notice in the paper a few days later claimed that the hordes of flies had shifted to the northern part of the city because the downtown shops had closed on Sunday. The arrival of the bugs “prevent[ed] the residents of that locality from enjoying their usual day of rest.” See “General Gleanings,” *Daily Gleaner*, 30 January 1883, 2.


16 See section 4 of chapter 2.

17 After Matilda’s testimony, which largely corroborated Tulloch’s account, Foster interjected, presumably in response to Matilda’s concluding remarks. She commented, “I gave further alarm and a lot of people came, but they were unable to put it out, and the house was burnt and we had to leave.” In response, the defendant remarked scornfully, “We did not make a fire to bake cakes.”
Another carpenter reported seeing Foster on the wharf twice the morning of the fire. The Feurtados’ cook also saw him that day, much closer to the time of the fire. As she returned from a trip to the market, “she saw the prisoner run out the wharf gate and go up the lane; he ran so fast that she had no time to speak to him….Shortly afterwards she heard the alarm.”

In response to the prosecution’s barrage of damning testimony, the defense called five witnesses to provide Foster’s alibi. But who his defense team was—since the Gleaner’s report had earlier explained that Foster had no lawyer—or who these witnesses were and what they said went unreported. The only testimony worth printing, it seems, was that of the victims and loyal employees. Similarly, Foster apparently spoke on his own behalf to the jury, but that too is absent from the otherwise lengthy transcriptions.¹⁸ The jury’s deliberations were brief. They found Foster guilty, and Ker sentenced him to life in prison. Given its lopsided coverage of Foster’s trial, it is no surprise that the Gleaner praised the life sentence in a lengthy editorial that reflected upon the severity of the punishment: “The civilized world is to be congratulated that it is but seldom that the Judge of a Criminal Court feels it his duty to pass this terrible sentence on a culprit.” Moreover, they solemnly claimed, “[i]t is of course a fearful thing to contemplate—that a young man only about twenty years of age should, as it were, pass out of his own life.” But, in this case, they believed that Foster deserved nothing less for wreaking such enormous destruction solely “because he had an ill-feeling against the owner of the shingles.” Foster had focused only on his plans for revenge, they insisted, and he had failed to consider the larger consequences, either for the city or for himself, when he “crawled as he thought, unseen, into

¹⁸ The author of a Daily Gleaner editorial insisted that Foster had received “a fair and impartial trial before a jury composed of as intelligent men as we have ever seen occupying the jury-box.” He also claimed that the defendant had been “allowed every latitude in his conducting of his defence” and dismissed Foster’s attempts to provide an alibi. See “A Life Sentence,” Daily Gleaner, 22 February 1883, 2.
the shingle shed, and used his ‘fire stick’ for the purpose of starting a blaze.” For these actions, they maintained, “no pity or sympathy can be extended.” Such a harsh summation was testament to how much damage the fire had inflicted on Kingston.

Relief

A disaster of this magnitude required immediate and widespread relief efforts. The day after the fire, Kingston’s custos H.J. Kemble held a meeting to coordinate relief. At that meeting, the men in attendance donated £600 to a relief fund. Musgrave allocated an additional £500 from government coffers for the use of whatever committees were formed.20 Within a week of the fire, a number of Kingston dignitaries started the Fire Relief Committee, a committee that organized the distribution of supplies and monetary aid.21 The relief committee was divided into subcommittees, each of which dealt with a different Kingston district and each run by Kingston dignitaries.22

Two days after the fire, one subcommittee met at Town Hall and found a large group of people waiting for relief. Worried that impostors might attempt to scrounge up funds they did not deserve, even though they felt sure that “few cases of direct imposition would present themselves so soon after the terrible disaster,” the committee only gave each adult 4 shillings as

20 CO 137/507, Musgrave dispatch #391 to Kimberley, fols. 215v-216r. One useful way to put these figures in context is to compare these amounts to Musgrave’s salary of £7,000. See “Two Financial Questions,” Daily Gleaner, 25 January 1883, 2.
21 With the help of the Government’s printing office, these men also published a series of daily Relief Bulletins, which provide a detailed portrait of their relief efforts. CO 137/507, Musgrave dispatch #401 to Kimberley, fol. 264. See also W.K. Azbill, “Untitled,” Relief Bulletin, 16 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 271r.
22 Applicants could only receive monetary aid from the subcommittee in charge of the area in which the applicant either lived or worked. “Other Resolutions, Relief Bulletin, 21 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 266r. A list of subcommittee members can be found in each issue of the Relief Bulletin, but see, for example, “Sub-committees,” Relief Bulletin, 16 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 271r.
a precaution. They then instructed those with large families to return a few days later for more.

On that first day, the subcommittee gave money to over 250 adults.23 The men in charge discovered that hundreds of people also needed clothes and bedding, neither of which most people had managed to save in their escape. In response to this issue, the subcommittee created a Ladies’ Committee—that included among others the wives of W.K. Azbill, secretary of the Relief Committee, and H.H. Kilburn, the chairman of Stiebel’s subcommittee, as well as Kilburn’s daughter24—that distributed clothing and employed other women to make various garments. These women also “established a coffee room, so that a little bread and coffee might be handed to the old, the sick and the mothers of young children.”25 The clothes these women made were sold by a Mr. Pawsey. Musgrave’s American wife, Jeannie Lucinda Field Musgrave, was heavily involved in this enterprise.26 Those who called upon these committees for help needed not only clothes and bedding but shelter as well. Although tents had been set up on the

23 The subcommittee reported that there had indeed only been a few cases of fraud. Concerns about fraud or people taking aid they did not need were rampant. In response to accounts of impersonation—one tale involved Peter Hussey, who was charged with and convicted of impersonating a special constable during the fire—the Relief Bulletin promised to publish a black list that named the people involved in fraud and imposition. If such a list was published, that issue was never sent to the Colonial Office. One week after the fire, the Relief Committee announced in that day’s newsletter that, although during the seven days after the fire the Committee had “charitably [given] applicants ‘the benefit of the doubts,’” the grace period was over. “Hereafter the motto will be,” they warned, “‘If any will not work, neither shall he eat.’” This pithy aphorism is a Biblical quotation, found in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Warnings of this kind continued: “People in the country and remote parts of the Island should be careful not to allow themselves to be imposed upon by persons claiming to have suffered by the fire.” Instead, residents were told to either wait for instructions from the Relief Committee or to steer those claiming to be victims to the General Secretary. The practice of limiting the amount of money any one person could receive without special approval was codified late in December 1882, with a stipulation that “no special relief should exceed the sum of two pounds except by direction of the General Committee.” See “Personating a Special Constable,” Colonial Standard and Jamaica Despatch, 19 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/508, dispatch #61, fol. 256v; “Black List,” Relief Bulletin, 16 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 271v; “Warnings,” Relief Bulletin, 18 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 270v; and “Other Resolutions,” Relief Bulletin, 21 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 266r.

24 Or perhaps his sister.

25 “Sub-Committee No. 3,” Relief Bulletin, 23 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 274. See also “The Ladies at Work” and “Ladies’ Committee,” Relief Bulletin, 20 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 267r.


157
Race Course, most displaced Kingston residents seemed to have missed this information. As a result, waves of people roamed the streets, looking for shelter “in the ruins, or piazzas.” For Kilburn, the only solution was to organize temporary shelter. “[O]ver-crowding exists in the habitable parts of the city to a frightful extent,” he lamented. “Some well-directed effort should be at once made to cope with this evil, or the calamity of raging pestilence may soon be added to our existing troubles.”\(^{27}\)

Such a large and complex undertaking inevitably ran into some minor problems, including infighting. Azbill likened the General Committee to the twelve apostles, who, he argued, had been a “‘Relief Committee’” to the thousands of Jesus’s disciples who “were dependent upon charitable relief.” There were grumblings among the apostles, some of whom felt slighted. “It is not to be wondered at, then,” he continued, “that those who are supposed to be the successors of the Apostles have like annoyances.” The commitment of those involved in the work could not be questioned; what disagreements there may have been were about “the details of the work,” not the substance. Differences were no surprise, but “let every man subordinate his personal feelings to the great desire for the general good,” he instructed.\(^{28}\) There were also complaints that the Fire Relief Fund had received more money than necessary to help sufferers. Custos H.J. Kemble and C.A. Robinson, treasurers of the Relief Committee, defended their work in a letter to the editor published in the *Daily Gleaner*. Their committee had spent the

\(^{27}\) Commodore J. Child Purvis reported: “forty or fifty tents were erected on the Race Course almost immediately after the fire, by the Government, as a shelter for those who had no houses, but up to the present time not a single tent has been occupied.” Unlike subcommittee 3, Purvis viewed this development as a good sign, writing “it is perfectly wonderful to observe the way in which the burnt out population have been absorbed.” Someone in the Colonial Office called this information “a curious fact” and suggested that “if it were known it might stop the flow of public charity.” See also Commodore J. Child Purvis to Vice Admiral Sir John Edmund Commerell, 24 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/512, Admiralty to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 January 1883, fol. 13r. See CO 137/512, minute to Edward Wingfield, fol. 9r. “Sub-Committee No. 3,” *Relief Bulletin*, 23 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 274v.

\(^{28}\) “A Hint to the Wise,” *Relief Bulletin*, 22 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 272r.
first few weeks supplying food and clothing. Next, they had begun to find work for those who had lost their jobs. That task was still ongoing in late January. Similarly, the board had spent small sums of money to buy the tools required for tradesmen to find work and “get off the relief.” The council was also considering the best way to help those who would need significant sums of money to get back on their feet.29

There were also questions about the Relief Committee’s judgments, which received full airing in the Daily Gleaner. A man writing under the name “Justice”30 recounted the Relief Committee’s unjust treatment of J.A. Naar. Naar lived in a house on Water Lane that his wife owned; her mother held a life interest. Naar and his wife were not at home during the fire, and they lost all of their possessions. After the fire, he had rented a house and bought essential household goods on credit. But the Relief Committee rejected his application for relief assistance because he was not the sole owner of the destroyed property. To “Justice,” their actions were inconsistent and inexcusable. After all, he knew of a man who had £400 of insurance, his own home, and his own buggy but had still received £20 from the committee.31 The chairman for the subcommittee for Naar’s district, S.P. Smeeton, responded to Justice’s accusations. In his application, Naar had claimed to own his home, and he had also requested help procuring a new title for the Water Lane property. But Smeeton’s own research uncovered records showing that Naar’s mother-in-law, Mrs. Charlotte Fuller, had already applied for and had received money (22 shillings). Moreover, like her son-in-law, Fuller had also requested assistance securing a new title for the same property, which she claimed was hers. This revelation, combined with the discovery

30 Although many letters to the editor were written pseudonymously, the Daily Gleaner had a policy against anonymous letters. Letters “unaccompanied by the names of the writers” were “consigned to the waste paper basket.” See “General Gleanings,” Daily Gleaner, 6 February 1883, 2.
that Naar worked at the government’s book-binders and earned £91 a year, eliminated him as a suitable candidate for relief funds. The \textit{Daily Gleaner} praised Smeeton’s forthrightness and his eagerness for transparency. They concurred with his conclusion that either Naar or his mother were at fault for creating confusion over who owned the property. “It certainly cannot be the sole and independent property of both parties,” the author huffed. “[W]hen people make statements, and especially when they put the same into writing, they should be careful to state that which is absolutely and entirely true.” At any rate, even if Naar’s mistake had not been intentional, a point conceded out of respect for his government position, his claim could “well await the settlement of others far more pressing than his.” There was not an inexhaustible amount of money available; “a game of ‘grab’ would be in order.”

In addition to the Kingston Relief Committee, other relief organizations dealt with the losses of certain smaller Kingston constituencies. A group of men representing the town’s Jewish constituency—more specifically, “the English and German Jewish congregation”—placed an advertisement in the \textit{Daily Gleaner}, asking for assistance and donations to help the Jewish families affected by the fire and to rebuild the 97-year-old synagogue and rabbis’ quarters. To raise money for Kingston’s masonic lodge, the city’s town hall held a literary and musical evening. Neighboring Caribbean islands, including Trinidad and the Grand Caymans, also contributed money.

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33 Smeeton had concluded his rebuttal by saying, “the public has a right to have the fallest [sic] explanation regarding the appropriation of the Relief Fund, and as far as enquiry relates to district No. 1, I am quite ready to respond to it if I am furnished with proper particulars and not the mere tattle of disappointed applicants.” See ibid.
In London, men who had a particular interest in Jamaica also donated to relief funds. At a meeting held in the West India Committee Rooms, 83-year-old J.W. Cater “spoke with remarkable clearness and vigor, and occasionally when speaking of the sufferings of the poor people in Jamaica, in a voice full of emotion.” He attended the gathering simply to show support for a country in which he had not lived for forty years; his age prevented him from “any personal canvassing for subscription.” Sir Henry Barkly, governor of Jamaica from 1853-56, commented that “it was but right that some assistance should be given to one of the oldest of British colonies.” As another attendee reminded those gathered, “[t]here was a large number of poor white and coloured people from living hand to mouth, who had been burnt out of house and home; also a large number of people must have been thrown out of employment by the destruction of the wharves and mercantile establishments.” A group of men, including Barkly, formed a committee that collected contributions and asked the Lord Mayor of London to create a relief fund.

Rebuilding

If providing vital relief to the victims was the first priority of Kingston authorities, then deciding how to rebuild was the second. Calls for government-run rebuilding schemes came soon after the embers died down, and they were led by Enos Nuttall, the Yorkshire-born Bishop of Jamaica. Nuttall had been working in Jamaica since 1862, when he began his religious career as a Methodist cleric in Kingston. By 1866, he had moved to the Church of England, where he

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would remain for the rest of his life. Nuttall was outspoken on matters of politics, and he soon became a fixture of Jamaica’s political and religious life. Just two years before the fire, Nuttall became Bishop of Jamaica at the young age of 38.\textsuperscript{40}

At a late December meeting of the Fire Relief Committee, Nuttall delivered a lengthy paper in which he declared rebuilding to be the most important issue that would determine Kingston’s long-term prospects. “[T]here is one primary necessity,” he declared, the immediate restoration of the parts of the city that merchants would not rebuild. “[I]f this be not met, other efforts to improve the condition of a large number of sufferers will be hopelessly inadequate [sic].” Such a task required the attention of the community and the government, he argued, since merchants and businessmen would be too busy restoring their businesses to contribute to larger building projects.\textsuperscript{41} Timing was critical, Nuttall warned: “If the work needs the sympathy and support of the Imperial Government we shall get it better now than when the freshness of our disaster has died away.” Similarly, he argued that it would be easier to garner “the support and co-operation of many classes and interests” in Jamaica then than it would be later. Delaying had economic consequences for the city as well. The longer the business district stood in ruin, the more losses in rental income and business revenue would be compounded. Even more unsettling was the possibility of “the permanent addition of some thousands to the already large number of our dependent population.” While “self-help [was] always best,” Nuttall believed that many would give up when faced with insurmountable problems. “The danger in many cases now,” he wrote, “is the fatal inertia which results from hopelessness.” Therefore, it was the job


\textsuperscript{41} “The Reconstruction of the City. A Paper Read at a Meeting of the Fire Relief Committee by the Bishop of Jamaica,” enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 280r.
of public officials and local dignitaries to create a more hopeful climate for residents to start their lives anew, and nothing would work better than a grand rebuilding scheme.\textsuperscript{42}

Furthermore, the fire presented Kingston with a wonderful opportunity to improve itself, a fact that Nuttall explicitly pointed out. As the bishop declared: “it is greatly to be desired that we may soon see, rising from the ashes of the destroyed sections of the city, the beginning of a new city, better constructed, both as regards health and safety, than we have hitherto been content with.” This opportunity was one to be grabbed wholeheartedly, he insisted, because in the absence of a central rebuilding scheme, whatever construction took place would be haphazard and would only replicate the old substandard structures. The quality of any new buildings would be determined by whatever resources an owner had on hand. Surely, Nuttall asserted, “we should all…like to see the beginning of a better style of houses for the middle and lower classes of the city population.”\textsuperscript{43}

The bishop’s ideas proved popular to prominent members of the Relief Committee. Reverend David East praised Nuttall’s paper and encouraged a comprehensive scheme. As a pastor, he viewed the economic goals of rebuilding as compatible with his moral concerns. As the \textit{Relief Bulletin} reported, East “thought the morals as well as the health of the city would be improved by carrying out the suggestiens [sic] of His Lordship the Bishop.” Lawyer Samuel Burke concurred.\textsuperscript{44} In his estimation, if Kingston residents were left without help, “they [would] live for a half century if not longer in the midst of ruins.” Other speakers highlighted the benefits to business that Nuttall had articulated.\textsuperscript{45} At the same meeting, Kemble appointed a

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., fol. 280r.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., fol. 280v. Nuttall also suggested that a sea-wall be constructed “with wharves of a uniform design along the entire sea frontage.” It was here that Nuttall spoke of the fire presenting a valuable opportunity: “The very destruction we have witnessed has removed some of the greatest difficulties in the way of the project” (fol. 280Ar).
\textsuperscript{44} For more on Burke, see Patrick Bryan, \textit{The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control} (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991), 71.
delegation to champion the bishop’s argument to Governor Musgrave. This group included the
custos himself, Nuttall, East, black millionaire George Stiebel, and G.J. DeCordova, editor of the
daily Gleaner. The governor supported the delegation’s proposals.

But rebuilding required more money than charities, businesses, building societies, or the
Jamaican government could provide, and the proponents of a comprehensive rebuilding project
worked under one assumption: the money needed would come from the British government.
Nuttall briefly mentioned the desirability of “an Imperial guarantee” that would allow the
necessary loans to be raised at a lower rate, while Burke remarked that “[t]he credit of the
Colony is good, and the aid of the Home Government might be sought.” And when Musgrave
revealed his support of the delegation’s resolutions, he announced that “[h]e had telegraphed the
Secretary for the Colonies, for substantially the aid the Deputation had asked, and he had hopes
that what he had asked for would be granted.”

But as the two previous chapters have indicated, the Colonial Office generally refrained from fixing Jamaica’s problems. In the aftermath of the cholera epidemic, the Colonial Office did little more than transmit advice from British “experts.”

What financial assistance the secretary of state at the time had provided in 1851 (a £3000
advance) paled in comparison to the massive sums needed to rebuild Jamaica’s capital in 1882.

In the asylum abuse case, the Colonial Office did intervene, but only after the practice of

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45 “Friday’s Special Meeting,” Relief Bulletin, 23 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 273.
46 Ibid., fol. 273v. On Stiebel: Patrick Bryan states that Stiebel earned his fortune abroad. See Patrick Bryan, The
is the famous Devon House near Halfway Tree in Kingston.
47 “The Deputation and the Governor’s Reply,” Relief Bulletin, 23 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fols. 273v-274r.
48 “The Reconstruction of the City. A Paper Read at a Meeting of the Fire Relief Committee by the Bishop of
Jamaica,” enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #402, fol. 280v; and “Friday’s Special Meeting,” Relief Bulletin, 23
December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 273r.
49 “The Deputation and the Governor’s Reply,” Relief Bulletin, 23 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/507, dispatch #401, fol. 274r.
“tanking” was confirmed by Ann Pratt’s pamphlet, almost four years after Bowerbank had first published his findings.\(^{50}\) But most relevant to this disaster, Kingston’s previous experiences with fire in the nineteenth century had already demonstrated that Britain had little intention of financing Jamaica’s rebuilding ventures.

II.

The precedents—1843

On a late August Saturday in 1843, Messrs James and Co Foundry, a business along southeast Kingston’s harbor coastline, caught fire.\(^{51}\) Less than thirty minutes after the first signs of smoke, the surrounding businesses, including a sawmill and lumber yard, were on fire. The sea breeze, unusually vigorous that day, whipped the flames into a frenzy and blew burning ash and shingles into the wooden roofs of farther-off structures. Buoyed by the strong wind, the flames raced along several Kingston streets, destroying houses and commercial premises. Some buildings, like the new Methodist Chapel, survived. The Surry Gaol caught fire several times but did not burn down. For much of the day, the sea breeze pushed the fire northwest to the more residential areas of the city. When the nighttime land breeze set in, it pushed the fire back towards its origin. This saved the rest of Kingston but compounded the catastrophe downtown.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{50}\) See chapters one and two.

\(^{51}\) Investigations conducted days after the fire by two justices of the peace and firewardens concluded that no one had intentionally set the foundry on fire, nor was the fire the result of “carelessness or neglect” on the part of the owners. Nevertheless, Kingston’s mayor, Hector Mitchel, was convinced that the fire was the result of arsonists. From the official report, Mitchel inferred that, since the investigators had no proof that the fire was an accident but were also claiming that the foundry owners were not to blame, arson was the only possible cause. Governor Elgin sided with the conclusions of the report. CO 137/275: collection of depositions enclosed in dispatch #164, fols. 124-147v; Elgin dispatch #153 to Lord Stanley, 6 September 1843, fols. 16v-17r; Firewardens’ report, 4 September 1843, enclosed in dispatch #153, fol. 25-6; Hector Mitchel, mayor of Kingston, to Captain Robert Bruce, 5 September 1843, enclosed in dispatch #153, fol. 27r; Elgin dispatch #164 to Stanley, 23 October 1843, fol. 120v.

\(^{52}\) “The Late Awful Visitation,” Jamaica Times, 29 August 1843, enclosed in CO 137/275, Elgin dispatch #153 to Stanley, fol. 20.
Kingston residents tried to extinguish the blaze, using a variety of techniques. Wetting roofs was an established method of checking the spread of urban fires, according to journalists writing for the *Jamaica Times*. Indeed, they argued, it was the difficulty of keeping roofs wet throughout the city that caused much of the destruction. In other instances, a light cannon blasted down houses directly in the fire’s path. The use of battle weaponry was not without cost, however, as several people were injured and one man killed “when a piece of shell cut open his throat and windpipe.” Twelve hours after the fire first appeared, it was finally brought under control, a result of the land breeze dying down around midnight and the extra firefighting help provided by the military and navy.\(^53\) Governor James Bruce, Earl of Elgin, announced that “a considerable portion” of Kingston had been destroyed, while estimates from the *Jamaica Times* claimed that at least ten percent of the city had burned to the ground. The official loss total, reported by Elgin in October 1843, was 257 houses destroyed, 89 pulled down, and six blown up. Damages totaled over £93,000.\(^54\)

The request for financial relief came not from Jamaica’s administration but from William Alers Hankey, senior partner in the City bank Hankey & Co.; absentee proprietor of an estate in Trelawny, Jamaica and former slaveowner who had received almost £6,000 in compensation after Parliament abolished slavery; longtime treasurer of the London Missionary Society; and representative of the West India Committee, the organized, lobbying wing of the West Indian planter interests.\(^55\)

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) CO 137/275: Elgin dispatch #153 to Stanley, 6 September 1843, fol. 14r; “The Late Awful Visitation. [From Our Bulletin of Yesterday.] Dreadful Conflagration, and loss of Property.,” *Jamaica Times*, 29 August 1843, enclosed in Elgin dispatch #153 to Stanley, fol. 20r; “Summary of Loss of Tenements by the Late Fire,” enclosed in Elgin dispatch #164 to Stanley, fol. 123r.

\(^{55}\) For more on Hankey, see Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22, 54-58, 62, 68, 161, 244. In public testimony in 1832 to the House of Commons Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery, Hankey claimed that
relief committee had drawn up to create a relief fund for Kingston, he cautiously petitioned the government for money: “I…beg leave to accompany [the resolutions] with [the committee’s] earnest solicitation, that Your Lordship will be pleased to bring the calamitous case of the Sufferers there…under the benevolent consideration of Her Most Gracious Majesty.” The civil servants in the Colonial Office denounced Hankey’s request for money, and, in their internal minutes, they discussed plans to encourage him to withdraw his appeal. One officer suggested that the office “arrange privately with the writer for the withdrawing of this letter.” Their objections were in response to news that had spread three years previously “that the Privy Purse was so burdened with the demands on it as to render it necessary to avoid exposing Her Majesty to any further applications of this kind.” Colonial Secretary Lord Edward Stanley agreed, and the two men decided it would be best to approach Hankey personally to persuade him to withdraw his request. Hankey misunderstood the Colonial Office’s concerns, thinking that instead the problem was his failure to follow the appropriate procedures for petitioning the Queen. He recognized that “such Application [was] irregular” but believed that his error was in writing to the Colonial Office directly. To correct his perceived mistake, he formally withdrew his original letter and simultaneously announced that he would forward his resolutions to a third party. The Colonial Office staff viewed this as an even worse course of action and immediately suspected that the man they used to send their message to Hankey had misunderstood their intent. Stanley

he had never had any contact with the West India faction. Something must have changed because by 1843, he was writing letters to the Colonial Office from the West India Committee Rooms on behalf of a committee set up to help the victims of the Kingston fire. For more on the West India Committee, see Lillian M. Penson, The Colonial Agents of the British West Indies: A Study in Colonial Administration, Mainly in the Eighteenth Century (1924; repr., London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1971), chapter 2; Draper, Price of Emancipation, 15-16, 97; and Andrew J. O’Shaughnessy, “The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West India Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution,” Historical Journal 40, no. 1 (1997): 71-95.

56 In all likelihood, James Stephen.
wrote to this messenger again, indicating that Hankey should send no application of this kind to
anyone. 57

The correspondence between Colonial Office officials and Hankey, alongside the
internal memoranda, document the government’s reluctance to use the already-strained treasury
to fund Jamaica’s recovery from a crisis. This was not a case where the damages and costs were
negligible. 58 Nor did Hankey represent some insignificant organization. The West India
Committee still had political clout five years after full freedom. The refusal to allow Hankey to
send his petition—a more significant action than waiting for the inevitable rejection—reflected a
deliberate decision not to allow Jamaica’s problems to tax Britain’s financial resources.

The precedents—1862

In late March 1862, a bakery chimney caught fire in the middle of the night, burning much of
Kingston and causing £87,000 in damage. When the fire was first discovered, it was confined to
a few sheds that adjoined the chimney, and witnesses believed that the fire could have been
subdued. But a government report claimed that the baker’s employees “[had] made no exertions
whatever to extinguish the fire.” 59 Complaints about townspeople or employees unwilling to help
were common to most descriptions of the 1843 fire as well. Commentators denounced
Kingston’s poor—and mostly black—residents for their alleged failure to demonstrate the

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57 CO 137/277: Hankey letter to Stanley, 16 October 1843, fol. 175; Stephen and Stanley minutes, 21 and 24
October 1843, fol. 178v; Hankey letter to George William Hope, 13 November 1843, fol. 183; Colonial Office
minutes, 14 and 17 November 1843, fol. 184v.

58 The £93,925 1/4 of damages in today’s money is roughly £4 million. See www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/
currency.

59 CO 137/365, Eyre dispatch #3 to Duke of Newcastle, 7 April 1862, fol. 265-266r; CO 137/366, Eyre
dispatch #26 to Newcastle, 21 May 1862, fol. 594r; Government Fire Commission report enclosed in CO 137/366,
Eyre dispatch #26 to Newcastle, fol. 596.
appropriate amount of concern and activity during the fire. But nothing the bakery employees could have done would have radically changed the outcome of the fire.

According to the commission that investigated the fire, the fire raged out of control because Kingston’s municipal government had failed to ensure that there was enough water at the disposal of the fire brigade in the event of fire. As a result, when the bakery caught fire, there was a critical shortage of water. The Corporation of Kingston had a longstanding contract with the Kingston and Liguanea Water Works Company in which the latter business kept the major city pipe and fire hydrants fully supplied with water. However, this contract had expired in 1861 and had not been renewed, even though the city was still paying the water works company. The commission viewed this oversight by Kingston’s Common Council as gross neglect. “No more apt illustration could well be furnished of the utter disregard for the public interest, which is shewn by the Common Council of Kingston,” they argued, “than is to be found in the fact of an important agreement of this kind having been suffered to lapse.” That the water works was still supplying water was no comfort, since “a matter of such vital importance to the interest of the City should not have been left for a moment open to doubt, or legal casuistry.” Worse, the commission discovered that the problem was more than a mere legal ambiguity: the water works company could not supply enough water to the city. A former company engineer testified that

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60 Governor Elgin received numerous “serious complaints about the indifference and apathy evinced by the mass of the Town population.” The Colonial Office noted this comment and in response, the secretary of state wrote, “I sincerely regret that it has not been in your Lordship’s power to enable me to lay before the Queen an equally favourable Report of the conduct observed, and of the spirit manifested, by the mass of the Town Population during the progress of the Fire.” CO 137/275, Elgin dispatch #153 to Stanley, 6 September 1843, fols. 15v-16r; Stanley draft response, 12 October 1843, fol. 19r.

61 A panel that had among its ranks Lewis Quier Bowerbank, now an assemblyman for Kingston; two engineers; Edward Jordon, the highly influential mixed-race politician who was not Kingston’s mayor; and Alexander Fyfe, prison inspector and member of the asylum commission.

62 Government Fire Commission report, enclosed in CO 137/366, Eyre dispatch #26 to Newcastle, fols. 596v-597r. For the makeup of the commission, see CO 137/365, Eyre dispatch #3 to Duke of Newcastle, 7 April 1862, fols. 271-272r.
“an abundant supply of water cannot be furnished to the whole City at one time,” forcing the company to shut off the water from various districts at different times of day, a fact of which the council appeared unaware. For a full year, Kingston and Liguanea had cut the water supply to downtown Kingston at night, leaving key business districts even more vulnerable to fire. This practice had stopped only three weeks prior to the fire. Instead of shutting it off at night, two company turncocks turned off the downtown water supply in the middle of the day. After a thorough investigation, the commission believed that the water was on at the time of the fire, but the fact that there still was not enough water “only prove[d] the total inability of the Company to furnish an abundant supply of water in case of the outbreak of a fire.”

Furthermore, Kingston’s Common Council was too casual about a matter so crucial to the city’s welfare. The city’s safety depended on the two men who turned the water on and off, and yet the police did not know where they lived or how to reach them in an emergency. What this commission uncovered was evidence of dysfunctional local government, found just months after another commission had definitively exposed the abusive treatment of asylum patients and general mismanagement that Bowerbank had spent five years broadcasting.

But in contrast to the Colonial Office’s handling of the asylum case, the civil servants in London had virtually no interest in the fire. The internal minutes are short and consist of little more than sympathy. Moreover, the idea that Britain might provide a grant or loan to help the city return to

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63 The commission spoke more forcefully further in the report: “In short, the Common Council has so completely abdicated its functions as conservators of the property of the inhabitants of the City against fire, that the Commissioners are impressed with the belief that it would be no longer prudent to entrust to their management any measures for the future preservation of the City from accident by fire.” See Government Fire Commission report, enclosed in CO 137/366, Eyre dispatch #26 to Newcastle, fol. 598v.

64 Government Fire Commission report, enclosed in CO 137/366, Eyre dispatch #26 to Newcastle, fols. 597-598r.

65 Two members of this commission had played key roles in the asylum case, including Fyfe, who had been on the commission, and Bowerbank, who had alerted authorities to the abuse and neglect in the asylum and hospital.
its former condition never appears in the Colonial Office files. So why the difference in approach between the asylum case and the Kingston fire, and, more importantly, how might that difference matter for the 1883 attempts to secure loan money?

It seems clear that Hankey’s petition was denied in 1843 because the Colonial Office was reluctant to allow a colony to make significant demands on the British economy. In 1862, that was probably still a consideration and may explain why Governor Eyre’s dispatches did not include any requests for money. But there was something else as well: a difference in potential political impact on the metropole of rampant abuse raining down on Britain’s most vulnerable subjects and a fire where the damage was caused in large part by the failure of city government. Political calculations had long been an essential part of imperial decision-making. As Matthew Mulcahy notes in an article on the 1740 Charleston fire, the £20,000 relief grant that Parliament gave to Charleston was unprecedented and was the “first and only time the English government provided significant disaster relief to any of its American colonies prior to the [American] Revolution.” In light of that fact and the discovery that other lucrative British colonies like Barbados had received no such funds in similar times of distress, Mulcahy argues that the relief money was not a humanitarian response to a colony in distress, but a political move designed to shore up South Carolina’s economy and the economic position of Charleston’s elites. In particular, he points to the series of crises that had plagued South Carolina during the 1730s, when “the security of the colony and of the elites’ position atop the social hierarchy appeared in

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66 The Colonial Office’s handling of the cholera epidemic is also instructive. In this case, the British government did provide financial support. In January 1851 Earl Grey announced the authorization of a £3000 advance, money to support the “many families, who have lost from this fearful disease those by whose industry they are maintained.” The warning that accompanied this money is what’s instructive here. Grey wrote, “I need scarcely point out the necessity of observing the strictest caution, and a rigid economy, since you are well aware how great a tendency there is in all countries to abuse, when grants for charitable purposes are made from the public purse.” See Earl Grey dispatch #393 to Governor Sir C. Grey, 1 January 1851, enclosed in Parliamentary Papers on cholera, CO 137/308, fol. 334v.
jeopardy.” He further writes, “Parliament’s unprecedented disaster relief was granted as much to stabilize—militarily, politically, and economically—a floundering city and colony as it was to aid victims of a fire.” In other words, this grant was not a response to the disaster per se, but an attempt to stem any political disruptions the fire might cause.

Mulcahy’s argument suggests the importance of politics to explaining imperial responses to crisis. When viewed through the lens of political motivations, the disparity between the Colonial Office’s eventual intervention in the asylum case and its overlooking the 1862 fire makes more sense. The appalling conditions in the Public Hospital and Lunatic Asylum were embarrassing to Britain’s sense of benevolent trusteeship, and the subsequent empire-wide investigation into asylum practices revealed a widespread failure on the part of colonial governors to oversee these institutions sufficiently. But in the case of the fire, the core problem was local leadership’s negligence, something which could not easily be turned into an indictment of British imperialism. If what was required for the Colonial Office even to consider using Britain’s limited financial resources to help Jamaica was high political stakes for the metropole—and not solely the colony—then any chance that Musgrave’s appeal to Britain would be successful depended upon the Colonial Office’s perceiving that Britain had more to lose by not coming to the financial rescue. Whereas such circumstances had not existed in 1843 and 1862,

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68 Mulcahy makes a similar argument in his 2006 *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783*. In Chapter 7, “The Politics of Public Relief,” he notes that the Parliamentary relief grant of £120,000 for Jamaica and Barbados after two hurricanes in October 1780 was an “extraordinary” measure. He further demonstrates that Parliament only approved this grant in light of concerns that Jamaica and Barbados might join the Americans in revolting against British rule. Mulcahy writes, “Parliament thus used disaster relief to reaffirm the connection between Britain and the West Indian colonies and to deflect criticism that British officials were inattentive to the needs of colonists.” See Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 165-188. Quotation can be found on page 173.

they did in 1882, as political upheaval in 1880s Jamaica over the existing form of British imperial rule reached a peak. The resulting agitation and pressure for a change in Jamaica’s constitution provides the critical background for understanding how the discussions over a potential relief loan played out.

III.

The spark

Kingston’s destruction by fire came at the most heated point in a years-long political battle between Jamaican elites and the Colonial Office over the Jamaican constitution. Drawn up after the events at Morant Bay prompted the Jamaica Assembly to abdicate control to the Crown, the 1866 constitution created a Legislative Council made up of the governor, six government officials, and an additional group of up to six men, who were not affiliated with the government. Men in this latter category were called “unofficials.” The governor nominated all members of the Legislative Council, leaving the Jamaican people with no electoral say in their government. Moreover, the Legislative Council was designed so that the governor—and, by extension, the Colonial Office—faced little opposition. Even if a governor appointed the maximum number of unofficials, they would still be outnumbered by the seven government representatives.70

Some white elites, especially planters and merchants, resented the loss in political power that Crown Colony government represented. Starting in the mid-1870s, some of these men began to advocate quietly for constitutional change. Those who supported changes in Jamaica’s

constitution fell into two camps. A small but not insignificant group held a radical position, which was most forcefully articulated by George Levy, the Jewish merchant who owned the daily newspaper *The Colonial Standard and Jamaica Despatch*. This contingent argued for a modest form of representative government in which legislators were elected by the small percentage of the population deemed eligible to vote. Those who advocated the more common position—who fell largely under the aegis of the newly-formed Jamaica Association—were still wary of elections. They instead looked to Trinidad’s modified form of crown colony rule as a model: here, the unofficial nominated members of the Legislative Council outnumbered the government officials.\(^71\) The West India Committee in London also supported this more moderate agenda. Despite the fact that Trinidad had a legislative council with an unofficial majority, the Colonial Office refused to consider this option for Jamaica. Their only concession would be the 1878 expansion of the legislative council: now this governing body was made up of the governor, nine officials including the colonial secretary and the attorney-general, and nine unofficial members.\(^72\)

When Musgrave became governor in August 1877, political turmoil was minimal. But even before he landed on the island, an event occurred that would inflame the calls for political reform. In July 1877, a crippled Venezuelan schooner bound for St. Thomas, the *Florence*, sailed in Kingston Harbor with a load of weapons and ammunition. Musgrave confiscated the ammunition, refused to allow the ship to leave the island with its cargo, and demanded that the captain pay a £1,000 deposit with the guarantee that the governor would arrange for the

\(^71\) It is important to keep in mind that calls for constitutional change were still a minority view. As Will notes, “[T]he overall impression of the period between 1875 and 1882 is one of conservatism and apathy towards constitutional reform. Many Jamaicans continued to favour crown colony rule.” See H.A. Will, *Constitutional Change*, 18; Sires, “Jamaica Constitution,” 72-3.

weaponry to reach the original destination. The owner of the ammunition sued, and in July 1881, he was awarded damages of £6,700, which Musgrave was obligated to pay.\(^{73}\)

The damages prompted a major question—who was responsible for paying Musgrave’s debt, the imperial government or Jamaica’s legislative council—whose answer had larger implications for the very meaning of crown colony rule. The Colonial Office staff was divided on this issue. Sir Robert Herbert, permanent under-secretary, and Edward Wingfield, the under-secretary tasked to West Indian affairs, both believed that the Florence matter was an imperial concern and, as such, should be paid for out of imperial funds. But instead John Wodehouse, the earl of Kimberley and secretary of state for the colonies, went with his parliamentary under-secretary’s suggestion and told Musgrave to convince the Legislative Council to sanction colonial payment of the damages. The question of who should pay the Florence damages, Jamaica or Britain, became the catalyst for a more vigorous campaign against crown colony rule.\(^{74}\)

For Jamaicans, Kimberley’s insistence that the colony was financially responsible for Musgrave’s actions illustrated the problems of the 1865 constitution. The Florence was an imperial concern, they claimed, and the secretary of state’s insistence that the colony bear the financial burden rankled. Moreover, because Jamaicans had no say in electing their government, they argued that they should not be financially responsible for its mistakes. The news that Musgrave had authorized an advance from the colonial treasury, even as he continued to ask the British government to pay, only exacerbated the situation.\(^{75}\) But Kimberley held to his original position and ordered the appointed officials on the Legislative Council to support his measure. In response, two of them resigned, the Jamaican-born crown solicitor and the auditor-general, \(^{73}\) Will, *Constitutional Change*, 15-16; Sires, “Jamaica Constitution,” 73-4. \(^{74}\) Will, *Constitutional Change*, 16. \(^{75}\) Will, *Constitutional Change*, 16.
and no other official would agree to vote as the secretary demanded. In January 1882, the Legislative Council, now weighted towards the unofficials, passed a resolution rejecting Kimberley’s instructions, and Musgrave withdrew the planned vote. Under-secretary Herbert had wanted the British Treasury to pay the damages all along, and he continued to push this approach, even as his colleagues Wingfield and Courtney viewed the impasse as “a crucial test of the possibility of maintaining the Crown Colony form of Govt. in the W.I.” Eventually, however, the Colonial Office put forth a compromise. The treasury would pay a portion of the damages, and the legislative council would sanction the payment of the remainder. To ensure a successful council vote, Kimberley instructed Musgrave to pack the two official vacancies with men who promised to support the British government’s position on this and all other issues. The governor once again questioned this plan, but the secretary remained steadfast. In November 1882, just one month before the Kingston fire, this new legislative council voted to cover half of the Florence damages. The next day, six unofficials resigned.

The Colonial Office’s efforts to muscle through unpopular legislation by manipulating the legislative council gave the previously modest constitutional reform movement more purchase among the broader population. Before Musgrave’s November attempt to push the Legislative Council to support Jamaica’s covering half of the bill—a move he had always opposed—the press paid more attention to the question of imperial versus colonial funds than to the larger issue of the constitution, while the mixed-race community worried that constitutional change might lead to a government dominated either by white elites or the black majority. But the events of November 1882 changed the landscape. Kimberley had insisted that

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76 Will, Constitutional Change, 16-17.
77 Quotation drawn from Courtney minute, 16 January 1882, cited in Will, Constitutional Change, 17.
78 Will, Constitutional Change, 17.
Musgrave seek out men who would vote the proper way. For many Jamaicans, this action highlighted “the bankruptcy of crown colony government.” Not only did the vote fire up those already thinking about reform, it also transformed the movement from an elite but small group of predominantly white planters and merchants into a more widespread campaign that demanded representative government. Moreover, the entire controversy prompted a sparsely attended but nonetheless heated debate in the House of Commons in which a few members of Parliament—including two former and one present high-ranking Colonial Office secretaries; two MPs with longstanding interests in Jamaican affairs; and prime minister William Gladstone—fought over their differing opinions about the financial responsibilities of crown colonies to the Mother Country.

In sum, by December 1882, the Colonial Office’s reaction to the Florence controversy generated a widespread movement for constitutional reform that drew from a broad and vocal spectrum of Jamaican elites and garnered the attention of at least a few members of the House of Commons in Westminster. The fire came in the midst of this political battle and was immediately linked to it. The urgent political questions raised by those demanding a more representative form of government for Jamaica produced a situation in which Jamaican elites could try to garner financial aid from Britain that the colony ordinarily would not receive.

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79 Previous supporters of Crown Colony rule, including the son of prominent Baptist missionary James Mursell Phillippo, changed their minds after this vote. Prominent men of color also joined, including the editor of The Budget. See Will, Constitutional Change, 18-21.
IV.

Political arson?

Commentators writing about the fire immediately linked it to the political ferment brewing in the weeks after the contentious November Florence vote. When a writer for the St. Vincent Witness expressed sympathy with Jamaica after the fire, he foregrounded the recent protests:

That Island has been passing through the throes of a peaceful protest against enormous and crushing taxation; and has made a determined stand against the oppressive financial imports and immoral financial tactics of Lord Kimberley, who has saddled the Colony by official votes with the payment of half the damages in the Florence case.

The dramatic prose continued: “The figurative blaze of enthusiasm arising from the Members of the patriotic fires has taken a literal interpretation and the overtaxed Island…now suffers from the literal ravages of fire.” The author concluded by hoping that the “Phoenix of Liberty” would rise from the ruins of the city.81

But many observers went beyond situating the fire within this political context and instead suggested that the fire was part of the reform movement’s tactical repertoire. George Levy, who had long supported a return to an elected council, quickly condemned these rumors of “political incendiarism” and insisted that they were driven by “a wish to discredit the movement that is being made for political reform.”82 The Daily Gleaner reported similar stories, including one in which

A good, kind, motherly sort of lady…has expressed the very strong opinion that the recent fire in Kingston was the result of the political agitation which has been going on

81 “Crown Government,” Daily Gleaner, 3 February 1883, 2. It is not clear whether the transcription in the Daily Gleaner is a direct quotation from the St. Vincent Witness or a paraphrase. I suspect it is a direct quotation but with missing quotation marks.
82 “Untitled,” Colonial Standard and Jamaica Despatch, 19 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/508, dispatch #61, fol. 256r. Levy got into a public press war with the Jamaican government around the time of the fire over his treatment when his newspaper’s premises were destroyed in the fire. The bad blood continued as Levy remained an outspoken critic of the government.
for some time past, that because public meetings were held and speeches made by representative men, not only in this city but throughout the Island, the disaster which has left its ruins on every side of us has been occasioned.

This paper dismissed them as quickly as Levy had: “The political agitation that has for a long time been rife has had about as much to do with the existence of this fire as one of our local carpenters had to do with the building of Noah’s Ark.” A Barbadian newspaper confirmed the pronouncements of both periodicals.

Few men of any importance believed that the fire had been set by an irate reformer, with the exception of the gullible Commodore J. Child Purvis. In his description of the fire for his superior Vice Admiral Sir John Edmund Commerell, he insisted that the fire was the result of political arsonists “and was probably intended as an expression of popular disapproval of the Government.” Internal Colonial Office minutes suggest that Purvis’s account was the only one they received that gave credence to the “political incendiariism” rumors. By mid-January, the Colonial Office was already abreast of the reports that Feurtado’s disgruntled former employee had set the fire. Nevertheless, the very existence of these rumors—and the fact that they made their way to London via Purvis—suggests the degree to which the catastrophe of the fire was understood as somehow related to the political agitation.

But it was not just that political analysts associated the fire with the constitutional reformers. The fire itself exacerbated the tension. In late January, Gall’s News Letter published a fiery piece that criticized Lord Kimberley’s recent dispatches and incited the colony to action,

84 “The Jamaica Fire,” Daily Gleaner, 7 February 1882, 2. The newspaper’s description read: “An attempt has been made to attribute the disaster to the political excitement which existed in consequence of the vote in relation to the Florence damages but it has been rejected with indignation.”
85 See Commodore J. Child Purvis to Vice Admiral Sir John Edmund Commerell, 24 December 1882, enclosed in CO 137/512, Admiralty to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 January 1883, fol. 15r.
86 Wingfield minute, 19 January 1883, CO 137/512, fol. 9.
deploying a range of Biblical allusions and national patriotic songs. “The Colony must now assert its Rights and take still more decisive measures in resisting the slavery to which Englishmen are being subjected under a perfect mockery of Legislation,” the author wrote. Following this strident pronouncement was the evocative central line from “Rule Britannia”: “Britons never shall be Slaves.” As he further explained, “Jamaicans must be free from the yoke of the oppressor in Downing Street.” This was a shrewd rhetorical ploy. In choosing this line from the 1740 patriotic song, the writer both asserted Jamaicans’ status as “Englishmen” and “Britons”—in effect trying to distance Jamaica from the demeaning racial stereotypes that had come to define images of the island—and likened the Colonial Office’s treatment of the island to slavery, that system that the British had so prided themselves on abolishing. He further amplified his critique by comparing Britain’s oppression of Jamaica to the metropole’s lenience toward a more troublesome Ireland. The violent outbreaks of the Fenian independence and agrarian movements in the 1860s and 1870s and the recent 1882 assassination of Chief Secretary of Ireland Frederick Cavendish, William Gladstone’s nephew-in-law, had prompted Gladstone’s Liberal government to offer at least some of what the Irish protesters wanted. To this Jamaican observer, Britain was giving Ireland—a place where “Assassinations, Agrarian Murders, Arson, and Treason are that country’s method of seeking reforms”—more rights and representation than “Loyal, Patient, forbearing, Law-abiding, and Submissive” Jamaica. He asked, “How is she [Jamaica] treated because of her devotion to the Sovereign?” In addition to being subject to the political machinations of the Colonial Office, he answered, Jamaica was also unfairly taxed in her most serious time of need. “Men who are burnt out of house, home, and store,” he announced, “are levied on for Taxes and forced to pay Taxes again on their New Premises. Those who import goods, to replace goods burnt, have to pay fresh duties and the Government fills its Treasury out
of the misfortunes of a brave but heart-broken City.” This passionate call to action—in which the author called for a Joshua figure to lead the island in “Pay[ing] no Taxes!” and “Demand[ing] Imperial investigations into injustice and wrongdoing!”—concluded with a stanza from the Scottish patriotic hymn, “Scots Wha Hae.”

By oppression’s woes an’ pains,
By your sons in service chains,
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free.

In 1793, Robert Burns had written this ode to freedom struggles, which he set to the tune to which Robert Bruce had reputedly marched at Bannockburn, and he himself had indicated that the poem referred not only to Scotland’s ancient heroes—the opening line is “Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled”—but to “some other struggles of the same nature, not quite so ancient,” a reference to the French radicals who had deposed and executed their king and to the British radicals that William Pitt the Younger sought to repress in the wake of the French Revolution.

In invoking Burns’s famous lines, the Gall’s News Letter author appealed to a shared language of liberty and rights that applied to all British subjects.87

The Colonial Office also recognized the fire’s potential to aggravate the already toxic political climate. When news of the fire first arrived in London via telegram, some in the Colonial Office saw the disaster as an occasion to ease some of the hostility. In one office minute, Wingfield wondered whether the fire might provide the British government “an opportunity for an act of conciliation” in which it would pay the full amount of the Florence damages, rather than simply half. Such a move, he mused, would be “a matter of grace.” But prominent Jamaicans wanted more than a few thousand pounds, money they believed they should never have had to pay in the first place. What they wanted was a substantial relief loan from the British government.

V.

The loan

If the fire was inextricably linked to the major political issue of the moment—even if the latter did not cause the former—then it was inevitable that concerns about constitutional protests loomed over the discussions about an imperial disaster relief loan. In some of Musgrave’s earliest communications with the Colonial Office after the fire, he admitted that Kingston would need more money to recover than was available in the colony. Just over a week after the fire, the governor sent a telegram to the Colonial Office in which he asked Secretary of State Kimberley to sanction a loan law for a £150,000 advance. In the formal dispatch that expanded upon the telegram, he also referenced an important precedent, a loan given to Antigua after an 1843

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88 Edward Wingfield minute, 12 December 1882 telegram, CO 137/507, fol. 209r.
89 CO 137/507, Musgrave dispatch #391 to Kimberley, 13 December 1882, fol. 216v.
earthquake. In a responding telegram, the Colonial Office did not reject Musgrave’s request but declared that no loan could be sanctioned until the Legislative Council was reconstructed.

From the outset, the Colonial Office did not believe this loan was necessary. Wingfield complained that Musgrave had not been sufficiently clear about the specifics of the scheme. Moreover, Lord Kimberley had sent a royal commission to the British Caribbean in December 1882 to investigate the financial condition of most of the British colonies, all but British Guiana, Barbados, and Trinidad, and the commission had not yet scrutinized Jamaica’s finances. To Wingfield, lumbering Jamaica with such a large financial obligation while there were still questions about the island’s economic condition seemed irresponsible. Herbert shared his doubts and argued that the loan was not “strictly justifiable, as the greater portion of it will apparently be expended in assisting those who are most able to do without assistance.” Herbert based his recommendation on a conversation he had with Jamaica’s colonial secretary, Edward Newton, who had returned to England on sick leave right before the fire. Newton’s opinion, based on his suppositions, was that only clerks and poor white men would need assistance beyond that which charity could provide. Merchants and traders had enough access to personal funds and capital, he argued, while black artisans and workers did not need more than what local relief organizations could offer.

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90 CO 137/507, Musgrave dispatch #402 to Kimberley, 23 December 1882, fols. 277-278r. The Daily Gleaner praised the group of men—including the manager of the Colonial Bank—for recommending that the Governor ask for a loan. See “Old Ladies in Kingston,” Daily Gleaner, 20 December 1882, 2. In a letter to the editor, F. A. Autey suggested that Jamaica receive a loan of £1 million. As he explained, “As men we must face the fact, and admit that without assistance the commercial city of this Colony will be to all intents and purposes crippled beyond redemption.” See “Sensible Suggestions,” Daily Gleaner, 20 December 1882, 2.

91 CO 137/507, CO draft telegram to Musgrave, 16 January 1883, enclosed in dispatch #402, fol. 281r.


93 CO 137/507, Wingfield minute, dispatch #402, 13 January 1883, fol. 274; Herbert minute, dispatch #402, 15
But as skeptical as these men were about the necessity of this loan, they were also wary of the devastating political consequences of refusing. “[T]he principal inhabitants seem very much bent upon the scheme,” Wingfield commented. “[D]oubtless great disappointment will be felt and the existing soreness towards the Home Government will be aggravated if it is disallowed.” Herbert concurred: “There is much force in Mr Wingfield’s observation as to the received [sic] soreness which will be created if the proposal is vetoed.” For that reason, he recommended that the office sanction the loan under certain conditions. That this was an unusual and strategic move on the part of the Colonial Office was expressed most clearly by Wingfield, who opined, “[p]erhaps the exceptionally great extent of the calamity may justify what cannot be regarded as a sound financial proceeding especially at the present junction.” The new secretary of state, Lord Derby, agreed. “We cannot refuse,” he bluntly stated.

The Colonial Office’s perceived obligation to authorize the loan colored all correspondence between London and the governor, especially after it became clear that Musgrave had overestimated the damages and had thus overstated the amount of money the colony would need. After a dispatch arrived in which Musgrave claimed he could not determine “the extent to which sufferers by the fire would avail themselves of such relief” until the secretary of state sanctioned the loan, the skepticism in London grew. “I am afraid,” Wingfield

January 1883, fols. 275v-276r.
94 CO 137/507, Wingfield minute, dispatch #402, 13 January 1883, fol. 275v; Herbert minute, dispatch #402, 15 January 1883, fol. 276r.
95 CO 137/507, Derby minute, dispatch #402, 16 January 1883, fol. 276r.
96 Some in Jamaica also believed it was the British government’s responsibility to help a colony in crisis. The Daily Gleaner linked the metropolitan responsibility to the Florence controversy: “The late Secretary of State for the Colonies made a strong point in re Florence of the obligations which the Colonies were owing to the Mother Country. We return the compliment and tell those in whose hands the Colonial reins are placed that the Mother Country has also obligations that she owes her Colonies, and one of those obligations is to assist them, when necessity demands it, to regain a prosperity which misfortune has for the time being robbed them of.” See “The Proposed Loan,” Daily Gleaner, 9 March 1883, 2.
declared, “that the governor had not any clear idea when he fired off his telegram of the burnt part of the city can be rebuilt for £200,000—the greater part of which is no doubt covered by Insurance—there would seem to be no necessity for a Government loan of anything approaching £150,000.” Herbert wondered whether Musgrave was helping rich elites too much, and Derby insisted that it was “foolish to borrow on account of the government ¾ths of the whole cost.”

But even after the Colonial Office became convinced that Jamaica did not need this loan, the office continued to give Musgrave the opportunity to prove that enough parties needed the money to justify the loan. But Musgrave had enormous difficulty drumming up enough viable applications. In April 1883, he reported that he had received applications for less than £10,000 and, of these applications, he suspected that many would have to be rejected. Under these conditions, he acknowledged, “there is no indication of pressing want of that magnitude which requires and would justify the interference of the Government, or its entering upon the risks, responsibilities and inevitable odium of a money lending business, which is not an ordinarily proper function of government.” He then made a public announcement in Jamaica that there had not been enough official requests to warrant going through with the Rebuilding Loan Bill. In response, a delegation from the Fire Relief Committee tried to convince him and the secretary of state to proceed with the bill.

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97 CO 137/507: Musgrave dispatch #405 to Derby, 28 December 1882, fols. 299-306; Wingfield minute, dispatch #405, 19 January 1883, fol. 298r; Herbert minute, dispatch #405, 20 January 1883, fol. 298v; Derby minute, dispatch #405, 20 January 1883, fol. 298v. A few months later, after several more rounds of correspondence, Herbert wrote, “It seems very doubtful whether any such assistance has been really necessary.” See CO 137/508, Herbert minute, dispatch #85, 31 March 1883, fol. 398r.

98 CO 137/509, Musgrave dispatch #149 to Derby, 18 April 1883, fols. 133-136r. By this point, a Loan Bill had already been drafted. In brief, it established that no more than £150,000 could be loaned to Kingston residents and that no more than seven-eighths of the cost of rebuilding any given building would be paid for out of the loan. See “A Bill entitled The Kingston Burnt District Rebuilding Loan Law,” enclosed in CO 137/509, Musgrave dispatch #149 to Derby, 18 April 1883, fols. 139-146r.
The Fire Relief Committee welcomed Musgrave’s attempts to secure an imperial loan, and they also shared his dismay that there had not yet been enough applications to make an imperial outlay a necessity. They tried to explain why applications had been so few, focusing especially on the “less intelligent and the poorer” classes that had been the most affected by the blaze. First, they argued, too much time had passed between the fire and the first announcement about the loan. They acknowledged that this delay was the unavoidable result of Musgrave’s communications with the Colonial Office, but, in that time, they suggested, some of the people who might otherwise have requested government aid were forced to make other, swifter arrangements. In doing so, they “set up a class of buildings of a very inferior description.” Furthermore, petitioners had only three weeks to apply, a period of time that committee members believed was too short, and by the time potential applicants understood the announcement, news had already spread that the plan might be shelved. The committee’s paternalistic emphasis on how slowly the poorer classes made sense of the finer points of imperial finance was one of their key arguments. “The less intelligent of our people are slow to receive ideas on subjects with which they are familiar,” they wrote, and in particular, these men believed that the intricacies of financial arrangements were beyond the intellectual capacity of the townspeople.99

That so few people had applied for funding, the committee insisted, should be read as a combination of ignorance and distrust on the part of non-elite townspeople and poor timing on the part of the government. It was not, as Musgrave or the Colonial Office might argue, a sign that the money was not needed. To the contrary, Kemble insisted that “the withdrawal of the

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99 H.J. Kemble, Chairman of the Fire Relief Committee, to Musgrave, 12 April 1883, enclosed in CO 137/509, dispatch #149, fols. 147-149.
measure” would be “one of the greatest calamities’ which…could befall our City.” The fire had destroyed nearly 600 buildings and displaced 6,000 people. Most of the homes in this area, Kemble noted, were rented out to lodgers. In many cases, this rent money was the sole subsistence of the owners, many of whom were “females who had been delicately brought up” and who were unaccustomed or unable to work. In particular, the custos singled out “widows or maiden ladies advanced in years.” By mid-April, four months after the fire, the vast majority of destroyed buildings still lay in ruins. Only rich businessmen with “extensive credit” could afford to rebuild. What was more, Kemble reminded the governor, those who had already applied for money would be devastated if the government rescinded the offer. “Indeed,” he explained, “we greatly fear that so far as the prospect of general building operations is concerned, the inhabitants would become paralysed by a spirit of despondence.” But if plans for the loan progressed, the Committee anticipated that those who had so far refrained from applying “would eagerly seek” the government funding.100

Kemble’s passionate pleas did not convince the men in the Colonial Office. In one minute to Wingfield, a staffer noted that even after Musgrave had issued a second notice—which was, in his opinion, “an appeal to possible borrowers to come forward in sufficient numbers to pull the Govt out of the ridiculous position in which it had placed itself”—the requests still only totaled £34,000, and of that amount, Musgrave surmised that roughly half would not qualify. “It would be easy to combat the arguments of the Deputation,” this official wrote, “but it seems evident for the above that the loan must be abandoned.” Wingfield agreed with Kemble that the notice had been too obscure. But nevertheless, he wrote, “it does not appear that any case has been made out justifying such an exceptional and in itself objectionable

100 Ibid., 157v-158r.
The political implications of reneging on the promised loan, however, remained at the forefront of office deliberations. In Herbert’s reply to Wingfield, he suggested that, “having agreed to the principle of the Loan, I think we should give cause for a good deal of complaint if we were to follow the justifiable course of declaring that as there is no extensive & urgent demand for it, it will be abandoned.” Herbert stood alongside his colleagues in arguing that the loan was unnecessary and unjustifiable. But politically, he believed the office had to go along with the plan. After all, he warned, “[t]he Jamaicans are very irritable just now.” Derby agreed.

In Derby’s official response to Musgrave, he told the governor that the Colonial Office believed that there were not enough applications to warrant the loan, “but in view of the representations of the Deputation…I have with some hesitation decided not to refuse my sanction for the introduction of the Bill.” This was a lie, albeit one the Fire Relief Committee believed. None of the men who contributed to the internal correspondence were swayed by the committee’s arguments. But Derby, who had gained notoriety as “Dawdling Derby” for his chronic inability to make a decision, still kept the possibility of a loan open, although he modified some of the terms. Rather than sanctioning the potential £150,000 advance, Derby cut the maximum amount to £75,000. Instead of requiring applicants to pay only one-eighth of building costs before they received any money, he raised the personal contribution to one-fourth.

That summer, when Musgrave still could not gather enough applications, he sent a

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101 CO 137/509, [??] minute to Wingfield, dispatch #149, 9 May 1883, fol. 129; Wingfield minute, dispatch #149, 10 May 1883, fol. 129v.
102 CO 137/509, Herbert minute, dispatch #149, 10 May 1883, fol. 130r; Derby minute, dispatch #149, 10 May 1883, fol. 130r.
103 Draft Colonial Office response, 16 March 1883, to Musgrave dispatch #149, CO 137/509, fols. 161v-162. Equally important, Derby refused to fix a minimum amount of applications, even though his officials suggested setting a minimum of either £25,000 or £30,000. See Herbert and Derby minutes, 10 May 1883 and 11 May 1883 respectively, CO 137/509, fol. 130r. For evidence that the Relief Committee took Derby’s words to heart, see “The Rebuilding Loan,” Daily Gleaner, 23 August 1883. On “Dawdling Derby,” see Brian L. Blakeley, The Colonial Office, 1868-1892 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 155-6.
telegram to London asking whether there was a “minimum for commencing [the] burnt district loan.” The Colonial Office saw this for what it was: an indirect acknowledgment that there simply was not enough demand for the money. Again, however, the Office had little room for maneuver. Charles Harris, the member of the Colonial Office staff most knowledgeable on Jamaica, recommended a minimum of £25,000, since “we are practically pledged now to the policy of the loan.” Derby concurred, and sent a telegram announcing this figure the next day.\textsuperscript{104}

From here, the archival trail vanishes. There is no loan law in the 1883 Acts volume, and there are no further dispatches on the subject. \textit{Daily Gleaner} advertisements suggest that a third call for applications went out in late summer and that the Municipal Board received requests totaling over £35,000.\textsuperscript{105} In late September 1883, yet another delegation from the Fire Relief Committee met with the acting governor, Major General Dominic Gamble, and presented requests for over £40,000.\textsuperscript{106} Gamble did not commit to anything, but he reportedly “assured the deputation that, though he could not pledge the government to any course of action, their representations should receive careful consideration in the spirit of affording every assistance which it was found practicable to give.”\textsuperscript{107} But he too invalidated a large section of applicants on the grounds that there was a “very great difficulty...of distinguishing between those applicants who have really a strong claim on the assistance of the public credit and those who could do without that assistance and yet might apply for loans under the Law as offering a monetary or

\textsuperscript{104} CO 137/509, Musgrave telegram [of which there is no copy], 8 June 1883; Harris minute, 9 June 1883; Derby minute, 10 June 1883; all three on fol. 352r. Derby telegram to Musgrave, 11 June 1883, fol. 353r. For Harris information, see H.A. Will, \textit{Constitutional Change in the British West Indies, 1880-1903: with special reference to Jamaica, British Guiana, and Trinidad} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 44.


speculative advantage.” If the committee could find a way to ensure that these applications were legitimate, then Gamble promised that their suggestion would “receive the fullest consideration before the Bill is finally passed into Law.” That message seems to be the final mention of a rebuilding loan in this newspaper.

In light of no evidence that affirms that a loan bill was finally sanctioned by the Colonial Office or passed by the Legislative Council, only one assumption remains: that after nine months of negotiations, the Kingston committee was unable to convince either the new acting governor or the secretary of state that the city needed the loan. That there seems to be no definitive dismissal from London only confirms the precariousness of the moment. From the time the idea of a loan was mentioned, the men in the Colonial Office were skeptical about the necessity of such an extraordinary measure. But invariably, when one man pointed out why the loan scheme was flawed, another would reply with the constant refrain: Jamaica was too volatile after the political mayhem one month before the fire, and it would be politically disastrous to either refuse to consider this legislation or to withdraw consent that they had already given.

**Conclusion**

What comes across most clearly in the colonial records is the extent to which the Colonial Office indulged the constant—and, in their minds, nonsensical—petitions for a loan from Jamaica. This was not the treatment West India Committee representative Hankey had received in 1843, when he received explicit instructions to withdraw his request for aid. Then, as in 1862, there was no political imperative to consider humanitarian gestures that went against imperial policy. But in 1882, there were politics to consider. The fire happened too soon after the much-

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maligned Florence vote for Secretary of State Derby to dismiss the concerns of Kingston residents. Indeed, the first thought that came to the mind of at least one man in the Colonial Office after the fire was to eliminate the Florence issue altogether by paying the full £8,000 in damages. Wingfield's instinct was to ease some of the outrage Jamaicans were expressing with a show of British generosity, and his approach became the unofficial policy that guided the Colonial Office's response to the loan requests. Despite their reservations about the necessity of the loan, the men in the Colonial Office were determined not to add to Jamaican grievances by turning their back to the colony after a crisis. If it were at all possible, the thinking seemed to be, making a grand gesture like approving a rare relief loan would boost the Colonial Office's bargaining position. And even though archival silences suggest that, in the end, the loan was never approved, the absence of a final, definitive rejection—something earlier incarnations of the Colonial Office had not hesitated to produce—hints towards the general acceptance of Wingfield's strategy. By letting the loan issue slowly fade away, the British government managed not to slam shut the doorway to financial help and thereby avoided giving protestors more kindling with which to stoke their wrath. In effect, the fire in 1882 almost shook up the established Colonial Office pattern of not providing significant financial loans when Jamaica was in trouble.\footnote{109} There was a brief moment when the heightened political tensions created the possibility for an uncharacteristic and substantial monetary relief gesture from Britain. That it did not happen because the Kingston relief committee and Governor Musgrave could not prove that the money was needed only underscores the point that the Colonial Office’s consideration of the measure represented a political calculation based on that precise moment, not a change in administrative policy.

\footnote{109} I thank Dan Rodgers for this particular phrasing.
With or without imperial help, Kingston had to be rebuilt. In a series of *Daily Gleaner* articles published in May 1883, the newspaper’s writers described the signs of a newly vital city that was slowly recovering from the devastating fire. They reported that a prominent business had moved into a new, fireproof building that was spacious and properly ventilated—concerns about ventilation, it seems, had not subsided in the thirty years after the cholera epidemic.\(^{110}\) Merchant S. R. DaCosta, “undeterred by his heavy losses in the fire of December last,” had moved his grocery business to a new Harbour Street location. The cabinet shop, Mark C. Hendricks, had reopened on the same street as the DaCosta grocery. Its “ground and second floors [were] used as sales and showrooms,” while “the back of the premises [was] utilized for carpenters’ and cabinet-makers’ shops.” An upstairs office would house Charles Hendricks’s dental practice. Mrs. Aarons’s dry goods business had reopened as well.\(^ {111}\) Subsequent articles went through other Kingston streets and explained which businesses had reopened in new or rebuilt locations, while commenting on the condition of each building. Some renovations were elaborate. The newspaper’s writers were impressed by the Alhambra building, which would house another DaCosta grocery store. As one explained,

> No expense, apparently, has been spared by its proprietor, Iliam Barrow, Esq., to render it attractive, nor has any trouble been grudged by the building...in making this building certainly one of, if not the handsomest structure in our city; It is finished in good style, lofty, solid and spacious, and the iron columns supporting the verandahs are the most elaborate we have seen here.

\(^{110}\) Not every new building met the *Gleaner’s* ventilation standards. Miss Burke’s shop, they wrote, “is in a good location, is commodious, but suffers greatly from the want of proper ventilation. It is well lighted, and if there could be an improvement made in regard to a better current of air through it, would be a most desirable shop.” See “The Rebuilding of Kingston. No. 1,” *Daily Gleaner*, 18 May 1883, 2.

This writer held up the Alhambra as a template to other builders of the kind of structure that would make a new Kingston attractive.\textsuperscript{112} These rapturous descriptions indicate the degree to which the Kingston Fire Relief Committee’s predictions that merchants and businessmen would find ways to recover without government assistance proved accurate. These articles do not mention residential buildings, perhaps a sign that those not in business rebuilt their lives more slowly than their richer neighbors.

The constitutional reform movement that had gained strength and coherence through the \textit{Florence} controversy was moderately successful. In 1884, an Order in Council reconfigured Jamaica’s Legislative Council to include the governor, two nominated members, four ex-officio members, and nine elected members. Any six of the elected members could band together and veto financial legislation. However, the order also allowed the governor to add three nominated officials to the council whenever he deemed a situation “of ‘paramount’ importance.\textsuperscript{113} As numerous Jamaican commentators recognized, the change in the composition of the legislative council did not represent a wholesale transformation in imperial rule but merely added elected officials to the mix. Moreover, there was no simultaneous and significant expansion of the franchise. In 1886, only about 7,500 men out of 500,000 were eligible to vote.\textsuperscript{114} Nevertheless, this episode in Jamaican history is more important than its relative absence in the historiography would indicate.

\textsuperscript{112} “The Rebuilding of Kingston.—No. 2.,” \textit{Daily Gleaner}, 21 May 1883, 2.

\textsuperscript{113} Patrick Bryan, \textit{The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control} (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991), 13. From 1884-95, the two governors (Sir Henry Norman and Sir Henry Blake) never resorted to this measure.

\textsuperscript{114} The ethnic breakdown is as follows: “3,766 blacks out of a black population of 444, 186; 98 East Indians out of an East Indian population of 11,016; 1,001 whites out of a population of 15,000; 2,578 coloured out of a mixed race population of 109,946.” The franchise was restricted to “[a]ll adult males who occupied a house assessed for poor rates, or who paid parochial taxes of not less than £1 per annum, or who paid a minimum of £1 - 10 per annum on taxable property.” Patrick Bryan, \textit{The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control} (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991), 14. See also Sires, “Jamaica Constitution of 1884,” 77-80.
Historians of the British Empire as well as Caribbeanists have largely overlooked these political protests and the subsequent constitutional change in the 1880s, an unfortunate consequence of the uneven historiographical coverage for the post-Morant Bay period of Jamaican history. When Jamaican historians have studied the late-nineteenth century, they have tended to focus on the island’s society, culture, or economy. Political analyses are much less common.\(^\text{115}\) Even Thomas Holt’s seminal work of post-emancipation Jamaican political history, *The Problem of Freedom*, skates over these events in two paragraphs that focus more on the outcome of change than the process leading up to it.\(^\text{116}\) Indeed, H. A. Will’s *Constitutional Change in the British West Indies* remains the only significant political overview of this period. For these reasons—the dearth of scholarship on the post-1865 period and the even more notable lack of political analyses within an already too-small body of scholarship—the 1882 fire and the 1880s political reform movement have not been linked. It is clear why the fire must be situated within the wider political context, but some would argue that a study of constitutional change need not mention the fire. I would disagree for two reasons. First, the fire was folded immediately into larger narratives about Jamaica’s constitution, both by those that believed the fire was started by protestors and those who used the fire to galvanize like-minded reformers. But more importantly, the political climate was the sole reason the Colonial Office made the option for a


\(^{116}\) Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 340-41. Holt’s brief mention of 1880s political change is symptomatic of a larger issue: despite the fact that he analyzes the period between 1832 and 1938, he too spends significantly less time on the post-1865 portion of his timeframe. Brian Moore and Michele Johnson note that Holt speeds through the period between 1865 and 1938 in two chapters, while spending eight chapters on 1832-1865. Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), xi. There is certainly some justification for his approach—the first thirty years after emancipation truly were turbulent. But there are significant political developments after 1865 that similarly deserve illumination.
loan available as long as it did. In other words, these London bureaucrats temporarily modified their approach to crises in Jamaica because of the insistent calls for reform coming from the island. If they took the movement for constitutional change that seriously, we should as well.

Situating a catastrophe like the Kingston fire within the political crisis it interrupted has revealed a keen awareness on the part of the British government of how its treatment of its colonies during times of distress might appear. A similar concern had motivated the Colonial Office in the 1860s to take seriously the testimony of a mixed-race, potentially insane woman. Attempting to keep up appearances would continue to dictate state decisions when Kingston was destroyed yet again.
The devout Hortense Bowden, a character in Zadie Smith’s multicultural and multigenerational epic *White Teeth*, believes in miracles. She was almost fifty years old when she had her only child, Clara. But her own birth was the more impressive miracle. She was born on January 14, 1907 to a woman named Ambrosia, in the middle of a devastating earthquake that rocked Kingston. Her father was British official Captain Charlie Durham, who had rented a room from Hortense’s grandmother. As the earthquake struck, Ambrosia was standing in a church, fighting off the unwanted advances of another British man, Sir Edmund Glenard, to whom Durham had entrusted her.

And then the world began to shake. Inside Ambrosia, waters broke. Outside Ambrosia, the floor cracked. The far wall crumbled, the stained-glass exploded, and the madonna fell from a great height like a swooning angel. Ambrosia stumbled from the scene, making it only as far as the confessionals before the ground split once more - a mighty crack! - and she fell down, in sight of Glenard himself, who lay crushed underneath his angel, his teeth scattered on the floor, trousers round his ankles. And the ground continued to vibrate. A second crack came. And a third. The pillars fell, half the roof disappeared. Any other afternoon in Jamaica, the screams of Ambrosia, the screams that followed each contraction of her womb as Hortense pushed out, would have caught somebody’s attention, brought somebody to her aid. But the world was ending that afternoon in Kingston. Everybody was screaming.1

The characters are fictional. There was no Edmund Glenard or Charlie Durham. But the emotions Smith depicts—the horror, the screams, and the sense that Kingston might cease to exist—they were real enough.

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Though less gripping perhaps than Smith’s fictional narrative, the historical record provides its own drama. At 3:30 in the afternoon of January 14, 1907, a 6.5 magnitude earthquake ripped through Jamaica and shattered Kingston. In the words of one survivor, “[t]he earthquake was heralded by an awful stillness, lasting about a minute. Then with a low moan which almost instantly rose to a loud roar, the earth oscillated violently to the south. The next motion can best be described by the word ‘circular.’ The earth spun like a top, for four or five seconds and then stopped with a frightful jerk.” “Buildings swayed like saplings in a storm,” wrote one reverend. “[They] tottered for an instant, and then crashed down with a mighty roar, burying beneath them a writhing, squirming mass of humanity, hundreds of unfortunates.” One estimate suggested that no more than two percent of all residences remained upright, an assertion that architectural historian Elizabeth Pigou-Dennis supports. The wooden houses of Kingston’s poorest suffered the least damage and needed few repairs. The subsequent tremors sparked a fire that whipped through the city hours later, felling any buildings in the downtown business district that had withstood the initial shocks. After the ground settled, displaced people ran around the city with little idea of where to go. “It is no exaggeration,” said the same writer, “to say that some persons had immediately lost their reason. They were rushing to and fro like wild beings.” While the fire ravaged downtown Kingston, those who had lost their homes in other sections of Kingston fled to the city’s Race Course and Parade Grounds, where they camped, some for weeks.


3 Kingston Restoration Committee memorandum read on 28 January 1907, JA 5/1/15/10, 1.

4 “City of Kingston Wrecked by Earthquake on Monday 14th,” JDT, 22 January 1907, 1. The earthquake...
Stories about natural disasters of this type can follow a predictable path: first comes a list of casualties, then the process by which communities rebuild, complete with versions of the blame game. In the case of Kingston, a story of this kind might focus on Archbishop Nuttall’s attempts to secure imperial relief funds, which culminated in his trip to London to present a petition to the Colonial Office and, hopefully, Parliament. The reverend never did stand before Parliament, but his mission was successful. Parliament sanctioned an imperial grant of £150,000 and a loan of £800,000, a sum less than the £1 million Nuttall requested but significant in light of Kingston dignitaries’ failure to receive relief money in 1883.5

Questions like these are important but, as has been the case in the three previous chapters, underlying these basic issues is often a set of more interesting and fundamental concerns about the nature of imperial rule in a minor colony. For running parallel to the story of relief and rescue was another drama as Jamaica’s governor, Sir James Alexander Swettenham, rejected the medical aid and military manpower provided by the United States Navy.

Biographical details about Swettenham are surprisingly hard to come by, perhaps because his younger brother, Frank Athelstane Swettenham, had the more prominent colonial career in the Malay peninsula. What we do know is that Alexander Swettenham was born in 1846, and he attended Cambridge before serving the British Empire in Ceylon.5 He took up the governorship of Jamaica in 1904, and he arrived with a reputation as a blunt and capable administrator who proved very disorienting as well. One British MP reported speaking with someone he did not initially recognize, who turned out to be a friend and fellow former MP. See “Kingston’s Ruin is Now Complete,” New York Times, 18 January 1907, 1.

5 For more on this, see the Kingston Restoration Committee’s minute book (JA 5/1/15/10), which provides a detailed record of the various actions Nuttall took regarding the grant and loan. See also the relevant Parliamentary Paper (Correspondence relating to the earthquake at Kingston, Jamaica, on 14th January, 1907; PP 1907 (Cd. 3560) LVII.). This parliamentary paper has numerous communications between the Colonial Office, Swettenham, and Archbishop Nuttall sprinkled throughout.

embraced hard work but who often disagreed with the planter elite, impressions built during his three-year stint as governor of British Guiana. A bachelor when he became governor, he married Mary Emily Copeland in 1905 at the age of 59. Swettenham’s decision to reject the United States Navy sparked a minor diplomatic squabble between the United States and Great Britain, and the dispute unleashed debates over Swettenham’s suitability for the position of governor. All told, the incident ended his imperial career. This chapter examines the event itself and then explains why Swettenham made his fateful decision. In the process, it explores the relationship between governors and the Colonial Office more closely than the other chapters and considers the position of governor in more depth: the local and metropolitan expectations and the diplomatic concerns that a governor in the Caribbean had to face at the dawn of the American century.

I.

Swettenham vs. Davis

Three days after the earthquake, three American ships sailed into Kingston Harbor under the command of Rear-Admiral Charles Davis. These ships arrived in response to Swettenham’s request to the British consul in Havana for additional medical supplies. In consultation with naval authorities, the American governor of Cuba sent Davis’s flotilla to Jamaica. The first ship, a torpedo, arrived on the evening of January 16, and the vessel’s commander told the governor that Admiral Davis was on his way with two men-of-war. The ships carried medical supplies,

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medical personnel, and troops to help restore order. It was the latter intention that led to the conflict.\footnote{8 British National Archives, Colonial Office (CO) 137/655, Swettenham dispatch #21, 18 January 1907, fols. 139-140v.}

The next morning, Davis presented himself at King’s House, the governor’s residence, where he told Swettenham that he had sent two armed bands of marines to the American consulate and the Kingston penitentiary. Swettenham had not approved this landing.\footnote{9 CO 137/655, Swettenham dispatch #21, 18 January 1907, fol. 140.} Davis’s decision to send men to guard the American consulate made sense, and Swettenham never challenged the admiral’s right to do so. As for the penitentiary, two inmates had died during the earthquakes, and prisoners were terrified of being trapped again, a fear no doubt amplified by the aftershocks. A small mutiny erupted as prisoners refused to be locked in their cells. To put down the mutiny, Davis’s ship, the \textit{Indiana}, docked near the penitentiary and landed an armed brigade of men who quickly restored order to the prison.\footnote{10 “Details of Disastrous Earthquake,” \textit{JDT}, 22 January 1907, 2.} But, for Swettenham, the penitentiary was a Jamaican matter, not one for a foreign force to handle. Many Jamaicans welcomed the American presence. The sailors brought much needed medical help, and many believed that the presence of American soldiers would curb any attempted violence and looting. So it was to the surprise and dismay of the editors of one local newspaper, the \textit{Jamaican Daily Telegraph}, when the governor demanded that Admiral Davis gather his men and leave Kingston. Swettenham rejected the American aid in an extended correspondence with the admiral; these letters formed the core of the controversy.\footnote{11 See the series of articles on \textit{JDT}, 22 January 1907, 2-3.}

Swettenham framed Davis’s actions as a kind of foreign invasion. He claimed that the admiral had gone to King’s House on January 17 and had announced the “armed intervention”
of American sailors at the consulate and penitentiary. Swettenham initially expressed
“disapprobation,” but he backtracked “in order to save face of Admiral.” According to him, he
clearly told Davis that his approval was only temporary. After the marines helped quell the
prison mutiny, the governor asked the admiral to leave Jamaica the following day. The governor
assumed that his request had ended the matter. But the next morning, twenty minutes before a
planned farewell meeting with Davis, Swettenham received a letter in which the admiral listed
what his men had accomplished the previous day. Davis had “landed working parties from both
ships of war on the shore…to aid in wreck [sic] and clearing away the ruins in the streets and
buildings.” If the governor allowed it, he planned to do the same the following day. Above all,
Davis intended to help police Kingston. The thieves and looters that some marines had
apprehended the previous day led him to suspect “that the police surveillance of the city [was]
not adequate to the protection of private property.” Swettenham repeated his request that the
Americans leave, although he was willing to allow a small group of unarmed marines to stand
watch over the American consulate. Other than that concession, however, the governor was

clear: the American help was not needed. “It is no longer any question of humanity,” he
explained. “[A]ll the dead died days ago and the work of giving them burial is merely one of
convenience.” The governor also challenged Davis’s suggestions that private property was at risk
or that the police protection was especially deficient in Kingston. Police in all cities were
inadequate to the job, he argued, including those in New York. He reminded the admiral of a
New York case where thieves had broken into a millionaire’s town house. “But,” he insisted,
“this fact could not have justified a British Admiral in landing an armed party to assist the New

12 CO 137/655, “Decypher of a telegram from the Governor of Jamaica received at the Colonial office the 23rd
day of January 1907 at 1.0 a.m.,” fols. 216-217r. See also fols. 147-150.
13 Ibid. See also 147-150.
York Police.” For Swettenham, the landing of armed troops made the American mission an invasion, and he would repeat this contention as the crisis unfolded. After a final meeting between the two men, Davis and his men left Jamaica on January 19.  

Backlash

Local and foreign newspapers roundly condemned Swettenham’s actions, in effect trying him in the press. The editors of the Jamaica Daily Telegraph published numerous excoriations, and they framed their objections in terms of his unsuitability as governor. After a cursory acknowledgment of Swettenham’s “energy” and “good intentions,” one writer launched into a damning critique: “his general behavior in a moment of great peril and difficulty, has not been worthy of a responsible British official or even of a cultured English gentlemen.” Although the editors admitted that Davis had not received the governor’s permission to land his troops, they viewed this transgression as a minor “technical mistake,” given the catastrophe. The writers had only one question for the governor: “Why…exaggerate the importance of a technical blunder, and adopt an insulting attitude to the American ADMIRAL?” To these men, Swettenham’s actions were “reprehensible” and “inexplicable,” and his dismissal of the American fleet proved how unfit he was to be governor. They concluded, “he is not the man who is wanted in Jamaica at the present crisis.”

The Daily Telegraph’s readership soon joined in the chorus that decried Swettenham’s actions. Port Antonio resident Vernon E. Grosett suggested that parochial boards across the island formally condemn Swettenham and the colonial secretary, Clarence Bourne. Such a

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strong, unified action would reassert the strength of the Jamaican people, he argued, a point he made using gendered language: “I do hope that the manhood of this country will on this occasion assert itself.”16 A much longer condemnation came from a George Solomon, who echoed an increasingly familiar sentiment: the admiral represented the best of American charity while Swettenham’s response was ungrateful and “cynical.” The governor’s attitude towards the Americans was not shared by the Jamaican population, Solomon insisted. Jamaicans recognized and appreciated American assistance, which, after all, had been a gift to the earthquake survivors, not to Swettenham himself. The governor did not have the right, Solomon argued, to reject a gift that was not his. To this writer, only the removal of Swettenham and the installation of a new governor would suffice.17

Swettenham’s detractors used the situation with Davis as an opportunity to criticize his performance as governor. Numerous witnesses reported that Swettenham had roamed around Kingston for four days, comforting victims and overseeing aid efforts. An editor of the Jamaica Times, a Kingston weekly, recounted the governor’s successes, which many commentators had undervalued. While there were reported minor incidents of looting, on the whole, there was very little “personal violence, [or] pillaging of residence,” Thomas MacDermot reported, a result of Swettenham’s effective mobilization of available resources.18 The governor had also curbed price

17 “Governor and Admiral Davis, U.S.N.,” JDT, 28 January 1907, 7. Foreign newspapers also judged Swettenham harshly, especially US periodicals. Some of these statements were republished in Jamaican papers including the Daily Telegraph, no doubt to bolster this journal’s own position against the governor. See for example, “Newspapers of Three Countries Comment on Governor’s Action,” JDT, 31 January 1907, 4. Highlights include the following from the Evening Mail: “As for Sir James Alexander Swettenham, let us not forget the monition of Sancho Panza:—It is a waste of lather to shave an ass.”
18 Thomas Henry MacDermot, named “Jamaica’s first native-born literary journalist” by one biographer, was born in Clarendon in 1870 to a family of Irish and English origins. He began his career in journalism in the Cayman Islands, writing dispatches as the Cayman correspondent for several Kingston newspapers. After a nervous breakdown forced his return to Jamaica, he began writing poetry and literature under the pseudonym “Tom Redeam”—his last name backward. Before he joined the fledging Jamaica Times, a publication started by Englishman Walter R. Durie, MacDermot was editor for the failing Jamaica Post before doing some part-time reporting and
gouging and stemmed the tides of people rushing into the city. In the end, thanks to Swettenham’s tireless efforts, “[p]estilence was averted; famine saved, order preserved.” A Canadian merchant published a similar story in a Montreal newspaper. But the hands-on approach to crisis management praised by MacDermot—who, according to his acquaintance and biographer W. Adolphe Roberts, generally supported British imperial rule—and others was viewed differently by a more hostile set of commentators. This latter group highlighted the absence of a centrally organized and coherent rescue, recovery, and rebuilding program. One observer claimed that the governor was “doing labourer’s work” and suggested that “for these days he should be only paid labourer’s wages.” Another editorial protested that Swettenham “career[ed] round the city, poking his nose into various corners, and attending to petty details which minor subordinates ought to be looking after.” The governor was never at his office in Headquarter House when various officials came to see him, leaving his subordinates to make decisions without his knowledge. His style meant there was no central vision or plan, a situation “on which [no] British Colonial Government [could] venture to congratulate itself,” concluded the editors.

These criticisms symbolized a debate about what kind of governor Swettenham should have been in the face of this catastrophe. He sacrificed organization for a more visible approach, copyediting work for the *Gleaner*. According to his biographer, MacDermot was a “liberal Anglican” who believed in the British Empire—W. Adolphe Roberts called it “a romantic faith in the British Empire”—and was comfortable with Jamaica’s place within the empire as long as the island was not “being treated like a stepchild.” Macdermot became full editor of the *Times* in September 1904. W. Adolphe Roberts, *Six Great Jamaicans: Biographical Sketches* (Kingston: The Pioneer Press, 1951), 86-92, 95-6.


22 “Governor’s Attitude,” *JDT*, 30 January 1907, 4.

one that had its supporters. At the very least, his presence in the city assured people that he had survived—Kingston’s mayor, Charles Walter Tait, was not so lucky. The Jamaican-born politician was thrown from the City Council building into the street and died almost a month after the earthquake in mid-February. But the option that Swettenham’s critics advocated was not perfect either. Had he done nothing but sit behind his Headquarter House desk, he would have left himself open to complaints that he was hiding from his responsibilities. In the end, however, these criticism were local concerns, no matter how vehement, and they were based on a local understanding of the governor’s responsibilities. The men in the Colonial Office, who had a different set of expectations for Swettenham, had a different reaction.

II.

Swettenham vs. his superiors

While Jamaican commentators questioned Swettenham’s leadership abilities and his worth as governor, the Colonial Office took a more detached approach. The men in the Colonial Office were more measured in their criticism because these British officials had no real issue with the governor’s turning away American help. Instead, their concern was with the manner in which Swettenham had rejected Admiral Davis, not the rejection itself. Sydney Olivier, Colonial Office clerk and former acting governor of Jamaica, articulated one version of this position in his notes on a telegram from Swettenham. “Sir A. Swettenham has been in the habit of addressing letters more silly and provocative than this to public bodies and humble persons in Jamaica,” he wrote. “[O]n more than one occasion I have urged that their impropriety should be pointed out to him.

24 “Death of Kingston’s Mayor: Mr. C. W. Tait Passes Away.—An Earthquake Victim,” Jamaica Times, 16 February 1907, 4.
I wish more than ever, now, that this check had been put on him.” Despite Swettenham’s undesirable tendencies, Olivier agreed with the content of the governor’s letter, writing that his “action in requesting the withdrawal of armed parties was quite correct.” Davis had landed a party on Jamaican soil that second morning without the governor’s explicit consent. Olivier concluded that “[i]t was…quite justified in asking that it might be reembarked.” Permanent Under Secretary of State Francis Hopwood agreed that the real issue was Swettenham’s tone. He felt that only once they addressed the issue of the letter would it be appropriate to “look closely into what happened prior to the writing of the letter.” He continued, “It is quite likely that some apology may be due from the Admiral for some act done in consequence of overzeal,” a statement that acknowledged the validity of the governor’s position. Winston Churchill, then the parliamentary undersecretary, informed his colleagues that the Secretary of State, Lord Elgin, had requested that Swettenham “withdraw his offensive letter.” Swettenham asked the Colonial Office to send his retraction and regret to Admiral Davis, who had returned to Cuba. That same day, January 24, Swettenham’s resignation arrived in the form of a brief telegram: “Respectfully apply for permission for retirement on account of age forthwith to be relieved.” These two simple telegrams touched off a firestorm of Colonial Office memoranda.

More so than any other official weighing in on Swettenham’s fate, assistant undersecretary Charles Prestwood Lucas most sided with the governor, or at least was the man most concerned about treating the civil servant fairly. “The governor has done what any loyal and self respecting man would do,” Lucas wrote, and he seemed pleased that the governor was

25 CO 137/655, Olivier minutes, 23 January 1907, fols. 206-207r.
26 CO 137/655, Hopwood minutes, 23 January 1907, fol. 208.
27 CO 137/655, Swettenham telegram to Lord Elgin, 24 January 1907, fol. 238r.
28 CO 137/655, Swettenham telegram to Lord Elgin, 24 January 1907, fol. 263r.
old enough to retire with a pension and “without being ruined.” Lucas had worked at the
Colonial Office since 1877, but his well-known admiration for Joseph Chamberlain—and
Chamberlain’s pet cause of tariff reform—may have cost him further promotion.29 A personal
friend of Swettenham and his younger brother Frank, governor of the Straits Settlements from
1901 to 1904, Lucas saw two potential ways to handle the situation.30 In the first, the Colonial
Office would forward Swettenham’s retraction to Davis and accept the governor’s resignation.
In the second, Lucas’s preference, the office would ask that the United States government
“dispense with the apology,” which would allow Swettenham to remain in his position. Lucas
accepted that the British government was not likely to take the second course so he
recommended the first option. Above all, Lucas wanted to avoid a third possibility where the
government would send the apology while still asking Swettenham to recant his resignation.
Although that might have been best from the government’s standpoint, Lucas believed it would
be “unfair to Sir A Swettenham.” After all, he argued, the Colonial Office still did not know “all
the facts of the case.” Moreover, he wondered whether his colleagues had “considered what
treatment would have been awarded to an English admiral if he had published a semiprivate
letter written in a moment of irritation & apparently with some provocation by an overwrought
American governor at a time of great stress.”31 While his sentiments were in part the product of
his friendship with Swettenham, he also framed his support of the governor in terms of the

Charles Prestwood (1853–1931)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn,
30 For Lucas’s reference to his friendship with the two see the insert between CO 137/655, fols. 234v-235r. For
more on Frank Swettenham, see H. S. Barlow, ‘Swettenham, Sir Frank Athelstane (1850–1946)’, Oxford Dictionary of
36387, accessed 29 June 2011].
31 CO 137/655, Lucas minutes, 24 January 1907, fols. 234-235r.
latter’s loyal service. The British government owned this faithful servant a dignified retirement or better yet, they owed him a thorough investigation that might even exonerate him. Swettenham’s resignation was not initially accepted, and in the following weeks, he made the mistakes that led to his leaving Jamaica in early May 1907.

Fundamentally, Swettenham managed his relationship with his London superiors poorly. The Colonial Office’s initial reluctance to accept his resignation suggests that they had no real desire to replace him. Indeed, their main concern was to gain a clearer understanding of the events that had led to the infamous letter. But Swettenham took too long to provide crucial details, which forced the Colonial Office to spend valuable time fact-finding and left them without the information required to take appropriate action. When he sent messages that claimed he was “not conscious of any friction” between himself and the Admiral, the governor prolonged the confusion in the Colonial Office, which was already hamstrung by the weeks it took for information to arrive from Jamaica by mail. They especially wanted clarification of who had sanctioned the landing of the American troops. Everyone knew it had not been Swettenham, but perhaps Davis had landed his men on the authority of Colonial Secretary Bourne, or at the request of the American Vice Consul, or maybe just on the basis of his own judgment.

Swettenham’s evasions continued as he responded to Elgin’s request for more information with nothing more than a reference to a previous communication. He clearly believed that he had already addressed their concerns. Swettenham’s flippancy sparked a

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32 CO 137/655, Swettenham telegram to Colonial Office, 23 January 1907, fol. 204r. This telegram may have been bare bones but those few lines demonstrated either an attempt to gloss over the situation or an equally unfortunate obliviousness to the full ramifications of his decision. For more on imperial communication, especially the continued reliance on mailed dispatches even well after the invention of the telegraph, see Glen O’Hara, “New Histories of British Imperial Communication and the ‘Networked World’ of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” History Compass 8, no. 7 (2010): 609-25, especially 614-16.
lengthy memorandum from Lucas. “This is not sufficient [sic] answer,” Lucas wrote. 

Nevertheless, he chalked up the governor’s reticence to the Colonial Office’s silence on his resignation as well as his potential reluctance to blame his own officers or Admiral Davis. Still, Lucas drafted a Colonial Office response, one that acknowledged Swettenham’s long career of colonial service and his request to retire, while still giving him the opportunity to rescind his resignation. In this draft, Lucas acknowledged that the stress that Swettenham had been under, and he admitted that there may have been just cause for Swettenham’s discomfort with the marines. But the draft also made clear that Swettenham’s words themselves were the problem. “[T]he terms of your letter to the American admiral were not to be defended,” he wrote. “There was I may say a consensus of opinion that by writing that letter you had put both yourself and the government which you represented in the wrong.”

In response to London’s prodding, Swettenham alerted the Colonial Office to the arrival of a more thorough dispatch that would arrive in the next mail. But Swettenham’s message would be too late. Parliament would meet before the mail arrived, and the Colonial Office could not wait for this report to arrive by ship. In case Swettenham did not understand how urgent the matter had become, Lucas prepared a telegram with the following message: “I must ask that the main points in promised despatch containing the explanations already pressed for may be immediately sent by telegraph.” Hopwood and Elgin agreed. The Colonial Office was trying to

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33 For Elgin’s request, see CO 137/655, Lord Elgin telegram to Swettenham, 24 January 1907, fol. 241r; a paraphrase of Swettenham’s response can be found on fol. 283r.
34 In part the answer was insufficient because Lucas did not know which telegram Swettenham meant.
35 CO 137/655, Lucas minutes, 26 January 1907, fol. 280.
36 CO 137/655, paraphrase of Swettenham telegram, 27 January 1907, fol. 320r.
37 CO 137/655, Lucas minutes, 28 January 1907, fol. 319. As it turned out, Swettenham had sent some of this information in a dispatch written on January 22. Among the enclosures were two testimonials from Bourne and Deputy Inspector General Wedderburn. The impression the Colonial Office gleaned from these documents was that “Bourne was responsible for the landing” while Wedderburn was responsible “for the armed landing” since he arrived with news of the prison insurrection. This dispatch was not registered at the Colonial Office until February.
help him by searching for information that might have acquitted him or, better yet, might have allowed them to demand an apology from the US. By not responding quickly, Swettenham hurt his own case.

Any good will that Swettenham might have stored up with civil servants like Lucas, he began to lose as he began a vigorous defense against his perceived mistreatment. Starting with a letter written two weeks after the earthquake—although not registered in London until February 14—Swettenham’s defense campaign grew more strident by the dispatch. From the outset, the governor argued that he was the victim of miscommunications stemming from the ruptured telegram cables and injured cable operators responsible for his delayed responses. As a result, Elgin’s recent letters seemed “to have been sent in ignorance” of the governor’s earlier missives. However, Swettenham’s case rested on more than communication delays. He stressed that his original request for supplies was not a plea for American aid; any medical supplies were “to be purchased at the cost of the Colony.” And while much of the dispatch rehashed the known timeline of events, Swettenham further clarified why he had been surprised by Davis’s actions. The governor recalled “most perfect order prevailing in the City throughout the night,” an argument that contradicted Davis’s. As for the offending letter, Swettenham explained,

> I thought it was more courteous to the Admiral to deal with his reasons than to ignore them completely and certainly if a reference to Police insufficiency in New York be considered out of place, it should be remembered that the Admiral had charged our united efforts in Kingston for the protection of private property with being inadequate, on the strength of a single incident as to which I believe he was accidentally misinformed.

According to the governor, the final meeting between the two men was without “friction.” What was more, Swettenham believed Davis had understood his reasoning, hence his surprise to learn

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9. See ibid., Swettenham dispatch #26 to Lord Elgin, 22 January 1907, fols. 221-225.
that American journalists viewed his letters as an insult. He offered the following hypothesis: he believed that the American officers and marines wanted “to distinguish themselves and to be conspicuous in succouring Kingston,” hopes the governor dashed when he insisted that they return to their ships. That night, he speculated, the admiral may have succumbed to pressure from his men and made the decision to land parties the next morning. Davis’s letter was the product of a hope that “the strong position he had taken would induce [Swettenham] - with a rather timid population behind [him] - to give way and detain the Americans whose presence reassured the timid, whose working parties helped private citizens and whose expenditure tended to enrich the City.” As we will see, Swettenham’s suspicion about American intent was not an isolated one.

Olivier rejected many of Swettenham’s initial complaints. To him, the governor had missed the main point, his letter “which, on publication, was clearly seen to be internationally impossible.” A draft response to Swettenham’s indignant dispatch, on which several officials signed off, took issue with the governor’s claim that he had been mistreated. After referring to the various memoranda that had gone back and forth between the governor and the Colonial Office, Lucas continued: “It is not therefore the case that you were, as you complain, tried ex parte ‘on the report of an unnamed newspaper and condemned without a hearing’; and, though I do not wish to continue the correspondence I cannot admit that you have valid ground for thinking that you have been unfairly treated.”

Swettenham continued to send a barrage of defensive private dispatches to the Colonial Office. Ignoring any annoyance these letters were causing, the governor used this more private

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38 CO 137/655, Swettenham dispatch #40, 28 January 1907, fols. 351-358.
39 CO 137/655, Olivier minutes, 15 February 1907, fols. 349-350r.
40 CO 137/655, draft Colonial Office dispatch to Swettenham, 26 February 1907, fol. 365.
forum to explain unreservedly his reasons for rejecting the Admiral. In his first private
dispatch—written on January 30 and registered on February 15—Swettenham included
information he had withheld for fear that “[s]ome of these considerations, if published, might
give offense.” He first outlined why allowing Davis’s men to roam around Kingston was a
dangerous proposition. In order “[t]o secure unity of purpose, unity of effort and due
efficiency,” he explained, all involved in this situation had to work under one authority to avoid
working at “cross purposes.” Jamaica’s status as a British colony made “working under one
authority” even more crucial as the governor needed to direct police and fire units, militias, and
armies, as well as manage the racial tensions between “a dominant race in the minority, and in
the vast majority a race which resents the idea of being dominated.” Adding another nation’s
soldiers would only increase the risk of miscommunication, he argued, as he and Admiral Davis
might “each [issue] orders without concert or mutual consultation.” Moreover, Swettenham
knew that Admiral Davis would never place his men under the command of another person:
“Naval parties landed would necessarily be independent of local regulations - a very likely source
of danger.”\textsuperscript{41} Swettenham was no champion of racial equality, as his reference to black Jamaicans
who chafed at “being dominated” suggests. But even so, he recognized that racial tensions were
of a different nature in the United States. Allowing Americans and black Jamaicans to mix freely
might not have been wise. “The Jamaican negro is prone to resent the treatment accorded to
him by inferior Americans,” he wrote. “[I]nferior Americans often have a very summary way
with negroes.” Swettenham wanted to avoid a situation in which Americans could find
themselves arrested by black police or militiamen.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} CO 137/655, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fols. 398-399r.
\textsuperscript{42} CO 137/655, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fols. 399-402r.
Most importantly, Swettenham’s answers revealed a poor understanding of the international climate and his position within it. As governor, he believed he had the right and responsibility to prevent foreign invasion, and he compared himself to Theodore Roosevelt, who had also refused foreign aid after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. In the governor’s mind, his actions were more than a simple assertion of his own authority over the island. He had based his decision on his suspicions over American intent in the region. “The policy of the United States of North America in these waters is accretion not colonization,” he stated. Given Swettenham’s sense that some Jamaicans wanted the island to “become American or Canadian by accretion” or at least to spark a rivalry between the North American countries and the United Kingdom, he worried about an American military presence on the island. As he argued, “I believe my duty as Governor was to do my utmost to maintain the present dependency of Jamaica on the United Kingdom.”

Swettenham’s concerns about American imperial designs led him to wonder what Davis and his men had been trying to prove when they ignored his request. As he wrote, “The spectacle of the American Navy on shore in Kingston…working there under the independent control of their own administration despite the disapprobation of the Governor previously communicated to Rear Admiral Davies [sic] was calculated to encourage a political sentiment which it was at least my duty not to encourage.”

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43 Swettenham claimed to understand that he was “comparing a great country and its President with a small Colony and a very inferior office.” CO 137/655, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fol. 401r.

44 CO 137/655, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fols. 400-401r.

45 CO 137/655, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fol. 401r. Swettenham routinely spelled Davis’s name as “Davies.” Swettenham made similar statements throughout the rest of the dispatch, arguing that “part of the conduct of persons in the American Squadron was due to a very natural desire to increase American prestige here at the expense of English prestige.” He also attributed the salute Davis’s men fired in breach of the governor’s wishes to a desire “to increase American prestige” by showing “that while British Forts were silenced the American Navy was not silenced.” See ibid., fol. 402r.
Swettenham had good reason to wonder about American intent. After all, less than a
decade previously, the United States had come out of the Spanish-American War with new
territorial holdings in both the Pacific and the Caribbean. As one historian puts it, between 1865
and 1945, “the United States assiduously went about the Caribbean earning its reputation as the
Colossus of the North. It made Cuba and Puerto Rico colonies in everything but name, finagled
Panama into existence, occupied the twin republic island of Hispaniola, purchased the Danish
Virgin Islands, lured tens of thousands of West Indian migrants, and overall, efficiently imposed
its capital, technology, and practices across the hemisphere.”[46] But what the governor missed
was how Britain’s posture had changed towards a United States grasping for power beyond its
shores. The 1823 Monroe Doctrine had already established two key principles: European
powers could no longer attempt to colonize parts of the Western Hemisphere, and the Western
Hemisphere became the United States’ sphere of influence. The first point had been clearly
understood. The second point, however, was further strengthened with the 1895-6 dispute with
Venezuela over the South American country’s border with British Guiana. The US, working on
behalf of Venezuela, forced the British to back down. This pattern continued as the British
acquiesced to sole American control over the Panama Canal in 1901, and pulled the majority of
the Royal Navy from North and South America, in effect entrusting the safety of British
colonies in the Western Hemisphere to the US navy. If the British had retreated such crucial
issues as the canal and imperial defense, then surely they were going to do the same over this
minor spat. This was Swettenham’s miscalculation. He had been rude to an American admiral

and rejected the help of the United States at a time when the United Kingdom could ill afford to antagonize its only quasi-ally in an increasingly tense international climate.\textsuperscript{47}

That the Colonial Office staffers working on this case had no fundamental disagreement with the governor suggests that his recognition of and concern about increasing US influence in the region was shared in London. In one set of minutes, Lucas referred to a previous Elgin statement on this point, in which the secretary of state wrote: “I share your views as to the extreme undesirability of allowing foreign armed intervention in a British colony.” Lucas added, “there is no difference of opinion on this subject.”\textsuperscript{48} Hopwood agreed, noting that the British government would have supported the governor if only he had not written the inflammatory letter. “I regret,” he wrote, “that he lost the opportunity of managing the business in such a way that we might have had an apology from Washington.” Hopwood even conceded that Swettenham may have been right about “American aims & diplomacy in the West Indies,” but he could not “convince [himself] that either in attack or in defense he has shewn himself in any sense a diplomat.”\textsuperscript{49} But for parliamentary under-secretary Winston Churchill, Swettenham’s inappropriate letter to the admiral was the only point of discussion. What little he said in response to the governor’s first secret dispatch was damning. “Evidently a man…unsuited to his present position,” he wrote. “I take this occasion [sic] of recording my opinion that his retention in Jamaica for the full term of his appointment will be detrimental to the public interest.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{47} See Kathleen Burk, \textit{Old World, New World: The Story of Britain and America} (London: Little, Brown, 2007), 191, 396-411, 425-8, 435. Chapter 6 deals with this period extensively. See also David Healy, \textit{Drive to Hegemony: The United States in the Caribbean, 1898-1917} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), especially chs. 5-6. In the latter chapter, Healy shows how the Roosevelt Corollary also consolidated US power in the region. This addition to the Monroe Doctrine declared that the United States could be the only power to intervene in Western Hemisphere affairs, even if that meant becoming a proxy for European countries.

\textsuperscript{48} CO 137/655, Lucas minutes, 16 February 1907, fol. 397v.

\textsuperscript{49} CO 137/655, Hopwood minutes, 16 February 1907, fol. 397v. “Shewn” is possibly “shown.”

\textsuperscript{50} CO 137/655, Churchill minutes, 20 February 1907, fol. 397v.
The stream of Swettenham’s messages that continued to flood the Colonial Office no doubt bolstered Churchill’s assessment. The governor wrote another extended essay in which he referred to old memoranda that instructed local governments to handle even major emergencies themselves. He pointed out a quotation from a previous general policy statement:

It is necessary...that the local forces of these Colonies...should be so trained and organized that they would contribute by themselves and without the aid of Imperial forces an effectual safeguard not only against such local and temporary disturbances as much be regarded as probable, but also against the graver emergencies.

These instructions apparently prohibited colonies from even turning to British warships for assistance. With this argument, Swettenham implied the following logic: adhering to Colonial Office instructions to run a self-sufficient administration meant turning away American aid.51

Lord Elgin responded to Swettenham’s flurry of dispatches with a secret communication of his own that forcefully clarified the Colonial Office’s position. First, the secretary of state recounted the opportunities his office had given Swettenham to defend himself. After newspapers had published copies of the correspondence between the governor and the admiral, the Colonial Office had sent Swettenham two telegrams asking if the reports were true. As Elgin explained, “The publication of your letter gave rise to much public comment, a situation of some difficulty was created by it in respect to the American Government, with which it was most important to deal at the earliest possible moment before ill feeling had been given time to grow.” A third telegram requested that the governor withdrew his letter and apologize for it “if it was correctly attributed” to him. Elgin acknowledged that press reports were not always accurate—indeed he noted that “to some small extent” they had been flawed—and he realized that Swettenham might have written the letter “in a moment of vexation, amid the strain of a

51 CO 137/655, Swettenham second secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fols. 406-407r.
terrible crisis.” Nevertheless, the British government could not stand behind the tone of the
letter, and Swettenham had to apologize. “Withdrawal and apology,” Elgin commented, “were
an absolutely necessary preliminary to any further action or enquiry or remonstrance.”\(^52\)

Swettenham’s reticent communications with his superiors, however, prevented them
from pursuing “any further action” on his behalf. The governor had been too slow to send the
requested information, Elgin explained, and the secretary of state, although wary of being
insensitive to the suffering in Kingston, clarified his objections to Swettenham’s delays in a
carefully worded passage:

> Were it not that ordinary telegraphic communication was disorganized at the time I
> consider that I might reasonably have expected, notwithstanding the magnitude of the
> crisis, to receive from you, spontaneously and at once, any information bearing on the
> subject of foreign aid and foreign intervention. As it is, I make the friendly criticism that
> it is only gradually and with some difficulty that the material facts bearing on this
> troublesome incident have been elicited.

But any mitigating information that Swettenham could have provided mattered little to Elgin.
The secretary of state was not debating whether the governor’s logic was rational. The letter had
to be withdrawn.\(^53\)

Finally, Elgin addressed Swettenham’s resignation. He would not back down from his
belief that Swettenham’s letter was inappropriate. Furthermore, combined with Swettenham’s
previous hostile interactions with the United States government over Jamaican laborers sent to
work on the Panama Canal—he had refused to accept all of the terms of the American
recruiters—this latest problem made a liability in the continuing relationship between the United

\(^{52}\) CO 137/655, Elgin secret dispatch to Swettenham, 8 February 1907, fols. 492-495r.
\(^{53}\) CO 137/655, Elgin secret dispatch to Swettenham, 8 February 1907, fols. 496-498r. As for further action,
Elgin had two reasons why nothing more could be done. First, he argued that “such action would in any case have
been difficult in view of the long delay which has taken place in ascertaining the facts,” a none too subtle jab at
Swettenham. But the second, more substantive claim was that the American ships had been sent with good intent,
something even the governor had admitted.
As Elgin reminded the governor in a revealing comment, “the American Government had recently on another occasion with good or bad reason complained of your attitude.” In other words, how the United States perceived the governor was more important to Elgin than whether or not Swettenham’s actions were wrong. Elgin explained further: “It is surely superfluous for me to point out how great are the issues involved in international dealings and how guarded in such matters should be the attitude and address of the King’s representative.” If Swettenham chose to remain governor, an option he still had, the job would carry an increased burden. Swettenham would have “to obliterate in friendly fashion” the unfavorable impression the United States had of his administration, a task “[consistent] with the dignity of your office as a Governor of a great British Colony.”

Despite Jamaica’s relative insignificance within the British Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, its position as one of the remnants of the British Empire in the Caribbean, an area full of possibility for American annexation or economic influence, meant that it had more diplomatic importance vis-a-vis the United States than other British colonies. In a colony somewhere other than the Caribbean, Swettenham might have had the right to request that American troops leave. In Jamaica, however, his ability to make those judgment calls was hampered because of the island’s proximity to a growing international power.

Elgin’s exhaustive explanation did not stop the Jamaican governor from deluging the Colonial Office with dispatches that countered every aspect of the secretary’s critique. If

\[\text{\footnotesize 54} \text{ See Tilchin, “Theodore Roosevelt,” 386; and CO 137/655, Swettenham letter to Lucas, 19 January 1907, 155-160r; and Swettenham confidential to Lord Elgin, 28 January 1907, 366-368v.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 55} \text{ CO 137/655, Elgin secret dispatch to Swettenham, 8 February 1907, fols. 499-500r.}\]
anything, Swettenham grew more hysterical in his vehemence, which led directly to his forced resignation. Two statements from a late February letter are particularly evocative. In the first, the governor styled himself as a victim of the Colonial Office.

Regarding myself, as I have always done, as an insignificant subordinate officer in command of a British outpost I make no objection to being surrendered or sacrificed when the interests of imperial strategy or policy prompt my immediate commander to make such a sacrifice, or even when, as in the present case, the commander has made a mistake and I therefore tendered my resignation on the 23rd Ultimo. But when such a mistake or surrender has been made, it is not reasonable to expect the victim to believe that the surrender was made solely to save his life, or even his own interest.\(^57\)

In the second statement, the Jamaican governor attacked Elgin himself. After claiming that armed intervention was nearly as serious an invasion as war, Swettenham blasted Elgin for not addressing the seriousness of what Davis had proposed.

Your Lordship, discarding all due sense of proportion and priority, has refused to consider this matter, devoting meanwhile more care and attention to the false report of a quarrel and an alleged indiscreet letter, than even to an Earthquake which has wrought immense damage to life and property in this Colony.

Swettenham followed one strident claim with another. Elgin had wasted his time, he argued, and distracted him from the colony’s needs.\(^58\) Once the governor reached this level of impudence, his forced resignation was almost assured. By mid-March, the London civil servants lost patience. As Olivier saw it, Swettenham’s inability to speak with appropriate deference to Elgin “rather [put] him out of court as a judge of the propriety of the terms of his letter to Admiral Davis.” Hopwood concurred and saw the letter as “full evidence” that Swettenham’s resignation should be accepted. Elgin’s response was even simpler: “Certainly send no reply,” he scrawled.\(^59\)

\(^{57}\) CO 137/656, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 28 February 1907, fol. 369r.
\(^{58}\) CO 137/656, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 28 February 1907, fol. 370r.
\(^{59}\) CO 137/656, Olivier minutes, 21 March 1907, fols. 360-362r; Hopwood minutes, 21 March 1907, fol. 362; Elgin minutes, 23 March 1907, fol. 362v.
As Swettenham defended his position to his superiors in London, he made several blunders. Regardless of whether his delayed response to Elgin’s demands for information was the product of intentional stalling on his part or merely the result of the chaos in Kingston, the governor’s inability to clarify why Davis thought he had the right to land men left the Colonial Office unable to act with any certainty either on his behalf or in the best interests of the government. Beyond that, however, the Swettenham we meet in these letters did not understand his mistakes. When chastised for the sarcastic letter he sent to Davis, he responded with overly detailed dispatches that occasionally attacked his superiors. These angry letters did little to endear him to Elgin and Churchill, the latter of whom had been one of the first to call for the Colonial Office to accept Swettenham’s resignation in late January.\footnote{CO 137/655, Churchill minutes, 30 January 1907, fol. 337v. Churchill wrote, “The Governor’s resignation should most certainly be accepted. He has asked to be relieved forthwith, & on public grounds the sooner he is out of Jamaica the better.”} Perhaps if Swettenham had been more forthcoming and transparent in the early days of this crisis, he might have remained Jamaica’s governor. After all, there were a few things working in his favor. He had an ally in Colonial Office staffer Charles Lucas. More importantly, no one in the Colonial Office ever questioned his choice to request that the American marines leave; they simply wished he had done so in a more delicate fashion. Furthermore, a change of leadership at such a fragile moment in Jamaica would not have been anyone’s first choice. If the governor had been more politically astute, he might have found a way to defend his decision with more diplomacy. But as it happened, Swettenham was too pedantic in his responses, too defensive of his actions, and too ignorant of the international considerations at play. And so, on March 4, the Colonial Office accepted Swettenham’s resignation.\footnote{CO 137/656, paraphrase of Colonial Office telegram to Swettenham, 4 March 1907, fol. 387r.}
III.

Reevaluations

Only one historian has written extensively about Swettenham’s decision: William Tilchin, a Theodore Roosevelt expert. In an article on the “Jamaica incident” and a book about Roosevelt’s approach to Anglo-American diplomacy, Tilchin explores this event from an Americanist perspective, and he reads the British sources through that lens. As a result, his findings, though thorough, speak more to the status of the special relationship than they illuminate the internal debates in Jamaica and Britain about the event. Moreover, since Tilchin uses his analysis to prove the strength of the Anglo-American relationship when tested by Swettenham’s misdeeds, he needs the governor to be a villain clearly in the wrong, even when the documents say otherwise. For example, he describes Swettenham’s attempts to defend himself as a “[bombardment of] the Colonial Office with a barrage of telegrams and very long letters in a bitter, demeaning, and frequently bizarre campaign of condemnation and self-justification.” Swettenham’s campaign certainly was a barrage of messages, and at points his letters may have betrayed bitterness. But when placed in context, the governor’s arguments are not as bizarre as Tilchin would have them. Tilchin never takes Swettenham’s own logic seriously—in fact he insists that Swettenham’s version of events is “extremely unreliable” in contrast to Davis’s trustworthy reports. Nor does he deal with the Colonial Office’s general

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64 Ibid., 388, note 16, his emphasis.
agreement with the substance, if not the style, of Swettenham’s position. Similarly he ignores the support for the governor that can be found in many of the Jamaican newspapers.

It is all too easy to dismiss Swettenham as an out-of-touch and angry governor unable to check his ego in the face of the Americans or his superiors. But in fact, many of his justifications were valid, even if they were obscured in the onslaught of his defense. Not only were they valid, but many of his point were echoed by journalists and the very clerks and undersecretaries who eventually tired of him. When it came to race, for example, Swettenham believed racial tensions could explode if American marines and black police officers or soldiers interacted, or worse, if a black office had to pull rank on an American marine. These sentiments would not have seemed far-fetched to some of the readers and writers of the weekly newspaper Jamaica Times, whose editor T.H. MacDermot had written an extended essay supporting Swettenham. MacDermot believed the governor had “erred, a little in judgment, a great deal in tact, in the manner of

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65 Not only does Tilchin imbue this spat with too much significance—my reading of the Colonial Office documents does not suggest that the “special relationship” was truly under threat thanks to Swettenham—he also glosses over the internal Colonial Office minutes in which various officials agreed with the governor’s view that this amounted to a public invasion. He references many of these internal memoranda in his footnotes but he does not do much with them. By drawing the bulk of his narrative from more official and public sources, he misses the essence of the problem: how to handle a governor with whom officials agreed while simultaneously criticizing his delivery. As just one sign of how Tilchin’s omission here misleads, see Richard H. Collin’s review of Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire in which he writes, “Incredibly, Swettenham regarded this rescue mission as an American invasion of Jamaica and ordered the Americans to withdraw, to the equal dismay of London and Washington.” As represented by the Colonial Office documents, none of the men dealing with this case were as surprised by Swettenham’s reading of the situation as Tilchin or Collin. See Richard H. Collin, “Review: [untitled],” The International History Review 20, no. 4 (December 1998): 1000.

66 CO 137/655, Swettenham secret dispatch to Lord Elgin, 30 January 1907, fols. 399-402r.

67 MacDermot’s essay was in response to one of the editorials his journal had published. On the day of the earthquake, MacDermot was trapped in his upstairs office along with most of the Jamaica Times staff trapped in the building. He was crushed by falling beams and debris pinned his leg to the floor. When told by rescue parties that they would have to amputate his leg, he forbade them from cutting it off. He held steadfast in this decision until he learned that other parts of the building were on fire. His sister begged the rescuers to try once again; this time, they were able to pull him from the wreckage, leg in tact. MacDermot’s injuries were too severe for him to return immediately to work—he would never fully recover from the injuries he sustained in the earthquake—so he had not been privy to the conversations that had produced the Times’s scathing rebuke of the governor. See “The Destruction of the Times,” Jamaica Times, 26 January 1907, 1; W. Adolphe Roberts, Six Great Jamaicans: Biographical Sketches (Kingston: The Pioneer Press, 1951), 98-9.
refusing, not the refusal,” but he largely approved of the governor’s actions. He argued that if American marines had shot any Jamaicans during their landing, the consequences would have been grave. Such a confrontation would have been inevitable, he suggested, because Jamaicans, “submissive to [their] own authorities would be the reverse especially to Americans whose attitude towards the blacks and coloured they know; and because the Americans would misconstrue innocent actions.”

British subjects in the Caribbean shared the concerns of Swettenham and MacDermot. In particular, many Afro-Caribbeans believed that the US had incubated “a peculiarly brutal brand of racism,” one that might threaten their personal safety and their way of life should American influence permeate island life too thoroughly.

Or take Swettenham’s claims that he believed his administration had to be self-sufficient. Arguments that Jamaicans needed to handle their affairs themselves appeared in many forums. When Lucas first defended his friend, he feared that a forced resignation would reward “[t]he begging propensities of the West Indians against which the Governor is manfully setting his face.” For Lucas, it was no coincidence that “American charity [was] being asked for and applauded in Jamaica and the Governor no doubt correspondingly vilified.”

In light of Kingston’s devastation, Lucas’s statements were callous. Moreover, he also ignored the degree to which Jamaica was already reliant on the American fruit and tourism industries.

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68 “The Governor and His Critics,” Jamaica Times, 2 February 1907, 2. See also “Americans and Black Jamaicans,” Jamaica Times, 2 March 1907, 7, where a writer supports MacDermot’s theories by recalling an incident in the late 1840s where American soldiers got into a fistfight with Jamaicans during a short leave. The Americans ran back to their ships and returned to the fray with guns and more men. Judah claimed that this fight nearly turned into a riot until US and French diplomats, Jamaican merchants, and the police inspector stopped the situation from escalating.

69 Harvey Neptune, Caliban and the Yankees, 53.

70 CO 137/655, Lucas letter, fol. 212r. Language of a similar nature can be found in the CO internal discussion over what to do about the charitable donations collected in London. Olivier warned, “If it is known that there is a…fund for rebuilding, great numbers will sit down and refuse to do anything but wait for the ‘Kings Money.’” See ibid., Olivier minutes, 23 January 1907, fol. 190v.

Insensitive statements highlight the degree to which Swettenham’s attempts at self-sufficiency were grounded in his understanding that the metropolitan government wanted to do as little for Jamaica as possible.\textsuperscript{72}

Most crucially, Swettenham’s questions about American influence in the region were widely recognized as legitimate. People were indeed suspicious of American intentions, no matter how pure their motives seemed. Even clerks in the Colonial Office shared this suspicion. Lucas was concerned about the message a forced resignation might send. He worried that American influence in the region would increase, a phenomenon he referred to as a “constantly growing danger.” He also noted that the Canadians sympathized with the Jamaican governor and would see a forced resignation “as one more instance of truckling to the United States.”\textsuperscript{73}

Playwright George Bernard Shaw expressed a similar concern. “The trouble in Jamaica,” he wrote, “was that the Americans had a way of behaving as if the island belonged to the United States.”\textsuperscript{74} One Swettenham supporter questioned the American marines’ motivations in the \textit{Jamaica Times}. Writing under the initials I.W., this author reminded readers that “with the enterprising American it is not always humanity so much as business.” Furthermore, “America has a great love for Jamaica and seems to think that the latter is greatly dependent on her under all circumstances,” he argued. For I.W., Davis’s suggestion that the local police could not protect Kingston was a perfect example of this tendency. His awareness of American ambitions in the Caribbean led to this cynical reading of events.

\textsuperscript{72} Lucas’s statements are also revealing about the nature of colonialism itself. The United Kingdom forced Jamaica and its other colonies to be dependent upon the mother country while simultaneously punishing the island when it was unable to handle the devastation of an earthquake itself.

\textsuperscript{73} CO 137/655, Lucas letter, fol. 212r. See also ibid., Lucas minutes, 24 January 1907, fols. 234-235r where Lucas continued to worry about a forced resignation.

I think our sad calamity and praiseworthy actions of Admiral Davis, through him the American nation, would have afforded a glorious opportunity for American Jingoism in brilliant Journalism, under glaring headlines, to proclaim to the world, America’s wide awakeness and alertness as against England’s sleepiness and backwardness in times of emergency, in matters affecting Jamaica’s interest and thus keep the sentimentalists alive.

I.W.’s arguments reminded readers of the newspaper that the United States was not a benign or neutral country offering a helping hand. As he put it, “[t]he thin end of the wedge must not be allowed in anywhere,” something Swettenham had accomplished. For him, Jamaica’s only option was to look to England. Swettenham’s actions had pointed the island in the right direction.75

History has proven Swettenham’s fears to have been legitimate. Concern over a potential annexation of the Caribbean to the United States motivated at least one Caribbean intellectual to write an extensive screed against the measure. Louis Meikle, a Jamaican-born, mixed-race physician who had attended medical school at Howard University before practicing medicine in Trinidad, published Confederation of the British West Indies versus Annexation to the United States of America in 1912. Harvey Neptune places Meikle among the canon of Latin American critics of American expansion in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a list that includes Cuba’s Jose Martí. Meikle’s argument against annexation was based almost exclusively on race relations. Indeed, he acknowledged that the British Caribbean stood to benefit from a closer economic relationship with the US. But the character of American racism towards blacks and Jews made this a flawed and dangerous relationship. Meikle found American racism more problematic—though not more prevalent—than British racism because white Americans believed that blacks were a threat to their superiority, a product of the fact that white and black Americans shared a country in a way that most white Britons did not. Furthermore, Americans

policing racial boundaries more intensively and violently, which would pose a problem for the large class of mixed-race Caribbeans, many of whom conducted their lives as white men and women. If their islands were annexed to the United States, these men and women would be demoted to black by way of the “one drop rule” and would be subject to more stringent and brutal forms of racial discrimination, including lynching.\(^76\)

Furthermore, Jamaicans themselves eventually understood Swettenham’s reasoning. In 1959, the *Daily Gleaner*, Jamaica’s paper of record, held an essay contest for senior citizens called “Jamaican Memories.” Jamaicans over 60 were asked to send their “memories of life in Jamaica fifty years or so ago” for the chance to win monetary prizes (£25, £10, £5, and ten honorable mention tokens of £1). The advertisement informed potential contestants that “all entries [would] be sent after the contest for deposit in the Archives of Jamaica.”\(^77\) Today, these letters remain at the Jamaica Archives, and together they provide a rich and varied picture of life in Jamaica from roughly 1890 to 1910. Given the catastrophic damage the 1907 earthquake wreaked on Kingston, it is not surprising that several contestants mentioned the event in their recollections. As 77-year-old Joseph De Souza wrote, “the Earthquake of 1907 was the greatest disaster in my time.”\(^78\) But more surprising—and ultimately more interesting—is the number of contestants who included Swettenham’s showdown with the American marines.

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\(^{78}\) JA 7/12/17, Joseph de Souza’s competition entry, no date, 1.
Fifty years on, public opinion had softened toward Swettenham’s decision. De Souza, who had been working at a downtown wharf when the earthquake struck, saw Swettenham surveying the damage on King Street that night. “It was he who reprimanded the U.S.A. Admiral who sent an armed force to quell the Prisoners,” the elderly man wrote before noting that the governor “came back to reside here for some time” after his resignation, a choice that seemed to indicate Swettenham’s attachment to Jamaica.  

Cecil A. Levy, who was ten or eleven and living on the other side of the island at the time of the disaster, also included Swettenham in his essay. “In 1907 there was an earthquake,” he stated. “The United States of America sent down food-stuff and the Governor returned it. The United States Government said he had insulted the government and that he should apologise but he refused and resigned in 1908.”  

Rupert Henry’s submission focused entirely on Swettenham, whom he called “Swedlom.” American food ship brought supplies for the stricken people after which the governor returns it back to the President of America, the American marines also landed at the prison and took up possession, the Governor also rejected them and the President of America sent messages to England about the incident and he was insulted by the said Governor Swedlom after which he was called home to England to give his reason, So he went and they asked him why he Insulted the President he told them that America had done the same thing to another country and after everything was over she sent Indemnity on the country to pay up many thousands of dollars preventing them from seized it. So it would be the same trick…they would play to Jamaica. England told him to make and apology to the President of America Instead of doing so he had resign from his office and said he prefered the sword to be broken over his head than to make an apology to the President of America.

Admittedly, letters like these are individual recollections, at best anecdotal evidence. But de Souza and Henry’s contributions add more weight to the idea that this chapter has advanced:

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79 Ibid., 2.
80 JA 7/12/26, Cecil A. Levy’s competition entry, 17 November 1959, 1.
81 JA 7/12/95, Rupert Henry’s competition entry, 22 November 1959, 1.
despite the diplomatic protocols which Swettenham ignored, his curiosity about the true nature of the American marine landing, which may have seemed charitable in spirit, was widely understood at the time by Colonial Office officials and by some Jamaicans.

A more articulate, if not more emphatic, recollection came from Jamaican poet Claude McKay. 17 at the time and attending a Kingston trade school on a government scholarship, McKay had been reading a “Wild West thriller” in bed at the moment the earthquake hit. In sections of an ambitious but unpublished dual autobiography project with Calcutta-born academic Cedric Dover, McKay recounted the chaos, confusion, and horror of that day. He described the reported looting and the rumors that American marines had shot some of the robbers, before turning to Swettenham’s rejection of Admiral Davis “for sending his Marines ashore armed and without the permission of the Government.” McKay continued,

But our Governor’s protest created an international incident. The Rear Admiral said he had been insulted. Washington referred the incident to London, which asked the Governor to apologize. The Governor said he wouldn’t, for he felt he was right and all the people backed him up. The coloured people were very happy indeed to say that Jamaica was not the United States, where coloured people were kicked around. So the Governor resigned; but he lived in Jamaica for the rest of his days and was treated like a hero by the natives. In the British Empire, for all its wickedness, there have always been men of exceptionally principles.

McKay’s account does not quite match the historical record, but it is revealing nonetheless. Not surprisingly for a writer of the Harlem Renaissance, McKay focused on the racial issues inherent to any encounter between Jamaicans and Americans. In his telling, Afro-Jamaicans celebrated Swettenham’s decision because he rejected the American way, one that had potentially deadly

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82 He remembered the wrong date for the earthquake: he claimed that the “great earthquake” was on January 7, 1907, a week before it actually hit on January 14. Claude McKay, “Boyhood in Jamaica,” *Phylon (1940-1956)* 14, no. 2 (1953): 140. See also Winston James, “Becoming the People’s Poet: Claude McKay’s Jamaican Years, 1889-1912,” *Small Axe* 13 (March 2003): 27.
consequences for people of African descent. Furthermore, by highlighting how Davis’s men had run ashore “armed and without the permission of the Government,” the poet also shared Swettenham’s belief that the marine landing constituted an invasion.

The point here is not to vindicate Swettenham, although certainly some writers tried. When Swettenham died in 1933, a writer for the *Daily Gleaner* questioned Elgin’s handling of the case. “It will be observed,” claimed the author,

that Lord Elgin did not ask the Governor for any explanation of the circumstances in which the letter was written; that he made no allowances for the severe mental strain under which Sir. Alexander had been living since the earthquake; that he acted as judge and condemned the culprit without wishing to know what the defense was, and that, ‘both in tone and expression’ his telegram was as imperious as the vocabulary of official rebuke could make it.

But even he could not fully commit to Swettenham’s absolution: “We do not say that [Lord Elgin] was wrong.”

Success as a governor was as much, if not more, about satisfying superiors in London and meeting the expectations—fair or not—of colonial subjects as it was about being historically right. On this count, Swettenham failed. But as Colonial Office documents, newspaper editorials, and the recollections on the eve of Jamaican independence from older Jamaicans who had lived through the disaster all suggest, Swettenham’s decision made sense. It was rooted in his reading of American expansionism and, if he failed to recognize Britain’s new position of deference in the Western Hemisphere, he had not missed the rise of American influence in the region.

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Conclusion

Swettenham left Jamaica in early May 1907, leaving colonial secretary Clarence Bourne as acting governor. Bourne himself was unpopular. A cartoon on the front page of a May edition of the *Jamaica Times* depicted Bourne, drawn with a sinister expression on his face, helping himself to another slice of “Governorship” cake.85


The same day that Swettenham relinquished his final imperial position, the *Jamaica Times* eulogized his tenure, absent the vehemence that characterized those early attacks on the governor. The author of this particular tribute attempted to recover the governor’s reputation by listing his successes. Swettenham had proven impervious to bullying and “intimidation.” He was not easily swayed by influential men and his refusal to cater exclusively to the needs of the upper and merchant classes endeared him to the poor. The author also praised the governor’s robust mortality. “Towards sexual immorality and drink,” he wrote, “the moral tone of King’s House has never been higher than under a man who in British Guiana insisted that the East Indian women should be protected from lustful employers at whatever cost.”86 A cartoon on the front page of a March edition of the paper prefigured this change of heart.


85 See “Our Acting Governor,” *Jamaica Times*, 11 May 1907, 10. For cartoon, see page 1. The fact that Bourne was also unpopular should make us less eager to take the criticisms of Swettenham in the local press too seriously. Even some commentators noted that it had become something of a pastime to hate governors in Jamaica. See also “Our New Governor?” *Jamaica Times*, 23 March 1907, 9. The editors noted that filling the vacancy would not be easy because Jamaicans were known for not getting along with their governors. They believed that whoever became the next governor deserved a fair chance from Jamaicans.

86 “Sir James Alexander Swettenham,” *Jamaica Times*, 4 May 1907, 8.
In the drawing, Jamaica, in the figure of a white woman, presents Swettenham with a banner as he packs his suitcase. The banner claims that Swettenham had run an “Honest Able Impartial administration,” but the bottom of the scroll reminds Swettenham—and the reader—of the episode with Davis. The caption beneath the image transcribes a dialogue between Jamaica and the departing governor. She says, “Putting aside little smudges, caused by that temper of yours, there is only one bad blot on your record, and, now you are going, we will forget that. Goodbye. You are as honest as you are courageous.”

Certainly some of the generosity evident in the editorial and cartoon was basic tact, but this portrayal goes a long way to replace the wholly negative image of Swettenham perpetuated by his fiercest critics with a more nuanced one.

Swettenham’s permanent replacement was Colonial Office clerk Sydney Haldane Olivier, who arrived in Jamaica on May 16, 1907, four days before the birth of his soon-to-be famous nephew, Laurence. The atheist son of an Anglican minister, Olivier had started working in the West India department of the Colonial Office in the mid-1880s after seeing a job advertisement in his Oxford college lodge. After spending eight years at the Colonial Office, he then moved to the Caribbean, where he spent the 1890s working in British Honduras and the Leeward Islands before becoming Jamaica’s colonial secretary in 1900. As part of that role, Olivier was acting governor several times. He returned to England with his wife and four daughters in 1903, only for him to go back to the island alone the same year to serve again as acting governor after a devastating hurricane destroyed that year’s banana crop. Upon his return to London in 1904, he became principal clerk of the West India department, where he was the first to read and comment on governors’ dispatches, including those from Swettenham. Unlike Swettenham and

87 “Telling Him Goodbye” cartoon, Jamaica Times, 16 March 1907, 1.
88 Sydney Olivier, Letters and Selected Writings, ed. Margaret Olivier (New York: MacMillan, 1948), 111-114, 123; and Stephanie Williams, Running the Show: Governors of the British Empire 1857-1912 (London: Viking, 2011), 336-7,
Bourne, Olivier was extremely popular in Jamaica, and most of those who called for Swettenham’s ouster named Olivier as their ideal replacement. “We want a man like MR. SYDNEY OLIVIER,” claimed the Jamaica Daily Telegraph. Olivier, they marveled, was “a man who will not spend his time and waste his energy in cavorting round the city damning and swearing at officials who are endeavouring to do their work in a zealous and loyal manner, and humiliating even heads of departments in the presence of their subordinates.” At his valedictory dinner in 1904, Archbishop Nuttall had offered his summation of “the true value of Mr. Olivier’s services to Jamaica.” He continued,

Apart from any question of the wisdom or unwisdom of any particular plans and efforts, Mr. Olivier has brought to his task so much self-denial, and zeal, and energy, and hopefulness, and sympathy...that he has secured the confidence and the appreciation of nearly every intelligent member of this community....He has set himself to meet needs, and to overcome difficulties, and has thought nothing of his own comfort or ease. And while doing this and exercising large responsibilities in regard to the material interests of the people, he has manifested such versatility of knowledge, and of interest in the intellectual and social life of the people, that his presence among us has had a strong stimulating and tonic effect upon important sections of the community in respect of other than merely material interest.

High praise indeed.

But Olivier was not a typical civil servant. He was an active Fabian Socialist, a group he had joined in 1885 at the behest of George Bernard Shaw. The two men had frequently eaten breakfast together when Olivier was working at the Colonial Office, and, along with Olivier’s


89 It should be noted that the editorial section of the Jamaica Times was considerably less enthusiastic about Olivier than the writers in the Jamaica Daily Telegraph but they too considered him among the more likely candidates. “Extraordinary Conduct of the Governor,” JDT, 22 January 1907, 3, their emphasis. They also referred to Sir Henry Jackson of Trinidad as a man of the same ilk. See also “Governor and Admiral Davis, U.S.N.,” JDT, 28 January 1907, 7.

90 Olivier, Letters and Selected Writings, 117.
officemate Sidney Webb, they had also attended some anarchist meetings. The Fabians championed the main objective of socialism—the creation of a society in which the means of production were owned by all—but they laid out a different path to that new society. They were not “political insurrectionists,” as one historian has pointed out: “they adamantly opposed any attempt at social and political change through no[n]-constitutional methods. Their ‘revolution’ would be very much a top-down affair, a revolution from above: any change in the fundamental political and social structures of British society would only be effected using strictly legal and constitutional methods.” The Fabians gained popularity after the success of their *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, a volume to which Olivier contributed. But although the Fabians inherently supported governmental solutions, they were less outspoken on issues of empire. Of the early leaders of the organization—Shaw, Webb, Olivier, and his old friend, schoolmaster Graham Wallas—Olivier was the only one to spend the bulk of his career in service of empire. Olivier balanced these two facets of his professional life. His wife insisted that her husband “remained a socialist throughout his life, convinced that the root of the economic evils in our society was the capitalist system.” And perhaps his deeply-held political beliefs kept him from being too invested in the longevity of the British Empire. As his friend and fellow Fabian George Bernard Shaw wrote, “Although he always held steadily by the Colonial Office as the only power that stood between the black proletariats and their pitiless exploitation by the West Indian Planters and the diamonocracy in Africa, he had no Kiplingesque idolatry of the Empire, and said, quite openly, that its break-up would not be the end of the world.”

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93 Francis Lee, *Fabianism and Colonialism*, 16-7; and Williams, *Running the Empire*, 337.
94 Olivier, *Letters and Selected Writings*, 77.
95 Ibid., 12-13.
Olivier’s unorthodox political ideologies posed no significant problem for Jamaicans. Any questions that Jamaicans had had about Olivier’s beliefs had been answered during his previous stints in local service. For example, a June cartoon in the *Jamaica Times* viewed his socialism as merely another political change that was ultimately insignificant.


“All scene, complete change, every five years; or sooner,” the caption read.  

Olivier had been so dedicated to the Jamaican people—to the point of traveling through rural villages to canvass public opinion—that any discomfort with his socialism seemed a moot point.  

Credited with rebuilding Kingston and introducing a sanitation code to the island, Olivier was immensely popular.  

Herbert De Lisser, editor of the *Daily Gleaner*, wrote, “[H]e was an entirely new element in the social life of the community and so strenuous was his energy, so original his point of view, that he soon began to affect most other receptive persons, thus gradually changing the ethos or character of Jamaica permanently.” Additional evidence, including an unsuccessful 1918 petition requesting that Olivier become the Jamaican governor once again, bolsters the claim that some portion of the Jamaican population viewed Olivier as an exceptional governor. For many, Olivier represented the aspects of good leadership that Swettenham had lacked. But more

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96 “The Scene is Changed” cartoon, *Jamaica Times*, 29 June 1907, 1.
important than the skills he brought to Jamaica, Olivier had the good will of the Jamaican people, something else Swettenham had sorely needed.

However devastating the earthquake and Swettenham’s refusal of American aid was to Kingston’s residents, the disaster and the incident have become little more than blips in the historiography. Nevertheless, there are several themes to glean from the chain of events that led to the governor’s resignation. First, as previously suggested, the entire incident—from Davis’s men arriving in Kingston to Swettenham’s forced apology and ultimate resignation—speaks to the unique position of Jamaica and the British Caribbean within the empire at the turn of the twentieth century. Jamaica may have been a minor colony, but it was a minor colony in an important and tricky geographic location. The United States’ increased involvement in the Caribbean came at the same time that the British were pulling naval resources from the Caribbean in anticipation of a variety of European threats. Indeed, according to Tilchin, the two phenomena were related. British leaders, he argues, reduced the Royal Navy presence in the Caribbean significantly, in effect handing the job of protecting the British Caribbean to the United States. In combination with American economic investments already in the region—mainly in fruit and tourism—this diplomatic concession reveals the new configuration of power and influence developing in the Caribbean, one that Swettenham only recognized in part.

The second point to highlight is the discrepancy between local concerns and those of the Colonial Office. For some members of the Kingston press, the incident between Davis and Swettenham had cost the island much-needed aid and manpower. Furthermore, Swettenham’s decision and his overall demeanor hampered relief efforts. For people living in an obliterated Kingston, help was most important, and Swettenham had blocked it. In this way, he failed to

meet local expectations of what a governor should do in a crisis. Editors, journalists, and readers judged him by a certain set of standards—fair or otherwise—and the governor did not measure up. Some local observers even declared that his good traits—hard work and good intentions—were not enough; they could not compensate for his lack of “self-control.” His only chance to “recover his reputation” was “to bridle his tongue, and also his pen, and to sit down quietly at Headquarter House, issuing orders and receiving reports.” These concerns were local ones, however, and not shared by the West India division of the Colonial Office. Instead, these men, so distant from the chaos on the ground, worried more about the diplomatic consequences of his letters and the implications of having such an insolent colonial servant as governor of a colony.

Finally, this series of events highlights the limits of Swettenham’s authority as governor. Despite the title of governor and a knighthood, he had very little meaningful autonomy, to the point where he could not turn away the armed troops of another nation. Moreover, he had to juggle an often contradictory set of demands. He could not antagonize the United States, but he also needed to protect Jamaica from foreign invasion. He had to run relief efforts from his office while still being a visible presence around the city. And most importantly, he had to recognize his subordinate position within the colonial structure even as he was the embodiment of British imperial power on the island. Swettenham failed in most of these tasks, as many a colonial governor did. He just had the misfortune of doing so in a spectacular fashion at a moment when, because of the severity of the crisis, the eyes of the Colonial Office, and indeed the world, were on him.

101 “Extraordinary Conduct of the Governor,” JDT, 22 January 1907, 3. See also “The Governor’s Opportunity to Assist Jamaica,” JDT, 16 February 1907, editorial page, where similar arguments were raised.
In January 2010, almost 103 years after Kingston’s destruction, the world once again remembered that the Caribbean is in fact earthquake-prone. This time, it was Haiti, the world’s first black republic, that suffered. For people not well-versed in Jamaica’s torturous history with earthquakes, the Caribbean may conjure up images of beaches, tourism, hurricanes, and perhaps political instability. The heartbreaking images of displaced Haitians were sober reminders of the dangerous fault lines in the region’s physical foundations. But, as this dissertation has shown, earthquakes are not just natural disasters. They, along with disease, scandal, and fire, also provoke crises in administration.

This dissertation has examined four crises that befell Jamaica and its major city in the seventy years after emancipation, and each case study has illuminated some of the issues the island faced in its long transition from a slave to a free society. The cholera epidemic of the early 1850s made worse one of the island’s most salient economic issues—the crippling shortage of plantation labor after planters alienated their former slaves with high rents and low wages. Bowerbank’s crusade against the Kingston Lunatic Asylum demonstrated how this society’s most vulnerable people—most of whom were black—were shut away and neglected until they found their advocate in Bowerbank and their voice in Ann Pratt. Her published story deployed the standard tropes of abolitionist rhetoric, with its focus on the violence towards and degradation of female patients, and was successful for doing so. Bowerbank, on the other hand, is the perfect symbol of white elite ambivalence towards Afro-Jamaicans. During the Morant Bay Rebellion, he took the side of Eyre and was himself responsible for the waves of suppressive and punitive violence against blacks.
Morant Bay has been a key turning point in the historiography, and although this dissertation questions the dominance of the rebellion in the literature on the nineteenth-century British Caribbean, 1865 did lead to one political change significant to this dissertation. In 1866, the Jamaican Assembly dissolved itself and agreed to let London rule Jamaica. In practice, Crown Colony rule meant no elections, no representative government, and increased power to the governor. But by the late 1870s, a variety of factions within Jamaica were advocating constitutional change. The 1882 fire sheds new light on the intensity of these protests and the degree to which the Colonial Office took them seriously, so much so in fact that these bureaucrats considered the possibility of providing a loan to Jamaica solely because of the political tensions. Finally, this dissertation ends with the 1907 earthquake, which on the face of it, may not seem especially relevant to emancipation. But I would argue that the racial tensions revealed in Swettenham’s explanations of his actions are remnants of Jamaica’s transformation out of slavery. Moreover, emancipation in the British Caribbean did not happen outside of colonialism. Therefore, the ways the Colonial Office forced the governor to back down so as not to offend the United States speak volumes about how far Jamaica had slipped in imperial importance.

Yet, at the same time that this has been the story of a colony dealing with the wide-ranging ramifications of emancipation, it has also been something more. It has also been an analysis of imperial administration, specifically how the Colonial Office handled Jamaica: when it left the island to its own devices and when it intervened. In the course of the narrative, I have also highlighted the wide variety of imperial actors, from the Scots who show up in almost every chapter to the Fabian Socialist Olivier. How these men ended up in Jamaica, and how they
related to their subjects and their superiors, illuminate some of the various paths to imperial service as well as the challenges posed by places like Jamaica.

But this dissertation has operated on a historiographical level as well. British imperial historiography—rich, inventive, and exciting as it is—has an awkward relationship with the post-Morant Bay Caribbean. While it is true that the region lost its economic value, that fact in and of itself calls for more investigation. What did it mean to live in a has-been colony? To see political clout in London drain away, in the case of planters. To end up there at the beginning or end of one’s imperial career. The British Empire was notoriously spread across the globe, and so studying it requires attention to each colony or sphere of influence, not just to the more central regions.

Finally, though, this project has to be about the people involved. For although Jamaica’s importance to Britain was declining daily, its residents—black, colored, and white—continued to demand things from the imperial government. They appealed to a common sense of British fairness and good treatment, a language used both to advocate for asylum patients and to justify booting out Swettenham. These people had expectations of what being a British subject meant, and in moments of crisis, they intended to collect the benefits: financial assistance, new and better administrators, and impartial investigations. These attitudes were best summed up by the son of Richard Rouse, the black asylum warden whose warnings about the egregious acts in the asylum were ignored until after his death, and so we shall end with his son’s pleas.

How long shall such a state of things be allowed to continue with impunity, nay, be fostered and encouraged by the ruling authorities of a Colony under the British Flag?\(^1\)

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